

GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS - SOUTH AUSTRALIAN STUDY

1090. Hon BARRY HOUSE to the Minister for Agriculture and Food:

I refer to my question without notice 1046, asked on Wednesday, 14 November, on genetically modified organisms. There is a typo in this question, so I hope the correct context was gathered.

- (1) What peer-reviewed scientific papers on animal feeding studies - as it should read - has Dr Judy Carman published?
- (2) Is Dr Carman still a senior affiliate lecturer at the University of Adelaide?

Hon KIM CHANCE replied:

I thank Hon Barry House for some notice of the question. We either did pick up the typo, or nobody noticed it and it was read as "animal" anyway, but the answer assumes that the word is "animal".

- (1) I am informed that Dr Judy Carman has been involved in at least 25 animal feeding studies throughout her career. However, I am unable to advise how many of those trials were submitted to scientific journals for peer review.
- (2) I understand that as a direct result of the government's announcement to provide grant funding to the Institute of Health and Environmental Research - of which Dr Carman is a principal - to undertake what will be one of the first independent feeding trials designed to measure outcomes relevant to human health from the consumption of GM food, Dr Carman has been subjected to concerted attacks on her reputation and professionalism by a minority in the community who may have a vested interest in stopping the study. Dr Carman has since been subjected to pressure from the University of Adelaide following lobbying by those opposed to the study; as a result, I understand that Dr Carman's position as affiliate senior lecturer with the University of Adelaide is currently under review. From the Western Australian government's perspective, we are aware of concerns held by the majority of Western Australian consumers about the health and safety of GM foods. When approached by the Institute of Health and Environmental Research to provide a grant for one of the first comprehensive and independent long-term animal feeding studies designed to measure outcomes relevant to human health, the government responded favourably, because the study will add to the limited knowledge of the government and consumers about the safety, or otherwise, of GM foods.

I find it totally unacceptable and extraordinarily curious that Dr Carman should be attacked in such a manner for simply seeking to add to the limited body of scientific knowledge surrounding the relatively new technology. To some extent these attacks can be expected from those with a commercial interest. However, I would have thought that universities that hold themselves up to be places that encourage independent scientific inquiry and endeavour would be above such influences. Such attacks only serve to make me ask what the opponents of the study fear from Dr Carman's work, and I believe the Western Australian public are equally justified in asking the same question. When the feeding trial is completed, it is Dr Carman's intention to publish the study protocol and study results in scientific journals for peer review. The Western Australian community, scientists and others with an interest in this matter can then judge Dr Carman on her work. In the meantime, Dr Carman should be allowed to proceed with her work unimpeded by those with vested interests and others willing to undertake attacks on Dr Carman's reputation and professionalism on their behalf.