

GM canola - invaluable tool with-held

Bill Crabtree, Honorary WANTFA Life Member

Dear members and committee,

I am forever grateful to WANTFA and the Department of Agriculture for my 1996 job exchange to Canada. This visit gave me life-long friends whose opinions I hold very highly, many of whom I will re-visit in August 2004. There are many benefits from GM canola in Canada and I am sure that the same benefits are awaiting our adoption of this technology. Anyone visiting Canada, with an open mind, thinks the same!

Interestingly, many WA farmers believe that if we adopt GM canola we will hasten Roundup Resistance. My Canadian contacts suggest that the opposite is likely true. This has been their experience! For example, Scott Day, past "no-till farmer of the year" for ManDak and former ManDak President says: *"GM canola has been a very important tool in the war against herbicide resistant weeds. Their use in this regard cannot be overstated. We have resistant Wild Oats, Green Foxtail, Wild Mustard and Kochia along with some other weeds."*

To believe that GM canola would hasten herbicide resistance goes counter to the Canadian experience. We have a lot in common with Canadian farmers. In 1996, I recall one farmer who was considering selling up his farm due to wild oat resistance which was crippling him with his wild oats being resistant to nearly all applicable herbicides. Now, according to Scott Day, he continues to farm with confidence in his range of herbicides. But GM canola was critical to him maintaining control and continuing to farm with no-tillage and stubble retention.

A Canadian writer and agriculturist told me that GM canola has dramatically reduced herbicide resistance concerns. He said we do not talk about resistance like you Australians do, resistance has become more a back seat issue and this is largely due to Roundup Ready canola.

Using a herbicide regularly is not the main driver of herbicide resistance! High numbers, and no other herbicide use group, are the main drivers of resistance! With high weed numbers, resistance can be brought on rapidly (but at different rates for different herbicide groups). The secret is to rotate herbicide groups and timings. Using Roundup in-crop and early in the season has added terrific diversity of use for Canadians, one facet that many did not expect.

I can see that GM canola would encourage more SpraySeed use for Australian farmers. While the experts, perhaps myself included, like to talk about the double-knock, the truth is that few use it in the dry regions! Why? We are told that anything less than a full lethal dose is not good enough for resistance management and at 2 L/ha it costs about \$22/ha. How practical a suggestion is this when perhaps another \$50/ha of herbicide is still required for the seasons weed control budget? Especially when \$3/ha worth of Roundup will likely give the same result!

With Roundup Ready canola, I believe that I could boldly encourage my clients in dry regions to use SpraySeed before sowing the RR canola. This could be done when the weeds are small. and would be a new experience for our WA weeds and terrific tool for weed control diversity. Usually SpraySeed usually comes second, after Roundup - see the Meckering WANTFA site in 2003 and 2004. Yes, I am sure not everyone will follow these rules. But many will and many would use Basta or Liberty, another powerful GM canola variety.

Many Canadians believe that the continued success of no-till is linked to GM technology. I happily submit to this view. Another related quote from Scott is: *"Another benefit of GM canola is the reduction in herbicide in the whole production system. If you know you are growing GM*

canola next year you will not spend as much money cleaning up the current crop - contrary to conventional canola practices. Also, in the crop following the GM canola we will often not need to spend as much to keep that crop clean. We may reduce or even eliminate the grass herbicide in the cereal crop following GM canola as we know the crop would have been pretty clean the year before.” Reducing herbicide usage and adopting more benign herbicides is a desirable focus for us.

Scott Day also says: *“So when you look at GM canola you have to look at the benefits to the whole cropping system and not just the year of production of that crop, which is about a 10% grain yield increase.”*

May I urge you to seek out your own reliable sources of GM canola information. Do not be swayed by those who whip up fairy dust and create illusions and fear by preying on your lack of compulsion to research for yourself. Just ask a Canadian farmer or anyone who has been there recently. Canadians have embraced GM canola faster than any other technology ever released to Canadian farmers. Now, eight years later, they grow almost no conventional canola and they receive the same as we do for our non-GM canola.