



The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) has approved plantings of three genetically engineered (GE) crops in as many weeks, including Monsanto Co.'s Roundup Ready sugar beets and alfalfa that are engineered to tolerate Roundup Ready weed-killing herbicide.

The USDA on February 11 also legalized, without restriction, the world's first GE corn crop meant for biofuel production. Biotech giant Syngenta's Event 3272 seed corn will simplify ethanol production and is not meant to feed animals or humans.

The approvals flew in the face of legal and regulatory challenges posed by GE crop opponents and members of the agricultural industry. Opponents fear the GE crop varieties could contaminate conventional food crops and promote the overuse of herbicides like the glyphosate-based Roundup and more toxic chemicals used to kill glyphosate-resistant weeds.

Monsanto won a victory on February 4 when the USDA partially deregulated Roundup Ready sugar beets. A federal court in August 2010 temporarily banned the beets and ordered the USDA to re-review the environmental impacts of the Roundup Ready sugar beets as the result of a lawsuit filed by farmers and environmental groups.

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