

Please consider the below as "Letter to the editor"
Bill Crabtree - 12th July 2005

GMs are more drought tolerant

You may have heard that GM crops do not do well in droughts in Brazil, India, Canada and the US. Allow me to share my experiences and notes from friends that align with my first-hand observations.

Brazil: A South American friend told me this morning "Dear Bill, many GMO soybean varieties have come (illegally) from Argentina from climatic zones not adequate for Brazil. Perhaps this will change as now Brazilian bred soybean varieties are being marketed."

India: There is a scramble for GM cotton with a 460% increase in GM cotton in the last year.

Canada: Dr Ripley said at the NSW Crop Updates in 2005. "These (GM canola crops) have been adopted rapidly by Canadian growers and accounted for half the market in 2004 due to their consistency in yield across diverse conditions and a high level of performance during Canada's 2002-03 drought."

USA: A Report on 9th July 2005 by Scott Yates of Washington State Staff reveals the following. The US National Agricultural Statistics Service survey shows GM crops are again on the rise in 2005. Now 52% of their corn is GM, 79% for upland cotton is GM, and 87% of soybeans are GM. South Dakota farmers are in some of the driest and drought prone regions and they lead with 83% of their corn being GM. Only 13% of the US's oil seed crop acreage (with which our canola competes) is planted to non-GMO varieties. South Dakota is the second highest adoption - a very drought prone state.

Australia: Mike Lamond is an independent researcher, based in York, and he has been conducting canola variety and breeding trials for many years. During our droughts of 2000, 2001 and 2002 throughout the wheatbelt Mike observed consistently that our TT canolas (Karoo and 501) yielded poorly and the same as the surrounding farmers paddocks being 300-500 kg/ha. In these same trials he had conventional and hybrid canola lines consistently yielding 1,000-1,200 kg/ha. These varieties can readily be transformed into GM lines. This is consistent with the more than doubling of yield that a dozen of us WA farmers saw when we visited Bayers Victorian GM canola trials at Horsham in 2004.

Yesterday (Monday 11th July), Dr Richard Richards was on the ABC's World today saying how they had isolated a drought tolerant gene. Similarly the GBA wheat growing at Corrigin this year is highly likely to have drought tolerance as well as salt and frost tolerance.

There can be no mistake that without GM technology we are being left behind, while at the same time, we are also being environmentally less responsible and more pesticide dependant.