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When is a market not a market?

"Let the Market Decide if it wants GM canola" was the mantra of the Victorian Department of Primary Industries (DPI) in a meeting with MADGE Australia last Wednesday.

But Fran Murrell of MADGE said this idea was a complete farce. "How can the market decide on GM canola when farmers can't guarantee a GM free product?"

"Markets can only exist when sellers know what they are selling and buyers know what they are buying. After our meeting with the DPI, it is clear that the Victorian government's approval of GM canola has wedged farmers and consumers into a crazy paradox."

The edge of the wedge:

- GM farmers do not have to tell their neighbours they are growing GM canola, even though it can cross pollinate with GM-free canola. **BUT...**
- **ALL** other farmers need to know if GM canola is grown near them, not only conventional canola growers. Any crop or pasture can become polluted by GM canola seeds or weeds, beehives must be kept 5km away from GM fields and organic farmers must notify their certifying body if there is a GM crop within 10km.

Therefore the right of GM farmers' to conceal what they are growing is overriding the need of everyone else to know what crops surround them. The only body that knows where GM canola is in Victoria is the multinational owner of the technology, Monsanto.

What can farmers do?

- They can ask Monsanto to enforce the voluntary agreement that GM farmers notify their neighbours of their decision to grow GM canola.
- They can monitor the roadside for spilled GM canola seed and weeds and clear them up. This will require their own time and effort as the State Government sees no need to supply them with free GM canola test kits or to treat GM canola weeds as a special issue
- They can sue their GM canola growing neighbours – if they know who they are and can prove negligence. However as GM canola is a legal crop they are unlikely to receive damages
- They can hope that their GM free canola is not contaminated after delivery to the silo. Last year two Victorian silos, designated GM free, had deliveries of GM canola. The farmers who caused the contamination have not been identified.

Therefore farmers that want to stay GM free have: no maps of where GM canola is growing, no help in dealing with multinational Monsanto, no GM weed monitoring, no viable legal remedy and no assurance that their crop will not be contaminated after harvest.

And farmers can't stop the movement of GM pollen by wind, insects, birds, and human error.

There is no way for consumers to know whether they are buying GM as most GM ingredients escape labelling, so consumers can't make the market decision.

When is a market not a market? - When it concerns GM canola.

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