



Newsletter

May 2008

Farm Writers' Association of NSW Inc
GPO Box 1108 Sydney NSW 2001
Website: www.nswfarmwriters.org

GM crops, global food shortages and climate change

Agrifood Awareness Australia executive director Paula Fitzgerald may have allowed herself a brief moment of triumph when plantings of GM canola were approved for NSW and Victoria this year, but she says the fight to gain access to GM crop technology is far from over.

Paula says there are still many challenges for Australian farmers wanting access to the technology and to realise the outcomes of R&D investment into GM crops.

At a time of tight global food supplies and new challenges from climate change, GM crops are a technology that cannot be held back.

Paula will draw on her experiences in policy and public acceptance work at CSIRO and AFAA to talk about the future of GM crops in Australia.

Paula will be speaking at our May seminar about the future of GM technology and its role in addressing current agricultural challenges.

Paula has spent fifteen years working in the biotechnology area and is the inaugural Executive Director of Agrifood Awareness Australia (AFAA).

She has published numerous articles on biotechnology and has been an invited speaker at over 200 science, industry and public conferences and events, both nationally and internationally.

AFAA is an industry initiative established to increase public awareness of, and encourage informed debate and decision-making about, gene technology in Australia.

Prior to AFAA, Paula was the Public Affairs Manager for CSIRO's Division of Plant Industry.

While NSW and Victoria are taking tentative steps to embrace GM food crops, moratoriums in SA and WA remain in place. Prohibition has its price.

ABARE estimates if the adoption of GM canola is delayed for five years the cumulative foregone benefits would be around a total of \$97 million for WA and \$66 million for SA, measured in 2006-07 dollars.

The uptake of GM oilseeds and wheat across Australia could lead to a gain of \$912 million in the Australian economy by 2018 relative to what would otherwise be the case.



AFAA's Paula Fitzgerald

Join our corporate members of the month **Virbac** and **Cox Inall Communications** to hear Paula's thoughts on the next battleground for GM crops on **Friday, May 30**.

To book your place for lunch go to our website:
www.nswfarmwriters.org/BOOKINGS.htm

Register early and online for the Friday, May 30 lunch. Please note the booking deadline of 5pm Monday May 26.

Corporate Members of the Month Virbac and Cox Inall Communications.

Venue: The Menzies Hotel, 14 Carrington St, Sydney

When: **Friday, May 30 2008 at 12.00 pm for 12.30 pm**

Cost: \$60 per head, or voucher, for members. \$70 per head for all non-members

Register: **BEFORE 5:00pm on Monday May 26 2008**

online: www.nswfarmwriters.org, email: bookings@nswfarmwriters.org

Reminder: If bookings are not cancelled by the deadline, the person making the booking will be invoiced. We will do our best to accommodate late bookings and cancellations – please phone Bev Jordan 0408 699 656

Can grain get any better than this ?

NSW Farm Writers' April 25 seminar heard there has been a fundamental shift in world grain markets from a supply driven market to a demand driven market.

Richard Koch, Managing Director of ProFarmer, said production subsidies in some markets had artificially suppressed prices for the past two decades. But now the demand curve had shifted out and up with increased demand despite increased grain prices.

With over 10 years' experience as an agricultural commodity analyst, Richard spoke about the factors fueling high grain prices and the impact this is having on Australian agriculture. Surging demand for protein from developing nations and grain demand from the biofuels industry have sent prices sharply higher.

However, a complex set of economic factors will lead to a cooling off of grain prices through 2008.

"As the US falls into recession, crude oil prices will ease and the \$US will start to recover by mid-year. This will take the heat out of soybean prices, allowing other grains to relax," Richard said.

There are signals in the US that the livestock industry was contracting as a result of higher grain prices which were now having an impact on demand for corn.

A larger global wheat crop is expected to add about 20 million tonnes of wheat to world stocks. However, there is still considerable production risk in both the northern hemisphere, and in Australia, which the market is watching closely.

With good northern hemisphere growing conditions and a good start to the Australian crop, Australian wheat prices are expected to come back to around \$290 to \$300/tonne (from forward prices of around \$320 to \$340/tonne as at end April).

Other cereals will take the lead from wheat, with barley coming back to about \$260/tonne (with a \$40/tonne premium for malt) and oats around \$230/tonne.

Richard believed that deregulation of the export market would be positive for export states but grain logistics would be a more important factor than deregulation on the east coast.

He also sees a cooling in canola prices, coming back from \$720 to \$740/tonne down to \$630/tonne.

Higher input prices would take some gloss off improved prices for grain growers; Richard estimated increased growing costs of \$30 to \$40/tonne for wheat this year.

Richard's Power Point presentation is available on the NSW Farm Writers website www.nswfarmwriters.org.

Climate Change Report to be launched at June Farm Writers

Get this one in your diary: CSIRO have prepared an analysis of the latest predictions on climate change and what they mean for agriculture in NSW. Most importantly, the report looks at the changes, or adaptations, agriculture will need to make region by region. Watch the website for more details soon.

Reminder: JB Fairfax Award for Rural Journalism Now Open

The JB Fairfax Award for Rural Journalism encourages undergraduate or postgraduate students of studies relevant to rural affairs to consider a career in rural journalism upon graduation.

One annual award of \$10,000 will be offered to an outstanding student enrolled in a relevant degree to be used towards the costs of the student's education.

The award is managed by the Royal Agricultural Society of NSW Foundation (RASf). Apply at www.rasf.org.au

At last, an award for the flacks: Farm Writers launches media release award

In recognition of the efforts of many members in providing news worthy and accurate information to the rural media in NSW, NSW Farm Writers Association has launched a Media Release Excellence Award.

The award carries a \$500 winner-takes-all cash prize and is open to individual or corporate members.

Farm Writers president Bev Jordan said the intention was to recognise and encourage excellence in crafting messages about significant agricultural or rural issues.

"The media release may have been aimed at raising awareness about an issue with urban audiences, or communicating information about science, a product or a service to rural audiences.

"The judging criteria will cover the quality of the writing and creative approach and the way the release was picked up and used by media," Bev said.

Details of the award will be posted on the Farm Writers website shortly. Entries close on July 31.

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Farm Writers' Association of NSW Inc

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