

Membership.

Thanks to all members of the Association who have renewed their membership. Reminders will be sent out shortly to those members who still have membership subs outstanding.

Members @ Work section

Don't forget that if you are a member and you would like to take advantage of our free web page offer – in the Members @ Work section – all you have to do is e-mail what you want to appear in the page to the Association – we will create the page and let you know when its done.

Corporate Partners and support for Agribusiness Online.

The Association has been fortunate in gaining support from several key corporate partners, allowing us to keep the doors open.

Agribusiness Online has been at the core of our activities over the last 4 ½ years. Our online publishing – Review, Perspectives and Connections – is still one of the leading sources of online agri-food related literature – attracting an average of 525 individual users per day.

If your organisation is interested in finding out how to support Agribusiness OnLine, please contact the Association.

Annual Conference / Forum.

Yes Folks there WILL be an annual event this year – either November 12th or 13th are shaping up as the favoured dates and the city will be Sydney.

The event will be held over one day, with a welcome function on the evening before the event and a networking function at the close.

The conference will be something different - a combination of contributed sessions and invited speakers.

The event will highlight leading research and the application of innovation in the agri-food sector AND look at what is happening in the major commodity sectors from a trade and economics perspective.

If you are interested in contributing to the research / innovation section, contact the Association.

Publishing

The Association has just completed publishing 4 new Perspectives papers and the first paper in Volume 10 – 2002 of the Agribusiness Review.

The new **Review** paper is an examination of land reform in Vietnam, with a move to recognise and allocate land use rights.

This has implications for the Australian agri-food sector as Vietnam may become a more significant market for Australian produce and expertise in the medium to long term.

Land reform and the development of commercial agriculture in Vietnam: policy and issues.

Sally Marsh and T. Gordon MacAulay, Department of Agricultural Economics,
The University of Sydney, NSW, 2006

Over the last decade, following the *doi moi* reforms, the Vietnamese government has formally recognised the household as the basic unit of production and allocated land use rights to households. Under the 1993 Land Law these rights can be transferred, exchanged, leased, inherited, and mortgaged.

A land market is emerging in Vietnam but is still constrained for various reasons. Additionally, lack of flexibility of land use is an issue. As Vietnam moves into the world market and reduces trade barriers in line with ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) requirements, farmers are becoming increasingly vulnerable to falling incomes because of lower prices for their produce.

An overview of the land reform policies and issues related to these are outlined in the paper. Challenges facing Vietnamese agriculture are discussed within the context of an effort by Vietnam to move its household farms from subsistence farming to a more commercial base.

Perspective Papers.

Three related papers has been contributed that examine the issue of so called GM free zones. Paper 1 of the 3 is the discussion document issued by the Western Australian government.

Papers 2 and 3 are contributions from the Export Grains Centre and the Life Sciences Network.

Paper 2 is a particularly interesting contribution as it critically examines so of the key issues and concerns raised by opponents of GM technology. Of particular interest is the empirical evidence presented regarding the movement of pollen from GM canola.

Opponents of GM technology continue to use the Percy Schmeiser case in Canada as 'proof' that GM canola pollen poses a threat to other farmers and the environment in general – and this continues to be reported as 'fact' by both print and electronic media.

Anyone who has taken the time to read the judgement (examined in Agribusiness Volume 83 November 1, 2001) will see that linking Schmeiser to this issue is a gross misrepresentation of legal and scientific fact.

Genetic Modification-Free Zones

The Government of Western Australia

Genetic modification or GM (also known as gene technology, genetic engineering, genetic manipulation) is a term used to describe a group of techniques which can alter the genetic material of a living organism (plant, animal or microbe) and thus modify its characteristics. The technology has a wide variety of applications including research, agriculture, production of therapeutic goods (e.g. insulin), bio-remediation (e.g. use of micro-organisms to decompose toxic substances) and industrial uses.

In the agricultural sector, proponents of GM believe that advances in primary production, from the use of this technology, will allow Australia to improve existing production efficiency. This in turn will help to maintain or improve Australia's share of world markets.

Despite the promise of this relatively new technology, the public has been confronted with charges and counter charges concerned with the risks and benefits of using GM.

The State Government has declared that it will take a cautious approach to the introduction of GM crop varieties into farming systems, noting that a balance is required between opportunity and prudence. The Government considers that the utilisation of GM crops may be a critical element in the future competitiveness of the agricultural sector. It is also aware that some members of the community have concerns about using such crops.

Genetic Modification-Free Zones: Comments.

