



## Biotech Bulletin 2

# Key Farm Group Biotechnology Policies

Welcome to the second edition of Agrifood Awareness Australia Limited's (AFAA) Biotech Bulletin. The Biotech Bulletin, produced on a monthly basis, aims to cover relevant topical gene technology issues.

This edition of the Biotech Bulletin is entitled "Key farm group biotechnology policies" and covers current farmer organisation positions that are specifically focussed on genetically modified (GM) crops.

### **NATIONAL ORGANISATIONS**

#### **NATIONAL FARMERS' FEDERATION (NFF)**

In March 2003 the National Farmers' Federation released its biotechnology position statement. Their official policy recognises that Australian farmers stand to gain significant benefits through the integration of biotechnology. Further, it notes the potential of this technology and the individual GM crop varieties may not only provide benefits for farmers but also the wider community.

The Federation endorsed that farmers should retain the opportunity to adopt the production method best suited to their business needs, be that GM, conventional or organic.

The position paper clearly opposes measures from government that impose barriers on the commercial release of any GM crop, that are deemed fit for release by the OGTR, and crops assessed by industry as favourable.

A detailed copy of the NFF's position paper on biotechnology is available on their website [www.nff.org.au](http://www.nff.org.au).

#### **GRAINS COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA (GCA)**

The Grains Council of Australia states that on the basis that appropriate procedures and standards are in place prior to the commercial release of any GM crops, the crops have the potential to deliver benefits for farmers.

The GCA believes benefits may potentially be gained from GM crops (such as from improved disease and pest resistance, better agronomic traits or through savings from farming practices such as reduced till, or reduced chemical applications). Further, GCA believes Australian growers should have the opportunity to choose the best production system to suit their needs, be that GM or non-GM.

For more information on the GCA position contact (02) 6273 3000.

## **STATE ORGANISATIONS**

### **NEW SOUTH WALES**

#### **NSW FARMERS' ASSOCIATION (NSWFA)**

The NSW Farmers' Association formed a biotechnology taskforce in 2000 to consider the issues surrounding gene technology, develop policy and communicate the technology to its grass root members.

Policy has been endorsed at the Association's annual conference each year. The Association's current policy covers biotechnology as a whole and also focuses on the possible introduction of GM canola into Australia. The Association's policies are as follows:

- The Association supports continued research into, and trialling and testing of, individual GM agricultural products and the release of GM products provided that the appropriate regulatory authority stringently assesses all possible food safety and environmental risks and that the release offers substantial benefits to Australia's agricultural industries.
- The Association also supports monitoring of trials of GM canola to ensure compliance with the OGTR and the postponement of the general release plans for GM canola until such a time as all identity preservation issues affecting marketing and trade issues are fully addressed by Government and the industry.
- Support is also detailed for a three-year trial of GM canola in NSW (up to a maximum of 5,000 hectares/per annum) as a condition of the license to be issued by the OGTR, and/or as Legislation of the NSW state government, with results from these trials made publicly available and an appropriate timeframe set for industry to comment before any commercial release is approved.
- Lastly, the Association supports the creation of an independent GM canola committee to monitor and report publicly on the three year trial (5,000 ha/pa) of GM canola in NSW.

A detailed copy of the Association's biotechnology policy position can be obtained by visiting the NSWFA website [www.nswfarmers.org.au](http://www.nswfarmers.org.au).

### **QUEENSLAND**

There are two key farm groups in Queensland, AgForce and the Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF). AgForce is an advocate group for cattle, grain, sheep and wool producers and as such, has farmers as its primary members. The Queensland Farmers' Federation on the other hand, does not have farmer members but represents 18,000 primary producers across the State through its 23 diverse member organisations including Cotton Australia, Canegrowers, Queensland Dairyfarmers' Organisation and the Australian Prawn Farmers Association.

#### **AGFORCE**

AgForce has formed and endorsed policy on biotechnology. The organisation's policy focuses largely on biotechnology within the broader grains industry, as there is virtually no canola grown in Queensland. AgForce's policy endorsed in February 2003 supports:

- continued research into the trialling and testing of individual agricultural products;
- comprehensive and rigorous science based assessment of GM species and products;
- the OGTR in ensuring responsibility of research trials to be strictly contained within the legislated guidelines;
- grain growers having access to an affordable choice of the latest research technology that is best suited to their production needs;

- individual grain growers having the right to maintain their current farming and marketing practices in the event of the release of GM crop varieties for commercial production.

The AgForce grains section also encourages further education and balance in the information provided to the general public regarding the use of gene technology so informed decisions and choices can be made.

For further information see [www.agforceqld.org.au](http://www.agforceqld.org.au) or contact AgForce on (07) 3236 3100.

### **QUEENSLAND FARMERS' FEDERATION (QFF)**

The Queensland Farmers' Federation has not formed a biotechnology policy statement at this stage as their members have differing views on the subject and suggest it would be difficult to develop a policy position that would be satisfactory for all parties concerned.

