

TORONTO ON, May 4th, 2023: Yesterday, Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, the Honourable Marie-Claude Bibeau, the Honourable Minister Marie-Claude Bibeau, announced a decision to allow new gene edited (GE) seeds to be released in Canada without health or safety assessments and only voluntary disclosure.

The decision to remove mandatory reporting from the GE database puts the whole agriculture sector at significant risk. Particularly, the organic sector which prohibits all forms of genetic engineering.

Making the database voluntary will:

- remove transparency;
- compromise trade with our international partners who have strict guidelines;
- make it impossible to monitor and trace GE seed coming into the marketplace;
- compromise organic guidelines making it difficult to verify genetically modified seed and product; and
- undermine consumer trust and confidence

The organic industry is asking for one policy change: **that the database and reporting remain mandatory.**

“For decades, the organic and conventional agricultural sectors have worked on the basis of mutual respect, innovation and transparency. The Government’s decision to remove transparency puts us all at risk.” says Carolyn Young, OCO’s Executive Director.

The organic sector has been asking for the Canadian government to protect public trust in organic products by ensuring regulation of new gene edited seeds for over a year. Without mandatory regulation, Canada may lose important trade opportunities.

“Our international trading partners rely on transparent, verifiable guidelines to buy seeds and products from Canada that are aligned with their purchasing specifications.” adds OCO’s president, Ben Cullen of Cullen’s Foods. “We need more transparency, not less, to protect Canada’s agricultural sector.”

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The Organic Council of Ontario (OCO) is the Voice for Organics in Ontario. We represent over 1100 certified organic operators, as well as the businesses, organizations, and individuals that bring food from farm to plate. We work to catalyze sector growth, support research, improve training, increase data collection, encourage market development, protect the integrity of organic claims, and inform the public of the benefits and requirements of organic agriculture.