



8 August, 2008

I am writing in regards to your recent endorsement of the Greenpeace *GM Free Chefs Charter*. Agrifood Awareness Australia Limited (AFAA) is an industry initiative, established to increase public awareness of, and encourage informed debate and decision-making about gene technology.

Globally, in 2007, 114.3 million hectares of GM crops were planted around the world, in both developed and developing countries. Twelve million farmers from 23 countries planted GM crops, representing a 67-fold increase since the new varieties first became available in 1996.

Genetically modified cotton has been grown in Australia - in Queensland and New South Wales - for over 12 years. The GM cotton varieties available are insect resistant, herbicide tolerant or a combination of the two. Cotton is primarily grown for fibre although cottonseed meal is used in animal feed rations and cottonseed oil is used by some sectors of the food industry. Genetically modified cotton has delivered environmental, economic and social benefits in Australia, including an 85 per cent reduction in pesticide applications per season.

Approximately 110 farmers have planted GM canola this year. Farmers planting the new varieties have greater weed management options and can benefit from an increase in crop yields in both their canola crop and in subsequent crops planted in rotation, such as wheat. The new canola also allows for the use of a more environmentally friendly herbicide.

The Australian grains industry has long recognised the requirements of all customers. With regards to GM canola, the industry has demonstrated its commitment to delivering choice through the statement entitled *Delivering market choice with GM canola*, which is available on the AFAA website ([www.afaa.com.au](http://www.afaa.com.au)). In the statement, major participants in Australia's grain supply chain committed to introduce GM canola in a manner that:

- Maintained or enhanced trade in Australian canola
- Enabled market choice along the supply chain
- Would be open and transparent
- Provided confidence to all stakeholders, particularly to customers, consumers and governments.

The grains industry remains committed to this position. The industry supports the responsible use of new technology that can help Australian farmers produce in a sustainable way and compete on domestic and international markets.

Gene technology in Australia is regulated by the Federal Office of the Gene Technology Regulator (OGTR). In addition to the OGTR, Food Standards Australia and New Zealand (FSANZ) is responsible for ensuring that all foods are safe to eat. All GM foods must undergo a rigorous safety assessment before they can be sold in Australia.

Australia implemented a food labelling regime for GM foods in 2001 to allow consumers to identify foods with GM ingredients and facilitate choice. Generally, if genetic material or protein from genetic modification is present in the final food it must be identified in the ingredient panel of the label. However, highly refined products and foods containing GM flavourings of less than 0.1 per cent of the food content do not require labelling. Additionally if a GM ingredient is present at less than one per cent, where this can be demonstrated as unintentional, labelling is not required. Oil is

considered a 'highly refined' product meaning it has undergone a refining process that has the effect of removing DNA and/or protein. Oil derived from GM crops cannot be differentiated from conventional (non-GM derived) crops and as a result oil from the new canola varieties, or cottonseed, is not required to be labelled.

No country in the world has introduced mandatory GM labelling for animal products such as meat, milk and eggs. Genetically modified animal feed, like all feed, is broken down during digestion and numerous peer-reviewed scientific studies have been conducted to evaluate the safety of GM animal feeds. Animal products derived from animals fed GM feed are identical to those from animals fed non-GM feed.

Australian canola processors imported GM canola from Canada in December 2006 to overcome domestic shortages due to the drought. This GM canola was handled through the existing canola industry supply chain infrastructure, and the requirements of all market participants (both canola oil and meal) were met. In addition to the imported GM canola, food products from six GM commodities, mainly grown overseas, have been approved by FSANZ including soy and corn.

Most of the GM crops currently available in the market place have been modified to improve agronomic characteristics. However, there are a range of consumer-orientated GM crops being developed. CSIRO is in the process of developing plants that produce DHA, an omega-3 oil, normally only available from fish sources. Currently, the majority of Australians do not consume the recommended daily intake of DHA. Enriching plants with DHA could provide cheaper and more varied sources of DHA and could reduce the demand on natural fish stocks.

Gene technology, whilst not a magic bullet, can contribute to some of the current and future food production challenges. The technology has the potential to improve the sustainability, profitability and flexibility of Australian agriculture by offering producers improved products and more management options. Australian farmers need access to new technologies being used in other countries in order to remain competitive. In achieving this farmers recognise the importance of meeting market and consumer demands. The *GM Free Chefs Charter* denies farmers the choice to select new tools, and risks setting back research that can address the challenges of climate change and support sustainable food production.

For your information I have enclosed a copy of AFAA's gene technology information pack. If you have any queries and would like to discuss the issue of gene technology further please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Paula Fitzgerald  
**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

*AgriFood Awareness Australia Limited is committed to providing quality, factual, science-based information on the use of gene technology in agriculture to allow for informed decisions. The organisation has three founding members - CropLife Australia, the Grains Research and Development Corporation and the National Farmers' Federation. The organisation's activities are also supported by the cotton and sugar industries, the Grain Growers Association and through a project partnership with the red meat industry. We work actively across the agricultural sector – particularly with research and development corporations, state farm organisations and commodity groups – to provide information and facilitate informed decision-making.*