

Some Ethics and facts are needed in GM views

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My advice to Bob Phelps and those who think like him (Debb Schmetzer, Helen Wallace, Rebecca Harrison, Samantha Dunn, Peter Hill, Wendy Radford, C Moore, Leslie Dalzeil, J Harrison and Jennifer Chadwick) is that they visit some GM crops and talk to farmers who grow GM crops before they encourage more fear with GM crops.

The fact is that it is likely that all of them eat GM products nearly every day and have done so for 11 years with no side-effects. Indeed, the pharmaceutical industry is much safer as a result of 50 GMs in the Australian market – of note is insulin that doctors say is much safer than the old non-GM option.

The sad thing is that these inaccurate views are condemning Australian agriculture to the back-water and within a few years, these, likely, well-meaning people, will learn the facts and may regret their current stance and the impact it has had. Will they, and the state governments who oppose GMs without evidence, be sued for their fear campaigns and the extra hard economic times they **have** inflicted on rural communities?

Ten years ago our Australian farmers were world leaders in efficient dryland cropping. But now, thanks largely to global adoption of GM technology and no-tillage (both giving drought resistance) we are rapidly falling behind Canada, USA, Argentina and Brazil. These are our export competitors and they get a 20-30% yield increase with GM crops and with less costs, pesticides, fuel use, time, CO2 emissions, machinery use etc.

Our rural communities are struggling not just because it has been dry but because we have shunned good science. WA has had 5 severe droughts in 7 years and despite this, with 90% adoption of no-tillage, we have produced average yields during this time – a great result! Those of us who led this drought managing no-till revolution know that to continue to compete in WA that we urgently need access to GM technology.

So please, before you write more fear based letters to the editor, visit Canada, USA, Argentina or Brazil (as I have done) and see for yourself what this technology is doing for them. GMs are smart and safe science and we can not afford to continue to lose over \$100 million annually in lost productivity in WA alone.

On a world scale, of the GM adopted countries, Canada is most like our agriculture, and nearly 90% of their canola is now GM. We grow similar crops to Canadian farmers and 10 years ago both they, and us, grew 2.5 Mt of canola. Now they grow 9 Mt and we grow 1.2 Mt. Why? They have had droughts too! Well, their GM canola yields about 75% of their wheat yields and in drought years it is even better (90-100%). While our non-GM canola yields are 45-55% of our wheat yields and in drought years yields perhaps only 25%. Is it any wonder why we are abandoning canola and Canadian farmers are expanding their area and their seed companies are investing heavily into further breeding improvements?

In WA, weeds often force us into using Triazine Tolerant (TT) canola, which is canola crossed with a weed species with many unknown and perhaps “unethical genes” included. Many of us just can not afford to continue to grow non-GM canola anymore. We would need at least a doubling in the value of our non-GM canola to make it worthwhile, not the historical \$10/t offered by the EU for only 10% of our crop. There effectively has been, over 10 years, a \$1/t premium on a \$400/t crop. How good has it been to be GM free for 11 years? Not to mention us relying on Atrazine that is banned herbicide in Europe.

Good farmers, I charge you, it is time you take the lead and make a future for your children and your rural towns, that you so cherish. You need to stare down the anti-GM propaganda and request understanding and science based knowledge from your city cousins and politicians. The future is in your hands!