

Letter to the Editor - "I'm back!"

By Bill Crabtree, Northam.

Along with 43 other farmers and scientists, from all over southern Australia, I recently saw first-hand numerous GM crops in Canada and the United States. We saw field after field of weed-free GM crops. We heard from farmers and weed scientists about how these crops had been powerful in controlling weeds and fighting herbicide resistance weeds. We heard how their crop yields had increased by perhaps 30% in recent years and that they largely attribute this to GM technology.

We learnt that these farmers, our competitors, can clean up dirty fields with Liberty, a knockdown herbicide that kills ryegrass that we still can't use yet (because it is linked with GM technology). We learnt that Canadians have no problems selling their wheat into GM sensitive markets even when it is grown in GM canola stubbles and some GM canola gets sent to market. We learnt that wheat, for many Canadians, has become their break-crop for the purpose of growing their Cinderella GM-canola crop. We learnt that those farmers who are in the seeds industry have suffered economically from GM canola and most farmers only want to grow GM canola. We learnt that the Canadians receive more for their GM canola than we do for our non-GM canola in our shared markets. We saw no fear about GM canola in Canada after 9 years of experience.

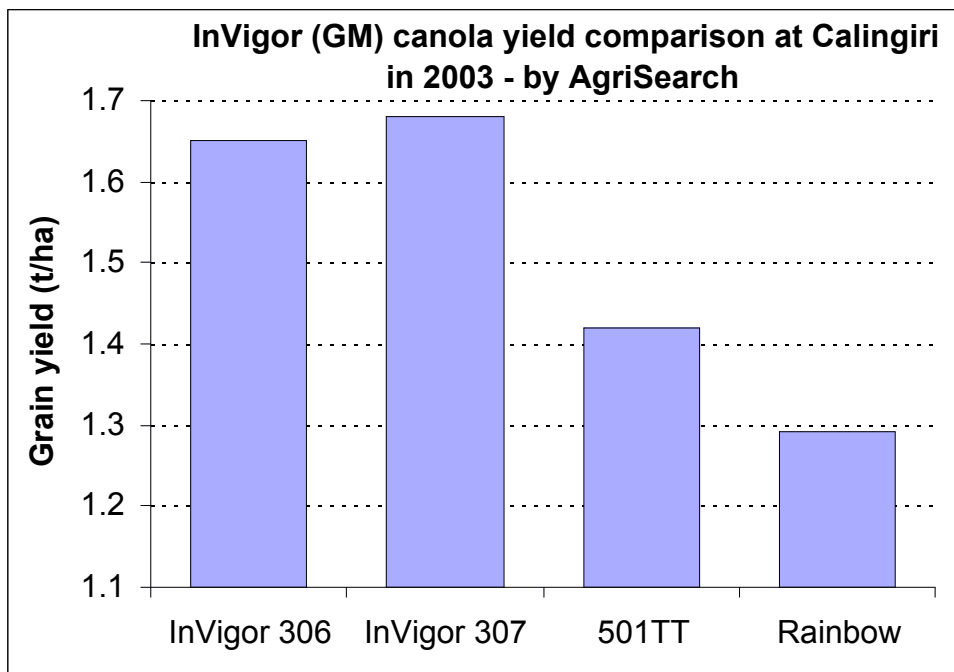
Now if the farmers surveyed by the anti-GM lobby (see page 4 of the Farm Weekly on 23rd September) knew all of the above issues to be true, then they would have answered differently - I'm sure! I sense that many farmers have been scared by frantic, mobile and straw-clutching logic. You can not afford to be bullied by a small group. I also completed the survey and the questions are abominable - they force you into feeling there will be big problems. This has not been the case in Canada and again is a scare campaign.

The NCF are with-holding invaluable technology from you. Will they repay you, when in 3-5 years time they realise that they were wrong. This is when ryegrass numbers have got out of control on your farm and are resistant to every selective herbicide but remains susceptible to sheep, the plow and the match? These are the old and often unsustainable ways of farming where organic matter is destroyed and irreplaceable soil is lost. This is why we currently have to invest in shields to maintain our soils integrity.

When I was in Canada in 1996, the first year GM canola was released, a delightful no-till farmer, in NW Manitoba, called Brian Harvey said to me he thinking of quitting farming due to herbicide resistance. He felt that he had almost lost control of his wild oats with fop and dim resistance. Four weeks ago, while I was in his Province, I spoke to him on the phone and asked how his wild oats were going and he said fine, the GM canola has got things nicely under control and he even still uses some fops and dims on his wild oats on occasions in his low numbers of wild oats. Resistance is a numbers game!

May I suggest that you go to Canada to find out for yourselves - it will only cost you a few thousand dollars - easily repaid from your first GM canola crop. It seems NCF are determined to confuse you and they are repeating ideas that have been shown to be inaccurate. For example, and again I say, there were two trials conducted at Calingiri and Wongan Hills last year by an independent researcher, as reported in the GRDCs 2004 Crop Updates.

These trials show that both Liberty (see graph) and Roundup Ready out-yielded the conventional TT varieties by 200-300 kg/ha and with better oil content - this is worth at least \$80-120/ha **per year**. The trials were not sown until June, due to regulatory restrictions. However, all varieties shown here are of the same maturity - so this issue is taken care of. Not to mention how easy it is to grow and how that Atrazine is not required.



You would not need a consultant, like me, half as much as you do now with GM technology. Currently much of my time is purchased by farmers who are devising strategies to combat herbicide resistant ryegrass. My view is clearly not promoting my self interests. Can this be said of others?

Come on farmer groups, do your desktop research and speak up and give leadership, the longer you hold off the more you will get behind and the harder it will be to win the city voters! Even Europe are now embracing GM technology at a rapid pace and their markets now accept GM contamination of 0.9% as of early this year.