

Committee Secretariat  
Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Regional Services  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
Federal Commonwealth of Australia

Dear Sir/Madam,

In short time to make a comment for the consideration of the Committee Inquiry relating to gene technology I would like to highlight a couple of points, please.

One of the impacts of gene technology use by primary producers will be the right of all consumers to know what has made up the final product and to have information about the product if it has not been clearly labelled.

I raise the issue as there is much to indicate that the health of people is affected by foods, drinks and chemicals. The medical scientists and professionals, and consumers, are increasingly aware of the problem of food allergy and chemical intolerance.

Already consumers struggle with products readily available which are affected by chemicals (preservatives, agricultural chemicals). In the field of mental health there have been various case studies of people whose behavioural disturbances and diagnosis of mental illness have been affected by toxic chemicals, heavy metal toxicity and food allergy. Such mental health work was researched in the USA from the 1940's by Dr Theron Randolph and other international medical psychiatrists such as Dr Richard Mackarness. Both have written books about their findings. There is much other literature.

In Australia there is much more awareness about the effects of foods, drinks and chemicals on physical and mental health. As a result people are becoming more careful about exposing their bodies and minds to risks brought about by their consumption patterns. Many prefer to avoid certain foods and drinks to achieve optimum health (eg avoidance of cow's milk and dairy products, including protein sources such as veal, beef and steak; elimination of grain products; beer, not only because of alcohol, but for other ingredients like hops, barley, malt, sugar, chemical preservatives); elimination or decrease in sugar products).

It will, in my view, be important for those practising gene technology, to document thoroughly the process used and apply complete transparency in the process. Information will need to be available for people to know what has produced the genetically modified organisms/varieties.

The marketing chains will need to have the documentation for products, for instance, which are retailed and about which the consumer has a right to know the ingredients. The debate about labelling is relevant to this process. What will be put in place so that the genetically modified product can be traced to source to know exactly what has been involved in the process?

The present situation is not ideal in the primary production process with the overuse of agricultural chemicals and the environmental impact and poor health outcomes from this overuse. Chemical pollution does affect rural communities in different ways, especially at source and in waterways. Bowel cancers in the rural communities may be caused by over-exposure to agricultural chemicals.

Chemicals in the food chain need careful monitoring. We may be poisoning ourselves. We need to be careful about ways and means of overcoming the existing problem. Organic farming has much to commend it and primary production needs to become more advanced in organic techniques before venturing into genetical modification of organisms.

Has the Standing Committee received any requests from the Parliament and the Minister to examine the need to investigate the problem of agricultural chemicals and to encourage more primary producers to apply better environmental techniques in their businesses?

Better health outcomes for farmers themselves, and improved land care and water ways, would be obvious benefits to primary producers. Then there would be benefits for consumers with less environmental impacts through applying organic techniques. Australian primary production could be part of the nation's objectives to improve health outcomes.

What ever the outcome from the Standing Committee's considerations I hope that the members will become aware of the place of environmental medicine and nutrition in the "political landscape" of preventive health savings to the Federal health budget.

I recommend that the Standing Committee discuss the importance of such matters as foods, drinks and chemicals to health outcomes with the Australasian College of Environmental Medicine and Nutrition in Melbourne (note website <[www.acnem.org](http://www.acnem.org)>) and Professor Avni Sali ( Research Director, Swinburne University of Technology Graduate School of Integrated Medicine),

who provides post-graduate education to medical doctors and health professionals.

Thank you for offering me the opportunity to make a couple of comments which may be helpful to the Standing Committee.

I have a bibliography of literature about the role and effects of foods, drinks and chemicals on mental health which the Standing Committee is welcome to have , if it wishes to examine this aspect in its work for the Federal Commonwealth Parliament and the people of Australia.

Yours faithfully

(Doug McIver)

Hon Life Member , Mental Health Foundation (ACT) Inc  
& Member, Canberra Schizophrenia Fellowship Inc &  
Supporters of Orthomolecular Medicine Health Association of  
Australia  
et al.