

Submission Cover Sheet

# Review of the Moratorium on GM Canola

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**Name of Individual/Organisation: Victorian Organic Dairy Farmers Association**

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**Attachments Submitted with this Submission:**

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## SUBMISSION TO THE REVIEW OF THE MORATORIUM ON GM CANOLA

BY THE

### VICTORIAN ORGANIC DAIRY FARMERS ASSOCIATION

#### Background

The Victorian Organic Dairy Farmers Association (VODFA) was formed in 1989 by 3 organic dairy farmers in South Gippsland, Victoria. They were an informal group and met monthly to share ideas and resources. The group gradually expanded - its membership is now 55 and includes organic dairy farmers but membership is not limited to this group. VODFA is a special interest group and has an important role in education of the general public about organic farming, the benefits to health by eating organic and nutrient-rich foods and encouraging a return to traditional diets. Any interested farmer or individual can apply for membership and the benefits of membership include quarterly newsletters, monthly meetings with guest speakers and farm visits, loan of resources and access to farming, health, gardening and general information.

A small group of organic dairy farmers including VODFA members formed a co-operative in 2002. Today membership of the co-operative has grown and there are now 20 members- 16 of these currently supply organic milk to the co-operative. The milk these family farms supply represents 80% of organic milk produced by organic dairy farmers in Australia. The number of dairy farmers converting to organic is increasing

#### Marketing

The organic milk supplied to the co-operative is used in products including fresh milk, butter, cheese, icecream, dried milk powder, UHT milk and yoghurt

Retail brands with products containing organic milk include:

- Parmalat
- Lemnos
- Pure Chill
- Tatura

The sales of organic milk products are increasing and demand exceeds supply especially for butter. Organic milk products from the co-operative are not currently exported but this option is being actively pursued at present.

#### Organic Certification

All organic dairy farmers are certified by either NASAA or ACO (BFA). This certification prohibits the use of **genetically modified organisms**, pesticides, herbicides, insecticides and other synthetic chemicals in all aspects of organic farming.

#### Stock Feeding

Organic dairy farmers feed their milking cows with pasture, hay, silage, grain etc. All feed must be certified organic and so sourcing feed from organic sources is critical. Organic farmers attempt to feed their animals as much as possible via on-farm harvesting but also need to buy organic hay and grain from organic feed producers. Their certification demands that 100% of feed supplied be organic.

Organic dairy farmers do not feed canola. They use organic wheat, barley and some other organic grains and feed products but not canola.

#### Genetically Modified Canola

Canola has not been used as feed by organic dairy farmers for about the last 3 years due to the risk that it will be inadvertently contaminated by GM canola from trial sites and the fear of buying in contaminated grain and jeopardizing their certification.

#### Concerns of Organic Dairy Farmers about GM Canola

Organic dairy farmers are seriously concerned about the overturning of the bans on the planting of GM canola

If the ban on the planting of GM canola is overturned organic dairy farmers are very concerned about:

- the contamination of grain used for feeding stock; they have stopped using canola which resolves the current problem but are concerned about what options will remain for them if GM wheat and barley follow - the thin edge of the wedge phenomenon
- the restriction of options for buying in grain and hay
- the purity of bought-in organic hay if the organic farmer supplying the hay has a neighbour growing GM canola
- the irreversibility of the situation if GM canola plantings are allowed - the genie will be out of the bottle
- the loss of markets now enjoyed by Australian farmers who export to countries who will not accept products from countries allowing GM crops eg: Japan, Europe etc
- legal implications if GM canola germinates on your property - who will be liable for contamination - will Monsanto demand payment for organic farmers "growing" GM canola?
- who will pay for the considerable costs of segregation of GM from non-GM canola during the post-farm stage
- buffer zones currently used for trial plots and likely to be required if the bans are lifted are grossly inadequate as pollen and bees travel far greater distances

## **Labelling**

- Customers do not go into shops and ask for milk from cows fed GM canola but they do seek out organic and biodynamic milk for the confirmed health benefits
- The majority of consumers do not want to buy food containing GM products
- Milk from cows fed GM feed would not be labeled as such
- Current testing regimes cannot detect the presence of GM so milk producers would not be required to label milk as containing GM under current labelling laws
- Could any products (including organic) be guaranteed 100% GM-free if the bans are lifted

## **Conclusions**

The Victorian Dairy Farmers Association strongly endorses the extension of the moratorium on GM Canola until at least 2013. This will only have positive impacts for Victoria allowing more time for examination of the potential impacts of introducing this technology and to examine the effects of the GM experience overseas. When organic milk products from Australia are exported in the near future most countries interested in importing them will only proceed if Australia remains GM free.

The only positive if the ban on GM canola is lifted is that demand for organic milk and milk products will increase.

To conclude, an article in the UK newspaper the Northern Echo reported on 1.7.07 that:-  
“Farming is in trouble but one sector seems to be bucking the trend. Organic farming, which stresses that crops and livestock should be reared as naturally as possible is on the up and up”. Shoppers in Britain bought £1.1 billion worth of organic meat and groceries last year. The article went on to outline the results of recent research from Aberdeen and Danish Universities proving organic milk has 50% higher levels of Vitamin E, 75% higher levels of beta-carotene and levels 2-3 times higher of anti-oxidants and omega 3 essential fatty acids than conventionally produced milk. Let’s not threaten that edge.