

**Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport**

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Budget Estimates May 2008

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** GRDC 01

**Division/Agency:** Grains Research and Development Corporation

**Topic:** GM Canola

**Hansard Page:** 36-37 (27/05/08)

**Senator Nash asked:**

**Mr Reading**—We are very happy to send a copy of the document to the committee. All the players came together, be they the bulk handling side, the marketing side or the processing side, and said, ‘We think we can do it.’ It was interesting reading a study out of Europe recently. You know what Europe is like on the whole area of GM.

**Senator NASH**—I am assuming you have included just the basic transport side in that?

**Mr Reading**—Correct. That is in it. Again, I am very happy to send a copy to the committee which goes through all the protocols and processes for each stage in the supply chain that needs to be addressed. But this study in Europe—Europe are pretty paranoid about GM, or have been—says that the biggest risk with canola in terms of segregation issues or cross-contamination issues is either pollen to pollen transfer or volunteers. They are the things you have to watch. A recent study in Europe suggested that you should not grow canola next to another canola field, door-by-door, or in the same field. That is normal segregation practice. Australia already segregates canola. We have juncea canola and we have low-erucic or high-erucic acid canola, which we segregate now through the chain. It says as long as the whole area is not more than 50 per cent of an area being grown, segregation can work through silos and good farming practices.

**Answer:**

Attached is an industry report prepared under the Single Vision Grains Australia process: ‘Delivering market choice with GM canola’

**[GRDC 01 attachment]**

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**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** GRDC 02

**Division/Agency:** Grains Research and Development Corporation

**Topic:** Organic fertilisers

**Hansard Page:** 37-38 (27/05/08)

**Senator O'Brien asked:**

**Senator O'BRIEN**—In terms of the work GRDC is doing in the context of exceptionally high fertiliser prices—and, of course, there is your comment about unlocking phosphorus in the soil—this committee has recently taken some evidence about organic fertiliser options. What work is GRDC doing with regard to alternatives to the chemical fertiliser options for Australian growers?

**Mr Reading**—I will just have to take the question on notice on the specific amount, if I can do that. We have always looked at various options in terms of what can be utilised. Some of it has been in terms of organic carbon and the levels going back into the soil. We are also doing work on split applications of fertilisers. In terms of the organic number, I will take that on notice, if that is possible.

**Answer:**

The Grains Research and Development Corporation is engaging the NSW Department of Primary Industries to undertake a review of the use of animal manures and biological wastes in crop production. The outcomes will be:

- a summary of the existing knowledge surrounding the use of animal manures and biological wastes in crop production
- recommendations on areas where further research, development and extension is needed, enabling the grains industry to strategically target its research efforts
- publication of information in a form suitable to assist grain growers to use these materials.

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**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** GRDC 03

**Division/Agency:** Grains Research and Development Corporation

**Topic:** Organic fertilisers

**Hansard Page:** 41 (27/05/08)

**Senator Siewert asked:**

**ACTING CHAIR**—Can you tell me if you are actually doing specific work focused on GE crops versus non-GE crops in terms of herbicide resistance?

**Mr Reading**—Let me take that on notice. I am just trying to remember what the integrated wheat package does and whether it has GM in it. Certainly we will be evaluating that in the national variety trials in terms of how they perform. But I do not know if they will be sprayed with glyphosate or not. I do not know.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Because that is an issue that has been reported from overseas—increasing herbicide resistance under GE crops is escalating. If you could provide us with information on that—what work you are doing, if any, to evaluate the difference between GE and non-GE crops—it would be appreciated.

**Mr Perrett**—A lot of our resistance built up before we had GE crops. Our first one is canola.

**ACTING CHAIR**—I appreciate that. It is an issue that is there and I want to know whether it has actually been examined.

**Mr Perrett**—We will look into it.

**Answer:**

The Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC) could not initiate research on the impacts of GE grain crops compared with non-GE crops on herbicide resistance as they could not be commercially grown. Following the lifting of the GE moratorium in Victoria and NSW, the GRDC is developing a research project to monitor the impacts of the introduction of commercial GE canola on glyphosate herbicide resistance.

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**Question:** GRDC 04

**Division/Agency:** Grains Research and Development Corporation

**Topic:** Organic fertilisers

**Hansard Page:** 41 (27/05/08)

**Senator Siewert asked:**

**ACTING CHAIR**—While claims are made that herbicide use is reduced under GE crops, there is also evidence from overseas that in fact that is not the case with some crops. I have just heard Senator Heffernan make an interjection, which I will ignore. Could you provide us with any work that you have done on that.

**Senator HEFFERNAN**—What I mean is you were right.

**ACTING CHAIR**—He is implying I was right, which is a change. If you could provide us with any work, that would be appreciated too. Has anybody else got any other questions for GRDC? Get away while the going is good!

**Answer:**

The Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC) is not investing in any research specifically comparing GE and non-GE crops for herbicide resistance as commercial GM crops have not previously been grown in Australia (apart from cotton and carnations which are not GRDC leviable crops).