

# **‘Monsanto Protection Act’ called outrageous, dangerous**

**By Michelle McGuinness, MSN News**

A short-term spending bill has sparked intense debate about America's food supply.

HR933 passed the Senate last week; President Obama signed it into law Tuesday. The bill helped the government avoid a March 27 shutdown. All of which sounds like standard procedure.

But activists are enraged over section 735 of the bill, the “Farmer Assurance Provision,” which they're calling the “Monsanto Protection Act” and claiming could harm America's food supply.

Monsanto is an agricultural biotechnology company that produces genetically engineered seeds. Opponents claim genetically modified organisms (GMOs) may be harmful to human health and environmental biodiversity.

“It's outrageous,” said Dave Murphy, founder and executive director of Food Democracy Now.

“This is an ATM machine for Monsanto,” Murphy said. Monsanto “basically opened a new line of credit when they got this thing passed.”

Usually, any new GMO crops need to be approved by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and legal challenges can be filed to stop a seed from being planted until it undergoes a more vigorous review. But opponents of section 735, the “Monsanto Protection Act,” claim the bill eliminates regulatory checks and judicial review.

“It's basically a corporate handout to Monsanto,” Murphy claimed. “It hurts every farmer. ... Every consumer is at risk.”

In a statement to MSN News, a USDA spokesperson said, Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack “has asked the Office of General Council to review this provision as it appears to preempt judicial review of a deregulatory action which may make the provision unenforceable.”

In an email to MSN, Kelly Clauss of Monsanto’s Public Affairs office said the Farmer Assurance Provision has enjoyed bipartisan support in Congress since June 2012.

“As we understand it, the point of the Farmer Assurance Provision is to strike a careful balance allowing farmers to continue to plant and cultivate their crops subject to appropriate environmental safeguards, while USDA conducts any necessary further environmental reviews,” Clauss wrote.

She said not only Monsanto, but other major grower groups like the American Farm Bureau Federation, the American Seed Trade Association, the American Soybean Association and the National Corn Growers Association supported the provision.

Clauss also provided a June 2012 letter to the House Committee on Appropriations signed by the groups cited as supporters.

“Opponents of agricultural biotechnology have repeatedly filed suits ... in order to disrupt the regulatory process and undermine the science-based regulation of such products,” the letter claims. It says the litigation has impeded the availability of new technology to growers and consumers.

The letter calls the provision a “positive step” that assures growers “the crops they plant could continue to be grown, subject to appropriate interim conditions, even after a judicial ruling against USDA.”

But that did not calm the worries of more than 250,000 people who signed a petition expressing their outrage at the passage of what they call the “Monsanto Protection Act.”

The petition alleges that the provision “forced USDA to immediately approve any permits for continued planting at the industry’s request, putting industry completely in charge by allowing for a ‘back door approval’ mechanism.”

Section 735 says the Secretary of Agriculture should “immediately grant temporary permit(s) or temporary deregulation” upon request from a farmer, grower, farm operator or producer.

Murphy said there was a protest at the White House March 27 that included a small group of local citizens.

“We gave Obama all the political cover he would need and he still caved,” he said.