

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
GPO Box 4440
Melbourne 3001

Dear Panellists,

I am writing to voice my concern in relation to lifting the ban on GM Canola in Victoria and the resultant lost market opportunities for Australian farmers if this occurs. Of major concern for me, is the loss of markets to Australian farmers, and at a time when farmers can least afford this! To explain: In 2001 and 2002 I studied for a Masters of Business at Ballarat University and my thesis focused on Farm Business Diversification. During this research I interviewed farmers across Western Victoria (Ballarat area through to the SA border, basically) and many were diversifying into herb culture, various broadacre crops, organic produce, optimum quality beef and lamb enterprises with sound marketing plans and future directions. Many were actually helping to 'set the scene for successful farm business management' for the future, as I saw it. (This is a perspective gained by reading widely in relation to farm business development here and across the EU, Canada, USA, and Africa.)

In relation to markets, I take the strong view that Australia is uniquely placed and actually has a golden opportunity to market clean green produce, into a global economy already feeling the effects of contamination and resulting lower market prices. Both the USA and Canada have lost markets by their adoption of GE technology, thus placing Australia in the enviable position of being the only GE free seller of canola globally. We therefore hold market share in Europe and Asia for sale directly into the human food supply. USA and Canada can only supply canola for animal feed or ethanol production. Because we are so well positioned, Australian canola has been able to command premium prices of up to \$120 per tonne for GE free canola since 2005. Why, at a time such as this, would commercial release of GM even be considered?

Our farmers have suffered considerable adversity over recent years, with continued drought, salinity problems and water shortages. I find Monsanto and Bayer's claims of being able to provide specific GE product traits to withstand the effects of climate change, very dubious indeed. My understanding is that these well-publicised 'promises' are 'at research concept' stage only, and may never come to fruition. Technology companies likewise have stated that GE canola is 'expected' to produce higher yields. Nowhere in my extensive reading have I seen that claim proven. The only benefit appears to be that farmers can work off farm and generate more income (Gomez-Barbero et al, 2006), because GE canola crops are less labour intensive. Given that 94% of profits in the early years go to the seed companies, a meager 6% to the growers, farmers may well need to work off farm! Really I do think the major

technology companies are hoping to cash in on our over-stretched Australian farmers, at a time of considerable adversity, in the hope that they will be willing to clutch at straws. No yield benefits, no proof of claims, expensive start up cost/outgoings – who would seriously consider such a proposal?

The prospect of contamination in country Victoria is a major concern also. In the Ballarat area, where I live, we see an increase in new farm enterprises aimed at niche local and export markets, enterprises which are more labour-intensive, such as organic production, broadacre herb growing, cheeses, small wineries etc. These are helping to keep family farms and smaller acreages viable. Should contamination occur, these businesses will be adversely affected resulting also in a downturn in farm employment. Jobs now and in the future may be lost in areas where they are most needed - in rural Victoria where unemployment rates are much higher than in the cities.

Victorian farmers will find increasing corporate control of crops and agriculture with closed loop marketing, patents and monopolies. Look at the state of the local potato industry here in the Ballarat locality! And the Mc Cain monopoly is “junior school” compared to the GE seed monopolies. Really the claims are enticing, but nevertheless it is spin: spin with very very serious consequences. Let’s stay with our current competitive advantage, capitalise on our clean green image and seek solutions to serious challenges from credible sources.

Sincerely
Kate Cullinan
Farm Business Development Consultant

a) Loss of employment opportunities in rural areas
Should contamination occur, many employment opportunities in rural Victoria now opening up may well be lost. There is an increase in new agricultural enterprises aimed at niche local and export markets, enterprises which are more labour-intensive, such as organic production, broadacre herb growing, cheeses, small wineries etc, which are helping to keep family farms and smaller acreages viable. Jobs now and in the future may be lost in areas where they are most needed - in rural Victoria where unemployment rates are much higher than in the cities.

v) Victorian farmers will find increasing corporate control of crops and agriculture with closed loop marketing, patents and monopolies. With contamination inevitable, not only GE farmers will be affected but, eventually, all Victorian farmers