John Hamblin

Research Director, Export Grains Centre Ltd, Western Australia

Export Grains Centre Ltd (EGC) aims to ensure that the farmers of Western Australia have a wide choice of world-class crop varieties. Therefore EGC has an interest in technical and commercial issues that affect the availability of new varieties to farmers.

The Commonwealth Gene Technology Act 2000 covers health and safety aspects of GM crops for people and the environment. However in its matching legislation the WA Government may reserve specific areas for growing GM or non-GM crops for marketing purposes (section 21 (1) aa). GM technology has the potential to improve community health, lower environmental risks, make agriculture more sustainable and lower farm costs (1, 9). Much of the debate on GM technology focuses on perceived lack of benefits set against community concerns on effects of GM crops on the health and safety of people and the environment. The current discussion in WA is over Roundup Ready (RR) Canola; i.e. canola varieties that tolerate the herbicide glyphosate. Liberty Link (LL) canola may also be released but Liberty is not a major herbicide of winter cropping in Australia, where as glyphosate is the predominant knockdown herbicide used in minimum tillage.

Submission to the Western Australian Government In response to - Genetic Modification-Free Zones: A discussion paper for public consultation.

Life Sciences Network
Canberra, ACT

The Life Sciences Network acknowledges the Western Australian Government has declared it will take a cautious approach to the introduction of GM crop varieties into farming systems, but considers the utilisation of GM crops may be a critical element in the future competitiveness of the agricultural sector. The Network notes the Government supports the recognition of designated areas as described in Section 21 of the Commonwealth Gene Technology Act 2000, and has introduced Complementary State legislation to enable GM-Free and/or GM zones to be established. In relation to any such designated GM-Free and GM areas, only areas designated for preserving product identity for marketing purposes can be recognised.

Under the Act, the Gene Technology Regulator is already empowered to address issues of human health and safety as well as environmental risks in relation to any request for a licence to deal with GMOs. As such, the Western Australian Government's Discussion Paper is only about recognising designated GM-Free or GM areas relating to 'crops', not to other organisms which may or may not be genetically modified.

The Life Sciences Network notes the Western Australian Government's commitment to obtain the views of a wide range of stakeholders on core issues including: the potential costs and benefits of GM-free zones; the form GM-free and/or GM zones might take and how they might be determined, implemented and managed; and other industry or government initiatives that might assist in cost-effective production of non-genetically modified products.

For those interested in the grains industry, our latest **Perspectives Paper** provides an interesting study into the diversity of genetics currently employed in the Australian wheat industry, particularly in light of the 3 papers discussing the pros and cons of GM crops.

Policy Influences on Genetic Diversity in Australian Wheat Production

David Godden and John P. Brennan

Department of Agricultural Economics, University of Sydney, and Wagga Wagga Agricultural Institute, Wagga Wagga NSW.

The research reported in this paper has its origins in a wider project (e.g. Brennan *et al.* 1999a) examining economic dimensions of genetic diversity in the wheat growing industries of Australia and China. Since 1945, government policy has had a major impact on the marketing of Australian wheat, and also on the research and development process. Government policy is therefore a possible shifter of the supply and demand curves. Genetic diversity in the Australian wheat growing industry is interesting for three principal reasons. Firstly, individual farmers face an array of risks and uncertainties including price and production risk. Wheat varieties, because of their different genetic makeup, respond differentially to climatic and other environmental (e.g. pest and disease) conditions. Choice of wheat variety offers some opportunities to manage risk and uncertainty in wheat production. For example, some wheat varieties are optimally sown "early" in a season, whereas others may be sown "late". The availability of different varietal types allows farmers to exploit different climatic conditions as they emerge. This factor might be denoted "routine" risk and uncertainty.

Events

Innovative Farming will hold a Farm Bushfire seminar on Thursday 9 May at the City Tattersalls Club in Pitt St, Sydney from 6-8pm.

Using a combination of slides and practical model demonstrations, veteran fire-fighter Terry Jackson (superintendent at the Hornsby Kuring-gai district of the NSW Rural Fire Service) will talk about the principles of fire safety and fire safe practices in a farming situation, eg landowners' responsibilities in relation to bushfire, how to prevent and control bushfire, what to do if one is heading your way, which trees to plant in bushfire-prone areas and how to care for fire damaged trees.

All Innovative Farming seminars are tailored specifically to the needs of people who do not live on their farms fulltime but are open to any rural property owners.

The cost to attend is \$20 per person (price includes light supper). For more information or to register please visit www.innovativefarming.com or robinm@innovativefarming.com or ring 02 9459 3320.
