

Submission Cover Sheet

Review of the Moratorium on GM Canola

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Attachments Submitted with this Submission:

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GM Canola Review Panel Secretariat
Department of Primary Industries
Level 19, Spring St
Melbourne, Vic, 3001

Dear Review Panel,

I write to you as a concerned producer regarding the effects on Canola research and on farmers of the moratorium on growing GM Canola.

As a producer I need access to the best varieties of seed available regardless of whether it is produced by conventional breeding or the Genetic Modification technique. The current moratorium has slowed research into new varieties and stopped the commercial introduction of others. Growers are well aware of the importance of testing new varieties in the field. This is where so many promising varieties come unstuck. They trial well in small plots but it is once they are placed in the paddock and are subjected to the vagaries of nature, that we get the chance to assess their true worth.

Paddock trials are the final stage of research, while we are unable to finish the research we will have bottlenecks in the constant struggle to stay competitive in world markets. These days even public or grower funded research is commercially driven via royalties paid on successful varieties. When do the research companies get their pay out if the research cannot be finished? If held up too long the research program gets sold, probably offshore where there are no moratoriums and the technology is lost.

This is a real tragedy because in the future whoever owns the genes will own the varieties. We cannot afford to lose the control over our destiny that grower funded research gives. Were the moratorium to be extended for another 4 years then most of the companies would give up and sell the programs and we would be so far behind that it would be almost impossible to catch up. We really would be at the mercy of the multi-nationals then.

Addressing the production side of things, the critics of GM would have us believe that it would be impossible to stop non-GM crops from being contaminated. For a very long time we have been segregating various crops from each other so as to present a premium quality product to market. GM crops will be no different, care will be needed to keep them separate from non-GM just as we keep wheat separate from barley now or various varieties of canola separate. The tolerances that are set for this could easily be met by today's farmers. Thus the cessation of the moratorium allows choice for those who wish to grow GM and those who do not.

As regards marketing, the constant growth in the production of GM crops worldwide, is empirical evidence enough that there is little resistance to them in the marketplace. In North America the issue is so low on their list of priorities that GM and non-GM crops are not even segregated. The Europeans who are said to be concerned about GM are now starting to grow significant quantities of GM. Japan are also said to be sensitive about GM yet buy large quantities of GM Canola from Canada. Even if there are small niche markets that wish to pay a premium for GM free canola our farmers have the track record to show they are capable of keeping varieties separate should it be necessary.

This is a technology which has been available for ten years or so. Long enough to know about any disadvantages, none have been discovered, but not long enough for its true potential to be realized. The promise of allergy free ryegrass, low methane emitting forage crops for our livestock to eat, pharmaceuticals from crops, drought resistance, salt tolerance, the list is almost endless.

The health risks are non-existent, the market can cope, growers can cope, the potential benefits are very high, what are we waiting for? Let us move on as the rest of the world is moving on and leave the moratorium behind.



Russell McKenzie
Farmer,
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