

GENETICALLY MODIFIED WHEAT AND SUGAR IN AUSTRALIA

Policy position

The Government believes GM technology can assist in dealing with emerging challenges, including those arising from climate change and pressure on global food supplies. GM crops can also benefit the environment by changing the way farmers manage their crops.

The Government supports the existing national framework for management and regulation of GM crops and food, which includes careful scientific assessment of human health and environmental risks.

Overview of Gene Technology Regulation in Australia

The regulation of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and genetically modified (GM) food in Australia is achieved through an integrated legislative framework which includes the Gene Technology Regulator, Food Standards Australia New Zealand, the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority and a number of other regulatory authorities with complementary responsibilities and expertise.

The Gene Technology Regulator (the regulator) is responsible for the assessment and regulation of the intentional release of GMOs into the Australian environment, such as commercial release of a GM crop. Under the Gene Technology Act 2000 (the Act), the Regulator must assess each application for commercial release and will only issue a licence for its release if the assessment shows any potential risks can be managed so as to protect the health and safety of people and the environment. Since 2000, the Regulator has approved several varieties of GM cotton, canola, carnations and a rose for commercial release.

Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) is responsible for the assessment and regulation of GM foods. GM foods cannot be sold in Australia unless they have been assessed as safe for sale for human consumption by FSANZ. To allow consumers to make an informed choice, human food derived from GM crops must be labelled as GM if any genetic material and/or protein other than that normally present in the food is contained in the final product.

The Gene Technology Act 2000 and regulations were enacted to protect the health and safety of people and the environment. The Gene Technology Regulator is responsible for examining each genetically modified (GM) crop for health and environmental impacts before licensing its release.

Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) administers food standards that cover the content and labelling of food - including GM food. Foods are subject to a pre-market safety assessment by FSANZ and approval by the Australia New Zealand Food Regulation Ministerial Council before a standard

is gazetted in the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code. Labelling regulations for foods containing GM material enable consumers to make an informed choice about the food they eat.

State and territory moratoriums

Statement here about what GM commercial approved (cotton, canola, carnations and a rose)

Then talk about wheat and sugar trials

Industry preparedness and the future of genetically modified (GM) crops

In 2008 there has been tight control of GM canola production in Victoria and New South Wales: farmers had to undertake industry stewardship training, seed stocks limited planting to around 9,500 ha, and GM canola is being managed in a closed system with the crop delivered to two crushers and product to be sold domestically. Harvest commenced in November 2008.

While the grains industry generally accepts GM crops, some downstream stakeholders, including Goodman Fielder, Tatiara Lamb and Woolworths, have indicated they have some marketing concerns owing to perceived consumer resistance. Livestock industries, including dairy, have generally adopted pro-choice policies on using GM feed. The poultry industry has expressed a preference for avoiding the use of GM feeds where possible.

In May 2009, nine grains organisations from Australia, Canada and the United States (three from each country – the Australian organisations were the Grains Council of Australia, the Grain Growers Association and the Pastoralists and Graziers Association of Western Australia) issued a joint statement indicating their intention to work toward the synchronised commercialisation of GM wheat (Grains Council of Australia et al 2009). While this intention may be aimed at minimising market disruptions, any GM crop that is going to be commercialised in Australia must first be assessed and licensed by the Gene Technology Regulator. Markets must then be identified for the product for it to be viable

GM crops and Japan

Consumer groups in Japan have called for Australia to not produce genetically modified canola. We are not aware of the Japanese Government raising concerns over GM canola with Australia, including in Free Trade Agreement negotiations. Over three quarters of Japan's imports of canola in the three years to 2005 were sourced from Canada where canola production is dominated by GM crops.

Japan does not grow GM crops commercially, but does have several products under development. Approved GM food and feed, including soybean, maize and canola, is imported. Japan has an extensive science-based regulatory system for GM products and regulatory agencies extensively test for the presence of GM material. Certain foods are prescribed as subject to labelling

requirements because they are made from ingredients that could include GM materials that can be identified in the food (excluding, for example, refined oils, as in Australia). These include soy products, but no canola products.

In addition to permitting the import of approved GM varieties, Japan has a tolerance of 1 per cent for unintended presence in stockfeed of GM varieties that are approved in other countries, but not yet in Japan.

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