

# Making America Organic...One Home At a Time!



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## Bill on DNA-Altered Crops Reaps Organic Outrage

By Kristin Collins

The idea of rearranging the DNA of plants once sounded like the stuff of science fiction. But today, man-made plants that repel pests or survive heavy doses of weedkiller cover 3 million acres of North Carolina farmland -- and state agriculture leaders are paving the way for more.

A bill likely will pass in the legislature this session that will stop local governments from banning genetically modified crops, as three California counties have done. The bill, requested by the Department of Agriculture, passed in the Senate on Friday, the last major hurdle to its success. The House, which passed the bill in May, must agree to a few changes to make it final.

No North Carolina county or city has tried to ban the crops. But the bill has created a maelstrom among those who say that genetically engineered crops pose a danger to the food supply and could destroy organic farming.

The outrage is heightened by a new genetically modified crop in North Carolina that, unlike most others, is intended to go directly into the food supply.

This year in Washington County, a California company planted 75 acres of rice implanted with a human gene that produces proteins found in human milk, saliva and tears. The company plans to extract the proteins and use them in food products that they say could help infants in the Third World.

Those who oppose the crops say they can easily cross-pollinate with organic and conventional crops, destroying rare heirloom varieties and making natural food almost extinct.

Now, as the bill awaits final passage, state leaders are in the middle of a rowdy debate over the future of high-tech agriculture.

Genetically modified crops are the products of biotechnology companies, which have figured out how to add genes to plants' DNA to make them resistant to pests or to the weedkiller Roundup.

Farmers, who pay the companies for the rights to use the patented seeds, say the mutant crops make farming easier and more efficient and cut down on the use of pesticides and herbicides. Ninety-five percent of cotton, 87 percent of soybeans and 52 percent of corn grown in North Carolina this year are genetically modified, according to the Department of Agriculture.

Right now, most genetically modified crops do not go directly into the food supply. Most of the soybeans and corn are used for livestock feed, not sold in grocery stores. But their uses are expanding.

Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler is among many state agriculture leaders who say that genetically modified crops provide the best hope for keeping farmers in business in difficult times -- and for feeding the world on less and less land.

Troxler said the Agriculture Department asked for the bill, which is similar to those being floated in several other states. It would give the state Board of Agriculture, which Troxler chairs, sole authority to outlaw plants.

He said the push comes at the request of seed dealers, farmers and agribusiness companies that were concerned about what they saw in California and New England --

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### Harvest Blend Regular

- Broccoli
- Rapini
- Baby Carrots
- Yellow Onions
- Celery
- Green Leaf Lettuce
- Cucumber
- Hass Avocado
- Zee Lady Peaches
- Black Amber Plums
- Bananas
- Thompson Grapes
- Kiwi

See the web site for details on our other options. Produce bag contents are subject to change based on availability.

### You Don't Say

"A good kitchen should be sufficiently remote from the principal apartments of the house, that the members, visitors, or guests of the family, may not perceive the odour incident to cooking, or hear the noise of culinary operations."

- Isabella Beeton, *Book of Household Management*, 1861

"All the things I really like to do are either immoral, illegal or fattening." - Alexander Woollcott

"I went to this restaurant last night that was set up like a big buffet in the shape of an Ouija board. You'd think about what kind of food you want, and the table would move across the floor to it." - Steven Wright

"A gourmet is just a glutton with brains." - Philip W. Haberman, *Vogue*

where "genetically engineered free" movements have gained steam. "The public is very misinformed," said Wade Byrd, a Bladen County corn farmer. "We're going to use fewer pesticides and have a safer food product when we get more of these crops on the market."

In California, several counties have held referendums on whether to ban the plants locally. Three have been successful. In Vermont, more than 80 local governments have passed resolutions barring them. And in Maine, one town has passed a resolution, and others are considering similar action. In North Carolina, where no such movement has gained a foothold, state officials said they thought the bill would pass without fanfare. It slid through the House in May with only one dissenting vote.

But advocates of organic farming got wind of it soon after, and it didn't have such a smooth road in the Senate. On Thursday, a Senate committee amended the bill to create a study commission that will examine the risks and benefits of genetically engineered crops. It also added two new members to the state Board of Agriculture: an organic farmer and a consumer advocate.

