

Submission to Inquiry into mechanisms for compensation for economic loss to farmers in Western Australia caused by contamination by Genetically Modified material

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Introduction

My name is Ian Onley, I am a certified Biodynamic producer from Gippsland, Victoria.

I am a member of the Biodynamic Agriculture Association of Australia (BDAAA)

The Biodynamic Research Institute (BDRI) offers certification under the 'Demeter' logo and is well respected in the market place. Allowing producers to attract price premiums and loyal customer support by providing a trusted production and certification system not only in Australia but increasingly overseas.

GM free is a condition of organic and biodynamic certification and loss of certification through contamination causes economic hardship not only to the farmer affected but loss to handlers, agents and consumers.

My farm, Bullfrog Gully, produces pastured free range eggs of very high quality and I rely on the integrity of certified grains I buy from 'Demeter' producers to maintain assurances that my eggs are GM free. The GM free status of the grain I purchase is essential to the ongoing viability of my business as it is for many farmers who rely on an environment free of the risk of contamination that would destroy existing markets and future opportunities for both domestic and export markets.

The 'right to farm' is an established principle, as is the principle that farmers be required to control weeds on their properties so that they do not contaminate the land of neighbours and spread in this way. It seems reasonable to assume that a property owner should be responsible for the plants they grow on their properties to ensure they do not cause their neighbours hardship or financial loss.

It is well accepted by Vic Forests, here in Victoria that the 'Pinus Radiata' they grow in timber plantations not be allowed to escape into surrounding lands. This is a common occurrence and Vic Forests are obliged to remove volunteer species that have escaped from their plantations into native bushland and neighbouring properties. This requirement is overseen by local Victorian municipalities.

It would follow then that farmers who want to grow GM produce which threatens a neighbours, 'right to farm' should be required to maintain pollen from GM crops on their own properties or be responsible for the consequences of ruining a neighbour's crop.

The onus must be on the GM industry to protect others from contamination of their product. Claiming substantial equivalence is not reasonable as it is the bit that is not equivalent that raises the concerns. In the absence of any independent data that proves GM technology safe, the precautionary principle should apply. Given that quite a lot of data has been suppressed by the GM

