

Submission Cover Sheet

Review of the Moratorium on GM Canola

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GM Canola Review Panel Secretariat
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Dear Members of the GM Canola Review Panel,

My family started farming in Australia in 1850. I am 48 and a fourth generation grain and livestock farmer and live in the Eastern Mallee region of Victoria.

For the past twelve years I have taken a very keen interest in the development of the GM technology. In that time I have tried to source the true facts and form a balanced view on the subject. I am a progressive person who likes to improve my farming practices and move forward, while being considerate of the impacts I have on my environment, my industries and the community at large.

In my attempts to better understand this subject I completed a course on Gene Technology in Canberra with C.S.I.R.O and have had the opportunity to visit the new Biotechnology Centre at Latrobe University in Bundoora Victoria. I had the chance to talk to a number of researchers, scientists and industry officials but also a number of Canadian and American farmers. I have taken the opportunity to seek out and speak to the OGTR's Dr Sue Meek.

Whether to allow the adoption of GM canola or not is the burning question.

I have come to the conclusion that as Australian farmers, we have been missing out on some wonderful advancements in World class science and technology. Australian farmers have over the last 12 years dramatically lost out financially and it has also impacted on market share.

In the last 12 years there has been a massive revolution in the adoption of biotechnology within agriculture worldwide, culminating in last year's 102 million hectares planted by 10.3 million farmers in 22 countries. These 22 countries accounted for 55% or 3.6 billion of the world's population. 2006 saw another 13% increase in total GM plantings. GM Canola accounted for 4.8 million hectares. (ISAAA 2007)

A recent ABARE report concluded in September 2005 stated that a continuation of the current GM canola moratoriums and extension to other transgenic broadacre crops is expected to result in a loss of gross national product of \$3 billion, in net present value terms, over the next 10 years.

Unfortunately while the GM canola moratoriums have stopped Australian farmers from growing these plants our heavily subsidised international counterparts have flourished,

dramatically increased market share and ultimately Australia has imported tonnes of GM ingredients into our country which we eat consistently.

Everyday foods, such as icecream, chocolate and potato chips and french fries which have even been cooked in it all have GM derived ingredients.

Yet as Australian farmers we can not compete even in our own country. This seems discriminative and ludicrous that this happens while Australian farmers are unable to compete even on our own soil.

The official Customs figures show Australian imported 57079.66MT of canola seed last year from Canada. ABS figures show canola oil imports at 1,128 tonnes. Unfortunately as oil doesn't contain any proteins therefore no DNA we can not say whether the oil is produced from GM seed or not. But a % is highly probable.

I note in a recent release by the Canadian Canola Council they plan to take the industry to 15 million tonnes of sustained market demand and production. They have also quoted in relationship to Australian competition;

“Australia has been plagued by production problems in recent years due to drought. Additionally the continuing moratorium on GM canola is believed to be damaging Australia's long-term production competitiveness. However it can be expected Australia will attempt to respond to demand signals and will eventually approve production of GM varieties. With higher production levels, Australia would impact on Canadian exports to Japan, Pakistan and the EU.”

The development of GM technology has the ability to address drought, frost and salinity, increase yield, and give better pest and disease management. As a farmer on ground I have been waiting for the chance to uptake GM plants that will help reduce the amount of chemical we use in the environment which we live and work in and grow our food. Health wise we all stand to benefit.

I note from Brookes¹ that GM crops globally have reduced pesticide use by 172 million kg, a 14% reduction in the global environmental footprint left by pesticide use.

I have been concerned with the use of TT Canola for some time. Simazine and Atrazine are 2 very harsh chemicals being constantly use on ground in Canola farming and there is an associated yield penalty of 10-20%. The residue left from these chemicals also limit the choices available for crop used in the following years which inhibit a proper rotation schedule.

Of course we also know Atrazine has risen as a major environmental concern. Canada phased out of use in 2003, the EU reduced its use in 2004 to a very small limit with

¹ Brookes, G. and Barfoot, P. 'Global Economic and Environmental Impact – The First Nine Years 1996-2004' UK AbBioForum, 8(2&3)

review this year, America is currently completing a review. APVMA are due to complete a review this year. If APVMA follows the lead of our competitors there will be one less tool available to Australian growers.

The introduction of a much softer chemical option with GM canola will allow me to address resistant brome grass and ryegrass and give me another tool and option in my management rotation to address persistent problems. I have always believed the use of canola in a rotation with wheat will give about a 20% yield increase. This is due to the long tap root from the canola plant that opens up the soil and leaves nitrogen in the soil for the following cereal crop to use. This has been backed up by Dr Rob Norton's research at Melbourne University "Conservation farming systems and canola".

