GM Cropwatch : Submission to Productivity Commission

2-8-16

GM Cropwatch formed in 2008 after the Victorian GM canola ban was lifted.

We work with farmers and rural communities to monitor and map GM crops, and to combat the spread of GM canola by monitoring and testing for GM canola weeds.

We decontaminate roadsides and farms when GM canola weed outbreaks are identified.

100 test kits are purchased in bulk, allowing us to post, at cost price, strip tests to anyone concerned about potential GM canola weed problems on their farms or on surrounding roads.

Contrary to the submission to the Productivity Commission by GM lobbyists Croplife Australia, , which stated that in seven years of GM canola production, there had been not one episode of cross-contamination, GM Cropwatch has documented numerous cases of GM contamination resulting from GM canola being grown beside non-GM crops.

Spillages from GM canola transport are a common cause of roadside GM canola weeds, such as this incident in WA in 2011: http://www.news.com.au/national/canola-spill-sparks-gm-contamination-fears/story-e6frfkp9-1226112606821

A full list of GM contamination is here : http://www.gmcropwatch.org.au/resources and in attached doc.

GM Cropwatch maintains a listing of GM farms, to enable contamination risks to be identified.

The rural media is monitored and locations of GM farms published in articles in the media are logged and posted on a google map http://www.gmcropwatch.org.au/

GM crop bans must stay in place to allow non-GM farmers to benefit

The established markets for non-GM canola allow a premium to be paid for non-GM canola.

The capacity of farmers to supply these markets is under threat in Victoria, WA and NSW, due to contamination and problems in the non-GM supply chain.

These include mistakes at GM receival silos, for example on 10th December 2015, in WA http://www.farmweekly.com.au/news/agriculture/agribusiness/general-news/premium-paid-for-contaminated-canola-load/2749430.aspx

In this case the non-GM farmer did not lose his premium, but there is no guarantee that the premium for non-GM canola, of $40-$60 per tonne, would be paid, if levels of GM canola were found in a non-GM delivery to a silo.

Beulah grain grower Quintin Willmott also had trouble being paid for his harvest when his GM canola sprouted in the pod. http://www.abc.net.au/site-archive/rural/content/2010/s3081523.htm

TASMANIA

Regular audits are taking place in Tasmania to monitor GM canola weeds, growing since trials in the 90's.

http://dpipwe.tas.gov.au/biosecurity/product-integrity/gene-technology/former-gm-canola-trial-sites-audit-reports

Since the Draft Report was released by the Productivity Commission, the Tasmanian Government has confirmed their support for the current GM ban, in place until 2019.

Primary Industries Minister Jeremy Rockliff said the state's moratorium "remained appropriate" and that there would be no change to the existing five year agreement.

“The report acknowledged the importance of cutting red tape, which is a priority the Tasmanian Liberal government shares in,” Mr Rockliff said.

“We have been working hard to ensure farmers can get on with the job of farming, from simplifying permits for dam works, specific purpose legislation to make it easier to grow industrial hemp and amendments to the Primary Industries Activities Protection Act.”

A review was completed this year in which the state government found measures to keep Tasmania GM-free were still appropriate.

During the review, Primary Industries Minister Jeremy Rockliff said the state government believed the moratorium struck the right balance between “the needs of today and the possibilities of tomorrow” for the agriculture sector.

http://www.theadvocate.com.au/story/4059248/state-to-remain-gmo-free-despite-pc-report/

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

The South Australian government is aware of the potential for marketing canola from a GM-free state.

On a State Government trip to Europe in April 2015, Agriculture Minister Leon Bignell met with the head of Glencore, which owns most of SA’s grain handling and storage facilities, to discuss the marketing potential of their GM-free status.

“They recognise that SA is the only mainland state where it’s illegal to grow GM crops and want to look at how we can brand that difference,” Mr Bignell said.

