

GM defence – Bill Crabtree, Consultant and Morawa farmer

Bee Winfield and Stewart Seesink in their letters on 10th December are quite illogical and aggressive to Terry Redman and Ian Edwards. But do their emotional claims stack up? I wonder if either of them have ever visited Canada and witnessed firsthand GM canola over there? To most Canadian Prairie farmers GM canola is nothing but a high yielding crop that is weed free and makes them the most money with little pesticides use. It is their Cinderella cash crop and wheat is grown as a rotational crop for canola pest management. Since the advent of GM canola their canola production has gone through the roof to 10 million tonnes annually – nearly tripling. So yes Bee, GM canola is about money! This money helps to pay the bills and keep struggling rural communities alive. Why should Nannup residents dictate the future of Dryland farming in WA?

The only North American farmers that I know who despise GM technology are either organic growers (who likely feel threatened by it) or the ones found guilty of using biotechnology without paying for it. They become guest speakers in Australia and get a free round the world trip by Greenpeace for their deeds.

As one who was taxpayer funded in 1996 to spend a year in Canada, on a job exchange, I continue to give a full and open account to the WA community about GM canola in Canada. Since this exchange I continue to keep a close eye on what is happening there – I revisit Canada every two years and I email my agricultural colleagues fortnightly. Virtually every canola farmer in Canada is a GM canola grower by choice – with over 90% of their canola being either Liberty Link or Roundup Ready. The third most commonly grown canola in Canada is Clearfield, which in Canada is classified effectively as GM (and rightly so, as it is bred through damaged genes with toxic chemicals). Ironically this is the one of these three types that we are allowed to grow in WA – the one most GM'd. Arguably Canadians have about 95% GM canola adoption. They do not have TT canola – they threw it out as it yielded too poorly.

Caption: Dr Gerhard Rakow explains that he was the person to breed Atrazine tolerant canola (which is the dominant Australian canola) but after several years they threw it out because it was not competitive enough (see HJ Beckie et al 2005: "A decade of two herbicide-resistant crops in Canada." *Can. J. Plant Sci.* 85).



To say that GM canola benefits no one but Monsanto is laughable. If this were so it makes Canadian farmers appear stupid for making Monsanto rich at their expense. Their canola price is the same as ours and that is why they did not go down the segregation path. Each day GM canola prices from Winnipeg are read out on the ABC radio – there is no difference.

This same GM choice has been denied WA farmers for seven very long years – thanks largely to Kim Chance. Now, at last, we have a Minister who is trying to do the right thing and explore the facts and science of GMs. For Bee to quote Kim Chance in Hansard on feeding studies, as believable, shows how gullible some people can be! Kim, under the protection of Parliamentary privilege, has made some of the most outrageous statements relating to regulation, technology, scientists and companies to suit his own political ideology. He has constantly worked to undermine public confidence in our regulatory systems. Kim, you are welcome to take me to task on this statement! No-one will ever forget Kim's monkey tale!

Terry Redman's biggest problem is that he went to Canada with an open mind and saw for himself how well GM canola was performing for Canadian farmers and with no concerns. You have to ask yourself why did Chance not visit Canadian canola farmers? Indeed most of those who write anti-GM letters have never been to Canada and walked a mile in their moccasins.

Bee Winfield would likely lose a court case on defamation if Dr Ian Edwards wanted to go down that path. However, the Ian that I know is more generous than this – having devoted hundreds, perhaps thousands, of hours of his time free of charge to the WA rural community appropriately defending the science of GM crops and this is highly commendable.

If people have an objection to GM safety then their focus is cruelly selective. It does not seem fair to me that this group have no conscience at trying to stop WA farmers from using GM technology but they are almost silent on our borders that are completely open for GM imports. It is like they are acting on behalf of our international competitor GM farmers' interests against our Australian farmers' interests. They would do WA farmers a service by focussing on the flood of GM imports through Federal Agencies like:

- soya bean imports that go into meals that feed our chicken, pigs, cattle and sheep
- all the hundreds of foods that have GMs in them on the shelves now
- the 2,000 plants that have been released in the community that have been mutagenically bred – random DNA or gene destruction technology
- all the GM pharmaceuticals – over 50 of them, including insulin.

So why are many non-farmers focusing on denying WA farmers the choice to use the best technology available in canola and turning a blind eye to the Rudd governments regulations that have seen an influx of GM products into the country. Does this sound fair?