

GE-Free Sonoma County
PO Box 231, Sebastopol, CA 95473
(707) 823-4410 www.gefreesonoma.org

Contact: Daniel Solnit
Phone: 707-823-4410
Cell: 707-953-8600
Fax: 707-823-4480
Email: dsolnit@ecoisp.com

Contact: Dave Henson
Phone: 707-874-1557 x214
Cell: 707-206-5548
Fax: 707-874-1558
Email: dhenson@oaec.org

GE Free Campaign Gathers Record Number of Signatures
Grassroots Coalition Certain to Qualify for Ballot

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: January 5, 2005

Santa Rosa, California – Advocates for a moratorium on genetically engineered crops turned in 45,387 petition signatures today, shattering the previous Sonoma County record of less than 33,000. Despite torrential rain in the past few weeks, nearly one in five County voters stopped to sign the petition and show their support.

“I talked with people from all ages and backgrounds, all walks of life, and I found broad and enthusiastic support every time I went out”, said Christina Hoex, a Radiologic Technologist at Memorial Hospital in Santa Rosa, who gathered over 1500 signatures from people throughout Sonoma County.

The signatures were gathered by over 500 volunteers, also a county record. Campaign Coordinator Daniel Solnit called the results “A real victory. This represents an incredible amount of dedication and hard work by hundreds of people who took time out of their busy lives, time from work and family, to make this happen. Most of our volunteers are not activists, they have not been involved in campaigns before, but care deeply about protecting our food and farms from this threat.”

“This has been an incredible experience”, said Linda Vaccaraza, a mother of two and resident of Sonoma, “I took time off of work to gather signatures because this is so important for my children’s future. We have to know what is being done to our food, and that what our kids eat is safe.”

Derek Trowbridge, winegrower and owner of Old World Winery in Windsor, said, “It’s plain good sense to put a ten-year moratorium on GE crops in Sonoma County -- that will give growers time to assess the dangers and possible benefits of GE technologies. The risk of contamination of our farms is so serious that passing this initiative is our only recourse.”

Observers consider the anti-GMO measure to be more moderate and better written than similar measures passed in Mendocino and Marin Counties last year. Dave Henson, Director of Occidental Arts and Ecology Center and the primary author of the initiative, spent several months consulting with local farmers, scientists, and public officials. “In drafting the initiative, we wanted to get perspectives from as many stakeholders as possible. I think we succeeded. This measure really protects our farmers, our local agricultural economy, and our environment from the potential risks of genetic contamination and loss of markets.”

The initiative prevents contamination of Sonoma County’s agriculture and environment by placing a ten- year moratorium on the propagation, cultivation, raising, growing, sale or distribution of transgenic organisms within the county. The measure makes exceptions for agricultural or medical research, and exempts human food and animal feed products. The County Board of Supervisors would be able to amend the law by unanimous vote. If passed, the ban would be enforced by the Sonoma County Agriculture Commissioner, who would ensure that prohibited GE organisms are destroyed or removed from the county. Violators who knowingly grow or raise GE crops or animals could be charged for all abatement costs, and fined a civil penalty of up to \$1,000.

Photo and interview opportunity –

Wed, 1/5/05 at 1:00 PM: Sonoma County Registrar of Voters Office,
435 Fiscal Drive at Paulin Drive (in County Center), Santa Rosa

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