Tony Kleese, head of the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association, which promotes organic farming, said the new bill is better -- but still not palatable. He said it will all but assure that genetically engineered crops can spread unchecked. He said allowing local governments to create zones where genetically engineered crops aren't allowed could protect organic crops from being contami-

nated by wind-blown pollen. Now, that right will be taken away, regardless what the study shows.

Kleese and other organic advocates say genetically engineered crops haven't been studied enough to prove they're safe. Europeans shun them, banning any U.S. product that contains them. They call the bill the work of giant biotech companies -- such as Monsanto, a Missouri company that owns the rights to most of the genetically modified seeds used on American farms -- that want to protect their profit margins.

"Do we want these companies to own our food supply from seed to plate?" Kleese said. "The more of these kinds of laws that go into effect, the more the balance tips to genetically engineered crops. We need to ask a lot of hard questions before we continue down this path."

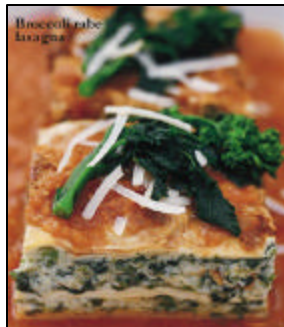
Sen. Charlie Albertson, a Duplin County Democrat, was one of the bill's sponsors. He said it's unrealistic to think that organic farmers, who sell vegetables and fruits at a premium, can feed the masses. He said the expansion of genetically engineered crops will ensure an abundant and affordable food supply.

"The truth is, organic crops are out of the reach of most people who are buying produce," Albertson said. "We can't grow them at the expense of genetically modified crops. These crops offer the best hope in the world to feed hungry people."

## Recipes

### Lasagna Con Rapini

- 1 bunch rapini
- 3 large eggs
- 1/2 cup bread crumbs
- 1/2 cup olive oil, extra virgin
- 1/4 cup 2% milk
- 1 cup ricotta cheese
- 1/2 cup feta cheese
- 1/4 tsp. oregano leaves, dried
- 1/4 tsp. thyme leaves, fresh
- 1/2 tsp. rosemary leaves, fresh
- 1/8 tsp. nutmeg
- 1 lb. lasagna noodles
- 1/2 cup butter or margarine
- salt & pepper
- 4 cups béchamel sauce



Wash and clean the rapini carefully. Saute the rapini in a small amount of the olive oil for 5 minutes. Immediately after, place the pan in a larger pan of cold water to stop the cooking process. When the rapini is cooler, squeeze out as much liquid as possible. Chop it as fine, or process it in a food processor until it is very finely chopped but not pureed.

Put the chopped rapini into a large mixing bowl. Add the ricotta, feta, thyme, oregano, rosemary, grated nutmeg, eggs, and milk. Mix thoroughly. Add the bread crumbs. Mix again until the mixture seems dry, and add 1/4 cup of water. Mix and set aside for 10-15 minutes while the bread crumbs absorb liquids. Check for consistency after this time, adding water or bread crumbs depending upon whether the mixture seems too loose to too dry. Add salt

and pepper to taste. While the above mixture is resting, cook the lasagna noodles in a large amount of salted water. Once they are al dente, drain them, and mix them with the olive oil to keep them from sticking together.

Use the butter or margarine to grease the bottom and sides of a 9 x 12 casserole dish. Place one layer of noodles on the bottom of the dish and cover with about 1/2 inch of the stuffing mixture. Ladle about 1/2 cup of Béchamel sauce over the noodles and sprinkle freshly grated parmesan cheese over this layer. Cover with another layer of noodles. Repeat the process by alternating layers of noodles, stuffing and Béchamel until the pan is full, the last layer being noodles. Sprinkle olive oil and parmesan on the top. Dot with butter, and bake for 45 minutes in a 350 degree oven. Let rest for 10-15 minutes before serving. Sauce each lasagna serving with Béchamel sauce.

### Celery Fruit Salad

- 4 cups mixed fruit (grapes, apples, oranges, banana, kiwi)
- 2 tbsp chopped cucumber
- 2 tbsp chopped tomatoes
- 2 tsp lemon juice
- 1 tbsp chopped celery
- 1 cup sour cream
- 2 tbsp chopped walnuts
- salt and pepper

In a bowl mix the fruits, cucumber, tomato, lemon juice, celery, salt and pepper. Pour in the sour cream and toss all the ingredients lightly till well mixed. Garnish with the walnuts and refrigerate. It's that easy!