

WA Government GM crop rebellion quashed by Monsanto influence

Thursday, 11 March, Perth: Pressure from the GM crop industry and Federal Government has quashed a rebellion within the WA Liberal Party. Six members threatened to cross the floor or abstain from voting to block the commercial growing of genetically manipulated (GM) canola in Western Australia, to support the disallowance motion tabled by shadow agriculture minister Mick Murray yesterday. The motion would have continued the ban on commercial GM canola in the state.

Agriculture minister Terry Redman made a minor concession that there will be a register of farmers growing GM canola. But in a win for industry, under the end-point royalty system any non-GM farmer delivering canola with GM contamination levels above 0.9% will have to pay a technology fee determined by Monsanto.

Gene Ethics campaigner Louise Sales says: "The West Australian Government has written a blank cheque to Monsanto. Agriculture Minister Terry Redman ignored government policy and the wishes of the majority of West Australians when he unilaterally lifted the GM canola ban in January. Yesterday the Government had an opportunity to do the right thing by farmers and shoppers by reinstating the ban but it categorically failed."

Network of Concerned Farmers spokesperson Julie Newman says: "It appears the Federal and State Governments are being bribed to support GM under Monsanto's rules because of company alliances with the public research sector. Non-GM farmers are expected to lose markets and also pay for GM contamination that we don't want and can't prevent."

According to a Newspoll survey released last December, the majority of West Australians believe that the West Australian Government's ban on the commercial growing of GM canola should stay in place.ⁱ

Ms Sales says: "Redman has argued that GM canola will provide choice for farmers, but in reality it will remove choice because the contamination of non-GM crops is inevitable. It will also remove choice for shoppers because GM canola products do not require labelling. GM canola will be known in future years as Redman's curse, threatening human health, our environment and our key export markets."

"Last year, 91 per cent of WA's canola was exported to Europe – a market where all GM foods are labelled and left on supermarket shelves. Canada lost its export markets to Europe in 1999 by adopting GM canola. We were the winners then and will be big losers now."

A recent review of the herbicide use associated with growing GM crops in the USA found that, in 2008, over 26 per cent more herbicide was applied to GM cropping areas than in areas planted to conventional varieties.ⁱⁱ No independent studies have been conducted on the human health impacts of eating GM canola, however, when Monsanto fed GM Roundup Ready canola to rats a 12-16 per cent increase in liver weight was found.ⁱⁱⁱ

"The West Australian government has betrayed its farmers and shoppers and will reap the electoral winds," Ms Sales concludes.

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ⁱ Newspoll (2009) GM food, November 2009, available at: <http://www.greenpeace.org/australia/resources/reports/GE/newspoll-wa-gm-food-crops>

ⁱⁱ Benbrook, C. (2009) Impacts of Genetically Engineered Crops on Pesticide Use: The First Thirteen Years, November 2009, http://www.organic-center.org/science.pest.php?action=view&report_id=159

ⁱⁱⁱ Greenpeace (2004) Greenpeace critique of Monsanto's Roundup Ready Oilseed Rape, GT73, http://saveourseeds.org/downloads/gp_GT731_comments.pdf.