



Bill C-18 Testimony Before the Senate Committee on Agriculture
Diana Bronson and Pat Mooney
on behalf of Food Secure Canada
February 3, 2015

Thank you for this opportunity.

Food Secure Canada is a diverse national membership based coalition of organizations and people working to eliminate hunger, ensure safe, healthy food, and build more sustainable food systems. We have been calling on the government of Canada to develop a national food policy and I have brought copies of our proposal for all Committee members.

Bill C 18 is a missed opportunity to legislate in the broad public interest, in the direction that Canadians want to see food policy evolve. I want to address my comments to the overall logic of the Bill and then invite Pat Mooney, from one of our member organizations, ETC Group, which specializes in these issues, to situate this legislation in a historical and global context.

In Food Secure Canada's view, the Agriculture Growth Act should contain incentives to help farmers move in the direction that Canadians want them to go towards more local and sustainable food production systems, which in turn will lead more public confidence that our food is healthy and safe, in addition to reducing agriculture's carbon footprintⁱ. Instead, this Bill puts the emphasis on an outdated and costlyⁱⁱ vision of more export and technologically driven growth of commodity agriculture entrenching an industrial system, heavily reliant on proprietary genetically modified crops that will not serve well the future of our agricultural sector. As we can see from the department's own commissioned opinion surveys, consumer opinion is shifting, and our public policies are lagging far behind. Bill C-18 is not moving us in the direction Canadians want us to go in and it does nothing to resolve the issues they are concerned with.

We share the concerns raised last week before this committee by the National Farmers Union, another Food Secure Canada member organization, that has raised awareness about some of the problems of this Bill. In particular, we are concerned about the decline in public research and development of plant breeding that is in the broad public interest, as is the appropriate role of government.

Mr Mooney will give the balance of our testimony.

Thank you for this opportunity. I have been following Plant Breeders Rights (PBR) and other exclusive monopoly legislation related to biological materials since 1977. I also had the honour of testifying before this committee when PBR was debated in 1991. When the Federal Minister of agriculture proposed Plant Breeders Rights in early 1977 he spoke to a joint meeting of the Canadian Seed Trade Association and the Canadian Seed Growers' Association and said that the purpose of the legislation was to (1) feed the hungry; and, (2,) make a more beautiful Canada. As the debate over Plant Breeders Rights intensified in Canada and around the world in the late 70s, 80s and onward, the purported benefits expanded to claim that PBR would:

- increase both the number of seed companies and plant breeders;
- encourage public plant breeding;
- stimulate research and development (R&D) to domesticate and introduce entirely new crop species;
- increase the number of varieties available to farmers;
- and, improve nutrition.

Before adopting legislation that will strengthen the monopoly position of seed companies, it makes sense to see what has happened to the seed industry and if the companies have kept their promises.

- According to an FAO survey conducted in the late 70s, there were approximately 7000 different seed enterprises around the world. While some seed companies were important in one or two countries or concerning one or two crops, no single company controlled even 1% of the global commercial seed industry. Today, the top three companies control more than 54% of the global commercial seed market covering all crops and the top 10 companies control over 75%.ⁱⁱⁱ
- And, just as the Canadian Seed Growers Association has been absorbed by the Canadian Seed Trade Association, six of the world's top 10 pesticide companies (who also control 70% of pesticide sales) have morphed into six of the top 10 seed companies.^{iv}
- These six companies together now control 76% of private-sector crop research.^v
- The Global Crop Diversity Trust, earlier this year, analyzed the diversity of crop species important to national food consumption around the world. They tracked the changes between 1961 and 2009. Incidentally, 1961 was the year that UPOV (the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants) was founded. Rather than commercial plant breeding contributing to new species – or even a diversification of species in different countries – the Trust discovered a 36% “implosion” in the number of species actually consumed including in the United States.^{vi}
- Both FAO and IDRC (here in Canada) report a 75% decline in crop genetic diversity over roughly the same timeline. In other words, industrial

agriculture has rendered extinct three quarters of the genetic diversity we may need to survive climate change in the decades ahead. Tragically, the global commercial seed industry devotes 45% of its R&D to one single crop – corn.

- What of the promise of improved nutrition? Two reports show a 5% to 40% decline in the nutritional value of vegetables, fruits, cereals and tubers over the last half-century.^{vii} ^{viii} Whereas PBR was to give us improved nutrition – we have lost food value.
- You already know what has happened to public plant breeding – both in Canada and around the world – continuous decline.

But, if the international seed companies haven't used PBR to diversify our crop species or varieties, or improve nutrition, have they made Canada and the world more beautiful? According to UPOV, since 1961 companies have claimed around 80,000 plant varieties of which 59% have been ornamentals. Since 1961 and the founding of UPOV, the world's farmers have donated – not patented – 2.1 million unique farmer-bred plant varieties of 7000 crops that they have placed in the world's gene banks for future breeding. If we are going to keep food on the table despite Climate Change, the Farmers' Right (not "privilege") to save and exchange seed – any seed any way – must be held sacrosanct.

Some things don't change. As I told the Minister of agriculture in 1977 and this committee in 1991, the Lord's prayer, "give us this day our daily bread" must not be a prayer to Monsanto. This legislation should not be passed. Thank you.

ⁱ Recent public opinion data commissioned by AAFC shows concerns around genetically modified organisms, corporate consolidation, encroachment on agricultural lands, and growing food for future generations in a sustainable fashion. It shows great appetite for local and organic food, with price being the main obstacle. See The Strategic Council, Modern Agriculture and Agricultural Awareness Focus Groups, March 18, 2014 and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Consumer Perceptions of Food, Wave 4, Final report, Ipsos Reid, August 2014. These reports are available on:

ⁱⁱ Costly in dollars as well as in uncalculated externalities: climate change, soil erosion, water quality, etc.

ⁱⁱⁱ ETC Group, "Putting the Cartel before the Horse...", Communiqué No.111, September, 2013.

^{iv} ETC Group, "Putting the Cartel before the Horse...", Communiqué No.111, September, 2013.

^v ETC Group, "Putting the Cartel before the Horse...", Communiqué No.111, September, 2013.

^{vi} Khoury, C. Anne D. Bjorkman, Hannes Dempewolf, Julian Ramirez-Villegasa, Luigi Guarino, Andy Jarvis, Loren H. Rieseberg and Paul C. Struik. Increasing homogeneity in global food supplies and the implications for food security. PNAS (2014) March 18, 2014, p. 4001-4006.

www.pnas.org/cgi/doi/10.1073/pnas.1313490111 Between 1961 and 2009, homogeneity increased by 16.7%, as measured by the mean change in similarity between each country and the global standard composition, with a maximum (single-country) change of 59.7%. Likewise, mean among-country similarity increased by 35.7%.

^{vii} Donald R. Davis, "Declining Fruit and Vegetable Nutrient Composition: What Is the Evidence?" HORTSCIENCE VOL. 44(1) FEBRUARY 2009.

^{viii} Jo Robinson, "Breeding the Nutrition Out of Our Food", *New York Times*, May 25, 2013.

Additional Information

Diana Bronson
Food Secure Canada
Tel: 514 271 7352
director@foodsecurecanada.org
foodsecurecanada.org

Pat Mooney
ETC Group
Tel: 613-241-2267
mooney@etcgroup.org
etcgroup.org