



MEDIA RELEASE

Monday 5th December 2005.

COORDINATED RISK ASSESSMENT FOR NEW COMMERCIAL GM COTTON

Australia's Gene Technology Regulator, Dr Sue Meek, has released her initial assessment of Monsanto's application to commercially release herbicide tolerant Roundup Ready Flex[®] cotton anywhere in southern Australia

The application requests the unrestricted release of Roundup Ready Flex[®] cotton alone and in combination with insect resistant Bollgard II[®] cotton. Bollgard II[®] was approved for commercial release in 2002 and currently makes up approximately 70% of Australia's commercial cotton crop.

Dr Meek is requesting public comment on this risk assessment, which is being conducted alongside parallel evaluations by Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) and the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) under Australia's integrated regulatory framework for gene technology.

Roundup Ready Flex[®] cotton has been genetically modified to tolerate the application of glyphosate, the active ingredient of Roundup Ready[®] Herbicide, which can then be used to control weeds in the GM cotton crops.

The key difference between this cotton and the existing commercially available, herbicide tolerant GM cotton (Roundup Ready[®]) is the older product can only be sprayed during a relatively short period before the cotton flowers form, at three to five week after planting. The new GM cottons can be sprayed with Roundup Ready[®] herbicide (glyphosate) later in the growing season (which lasts 24-28 weeks).

Currently, if farmers are unable to spray Roundup Ready[®] cotton in the short period available before flower formation, for example because of bad weather, they have to resort to more intensive methods of weed management such as hand weeding or spot-spraying.

"Glyphosate is a very important and widely used agricultural chemical because of its effectiveness against a broad range of weed species, its low toxicity to animals (including humans) and microbes, and low persistence in the environment," Dr Meek said.

"For this reason, I have carefully considered whether the extended ability of the Roundup Ready Flex[®] cottons to tolerate glyphosate application could result in them becoming more aggressive weeds, and I have found no evidence for this.

“In our assessment of this application we have applied internationally accepted best practice in risk analysis, and drawn upon a wide range of information in addition to that supplied by the applicant. This includes data from extensive field trials in Australia, experience with previously approved commercially released GM cottons, and relevant independent and peer reviewed literature from Australia and overseas.”

Monsanto expects Roundup Ready Flex[®] to replace Roundup Ready[®] cotton in the market, and anticipates a phased introduction beginning with up to 20,000 hectares in spring 2006 in the current cotton growing regions of New South Wales and southern Queensland.

The genetic modification in the new Roundup Ready Flex[®] cottons does not affect the climatic and water requirements which all cotton (GM and non-GM) requires for successful cultivation. Therefore, any expansion beyond the current cotton growing areas will only occur where environmental conditions are suitable for growing non-GM cotton. The timing and extent of any increased plantings will depend upon a number of factors such as grower acceptance and seed availability.

“I am now keen for the public to take the opportunity to comment on the comprehensive Risk Assessment and Risk Management Plan that I have prepared on Monsanto’s application, before I make a decision whether to issue a licence,” Dr Meek said.

Copies of the RARMP for this application (DIR59), as well as Executive and Technical Summaries and ‘plain English’ Questions and Answers, are available from the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator’s (OGTR) website www.ogtr.gov.au under “What’s New” or by phoning the OGTR on 1800 181 030. The closing date for submissions is 27 January 2006

Media contact: Kay McNiece, Media Adviser to the Regulator, 02 6289 5027