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European markets remain open to Canadian mustard

Reports have circulated over the past week regarding a disruption in mustard marketing due to GMO contamination discovered in Europe. The Saskatchewan Mustard Development Commission (SMDC) would like to set the record straight.

“Reports of GMO contamination have been misconstrued and any impact on mustard marketing and prices has been minimal,” says Kevin Hursh, SMDC executive director.

On September 18, Greenpeace in Germany issued a news release claiming that tests done on Dijon mustard, manufactured by Maille, a division of Unilever, indicated the presence of a genetically modified canola event known as GT73. The Greenpeace release points to out-crossing of GM canola with mustard as the reason for the positive test.

After consulting with Canadian officials, scientists and industry, the SMDC has found no rational reason for concern.

GT73 technology is broadly used in Roundup Ready canola. Nearly 200 canola varieties are registered with the GT73 event and that event is registered for food and feed uses in Europe.

With GT73 approved in Europe, there has been limited backlash from the Greenpeace “discovery.” No action has been taken by regulatory authorities in the European Union and there has been no instruction given on product recall.

Mustard breeders in Canada say that out-crossing of canola and mustard under field conditions is improbable. If trace amounts of canola are found within mustard, it’s no doubt due to mechanical mixing of the seeds.

To grade No. 1, mustard seed from Canada must contain less than 0.1 per cent canola (less than one seed in a thousand). This is designated in Canada’s official grading guide as inconspicuous admixture. The tolerance for canola within No. 3 mustard is 0.3 per cent.

“Even tiny amounts of canola or weed seeds such as wild mustard result in a lower grade,” notes Hursh. “That’s why producers carefully choose their fields for mustard production and employ good identity preservation practices. Grade loss means a huge drop in the value of production.”

Using top grade mustard ensures that only a tiny amount of canola could ever be present in any mustard sample. However, with the sensitivity of modern scientific

testing, it isn't surprising that minute traces of a canola trait might be detected in a mustard product.

Since the canola trait allegedly discovered is an approved trait, there is no safety issue and there shouldn't be a market access issue. Saskatchewan mustard growers are committed to providing the highest quality product in the world and they value the long-standing support of European buyers.

Some reports have indicated a large drop in mustard prices in recent weeks and this has been attributed to a GMO issue in Europe.

"In fact, the drop in mustard prices has not been any greater than most other commodities," says Hursh. "The decline in values is related to supply and demand and seems to have little to do with the Greenpeace allegations."

The SMDC continues to monitor the situation and gratefully acknowledges the assistance of Canadian officials in helping to sort out fact from fiction.

The Saskatchewan Mustard Development Commission is a producer-funded levy organization working for mustard producers in the province. The elected producer Board of Directors is responsible for allocating dollars towards research, market development and extension related activities. Saskatchewan producers are the largest exporters of mustard in the world. See www.saskmustard.com for more information.

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