

Boulder County to end growing of GE crops on publically owned land

By Roni Dengler

March 18, 2016

BOULDER, Co. – Boulder County Commissioners endorsed discontinuing the growing of genetically engineered (GE) crops on county open space agricultural land at a public hearing in the courthouse Thursday evening.

The recommendation hinged on Boulder County Open Space's goal to become a national leader in sustainable agriculture.

According to Commissioner Elise Jones, the impact of using GE crops does not comply with this vision.

"[GE crops] that are relying on synthetic pesticides really guarantee a continued use of pesticides, particularly glyphosate," she said in her statement at the hearing.

Nationally, the herbicide glyphosate is applied to 73% of corn acres, the vast majority of which is genetically engineered, according to a report from the USDA.

For Jones, this is troubling.

"We are putting all of our eggs in the glyphosate basket. This is counter to what we know about sustainability and resiliency in natural systems," she said.

Glyphosate resistant corn and sugar beets are the only GE crops grown on Boulder County public lands besides *Bt* corn, an engineered variety that produces its own insecticide by using DNA from a soil bacterium, *Bacillus thuringiensis*, to make toxins that kill corn rootworm larvae, a bane to corn growers.

Despite this trait, almost all GE corn is treated with insecticides known as neonicotinoids, even in Boulder County. The genetically engineered resistance to rootworm larvae does not protect the plants against other pests that may damage crop yield.

According to Jones, "There's a growing body of science that is calling into question the impact [of these pesticides] on pollinators."

There is particular concern over the effect neonicotinoids have on honeybees, as nearly a third of the U.S. food supply relies on their pollinating services. Several research studies demonstrate that the neonicotinoid insecticides

interfere with the central nervous system of these pollinators, resulting in memory loss, decreased ability to fight off viral infections and reduced colony growth.

The potential harm to bee health does not align with the goals of Boulder County Open Space.

Commissioners Deb Gardner and Cindy Domenico echoed these sentiments in their statements.

Consuming foods made from GE crops however did not pose concern in regard to human health and safety for the commissioners.

“The peer-reviewed studies have come to an evidence based conclusion on food safety that consuming foods containing ingredients derived from GE crops is no riskier than consuming the same foods containing ingredients modified by conventional plant improvement techniques,” said Cindy Domenico.

In other words, food made from GE crops is just as safe to eat as food made from crops grown using traditional agricultural practices, according to the results of a body of scientific research.

The decision came following lengthy testimony from the public at the end of February and deliberation by the Parks and Open Space Advisory Committee, which recommended for the continued use of GE crops.

Though a formal vote was not taken, the Commissioners asked for drafting of a transition plan for farmers who currently grow GE crops. The commissioners offered a transition-period recommendation of the next three to seven years, as details for how to enact this recommendation were not discussed at the hearing.

Farmers and farmer advocates, many of whom were visibly distressed by the decision, declined to comment following the hearing.