

GM Crops are safe – Letter Editor 24th June 2013

A recent GM food study with pigs by Dr Judy Carman sponsored by WA taxpayers (via WA's past Agricultural Minister Kim Chance) six years ago has finally been published in an obscure on-line Journal. The study claims that GM corn and soy causes stomach inflammations.

The editor and reviewers of the paper and have done a great disservice to science, food consumers and farmers globally by allowing such a weak piece of work to be published. For credibility, the work should have been published in a well-respected, high impact journal, but I doubt that would have been possible.

The paper has many weaknesses, which have been highlighted by commentary, especially from the USA and Canada. The authors have overlooked many highly regarded scientific papers, which document similar work and find no risks. A major error was not making sure that the food sources were exactly comparable. In good science researchers keep all things the same, except what is specifically being tested. This paper does not do this.

GM corn typically has one-third of the levels of the fungal toxin fumonisin of non-GM corn. Yet this trial has used GM corn that has 2.5 times more fumonisin than the non-GM corn (3.0 vs 1.2 mg per kilogram). Fumonisin toxicity is more typically a problem with organic or conventional corn and is least likely to occur with GM Bt corn. This research has chosen corn sources with a seven-fold bias – showing exactly the opposite of what is reality. This starting point effectively destroys the papers credibility and leads to misleading and fear-mongering results.

Fumonisin fungal toxin starts to have adverse effects on pigs at about 1 mg per kilogram of diet (Delgado and Wolt 2011). This is about the level of fumonisin chosen for the non-GM corn. While, in contrast, the GM corn chosen for this 'scientific research' had 3.0 mg/kg level rather than a typical comparison of 0.4 mg/kg. Therefore this paper effectively reinforces what many EU and world authorities food studies have shown – that GM foods are safer than conventional foods. Other key errors included statistical analysis and incorrect interpretations of stomach inflammations.

Western Australian farmers need this safe GM technology in order to compete with other major global agricultural grain exporters who heavily export GM crops. They have a competitive advantage over us by using this technology.

Papers like this mislead and scare the public and destroy our farmers' competitiveness. Like my UWA mentor Prof Alan Robson said when I took him to visit then MLC Ag Minister Kim Chance "denying our farmers access to GM technology is like forcing them to farm with one arm tied behind their backs."

Bill Crabtree