

Submission Cover Sheet

Review of the Moratorium on GM Canola

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Attachments Submitted with this Submission:

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Submission to The GM Canola Moratorium Review Panel.

This submission is made as a private citizen not representing any organization.

I am a columnist and cartoonist for the Weekly Times, Australia's largest agricultural weekly, have a farm background and live in Victoria's grain belt with wife and four children.

Any assessment of the industries own figures on increased profitability of growing gm canola are unambiguous. The industry DOES make more money when it sells its gm seed and chemicals to farmers.

Figures available of increased profitability to farmers are not so clear. Low-till or no-till regimes may initially be assisted by the ability to spray for post emergent weeds. However the evidence would appear to be that subsequent years require greater applications of herbicide to maintain

weed control levels. Again this is profitable if you are selling herbicide but not if you are buying it.

Actual yield increase is extremely debatable and, where claimed, is marginal. In fact the chief advantage discernable would appear to be less fuel consumption in preparation tillage.

It is also a fact that seed MUST be bought from the company each year. No allowance is made to re-use seed as has been practiced through history. Again this is an input cost levied on the farmer.

Public concern over gm crops is obviously important to marketing of canola products and this is very understandable. Any reading of the behaviour of these and many other corporations is far from reassuring. Their “mission statement”, the real one, is to get away with as much as they can as profitably as possible and it is naïve to think otherwise and arrogant to think the general public doesn’t realise it. Impetus for producing these products is provided by the industry and certain government bodies and institutions who see advantages in research investment and prestige. This is not to be confused with research into genetic technologies that actually are of benefit to health and welfare.

The public has never called for these food products and can usually only be tricked into consuming them through ignorance and inadequate labelling, as is the case in Australia.

An actual lower priced product to the consumer IF it is realised means one of two things. (A) The farmer is being paid less for his product and any savings or yield increases are consumed by a lower price. Or (B) The farmer is now competing directly with US and Canadian gm producers and thus has no marketing advantages whatsoever or, as is more likely, is at an actual disadvantage because of overt agricultural subsidies provided in those countries.

Whether history reveals a problem with consumption of gm canola remains to be seen, but from a marketing point of view it is obvious that any perceived risk in consuming the products can be turned to a massive marketing advantage IF a country can provide the product. Successive contaminations of Australia’s farms (despite a supposed moratorium) continue to jeopardise this potentially lucrative advantage. Observe the ABARE figures that show our exports into the premium markets of the EU compared to Canada’s.

With due respect to the members of this committee, the question of whether the moratorium is an advantage or not to Australian farmers and the larger community should be put to an advertising agency. Here the question would be deemed a “no-brainer”.

You do not gain anything from being the same as your competition. What you do is exploit the difference. If you haven’t got a difference, you get your creatives to invent one. To think that we should be gulled into destroying our ACTUAL marketing advantage is almost criminal.

Having grown up on a farm (and grown canola) I am fully aware of the steady increase in gross farm income and the steady decrease in net farm income due to the input costs and the failure of produce prices to increase at even a fraction of these costs. This is also true of Canadian and US farmers. Only a fool could fail to see that the farm sector is a huge and profitable one... but not for the farmers themselves. It is unsurprising that farmers may wish to try anything that even promises to maintain their liquidity. The reality is that it is clutching at straws and is unlikely to meaningfully increase profitability or stem the flow of youth from farming or relieve the decline of rural economies and communities.

The solutions to these problems at the heart of this vital part of the Australian identity do not lay in the reduction to virtual serfdom of our farmers to multinational companies.

The year by year exponential growth of our organics industry is witness to the concerns consumers have for the quality of their food

A moratorium alone has so far just managed to protect our marketing advantage but to truly realise Australia's potential, government and industry should actively promote us as the planet's last food source of pristine isolation.

That is absolutely and demonstrably and patently NOT what Bayer and Monsanto want us to do.

Your decision on this question will be historic. Make sure history records that you were actually on Australia's side.