

Gene Ethics Media Release Tuesday October 28 2008

GM grass a 'boffins idea'

“Victoria's 'more digestible' Genetically Manipulated (GM) pasture grass experiment announced today is a waste of public money,” says Gene Ethics Director, Bob Phelps.

“These scientific resources are needed right now to develop and deploy ecological systems that can drought proof, desalinate and restore soil fertility on farms.

“An integrated, whole-of-landscape approach to sustainable farm management is the only way off the brink of permanent rural destruction.

“The 'bright idea' of more digestible GM grass would make farmers more dependent on expensive and vanishing stocks of oil, synthetic fertilisers and chemicals,” he says.

“Farmers need to be helped off the petro-chemical and GM treadmills with smart integrated landscape and vegetation management systems.

“High technology, patented, gee-whizz GM plants cannot reverse the drought, biodiversity loss and collapse of nutrient cycling that is crippling farm production.

“More digestible GM grass is just a boffin's idea that makes sense in the laboratory but will fall at the first environmental hurdle.

“Their plan to test 500 different GM lines until 2012 shows this experiment is just a fishing expedition,” Mr Phelps says.

“The probability of commercial GM grass is very low as GM technology is flawed and any product would take at least a decade to bring to market.

“The GM grass will not be fed to animals as part of the GM research. I see history repeating itself.

“Like CSIRO's weevil resistant field pea research, the GM grass may prove to be toxic to animals after hundreds of millions of dollars and ten years have been wasted.

“In the USA in 1996, Monsanto launched four GM crops - soy, corn, canola and cotton - with just two traits - herbicide tolerance and Bt insect toxins. In 2008, Monsanto has only the same four crops with two traits available!

“GM is a stalled and failed technology. If we were still using Windows '95 we'd also wonder,” Mr Phelps concludes.

Comment: Bob Phelps 03 9347 4500/0449 769 066