

Facts concerning Percy Schmeiser's public comments, by topic/public perception enhanced version from 2006

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1. Schmeiser was the innocent victim of Monsanto

PERCY SCHEMEISER: "I lost it all to a contamination because a judge ruled in my case it doesn't matter how Monsanto's genetically modified canola gets on my land or any farmers land. You violate the pattern and you infringe on the pattern and your seed becomes Monsanto's property." (Source: Australian ABC 7.30 Report TV Transcript, 4 July 2002, from <http://abc.net.au/news/indepth/featureitems/s599662.htm>)

FACTS: The Canadian court's record indicates that the judge found that Schmeiser deliberately selected for and multiplied GM seed. In 1997 (for example), Mr. Schmeiser sprayed Roundup herbicide over "a good three acres" from which approximately 60% of the plants survived and continued to grow. At harvest, Schmeiser saved surviving canola seed from these plants and then used them in planting his 1998 canola crop (see especially paragraphs 39, 40, 102, 103, 104, 119, and 125 of the judge's decision at <http://decisions.fct-cf.gc.ca/fct/2001/2001fct256.html>). Schmeiser could have saved seed from any part of his farm, but he took the unusual steps of spraying just part of the crop with Roundup (which should have killed three acres of crop, so Schmeiser must have suspected it would do otherwise) and then saved seed from the survivors, which any reasonable person would expect to have a high frequency of GM Roundup resistance. No one tried to establish how Schmeiser got the seed in the first place, but the judge said that was not relevant to the facts that he was intentionally growing it. A three judge Canadian court rejected Schmeiser's appeal unanimously on all counts, but in January 2004, he took his case the Canadian Supreme Court claiming that Monsanto's patent was invalid.

2. Canada's export markets have been damaged

PERCY SCHEMEISER, CANADIAN CANOLA FARMER: "That means 30 per cent of our exports have been lost just to Europe alone." (Source: ABC 7.30 Report TV Transcript, 4 July 2002).

--Mr Schmeiser said the fact that Canada could no longer ship canola to the EU had left Canada "sitting on a mountain of GM canola that nobody wants" (source: The Land, 11 July 2002, p. 28).

FACTS: Canadian exports have increased during the adoption of GM canola over the last 5 years. In 2000-2001, exports were 25% higher than ever (according to the Canadian canola website, www.canola-council.org/markets/seedexports), mainly to Japan, Mexico and China. Europe is also a net canola exporter anyway, and never purchased more than about 14% of Canada's canola throughout the period in which Canada was non-GM from the early 1980's except for 1993-1995. An anti-GM activist from Holland has brought to my attention a Monsanto website that also addresses market share issues (www.monsanto.com.au/canola/marketing.htm).

3. GM will cause financial losses to conventional growers

Schmeiser warned that conventional growers could be fined for an infestation of GM canola on their property, which could also cost them premiums from export destinations that demanded GM-free produce. (source: The Stock Journal 11 July 2002, page 3, reporting on a meeting held in Clare, South Australia)

RESPONSE AND FACTS: Who would issue these fines? On the subject of premiums, neither the Victorian government review of GM free zones nor ABARE has found any premiums. "GrainCorp oilseeds trader Cameron Pratt said that Australia had not been able to identify a consistent premium for GM-free canola, despite it being mandatory for the EU market and desirable for Japan." (4 July issue of "The Land", page 27). Japan takes our canola and mixes it with GM Canadian canola. "There was no evidence to support the hypothesis that adoption of transgenic varieties had a negative impact on canola prices or producer returns" (Source: http://www.canola-council.org/production/gmo_toc.html).

Peter Toole, Parkes was cited in the The Land as noting that prices for non-GM Australian canola are in fact slightly below the Winnipeg quoted Canadian price - the world price yardstick. He was supported by Ian Donges, recently retired National Farmers Federation president and a local grain grower, who said that the EU was largely self-sufficient in canola and only "occasionally" had to import. "I don't know of any other markets that pay a premium for GM-free canola", he said, "Japan certainly doesn't" (source: The Land, 11 July 2002, p. 28, from a meeting at Cowra, NSW)

4. 1800 other (Canadian?) farmers are also being sued.

Schmeiser: (When asked about the host about whether he was the only farmer sued): "We estimated that there is (sic) at least 1800 lawsuits". (Source: Australian ABC TV's Landline on 14 July 2002)

FACTS: Landline noted on air in the same program that they could find no support for this claim. I then wrote to 5 Canadian weed and agricultural scientists from across Canada, and they replied that they didn't know of any. I then wrote to Monsanto in August 2002, who said there were 2 in Canada and 14 in the US, and that was all worldwide. In December 2003, Peter T. Jenkins, Attorney/Policy Analyst at the anti-GM International Center for Technology Assessment, claimed that there are 88 cases. Where are the other at least 1700 cases that Percy claimed? On February 21 2004 in Davis California, I personally heard Schmeiser claim that it was 550 lawsuits.

