



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on October 1, 2012

## Russia Bans GMO Corn Over Cancer Fears as Pressure Builds on Monsanto

Following an [explosive French study](#) suggesting a link between Monsanto's controversial genetically engineered corn and cancer, Russian authorities have temporarily suspended all imports and use of the biotech GMO product until further safety testing can be performed. Officials worldwide are reportedly investigating the matter as well.



Russia's consumer-protection agency, known as Rospotrebnadzor, announced the decision last week, saying it had ordered the country's Institute of Nutrition to investigate the recent French university study. The regulatory agency has also reportedly asked the European Union for its views as the European Food Safety Authority vowed to review the research.

"Until we receive the full information in this case, the import and sale of genetically modified NK603 corn is being temporarily suspended," the Russian agency said in a [statement](#) posted on its website. Some analysts [called](#) the move largely "symbolic," but it did make a splash.

The news out of Moscow quickly prompted headlines around the world as consumer fears over genetically engineered crops reached their highest level yet. But even before Russia's new temporary ban was announced, the embattled American biotech giant was already under attack from [California](#) to Europe.

Analysts and Monsanto itself downplayed the significance of the Russian government's decision, claiming that it would not have a large effect on the firm's business. Among the reasons cited: the government already prohibits farmers from planting genetically engineered organisms (GMOs) and Russia imports very little corn from the United States anyway.

"Russia is a net exporter of grain, so the actual impact of their temporary suspension, if any, is likely to be small," a Monsanto spokesman said in a statement, claiming that the safety of NK603 corn was "well established." The company's stock price has not yet suffered any serious blows from the news, either.

Some critics of the Russian government's decision, especially pro-GMO lobbyists, alleged that the move did not really have anything to do with safety concerns. Instead, they argued, it was a transparent effort to shield the inefficient Russian agriculture sector from tough U.S. government-subsidized competition.

Anti-GMO advocates countered that Monsanto has long been using the U.S. government as its attack dog in the drive to spread its products around the world. Despite heavy American diplomatic pressure and an intense lobbying campaign, however, governments have not all accepted genetically engineered crops just yet.



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Still, Monsanto has been feverishly playing defense in recent weeks, attempting to discredit the University of Caen [study on GMO corn](#) that showed increased tumor growth in both male and female rats. According to the St. Louis-based firm, the data was incomplete and the study “doesn’t meet minimum acceptable standards for this type of scientific research.”

Critics have accused Monsanto and the biotech industry as a whole of attempting to quash any scientific data that casts doubts on the safety and efficacy of genetic engineering, saying the whole sector relies instead on lobbying and [U.S. government support](#) as the cornerstone of its business plan. But despite being heralded as the first long-term study on the effects of GMOs — industry studies typically last about three months — Monsanto dismissed the results of the latest investigation.

“We do not believe the recent French research findings present information that justifies any change in the safety determination for NK603 or its approval status for imports,” a spokesman for Monsanto [told](#) the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. “The safety of NK603 is well established as reflected in the respective safety assessments by regulatory authorities around the world.”

Earlier this month, researchers in France released the results of their two-year study, which was published in *The Food & Chemical Toxicology Journal*. According to the scientists, both the genetically engineered corn and the herbicide Roundup were [linked to early death, massive organ failure, explosive tumor growth, and other problems](#).

In addition to Monsanto, some independent experts also questioned the study. However, the outcome sparked major concerns about GMO products around the world, with French authorities calling for an emergency review and even a possible European Union-wide ban on Monsanto’s controversial seeds and herbicide.

“Depending on [food safety agency] ANSES’ opinion, the government will urge the European authorities to take all necessary measures to protect human and animal health,” explained French Agriculture Minister Stephane Le Foll and Social Affairs Minister Marisol Touraine in a joint statement. “[The measures] could go as far as invoking emergency suspension of imports of NK603 corn to Europe pending a re-examination of this product on the basis of enhanced assessment methods.”

In California, the biotech industry has been waging a multi-million dollar campaign to stop [Proposition 37](#), a ballot initiative dubbed “California Right to Know Act” to mandate the labeling of consumer products containing GMOs. Monsanto itself has reportedly spent some \$7 million to fight the proposed labeling.

The French study, however, was quickly seized upon by proponents of the plan as another reason that consumers should be able to know what is contained in their groceries. “There is a giant question mark hanging over these foods and their health risks,” [said](#) pro-Proposition 37 campaign manager Gary Ruskin. “For those of us in California, the case for labeling of genetically engineered foods has never been stronger.”

More than a few opponents question the very foundation of Monsanto’s business model, saying that obtaining patents on DNA — life itself — should be off the table completely. Other critics are more concerned with the potential side effects of consuming food that has been genetically modified, sometimes combined with DNA from other plants or animals.

Despite the growing pressure on both sides of the Atlantic, Monsanto is still doing very well as a company. Its share price is [up by about 30 percent](#) year-to-date, and more than a few analysts have touted the stock as a bargain. Supporters also believe that genetic engineering might one day help to



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feed the world by making crops more resistant to droughts or pests.

Documents released by WikiLeaks also [confirmed](#) that the company has a relentless ally in the U.S. government, which even tried to [threaten other nations](#) into approving GMOs. Top Monsanto officials also have what critics refer to as a “[revolving door](#)” with the federal government — allowing executives to move back and forth between regulatory agencies and the private sector at will.

However, even considering the power of the U.S. government, fear and opposition to GMOs is building even in the United States, where most of the corn planted today is genetically engineered. The whole industry could eventually collapse if the trend continues, according to analysts. Activists are currently trying to [orchestrate a boycott](#) of companies opposed to labeling as a precursor to bringing down the whole biotech industry.

“Why is this GMO labeling fight so important? Once GMOs are labeled in California, it will bring a cascade effect in other states as well, since most national companies won’t create two labeling schemes, one for California and one for the rest of the country,” [said](#) the Alliance for Natural Health, one of the groups leading the boycott effort. “Moreover, once products containing GMOs are labeled, people will stop buying them — and this economic pressure will be enough to force GMOs off the market.”

Many experts predict that if the popular California labeling proposition is approved, which seems likely, it might indeed be the beginning of the end for genetically engineered crops — at least until the industry can prove the safety of its products to American consumers. However, with the powerful U.S. government so [blatantly committed](#) to Monsanto’s success, it may well be a long battle.

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