He believes an extra 200,000 hectares of canola would be grown under direct drill or minimum tillage and 640 tonnes less triazine herbicide would be used a year. The average Australian canola yield would increase from 1.27 tonnes per hectare to 1.38 tonnes per hectare, with an increase of canola production, estimated at 295,000 tonnes annually.

Wheat production would increase by 64,000 tonnes on the additional canola area. Dr. Norton states, the increase in canola and wheat production would be worth \$135 millions to the Australian grains industry.

With living in the Mallee we are always looking for ways we can successfully implement min-till operations but more realistically no-till to reduce the impact of loss of valuable topsoil and reduction of costs.

Certainly the adoption of this technology will go a long way towards achieving these goals. Obviously there would be a huge reduction on the use of fossil fuels with less cultivation.

Brookes 2005 also points out that global GM crops have reduce greenhouse gas emissions by over 10 billion kgs, the equivalent to removing 5 million cars from the road for one year.

Australia has one of the most rigorous and stringent testing regimes in the world for assessing the human and environmental safety factors of GM crops. It is open and transparent and independent which gives me a great deal of confidence and security on ground we are headed in the right direction with GM adoption

Co-existence has worked for years between traditional crops, TT, organics and seed production. I have worked as a certified seed producer for the soft and hard seed industries in Australia over the years producing for both the domestic and international market place. I have been under contract and inspected by AQIS and the appropriate regulative groups.

I know and understand what contracts are and they are certainly not foreign to the Grains industry in general especially with forward contracts, futures trading and plant breeder's rights. I believe farmers will choose whether to take on these contracts to grow GM or not. Insurance companies once the technology is in place will do the same as I've never had a problem before.

ABARE Review on May 2007 concluded the introduction of GM canola would have minimal, if any, impact on the Australian organic canola industry when commercially introduced.

Segregation has been proven successful by companies likes of Harvest Grain for international markets and I am positive GM creates no burden that hasn't been addressed before.

I believe that much of the concern surrounding GM technology has been addressed, as stated by Mark Lunney and Robert Burrell (DAFF/ACIPA report 2007),

"Much depends on existing scientific evidence but certainly where a new crop has gone through an existing regulatory approval process as for GM crops the farmer planting the crop has strong arguments to defeat claims brought in negligence and private nuisance."

Various reports commissioned in Australia have concluded, that common law is sufficient to deal with any issues should they arise in relation to GM crops.

ACIL Tasman in its report entitled "Managing genetically modified crops in Australia GM crops, segregation and liability in Australia agriculture" notes that, Australian farmers have managed spillovers for decades. A hierarchy of effective methods, mainly informal, to protect property rights in these circumstances has evolved. The use of legal remedies by farmers or the grains industry has been rare. Where the courts have been called upon to manage disputes, common law has proved adequate, especially over the past 20 years where the rate of technological change has been rapid. By its nature, common law is flexible and provides a 'bottom up' approach to establishing property rights. There is no evidence to suggest that the commercial introduction of OGTR approved GM crops will pose problems that are beyond the scope of informal resolution or the common law.

The announcement by Federal Agriculture Minister Peter McGauran last week of a report produced by the consultancy firm ACIL Tasman says GM canola also offers solutions to problems facing conventional canola in Australia and adds more evidence to why the GM canola moratorium should be lifted, so that Australian farmers can have access to the benefits of this technology.

He said, "Australian farmers are extremely efficient and innovative producers, but need to remain internationally competitive".

Mr McGauran said "The report covered everything from regulation, supply chain management and market acceptance of GM crops to agronomic, economic and legal liability issues at farm level, this package is intended to make a well-informed contribution to the current debate about the GM crops".

Mr McGauran said Australian farmers stood to gain significantly from the introduction of GM technology.

It also points out that GM canola has been farmed in other countries for a decade without any reported health problems.

"The study concludes that Australia's main competitor, Canada, has been growing GM canola for 10 years without any appreciable loss of market share or prices, while enjoying significant agronomic benefits," Mr McGauran said.

With so much good factual information about GM canola, it is unfortunate that the media has concentrated on the misconceptions and innuendo generated by a very small factional anti group. This has hurt Australian agriculture's competitiveness on the world scene and has been detrimental to its advancement and those thousands of farmers operating have missed out financially.

I hope I have portrayed some of the facts in this submission as seen by an active farmer on ground. As for my livestock prime lamb and beef cattle, ABARE have demonstrated that there has been no real impact on overseas industries with livestock feed with GM product.

Outside my direct industry, I see GM insulin as a proven shining light and has been a revolution for the medical industry and diabetics.

In conclusion I believe it's time for Victoria and Australia to move forward with GM canola. We need the ability to compete, to increase productivity and financial stability into the future. We don't want to have to wait at least another 8 years for this opportunity to produce GM canola.

Yours Sincerely,

Geoff Kendell