

We don't need GM crops - by Julie Newman – Countryman May 12th 2005

Letter to the Editor

The letter, 'We must give GM a chance', by Bill Crabtree (Countryman April 28) was what was expected after the recent GM industry-sponsored PR consultant meeting in Perth recently. It appears Bill listened to the "become an extremist" advice given.

Don't be misled. GM canola will not reduce greenhouse gases, stop erosion, stop children being exposed to herbicides, give an average 30 percent increase in grain yield, feed the poor etc. We need open sensible debate to try to keep a lid on outrageous claims. GM is a single gene-technology that allows cross-kingdom breeding.

While Japanese scientists are now integrating human liver genes into rice to gain multiple chemical resistance, GM canola offers single chemical resistance by the introduction of a gene from a soil bacterium. It is not true that farmers don't need pre-emergent chemicals with GM crops, as weed control prior to emergence is the most critical weed control factor impacting on yields.

Like our non-GM chemical resistant varieties, GM chemical resistant varieties allow us to extend our existing range of post emergent chemical use to include the chemical the crop is resistant to. Non-GM allows us to use Atrazine, Simazine and Imidazoline. If you plant GM Invigor canola it allows the use of Liberty which is extremely expensive and not as effective (eg does not control radish).

If you plant GM Roundup Ready canola, you can use glyphosate, but this has been reported by "the scientist" to reduce yields and will likely result in a rapid resistance problem where our weeds become resistant to our most commonly used chemical. It is recommended we use more toxic chemicals such as 2,4-D and Sprayseed to control it.

Will we see a better price for a GM product? No, we expect a lower price. Will we lower our input costs on GM crops? No, we expect a higher costs.

We don't need GM crops we need good agronomy and good economic decisions with an aim to return profit to farmers rather than to investors in a GM-patented product. The problem is that farmers not wanting to grow GM crops are meant to risk markets, try to keep GM crops from contaminating our consumer preferred non-GM crops, pay for closed loop segregation and accept liability for the economic loss that will occur.

This unfair liability issue is a major factor that has lead to state governments imposing moratoriums.

Rather than claim there is no problem, the GM industry should be accepting the liability for economic loss associated with their product, not expecting non-GM farmers to compensate them.