

Food topic of grassroots rally

Event at Queen’s Park draws attention to genetically engineered seeds

By Solana Cain

This past Thanksgiving, when many gathered with family and friends to feast on a variety of foods, the Toronto chapter of a grassroots organization called Millions against Monsanto held a rally at Queen’s Park to draw attention to those very foods on your plate.

Protestors danced on the provincial legislature’s lawn to improvised music from Toronto 10-piece big band Ram-bunctious. Lyrics like, ‘Monsanto made a plant that don’t make seeds’ and ‘What if there are no flowers for the bees, the honey bees don’t want money please’ belled out of speakers.

More than 400 demonstrations took place in cities all over the world on Saturday, Oct. 12 to condemn biotech corporation Monsanto, a leading producer of genetically engineered seeds.

Peter Mehren, who attended the rally with a sign that read: ‘I disapprove of Monsanto’s activities: poisoning, dominating, exploiting, short-sightedness’, said he believes Monsanto is displacing traditional farmers.

“They are replacing farmers with a system in which they become essential... Monsanto’s in it for quick gains and not worrying about the long-term consequences,” he said.

According to its website, Monsanto, a St. Louis-based company, states it is dedicated to helping farmers produce more food by “selling seeds, traits developed through biotechnology and crop protection chemicals.”

One of several speakers at the rally was former Health Canada employee now a whistleblower, Dr. Shiv Chopra, who was instrumental in Canada’s decision to bar Bovine Growth Hormones in 1999.

Chopra says the pesticides used in cultivating genetically modified organisms are toxic and therefore should not be put in grocery stores.

In a statement released by Monsanto following the worldwide protests, the company said that, “17.3 million farmers worldwide have made the choice to grow crops with seeds enhanced through biotechnology.” Monsanto claims farmers are making this choice because GM seeds allow them to “farm sustainably.”

The statement went on to say that they respect each individual’s right to express their point of view on Monsanto, “but we prefer to engage in a respectful manner that encourages dialogue and discussion.”

Genetic modification, or engineering,



By Solana Cain

At the Millions Against Monsanto Rally held in Toronto on Oct. 13, Samantha Urrutia, 12, signed teenager Rachel Parent’s petition to get labelling of GMOs on all food products. “Say no 2 GMOs,” wrote Urrutia, who attended the rally with her family.

is the human manipulation of an organism’s genetic material using biotechnology. New DNA may be inserted into the host genome or genes may be deleted, or removed.

Fourteen-year-old activist Rachel Parent, who also spoke at the rally, called for labelling on all GMO products. She said the biotech companies that produce such products have become corporate bullies.

“Most of you may think that bullying only happens in schools but think again,” said Parent. “These companies use their power and political influence to persuade our governments to accept their untested and unregulated genetically modified crops and then they force us to eat it because they don’t label it.”

In Canada, labelling of GMOs in food products is by and large strictly voluntary. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency,

in association with Health Canada, leaves the decision up to manufacturers to indicate genetically engineered ingredients.

The CFIA does have the power to require each manufacturer to list GMO foods if consumers’ health is at risk or the product has been changed too severely.

Only in eighth grade, Parent has been a guest on the Lang and O’Leary Exchange where she debated Kevin O’Leary on why genetically modified foods need to be avoided. During the debate, O’Leary, a software entrepreneur and dragon on CBC TV’s *Dragon’s Den*, conceded his position, admitting that we are all apart of a long-term experiment when it comes to companies intervening in farmer’s crops.

At the conclusion of her speech, Parent challenged Minister of Health Rona Ambrose to have a discussion with her on the

issues of GMOs here in Canada.

GMOs now have a firm place in our everyday consumption since the first genetically modified food item, a tomato, appeared in the United States in 1994. Today, they are present in upwards of 30,000 different food products, making them nearly impossible to avoid.

This interference with food at crop level is believed by some to have caused “the hive collapse”, which refers to the current dire state of the bee population.

According to Ontario Beekeepers’ Association and Health Canada studies, controversial pesticides have been linked to the widespread loss of hundreds of bee colonies in various locations throughout Ontario and across Canada.

Neonicotinoids, insecticides that act on the nervous system and are chemically similar to nicotine, have been found lath-

ered on corn and soy seeds.

According to the Grain Farmers of Ontario, crop science companies Bayer and Sygenta have coated virtually all corn seeds in the province with it. This is the cause of the acute bee poisoning, they say.

“You can’t grow your own food if the flowers aren’t being pollinated naturally,” said Chris Laxton, 28, who rode his bike to the rally.

“So if they [the biotech corporations] control the food supply, then they control who has what when, who can be part of the better society and who is left in the margins,” he said. “It’s just this level of control that is unprecedented and very scary.”

