

Opinion or Letter to Editor – GM wheat response

GM wheat will happen, and the sooner the better! Those that get the jump on the rest of the world with this technology will make the first stronger dollars. In contrast to the Flat Earth Society, I believe it should be us rather than the Russians, who have the world's largest gene store bank at the Vavilov Institute (www.vir.nw.ru/), with "Its global gene collection representing plant diversity encompassing 320,000 accessions of 155 botanical families, 2,532 species of 425 genera." To infer that the Russia and Ukrainians, with their fertile soils, will only get into GM wheat on our Western coat tails is either misleading or naive.

Those who have got into GM canola in WA this year are so far thrilled with their results. The same has been the case with Canada, where they jumped to 35% GM canola adoption in just two years. The same has been the case with GM soy, GM corn, GM cotton, GM sugar and a host of GM crops. The clever country, Australia, has been held back for far too long with a concerted scare campaign by those with vested interests. In particular the multi-national company Green Peace who have generated a lot of donation money by petrifying many well meaning, sincere and yet uneducated community leaders.

With Roundup Ready wheat, Monsanto had it set to go in Canada in 2000-01 and the Canadian Wheat Board had a concerted campaign to stop its introduction. My Canadian farmer and agronomist friends, at the time, were also not too keen on RR wheat as it would mean expensive grass selective herbicides (as they were then) would be needed to take RR wheat out of RR canola. They also said that they believed the market would likely have accepted RR wheat as the science would say "why not?" And people have accepted all other GM food crops.

All introduced GM crops have been an outstanding success and all go into the food chain and have done for 15 years without one single human health issue. The fact is that genes are basically proteins and all the GM genes released have been "over-studied" before being released. This contrasts mutagenic breeding – where severe radiation creates random plant proteins that are neither studied nor tested, before being released. Despite this the use of mutagenic breeding has not caused a single human health problem, since their initial use in 1926 and the subsequent 2,000 varieties being put on the market (examples are IT or Clearfield wheat and canola).

In a few years time GM wheat will be "the wheat" that people will be looking for on the supermarket shelves, like pasteurised milk was many years ago. When the first GM wheat is released it will likely also have a human health benefit, like a low glycaemic index (good for diabetics, colon cancer control and irritable bowel syndrome). The introduction of GM wheat with a health benefit plus a farmer benefit will make it a win:win. Monsanto will also win and this will drive their incentive to invest more into smart modern plant breeding as it has done in other "clever" American countries who have had a 15 year jump on us with this safe technology. Mind you it will make life for those who have seed cleaning businesses a little more challenging!