

GENETICALLY MODIFIED ALFALFA — WA PRODUCTION

3541. Hon Lynn MacLaren to the Minister for Child Protection representing the Minister for Agriculture and Food

I refer to the recent decision by the United States Department of Agriculture to fully deregulate alfalfa/lucerne that has been genetically modified to be resistant to Monsanto's Roundup-brand herbicide, and I ask —

- (1) How much alfalfa/lucerne is currently produced in Western Australia (please provide answer in tonnes and dollar value)?
- (2) Regarding the answer to (1), how much of this is —
  - (a) exported; and
  - (b) used domestically?
- (3) How much alfalfa/lucerne from the United States is imported annually into Western Australia (please provide answer in tonnes and dollar value)?
- (4) Regarding the answer to (3), will you please list the principal uses to which the alfalfa/lucerne is put (for example, cattle feed)?
- (5) What do you or the Department consider to be the main impacts on Western Australia of the United States' decision?
- (6) Regarding the answer to (5), what strategies are in place to address those impacts?
- (7) I refer to the use of alfalfa/lucerne in crop rotations to fix nitrogen and to the *Natural News* article of 11 March 2010, 'Scientists reveal negative impact of Roundup Ready GM crops', ([http://www.naturalnews.com/028347\\_GM\\_crops\\_Roundup.html#ixzz1EYom6lvL](http://www.naturalnews.com/028347_GM_crops_Roundup.html#ixzz1EYom6lvL)) and ask, how will increased use of specific glyphosate formulations impact on alfalfa's/lucerne's ability to fix nitrogen?
- (8) Does the Minister or the Department support the commercialisation of genetically modified alfalfa in Western Australia?
- (9) If yes to (8) —
  - (a) what steps are being taken in that direction; and
  - (b) upon what evidence/research is that decision based (please provide full details)?
- (10) Regarding the answer to (9)(b), is this information publicly available?
- (11) If no to (10), why not?
- (12) If yes to (10), where is it publicly available?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY replied:

- (1) The total tonnage and value of Western Australian production of lucerne/alfalfa is not known as the Australian Bureau of Statistics does not report the tonnage and value of all lucerne products produced in Western Australia. Instead, Australian Bureau of Statistics data shows that in 2009-10 88,227 tonnes of alfalfa/lucerne products were exported from Western Australia with a value of \$26,359,000.
- (2)
  - (a) A total of 88,227 tonnes of lucerne products (meal, pellets, hay and chaff) was exported in 2009-10.
  - (b) The amount of lucerne products used domestically is not known.
- (3) Western Australia did not import "Lucerne Hay and other forage products" in 2009-10, but did import a small amount (25 tonne) in 2007-08. The exact nature of the import is not known or the value.
- (4) Lucerne has two principle uses, livestock feed as grazing, hay or silage. The hay may be ground and pelletised for ease of transport, storage and rationing. A very minor domestic use is for garden mulch as the plant has a high nitrogen content and soil conditioning qualities.
- (5) No impacts on Western Australia are expected as:
  - Food Standards Australia New Zealand approved the use of Roundup Ready alfalfa/lucerne as a food in Australia in 2007; and
  - Western Australia only rarely imports lucerne/alfalfa products from the United States/
- (6) Not applicable.

- (7) The article in Natural News refers to a series of five papers authored by Robert Kremer and colleagues which report on the results of studies of the effect of glyphosate and glyphosate resistant soybeans on the populations of microbes around the roots of the soy plants. It is not known if this data is relevant to glyphosate resistant alfalfa/lucerne.
- (8) The Minister and the Department of Agriculture and Food Western Australia neither support nor oppose the commercialisation of genetically modified (GM) alfalfa in Western Australia. Commercialisation of GM alfalfa would require approval of the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator, market acceptance of GM alfalfa and approval under WA's GM Crops Free Areas Act 2003.
- (9) (a)-(b) Not applicable
- (10)-(12) Not applicable.