### **SOUTH AUSTRALIA**

#### **SOUTH AUSTRALIAN FARMERS' FEDERATION (SAFF)**

The South Australian Farmers' Federation formed a biotechnology taskforce in early 2002 to look at the issues surrounding gene technology with their key focus to communicate the technology to their members and consider the applications relevant to the South Australian primary producers that are submitted to the OGTR.

The South Australian Farmers' Federation current policy focuses on the use of gene technology in primary production and is broken down into four main areas that include legislation and regulation, research and development, education and consumer demand. It is as follows:

- Legislation and regulation - The Federation supports the national framework of the OGTR, provided that the Office has clearly defined roles and responsibilities and provides adequate resources and support generated by the commonwealth and not from industry sources.
- Research and development - There is a need for further scientific research to be conducted on genetically modified organisms (GMOs), in particular how they will impact on the commercial markets, the community and the environment in South Australia.
- Education - The Federation believes there is a need for further education for farmers, users, customers and consumers on the technology so informed decisions on the risks and opportunities involved in the adoption of the technology may be made.
- Consumer demand - The Federation believes that the ultimate decision to adopt gene technology or not rests entirely with the marketplace when taking into account the financial, environmental and philosophical reasons. However, in choosing such a status there must be no negative impact on those who choose not to embrace the technology.
- Ultimately, SAFF believes the decision to adopt the technology, once it has passed through the framework, must rest entirely with the individual and primarily influenced by market demand.

Further to the above position, policy adopted by the Federation at their recent conference held in July resolved that the Conference record its opposition to the commercial release of GM canola in South Australia whilst issues of market acceptance, cost and liability remain unresolved.

Additionally, the conference resolved that SAFF should call upon the State and Federal Government to delay the commercial release of GM canola until it can be shown that there will be minimal risks upon other growers.

A detailed copy of the SAFF's biotechnology position paper can be obtained by contacting the Federation on (08) 8232 5555.

## **TASMANIA**

### **TASMANIAN FARMERS' AND GRAZIERS' ASSOCIATION**

The Tasmanian Farmers' and Graziers' Association does not have a formal policy position or statement on gene technology as yet. However, they recognise the importance of the technology and the potential benefits, but until such a time as consumers are engaged in and embrace the technology, they do not support the release of any application in the state.

For more information contact (03) 6331 6377.

## **VICTORIA**

### **VICTORIAN FARMERS' FEDERATION (VFF)**

The Victorian Farmers' Federation in principal supports gene technology as detailed in their current policy statement.

The Federation's existing policy recognises and supports gene technology as a tool for improving the functional properties of food and fibre produced on farms, improving the long term sustainability of agricultural production systems and increasing agricultural productivity and profits, provided that the concerns and recognised risks associated with the technology are managed.

The Federation supports the development of an integrated and science based regulators framework for controlling scientific research into gene technology and the use of GMO's by industry. They believe there must also be a provision for recognised industry bodies to have input into the decision making process based on strategic and marketing issues. That said, the Federation recognises the integrity of the regulatory regime is critical to maintaining public confidence in the technology.

The Federation recognises that Australian farmers must have access to the appropriate technology at reasonable prices to remain internationally competitive, and farmers should have the right to choose what technologies are used in their production system, be that, organic or the use of gene technology that have been endorsed by the responsible Australian regulatory authorities.

All commodity groups of the VFF are bound by this policy developed at their Annual Conference in 2001. At the VFF's most recent Annual Conference held in July 2003, the following resolution was supported:

"The VFF seek independent regional variety trials of GM and non-GM crops showing yield and costs of seed and chemicals including the control of volunteer plants in the following years."

Further information or a detailed copy of the VFF's policy on biotechnology can be obtained by contacting the Federation on 1300 882 833.

## **WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

Western Australia has two farming associations, both of which have farmers forming their primary member-base.

### **PASTORALISTS AND GRAZIERS ASSOCIATION (PGA)**

The organisation's official policy on biotechnology was endorsed in July 2002. Their policy statement is outlined below:

“The Pastoralists and Graziers Association encourages and supports the continued research, development, promotion and commercial release of genetically improved plant varieties utilising biotechnology.”

More information may be obtained from the PGA by calling (08) 9651 1703.

### **WESTERN AUSTRALIAN FARMERS’ FEDERATION (WAFF)**

The Western Australian Farmers’ Federation endorsed policy following their annual gene technology workshop held in April 2003. A number of their policy decisions mirror that of other state farming organisations, specifically supporting the continued research and trialling of genetically modified organisms.

The Federation supports a moratorium on the commercial release of GM crops in Western Australia during the next twelve months and will then consider their release on a year-by-year and case-by-case basis. This decision is subject to compliance with key industry requirements, and includes such things as industry involvement in decision making, protection of current systems, supply chain acceptance and preparedness and the preservation of the farmer’s rights to choose.

More information can be obtained by contacting the WAFF on (08) 9325 2933.

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We look forward to your feedback on this newsletter.

For further information, please contact the AFAA office on (02) 6273 9535 or via email – [info@afaa.com.au](mailto:info@afaa.com.au)

**August 2003**

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