5. Schmeiser denied the crops improved profits.

(source: The Stock Journal 11 July 2002, page 3, reporting on a meeting held in Clare, South Australia)

FACTS: "In summary, the total economic impact of transgenic canola production systems has been estimated to be up to \$464.0 million over the period 1997 to 2000, inclusive of direct and indirect impacts." "Transgenic canola yields higher than conventional varieties. Survey results showed that transgenic canola yielded approximately three bushels per acre (>10%) more than conventional canola in 2000. ... The yield advantage for transgenic systems resulted from the varieties and a slight increased use of fertilizer, but less summer fallow. Dockage was significantly lower in the transgenic system, largely attributed to more effective weed control..... Transgenic canola growers reported having made fewer tillage passes over their fields than growers of conventional varieties. The majority of the transgenic sample in both the survey and the case studies indicated they practice minimum or zero till on their operations." (Source: http://www.canola-council.org/production/gmo_toc.html). Other reports I have seen estimate benefits between \$10-26 per ha.

6. GM canola had become a "superweed"

Schmeiser said that GM canola had become a "superweed" that was virtually impossible to eradicate. (source: The Stock Journal 11 July 2002, page 3, reporting on a meeting held in Clare, South Australia)

.....canola itself had developed into a "superweed" that no chemical would control and was becoming a menace to farmers and municipal authorities alike (source: The Land, 11 July 2002, p. 28)

FACTS: "Canola volunteers are not generally found to be harder to manage in Canada. For example, a recent study prepared for the Canola Council of Canada (Winnipeg) surveyed 650 western Canadian canola growers on numerous issues, one of which was management of volunteer canola. Half of the producers surveyed grew transgenic herbicide-tolerant canola and half grew non-GM canola. Of the producers planting transgenic herbicide-tolerant canola in 2000, 61% said that the difficulty of managing volunteer transgenic herbicide-tolerant canola was about the same as that of volunteer conventional canola. Interestingly, 16% said that managing volunteer transgenic herbicide-tolerant canola was easier than managing conventional canola varieties. The remaining 23% said that it was more difficult to manage volunteer transgenic herbicide-tolerant canola.... for example, spraying with 2,4-dichlorophenoxyacetic acid (2,4-D) controls this problem. This chemical application means an additional cost to the producer of 1.502.00 Canadian dollars (C\$) per acre" (source: Stuart Smyth, George G. Khachatourians & Peter W.B. Phillips, Liabilities and economics of transgenic crops. Nature Bio/Technology (June) 2002 Volume 20 (Number 6) pp 537 - 541)

7. Monsanto covertly dropped herbicide bombs to test a crop it suspected illegally contained its genetically-modified canola

"Percy Schmeiser made the claim in Perth yesterday during a Greenpeace-sponsored speaking tour"

(source: The West Australian, 11 July 2002, p. 33). This claim was also made by Schmeiser at the Wagga meeting (S. Sutherland, unsolicited email, 24 July 2002).

RESPONSE: This is so crazy that it doesn't really justify a response, but just what would a Roundup bomb look like, and wouldn't be easier, cheaper (and more stealthy) just to collect some plants from the road to take them back to the lab for a test, or even just spray some with a hand sprayer? In Davis on February 21 2004, Schmeiser claimed that the details were all at his website, that the CBC in Canada had covered the story. Schmeiser claimed that Monsanto never even denied it. I found <http://www.tv.cbc.ca/national/pgminfo/canola/> at Schmeiser's website, and this is what it shows:

"The Kram family in Raymore say planes and a helicopter have buzzed their fields. The couple says agents dropped weedkiller on their canola field, to see if the crops had the Monsanto's gene. Monsanto says they had absolutely nothing to do with it."

Contrary to Schmeiser's claims, Monsanto did in fact deny this story. One could find more evidence on the web for alien abductions than that Monsanto is using Roundup bombs.

8. "(Schmeiser) said yesterday that a reign of terror had followed the release of GM canola in Canada" (source: The West Australian, 11 July 2002, p. 33)

RESPONSE: No "terror" is evident in any reports I have seen or replies from Canadian weed scientists. To the contrary, "Social concerns expressed by case study participants centered around the lack of knowledge about transgenic production by those outside industry.... In summary, the transgenic canola systems had a positive economic and agronomic impact when compared to the conventional canola systems in western Canada for the four year period, 1997 to 2000." Concerns yes, but not "terror" (http://www.canola-council.org/production/gmo_toc.html)

9. "Schmeiser: I have been breeding canola for 50 years and Monsanto took it all away from me. Claims made in Davis in Feb 2004 and at (<http://Www.percyschmeiser.com/profile.htm>).

RESPONSE: Setting aside the issue of Schmeiser's own responsibility for whatever legal action Monsanto took against him, the very first canola ever, Tower, was released by the Canadian government in 1974, so Schmeiser could not have been breeding canola for 50 years. According to the court record, Schmeiser bought new seed in 1993 for sowing on his farm, a claim with which he agreed in an email to me on 8 March 2004 ("The next point you state that I purchased seed in 1993 which is correct."), so he has not always relied on his own breeding for 50 years.

Further, canola is a largely self-pollinating plant and professional breeding efforts for it require specialized pollination practices. Professional breeders in Canada have challenged Schmeiser's claims on this. I have asked Schmeiser what breeding practices he used, but he did not answer this in his email to me of 8 March 2004. I also asked Schmeiser "In addition, a common practice among savers and breeders of traditional varieties is to share and swap seed with neighbors. Did you ever provide access to your seed to any other farmer?" Schmeiser did not answer this question either.