

Submission to the Productivity Commission on Regulation of Agriculture

The draft findings that there is no economic or health and safety justification for banning the cultivation of GMO's and the recommendation that the Tasmanian and other State governments should repeal moratoria ignores the economic realities of a state the size of Tasmania who is today (successfully) very busy leveraging its GMO-free status in promotion of its brand.

The debate still rages globally about the benefits versus the costs and risks of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) or Genetically Engineered (GE) products. In Tasmania, the State is ideally positioned geographically to take advantage of its GMO-free status and this right to determine its GMO future should remain with its elected representatives. Less than two decades into commercial production, public perception on whether the potential risks and costs outweigh the overall benefits of GM produce remains firmly on the no side.

The overwhelming issue right now is that the consumer does not want their food to be modified genetically.

"if you put a label on genetically engineered food you might as well put a skull and crossbones on it."

Norman Braksick, president of Asgrow Seed co., a subsidiary of Monsanto, quoted in the Kansas City Star, March 7, 1994.

Recent analysis also shows that the production benefits on-farm in Australia cannot be considered in isolation of consumer perceptions in Asia. Reducing barriers to access to non-GM canola may improve productivity gains, however the potential higher risk of contamination of GM material could 'taint' the brand position of our products in Asian markets.

GMO Annual Environmental Scan 2015, Agrigrowth Tasmania, Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment.

A Pew Center poll in the US in 2015 found only 37 percent of the public thought GE foods were safe, as compared to 88 percent of scientists, a greater gap than on any other issue of scientific controversy, including climate change, evolution and childhood vaccinations. These entrenched attitudes are not about to disappear as ongoing research indicates that it is the connection between GMO and the industrialization of the food supply sector by large corporations that drives much of the anti-GMO debate.

Tasmania has a unique place in this increasingly complex planet of ours where our farms and food chains remain more closely tied to natural food systems while the rest of the world continues to industrialise their food production. Tasmanian legislation against the use of artificial hormones and antibiotics in red meat production, predominate

Tasmania's community farmers' market

PO Box 862, Launceston 7250
Email: info@harvestmarket.org.au | ABN: 51 237 363 534



grass fed animals and a moratorium on GMOs supports the clean green brand Tasmania is so well known for. In October 2005, the Tasmanian Minister for Primary Industries declared the whole of Tasmania a GM-free area. The stated aim was to position the state in the global marketplace as a genuine producer of GMO free food. In August 2014 this moratorium was extended for another five years.

Although we are just at the beginning of exploiting and promoting this brand image, we are now seeing a price premium achieved for GM free canola into Japan. Our organic farming industry is gaining momentum and mainstream support and even some vineyards are converting to and using bio-dynamics in their operations. Positioning Tasmania to exploit niche markets continues to be recognised as an important factor in growing the Tasmanian economy. In 2015 the Tasmania Legislative committee emphasised that maximising our GMO status and a push for organic farming ventures is the direction the world is taking and a GMO-free Tasmania would be at the leading edge. Current examples are Cape Grim Beef with its clean, green, hormone and GMO free status; only Tasmanian cherries meet Japan and Korea's stringent quarantine conditions despite the breakdown of trade barriers due to free trade agreements.

The rise of farmers' markets around the country is another indicator that the local Tasmanian and Australian consumer is seeking out environmentally friendly sustainable ethically raised and grown produce.

Internationally Australia has a significant reputation for quality and safe produce, it is, as the Government White Paper on Agriculture, "Stronger farmers, stronger economy", acknowledges, crucial that this is protected to safeguard market access and for farmers to remain competitive.

Tasmania cannot compete on a commodity level globally with its high costs of production and transport and it will continue to need to look at ways of innovating and value adding to produce to get price premiums. Therefore, Tasmanian producers will continue to target the higher spending consumer who is more demanding, discerning and knowledgeable about what they eat. Tasmania as a place of origin brand is more valuable than many people recognise.

Currently there are clear consumer market segments:

1. Place driven, budget segment epitomized by supermarket 'home brands'.
2. Convenience foods for a busy lifestyle such as McDonalds, or pre-packaged microwave meals.
3. Providence conscious buyers who want to know where their food came from and how it was produced. This is Tasmania's target market segment even if only because we produce fresh vegetables let alone the premium value added product grown and made in the State.

Many of today's customers seek specific information on the foods they buy. Customer interest extends beyond marking mere distinctions between organic or natural. These choices include notions of "clean foods" –those foods that distance themselves from

factory farming techniques and are often viewed as coming from known origins or produced using ethical methods.

Our premium markets internationally are demanding GM free:

Europe demanding more Australian non-GM canola
ABC Rural Report 21/05/2013

“European consumers remain resolutely opposed to genetically modified crops, and as European importers we must remain responsive to the needs of our customers,”
The Australian 27/12/2010

European countries who have banned GM canola are turning to Australia for supplies. They previously bought from Canada, but now that country grows mostly GM crops.”
Digital Journal 25/04/2012

Until the consumer, our valued customers, want genetically modified food products it would be wise for Tasmania to continue to maintain the moratorium on GMO's in the State and to ensure that all food is labelled so as to continue to support consumers in their increasing demanded to know what it is that they are eating. After all, a label is not merely proof of safety, but it is proof of content and will go a long way to enhancing the integrity of the food that Tasmania producers choose to produce.

Submission prepared

By Kim Seagram (President) and

Kim Hewitt (committee members)

on behalf of

The Harvest Launceston Community Farmers' Market

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