

Brumby sells out to Dow Chemical

ALP Conference, Melbourne: June 13, 2009

Innovation Minister Gavin Jennings signed a public private partnership (PPP) with Dow AgroSciences at the Biotechnology Industry Organisation (BIO) Genetic Manipulation (GM) trade show in Atlanta, USA, May 19 2009. The deal's main promise is to develop GM crop plants that yield more but its real aim is to enrich Dow and keep Brumby in power.

PPPs: public funds for private profit

Scarce funds should be spent on the real needs of growers and shoppers, for clean, green sustainable farming systems and safe food. Dow Chemical is the world's second largest chemical company that made napalm and Agent Orange for the Vietnam War and created dioxin pollution in New Zealand. Patented, chemical-dependent crops are the aim of this deal, so Dow can maximise profits and Brumby can stay in power. It will not feed the world or solve climate change.

GM yields less, not more

The Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC) reported on the first commercial GM canola in Victoria and NSW last season and found just 7,000 hectares - less than 0.5% of all canola - grown and harvested. Their data showed the best conventional canola varieties out-yielded GM Roundup herbicide tolerant canola. (Ask: ground-cover-direct@canprint.com.au or free call 1800 11 0044 for a copy) The UN International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology - a four-year study by 300 scientists - found no evidence that GM crops increase yields or lower synthetic chemical use. And "Failure to Yield", the Union of Concerned Scientists USA review of data from all GM crops grown since 1996 found, with one small exception, that GM crops yield less than the top conventional varieties. Traditional breeding contributed much more to crop production gains than GM. Please download the paper from: http://ucsusa.org/food_and_agriculture/science_and_impacts/science/failure-to-yield.html Most promises for GM are false.

Corporate and government research and development pipelines contain little new to be commercialised in ten or twenty years (Monsanto 2008; BRS 2006). GM crops are stalled world-wide. GM soy, corn, canola and cotton, with herbicide tolerance and insect toxin traits, were first grown in 1996. That's all that's available now! What if our computers were still running Windows 95?

Conflicts of interest

Brumby's office is a full member of the Biotechnology Industry Organisation (BIO), based in Washington DC. It promotes GM world-wide, including the show where Dow and our government signed the deal. Brumby could join ex-Premier Beattie, Queensland's trade commissioner to USA, to promote GM and its products. Beattie's deal is worth about \$300,000 pa. See: http://www.news.com.au/couriermail/story/0,20797,24262751-3102,00.html?from=public_rss

Claytons Choice

Fewer than one in a thousand farmers grew Roundup tolerant GM canola last year. They claim the right to choose GM but their canola poses unacceptable risks of GM contamination to all other farmers, rural industries, local government and shoppers. The State of California's new Law AB 541 limits Monsanto's lawsuits against farmers as they cannot prevent the inevitable drift of GM pollen or seed onto their land, contaminating their non-GM crops. See: http://www.gepolicyalliance.org/action_alert_support_ab541.htm Australian farmers are unprotected by such laws yet Brumby would not even order a cleanup of a GM spillage.

Mixed messages

Brumby lifted the ban on GM canola last year. Pro-GM consultants Acil Tasman got \$93,000 for writing Sir Gus Nossal's report to justify ending our GM-free status. But this was not the only advice Brumby and Helper got. The Victorian Food and Wine Tourism Committee told Tim Holding that GM canola would harm their industries. The Victorian Biotechnology Ethics Advisory Committee (VBEAC) that advised the Health Minister, "on issues of ethical concern relating to biotechnology and gene technology" also backed extending the ban. Their advice was rejected and they were disbanded! See:

<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/biotechnology/vbeac/index.htm>

Segregation Myth

Australian governments agree that GM segregation is impossible. They set a 0.5% threshold for 'accidental' GM contamination in seed for planting, and 0.9% in harvested grain. And Brumby allows GM crops to be grown under voluntary industry guidelines, never publicly discussed. Compliance failed but GM rules are not monitored or enforced. For example, Andrew Wiedemann, was pictured without buffers between his GM and non-GM canola, but Monsanto's GM manual specifies a five meter dead zone.

Monopoly control

Monsanto owns and controls over 90% of all commercial GM crops and is the world's largest seed company. Just seven countries grow over 95% of all GM crops. Around 70% of these are Roundup tolerant soybean grown in North and South America, mostly for animal feed and biofuels. 170 other countries and 60 colonies remain GM-free and they are unlikely to widely adopt GM, at least until the Biosafety Protocol is in force.

Twenty countries grow canola but just Canada, USA and now Australia grow GM. By growing GM we join our competitors against our customers – India, China, Japan and the Middle East – that all want GM-free.

Contractual obligations

New Zealand barrister and international law expert Duncan Currie recently warned Australian farmers who sign Monsanto GM canola contracts that they are not permitted to sell their land for up to two years after the contract expires, without the company's agreement. Their obligations pass to the next landholder who may also be liable for any past breaches. The contract gives Monsanto the right to sue any farmer found with patented GM canola seed and the landowner must prove contamination, not theft, is the reason. The company may also: "inspect, take samples and test all of the grower's owned and/or leased fields and storage bins" and access copies of all documents for three years after GM canola seed is bought. Ask info@geneethics.org or 1300 133 868 for Monsanto's contract.

Empty promises

Despite 25 years of research, GM techniques have failed to deliver the promised GM drought, salt or acid tolerant crops; grains that fix nitrogen; virus resistant plants; or nutritious foods. GM techniques are too crude to deliver on these good ideas. Monsanto estimates its rate of success with products in its pipeline at about 8%, and that's optimistic. See: <http://www.monsanto.com>

Government review needed

Victoria's huge commitment of scarce Research & Development funds to GM crops and foods must stop. It is based on spurious and unrealistic claims about the potential of GM to feed the world. Our resources are urgently needed to develop management systems for farmers and other land managers to really cope with recurring drought and global climate change. The interested public should be engaged in this process.

Brumby and Jennings must begin to restore Victoria's GM-free status and democracy by cancelling their GM research deal with Dow!