



GM-FREE MEDIA ALERT

Melbourne: Tuesday February 16, 2010: Supporters of a GM-free future will attend the Victorian Rural Press Club breakfast on Thursday to advocate bans on GM crops. Monsanto Australia's lead Peter O'Keeffe will be there to promote Roundup tolerant genetically manipulated (GM) canola and claim the company has a role in agricultural development.

"Monsanto, the biggest global commercial seed company uses its monopoly power and seed patents to maximise its profits, not feed the world," says Greg Revell of Gene Ethics.

"The US government is investigating the company for antitrust practices including price hikes, withholding non-GM seed and suing ordinary farmers whose farms become GM contaminated. As GM contamination is inevitable, California Governor Schwarzenegger has limited Monsanto's powers to sue farmers who grow GM seed without a licence.

"Despite 30 years of empty promises, Monsanto has failed to create drought or salt tolerant, virus resistant, higher yielding, nitrogen fixing or more nutritious crop plants. And the company's research and development pipeline is dry as a bone. GM techniques are very limited as they cannot cut and paste the many traits mediated by multiple genes.

"Monsanto's herbicide tolerant and insect toxin-producing plants are also rejected around the world. Few farmers want to grow them and the vast majority of shoppers say 'no' to GM foods. A Swinburne University survey found most Australians very 'uncomfortable' with GM foods, due to a failure of trust in those commercialising the technology," he says.

"Monsanto's management and shareholders should be ashamed of ranking dead last among the 581 trans-national companies assessed by the annual Geneva-based Covalence reputation index - a barometer of how the ethics of big businesses are seen throughout society. Monsanto fails ethics 101 consistently and must behave much more ethically if it hopes to win public confidence.

"Mistrust was reinforced last week when India banned GM eggplant after a former Director of Monsanto India, Tiruvadi Jagadisan, was reported as saying the company: "used to fake scientific data" to support its applications for government regulatory approval.

"Monsanto's business is unsustainable. Its global profits dived last quarter. It's 14 years since they released soybean, corn, canola and cotton with just two GM traits and no new GM crops or traits have been commercialised since then. If Microsoft were still peddling Windows '95 we'd know something was wrong but GM companies keep fudging results.

"85% of all GM crops grown is still confined to just four countries – The USA, Canada, Argentina and Brazil. Though 20 other countries dabble with GM, 160 nations and 60 dependent territories are GM-free and want nothing to do with GM. In Australia, farmers are skeptical of GM canola and less than 4% of last year's canola crop was GM.

"Most people, everywhere, want to stay GM-free so the vast majority of GM crop products are either fed to animals or used in ethanol production. That does not feed the world!

"We must ban GM and use our scarce research and development resources to develop really sustainable food and farming systems for this and future generations," Mr Revell concludes.

Further information and interviews:

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