The rally finished with a march through Toronto’s downtown streets with signs held high condemning Monsanto and demanding freedom of food.

Farmers live sustainable and healthier life

(Photojournalism student Guillaume Nolet writes about his experience of purchasing his first-ever Thanksgiving turkey.)

By Guillaume Nolet

Where did my Thanksgiving turkey live? And what better place to get my first-ever Thanksgiving turkey than the tiny hamlet of Moscow?

This little village of less than 75 people in eastern Ontario, 30 kilometres west of Kingston, is where Andrea and Justin Hilborn helped raise my beloved bird.

For the last 14 weeks, they have taken care of my protégé along with 30 other large poultry birds.

Both in their mid-twenties when they decided to buy 80 acres of land a couple of years ago, the Hilborns wanted to get away from the city and live a more sustainable and healthier lifestyle.

“To live off the land, and grow your own food is a great feeling,” says Justin.

Oct. 11 was turkey pickup day. I arrived in mid-afternoon at the farm, excited to get my prize. The sun was shining and a bunch of loose chickens greeted me as soon as I got out of the car. Some of them were more intrigued by my tires, while others followed me nervously towards the Hilborn’s house.

The house was made of a nice, brown-coloured wood. It was built from scratch by Justin, who during the day, works as a carpenter in the city.

“It’s a work in progress,” he said. He had just recently covered the base of the cabin with new panel board.

You could tell he was not an office worker by looking at his rugged hands, his dark tan and his long slim build.

Andrea was chatting with another customer. It was a busy day for the Hilborns. Justin was running back and forth between the house and the barn with an apple in his mouth. I assumed he didn’t have much time to eat -- since the turkeys were killed and prepared fresh that day for pickup.

Andrea also works in the city during the day as a naturopath. Her slim build, with long curly red hair and glasses made her look like the businesswoman of the two. But like Justin, she is not afraid to work hard on the farm.

“Getting out there and working with what the land has to offer is tough but rewarding,” explains Andrea.

The Hilborn runs a mixed farm with an emphasis on pasture-based farming. This means their chickens, pigs, turkeys and cows live outside and get rotated to fresh pasture daily, in a way that improves the land and allows the animals to express their natural instincts.

“Our turkeys eat GMO-free (genetically modified organism-free) grain in addition to legumes, grasses, weeds, insects and probably small frogs out in the pasture,” says Andrea.

“Right off the bat, ours are raised outdoors. We don’t inject butter into the carcass such as other big industrialized turkeys. We don’t medicate. Like people, animals who exercise, eat well and get plenty of fresh air, thrive.”

Managed pastured-based farming not only improves the soil and all the things that live above, be-



Photo by Guillaume Nolet

Andrea and Justin Hilborn carefully picking one of their fresh turkey they raised for the last 14 weeks at their farm 30 kilometres west of Kingston.

low and in it, it is better for the environment and the quality of the soil.

“There is no chemical runoff and no soil erosion. Instead, the land increases in fertility year after year,” explains Justin, who started this type of farming just a couple years ago.

Turkeys wake up in the morning and wait for one of the Hilborns to show up. When one of them arrives, they move the pen ahead one length, and the turkeys immediately start eating a fresh breakfast of legumes and grasses.

“When they get their fill, usually when it’s all gone, they turn their attention to the grain feeder.”

“Then they take time to lay in the sun and do whatever turkeys do to socialize with one another. Then we show up in the afternoon and they do it again. Turkeys are quite curious and learn quickly. They pick up really fast on the twice a day moves and are always waiting for us when we get home or get up in the morning. They love to peck at shiny objects and like to snap at our wedding bands,” says Andrea.

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Andrea Hilborn

I saw a big white cooler behind the Hilborns. I thought it was where my bird was resting. Sure enough, Justin opened the cooler and reached for my 12-pound bird. I saw a fresh turkey that, up until

a couple hours before had a beautiful and a happy life.

This happy life would certainly continue with my family and I later that weekend, when we enjoyed it with a side of creamy mashed potatoes, parsnips, gravy and perhaps, a glass of wine.

Before I left with my turkey in hand (I really needed my two hands to carry it to the car), I asked both the Hilborns: “What’s the best way to cook it?”

“We’ve yet to try one deep fried and that may change our opinion, but for now, the best way to cook a turkey is the plain old way and that means, 325 degrees for a couple of hours, with stuffing inside and basting every half hour.”

One day, the Hilborns hope to live on the revenue from their farm, but for now, they are managing their busy lifestyle – working in the city and managing a farm.

Next month, is pork pickup day.

I cannot wait to get my hands on my pork. I will probably need a trailer for that one.