“It’s our biggest bulk commodity and they’re treating it exactly the same but they are willing to look at whether they can market the grain in a different way.

http://www.adelaidenow.com.au/news/south-australia/time-to-harvest-gmfree-status/news-story/d419d2a653ea8cffa9f68c7dd79f1c9a

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

As well as examples already mentioned, on 21st October 2015, the GM-Free Farmers group found GM canola plants growing on road verges at five sites in the metropolitan area, in some cases more than a 100km from the closest grain farm. Mundaring, Kewdale, Mandogalup and two Maddington sites.

This proves the spread of GM canola seeds in rural areas.

The GM-Free Farmers Group, represents around 150 WA broadacre farmers.

GM Free Farmers Group’s Darrell Boase and Chris Edmonds with a suspected GM canola plant.

Article here: https://au.news.yahoo.com/thewest/wa/a/29861723/gm-free-canola-market-at-risk/

GM FEED AND DAIRY EXPORTS

Murray Goulburn Co-op and Bega Cheese Ltd are two dairy companies which specify to their suppliers that stock feed must be 95% GM free. With sensitive export markets in Europe, their policies confirm the demand for GM-Free products.

Bega's GM policy:

"Our products are free from any ingredients that have been genetically modified or contain genetically modified organisms. We actively monitor and manage our raw material supplies to assess any implication on the products that we produce. Products supplied by Bega Cheese Limited are therefore, to the best of our knowledge, manufactured, packed and labelled in accordance with Australian and European requirements: http://www.begacheese.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Letter-GM-Status-April-2015_Approved-ACGB-28-Apr-2015.pdf

Murray Goulburn Co-op – GM policy:

http://www.mgc.com.au/media/24632/Supplier-Handbook-NSW-Milk-Region.pdf

GM WHEAT - CONTAMINATION RISK

There are no commercially approved GM wheat varieties anywhere in the world, but a farmer in Washington, USA, found 22 unapproved GM wheat plants in his field on 29th July 2016. The plants were identified as being one of Monsanto's experimental varieties. For the third time in three years, a Monsanto experimental GM wheat variety has contaminated a commercial wheat crop.

The discovery of the unapproved illegal GMO wheat has caused a reaction in US wheat export markets around the world.

The South Korean Ministry of Food and Drug Safety said it had asked APHIS to provide details on the unapproved wheat and methods of inspection and added that it has already suspended customs clearance for some wheat imports from the United States.

http://www.reuters.com/article/us-wheat-washington-gmo-idUSKCN10920K

GM wheat trials in Australia

There are currently 11 GM wheat "trials" in Australia, in South Australia. Western Australia, Victoria and the ACT.

Based on the contamination incidents in USA, if GM wheat plants are found in **any** Australian export wheat, it could have devastating consequences for our export markets. GM wheat "field trials" put premium markets at risk.

Report on market rejection of GM wheat: "No appetite for GM wheat"

http://www.gmfreeaustralia.org.au/assets/script/ckfinder/userfiles/files/No%20Appetite%20GM%20Wheat%20Report.pdf

Report on GM wheat trials in Australia, 2014 http://www.gmfreeaustralia.org.au/assets/script/ckfinder/userfiles/files/9GM%20wheat.pdf

Conclusion

The right of States or regions to ban GM crops on economic grounds is essential and must stay in place.

As seen above, GM contamination is documented in Australia. Although hard to prevent, it can be achieved, with the vigilance of local farmers and the help of volunteer groups such as GM Cropwatch.

The GM moratoria are essential for farmers to use the marketing advantage which GM-free crops represent. **The 2008 decision by grain handlers Graincorp the eastern states, and in 2009, CBH in Western Australia, to undertake segregation of GM and non-GM was driven by the market for non-GM.** The market and the oil seed crushers demanded it.

Farmers continue to receive premiums for their non-GM canola crops, or, put another way, GM canola is discounted in comparison to conventional canola crops.

Non-GM farmers have profited from segregation by being able to sell their crops to sensitive markets. This translates into money in their pocket for farmers and established markets are satisfied.

Segregation confirmed in 2010: http://www.abc.net.au/site-archive/rural/nsw/content/2010/08/s2998629.htm

GM-free states and regions protect farmers against GM contamination.

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