

Submission Cover Sheet

Review of the Moratorium on GM Canola

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Attachments Submitted with this Submission:

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This submission is made by Geoff and Bronwyn Hunt of Normanville near Kerang. We are growers of cereals, pulses and oilseeds and have been in the industry since 1977.

In making this submission in favour of the termination of the ban on growing GM canola in Victoria we wish to make the following points.

1. The control of broadleaved weeds is one of the major constraints to growing canola. In Australia there is widespread use of TT (triazine tolerant) and IMI (imidazolinone) tolerant canolas to enable the removal of weeds from canola crops. In Canada, Australia's major competitor in the global canola market, growers are able to use GM varieties which are resistant to certain herbicides. These GM varieties can greatly reduce the cost of production of canola. For example, the herbicide required for the IMI tolerant variety which we currently grow costs approximately \$50 per hectare. A glyphosate resistant GM variety would require a herbicide cost of around \$5 per hectare. In our Mallee environment canola yields are below 2 tonnes/ha so the impact of herbicide costs on production cost is large.
2. Both the triazine and imidazolinone herbicides have residual activity in soil. In particular, atrazine which is applied to TT canolas, is regarded as causing environmental problems. The availability of glyphosate resistant GM varieties would be expected to greatly reduce the use of these herbicides, replacing them with the environmentally friendly glyphosate.
3. Objections to GM plants have come from various groups including organic producers. Thus far it appears to us that no logical or substantive arguments have been advanced by those opposed to GM plants. Of course every modification has to be examined on its merits and approving the release of GM canola would not automatically give approval to other GM plants. It appears that organic producers have simply defined GM plants as lying outside the scope of organic agriculture. This is despite the environmental and health benefits which these plants offer now and in the future. The absurdity of this arbitrary decision is clear from the acceptance of TT and IMI tolerant canola by groups opposed to GM canola. The former types are created by mutation breeding, a somewhat crude process by comparison with the more targeted gene insertion of genetic engineering. If the objection to GM is that it is "unnatural" then crops resulting from mutation breeding must be more so. If state bans on GM crops are continued it is likely that, in time, some of the traits introduced by GM methods will in the future be introduced by non GM methods (such as mutation breeding).
4. The plant types which are the subject of this review are widely grown in Canada and have been grown for a number of years. Humans have consumed millions of tonnes of oil from these plants. We are unaware of any major problems arising, such as the development of "superweeds". Claims that further testing is needed are nonsense.
5. The development of GM plant technologies in Australia has been adversely affected by the state moratoria. This has resulted in no discernible benefits but has been to the cost of farmers and the economy, while giving our overseas competitors a headstart. Our research industry needs as much encouragement as possible to develop intellectual property which will benefit the state and the nation in the long term. Allowing the moratorium to expire will encourage further research and minimise the damage which has already been done.