

Submission Cover Sheet

Review of the Moratorium on GM Canola

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Name of Individual/Organisation: Mr Robert Vickers

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Attachments Submitted with this Submission:

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As return to path.



1st. June 2007

Ack 7/6

Sir Gus Nossal,
c/o Walter and Eliza Hall Institute,
Royal Melbourne Hospital,
Parkville, 3052.

Dear Sir Gustav,

I am seriously concerned that the go ahead may be given to GM crops in Victoria in the near future. The subject is apparently up for discussion once again, with your name being mentioned in dispatches, and I don't know that there are any misgivings at the top of the decision-making system, although the flaws in the system become clearer as time passes.

Once more we are being asked "Trust us: we're scientists." I regret to say that however much I would like to trust the scientists, I have no such trust in corporate power and application of the technology, and of inter-government deals that form the basis of free trade agreements.

Below is a letter I sent to a Rupanyup wheat farmer last week, after he was quoted in the Sunday Age as eager to get his hands on the stuff. God, or whoever, help us if he does.

Yours faithfully,

Dear Andrew Weidemann,

I am old enough to have believed the promises of 'experts' who imagined nuclear power stations around the world, producing power so cheaply that meters need not be installed. Failure to deliver and my science education soon put that illusion to rest. GMOs look no different.

It saddens me when intelligent politicians, farmers and others who have suspended natural caution, advocate the broad-acre adoption of GM seed. You could say the same thing about my opposing view, but I believe the science is starting to vindicate my stance rather than yours. I ask only that you give me the courtesy of reading this letter before dismissing me.

SBS-TV recently screened the German documentary "Patent for a Pig," and I refer you to the piece I wrote for a writers' group I attend. To say it shocked farmers at a Landcare committee meeting would be an understatement. My arguments though, are based on wider reading than a single documentary. I have emailed SBS asking them to rerun the film in the near future.

You are quoted in the "Sunday Age" (20th May 2007) as saying "crops that are cheaper, healthier and better for the environment, and achieved with higher yields." A growing number of US and Canadian farmers would dispute you most vociferously on every point. Once you buy your first crop of GM seed from say, Monsanto, you are locked in for life. You are **contracted** to use Monsanto fertilizers, pesticides and next year's seed, and the newest contracts do not reimburse you for crop failure, for whatever reason.

If next year, you do not renew your contract with Monsanto, you will be treated the same way as your non-GM cropping neighbour: any GM plant escaping from your crop to a neighbour or germinating from last year's crop are searched for diligently by Monsanto officers and both are treated as growing Monsanto seed without a licence, and you will be sued off your farm should Monsanto so choose, and many American farmers have been broken by this policy. Do not consider your neighbour suing for crop contamination – it doesn't work that way.

Healthier? Is that the crop or the foods produced? It has been demonstrated that Monsanto does minimal testing, if any, of the product. American pig and cattle breeders are finding GM soy and maize are cutting fertility rates, often to zero live births in any one year. A foreign gene spliced into a natural genome, can be shown to move from the intended insertion site. This can produce proteins unknown in nature, proteins for which the body has neither use nor enzyme to digest. It is a rogue protein of unknown origin called a prion, which causes BSE and CJD in humans.

"Round-up ready" means the farmer sprays the whole crop to get rid of weeds, as it is no longer necessary to avoid getting the herbicide on the crop. And guess what – American farmers are getting heavy infestation several years on, of Round-up resistant weeds, weeds that Monsanto promised would never arise. Herbicide residues on the crop are obviously higher than normal.

Higher yields are being found to be a delusion, and Monsanto is reluctant to publish their source data on this claim, and resistance to pests and disease an illusion. The genetic purity of the GM seed is higher than that of natural seed, so the whole crop can be wiped out, not half, ten percent, whatever. As to genetic manipulation or modification being no different from traditional cross-breeding, nothing could be further from the truth. A natural hybrid is just that – natural. It might be useful, that is the luck of the draw, but farmers and science are better than that, and are skilled in breeding at better than dumb luck. GM takes a gene from one organism and inserts it at the molecular level into the DNA of the target species. We think we know what we are doing, but in reality, we know very little about what we are doing and why it works, and we often get it wrong. Monsanto often gets it wrong, and those GMOs are never developed, but of the ones they get "right," they have scant knowledge of what will happen now or in years to come of that new and unnatural organism.

Trans-fats have never been a problem, and for further reading, I refer you to Wikipedia and <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trans-fat>. This looks to be an accurate and well researched entry, and informs that natural trans-fat, found at 2 to 4% in the fat and milk of ruminants has not been shown to cause harm. Most trans-fat in our diets is from the chemical hydrogenation of natural oils and fats to manufacture products with more desirable properties – easier to spread, more resistant to becoming rancid etc. We do not need GM crops to rid our diets of trans-fat.

I am not sure "bloody hypocrisy" can be leveled at one side or the other. Go back to about the year of your birth and what was being said about "greenies." They were the people who were warning we would eventually run out of oil, that we would pump too much carbon dioxide into the atmosphere for our own good. That cutting down forests was unsustainable or that we could deplete the oceans of fish. If all those warnings were chooks, they are now coming home to roost.

