

NATIONAL AFFAIRS

USA

Genetically Engineered Crops

A lawsuit was filed in March by farmers of organic produce and environmental activists against the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). They allege that its approval of various “BT” crops had been unlawful. These crops have been genetically engineered to contain the *bacillus thuringiensis* organism, a naturally occurring, soil-based strain which then produces toxins that kill off certain insects. Environmental groups had already petitioned the EPA to withdraw registration for BT crops and have said that the lawsuit followed up on that application.

The suit focuses on the environmental implications of BT crops, claiming these encourage pest resistance to

build up and ultimately make it harder to treat problems through traditional means. It also asserts that contamination of non-genetically engineered crops can occur when pollen is transferred by wind or insects, and that there can be an effect on non-target insects and organisms. The lawsuit formally accuses the Agency of breaching several federal acts, including the Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act and the National Environmental Policy Act, because of these environmental effects. In it, the plaintiffs have cited estimates that up to 25 per cent of the 1999 field corn crop would involve BT corn – with predictions that BT corn is grown on about 15m acres in the United States. □