



## MISSOURI SENATE

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# Failure of Senate Bill 1009 a Success for Southeast Missouri Farmers

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JEFFERSON CITY — This year's legislative session was successful for the quality legislation approved by the Missouri General Assembly. However, one significant achievement of the 2006 session was a bill that did not pass. Senate Bill 1009, which I vigorously fought against, would have eliminated state control over seed planting. As a result, Southeast Missouri would be open for business to large bioscience corporations that produce genetically modified organisms (GMOs), which would wreak havoc on Bootheel rice farms.

An earlier version of the legislation would have prohibited the state from enacting any seed regulation exceeding federal requirements. In other words, regulatory control over planting would have gone from local communities and state control to federal authorities.

This legislation clearly would have acted as an infringement upon state control. However, these reforms are not simply about idea of who is in charge of regulation. In fact, they pose a real danger to Southeast Missouri farms and the future of Bootheel agriculture.

The threat lies in the vulnerability of traditional crops, such as Southeast Missouri rice, to genetically modified crops. GMOs are engineered to produce proteins to be used in pharmaceutical medicines; however, at this time there is no market for this product. If these GMOs are planted near conventional rice fields, co-mingling would be disastrous to Southeast Missouri rice producers. Of course, even the perception of cross-contamination can deter buyers and negatively affect the market for nearby farmers.

This threat reared its head in 2005 when Ventria Bioscience initiated a plan to grow genetically modified rice just a few miles from conventional rice fields in Southeast Missouri. Large buyers of Missouri rice threatened to boycott rice grown in Missouri if Ventria went through with its plan. As a result, Ventria promised to move its operations 120 miles from Bootheel rice fields.

Were SB 1009 allowed to pass, the state of Missouri's authority would have been weakened in deciding whether Ventria, or any other bioscience company, would be allowed to grow GMOs near Bootheel rice fields. Regulatory powers need to remain in the hands of rice producers and the Missouri Department of Agriculture, not the Washington bureaucrats. That is why I will continue to fight against legislation like SB 1009.

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*Senator Robert Mayer represents the people of Wayne, Ripley, Butler, Stoddard, New Madrid,  
Pemiscot and Dunklin counties in the Missouri Senate.*