To be honest Andrew, I don't have all the answers, and I somehow doubt you have them all either. What I do have is a healthy cynicism and caution about what we do to our environment. Once a genetically modified organism is released to the environment, there is no stopping it or curbing any undesirable side-effect it may one day display. Monsanto could not recall it and try again. They cannot stop it spreading or further mutating. That is it – all options of ridding it by the original and thus far only 'natural selection' are lost. One could only hope it self-destructed or became so diluted in effect to be harmless, but even then it could take hundreds of generations of the organism to eradicate. In this way, GMOs are worse than nuclear waste and pollution.

I see by your entries in a Google search that you are more than simply a wheat grower, and I would hope that I could in some way get across to you the seriousness of the threat, and very real threat, that GMOs pose. By now we should all have a healthy cynicism of corporate rule, transnational companies and all they stand for. Would you have bought a used car from the CEO of Enron? Would you buy a used car from the CEO of Monsanto or from George W Bush? A thought just occurred to me – what would the CEO of Monsanto be doing if he knew he was going to live for another 100 years? Another web site I can recommend for more of Monsanto's less well known woopsies, is <http://www.organicconsumers.org/monlink.cfm> (Millions Against Monsanto). Whatever credibility you place on such information, or to that in "Patent for a Pig," why hasn't Monsanto sued for damages or to even have it removed? Could it be because Monsanto cannot prove it to be false?

I would very much like to engage you in dialogue to disavow you of your support of GM crops as the saviour of the human race. Monsanto was quoted as saying to an executive of Arthur Anderson that they are not interested in saving the world, but in controlling its food supply. Please contact me at the above email address, or write if you would rather not divulge your email address.

Yours faithfully,

cc: The Hon. John Brumby
"Sunday Age" Att. Simon Castles
Reid Sexton.
William Birnbauer.

"PATENT FOR A PIG"

There is a curse about to plague mankind and it rates second only behind global warming, and way ahead of international terrorism. After watching this 2006 German documentary screened recently on SBS-TV, there is every reason to be worried about genetically modified organisms or GMOs in the food chain.

The title story was about Monsanto's current application to patent in 160 countries, including Australia, a gene sequence in pigs. This sequence relates to animals which produce more meat, and are therefore valuable as a source of food. But the gene sequence is not something Monsanto has developed or implanted into pigs. It is a natural trait, bred by centuries-old animal husbandry, and is present in possibly seventy-five percent of the world's farmed pigs, including pure heritage lines.

Monsanto claims the patent is all about protecting their 'intellectual property': the fact they have determined which sequences of genes control meat production. What it will mean in the real world of farmer and consumer is, any pig bred containing this gene sequence will be in breach of Monsanto's patent, and a fee (or punitive fine) will be due to Monsanto, for each and every pig for ever! As if that is not enough, the researchers for the documentary had difficulty finding laboratories to test the DNA of pigs, because the testing method is also covered by a Monsanto patent, with fees payable. The patent is soon to go through the process of being granted in the USA, and if passed, the other 159 countries will no doubt follow. (Like pigs to the slaughter?)

Australia is still equivocating about broad-acre release of GM crops, yet they are said to be safe, high-yielding and pest-resistant. Several years on, and US and Canadian farmers are not so sure, as Monsanto powers on with the intention of becoming the controller of the world's food supply, showing scant regard for the niceties of the law and the welfare of its customers.

Crops are consistently failing to yield higher than the GM-free seed they replace, crops are becoming more choked with herbicide resistant weeds, pests are returning and allergies are increasing. On top of that, farmers cannot save seed for the next crop, having to buy new seed at high Monsanto prices to continue. And continue they must, for any rogue seed that may be left in the field to germinate will be found by the Monsanto inspectors, who have no qualms about bankrupting a farmer who seemingly breaks the company's rules. New contracts for seed, apart from specifying Monsanto fertilisers and pesticides, now give no recourse for crop failure. The mug farmer has no choice but bear the full cost of every eventuality and stuff-up.

Over one hundred farmers have been ruined and hundreds more face court for violations of Monsanto patents. A farmer with GM plants in his crop but no current licence to grow them is in diabolical strife. Whether from contaminated seed (it now cannot be stopped), contamination from a neighbour's crop, or even in known cases, deliberately contaminated, and the company brooks no excuse. There is only one safe option for the recalcitrant, stick-in-the-mud farmer to avoid ruin and that is to sign his life away to Monsanto.

But there is more. Pigs and cattle fed on high levels of GM maize or soy are becoming infertile, with farmers bankrupted with the cost of providing GM feed and no off-spring generating an income. We were told that would be impossible, but foreign genes added to a genome are being shown to move, mutate, and produce rogue proteins never before seen in nature. Proteins Monsanto assured regulators had been tested, but in reality were ignored. Rogue proteins known as prions are the causative agent in bovine spongiform encephalopathy or 'mad cow disease' and its human equivalent Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease.

All this is allowed to happen, because in what is known as the 'revolving door' of United States government and regulatory bodies, a steady stream of Monsanto employees hold positions of power, thus ensuring the passage of legislation, defective reports, dodgy patent applications etc., through the various stages of approval with little or no scrutiny. Employees found delaying the fast-track with legitimate queries are usually sacked as 'unable to reliably do their work.'

Time may reveal GMOs as the greatest fraud ever perpetrated on society. Hopefully soon.

Robert Vickers. 9th May 2007.