Australian Farm Institute

MEDIA RELEASE

Monday, 14 September 2015

Will consumers stop agricultural technology?

'One of the most perplexing paradoxes of modern life is that consumers will willingly ingest potent mixes of chemicals or submit to invasive analysis using some of the most advanced technologies in order to sustain their health, yet baulk at the use of the same technology in the production of the food they consume.' said Mick Keogh, Executive Director of the Australian Farm Institute.

'The most obvious example is the use of insulin for the treatment of diabetes. The insulin used by diabetes patients around the world is produced via the use of recombinant DNA gene technology, and its use is absolutely uncontroversial. Yet the use of that same technology to produce GM crops triggers virulent opposition and government regulation, despite the fact that such crops have been grown for 40 years without a single adverse impact on consumers.'

'Why technology that is absolutely uncontroversial in some uses suddenly becomes the subject of consumer protests and government bans when used in food production is the topic that is addressed by the papers included in the Spring 2015 edition of the *Farm Policy Journal.'*

'The papers also tackle what is an equally important issue, which is the need for the agriculture sector to find ways to ensure that farmers' access to technology is not unnecessarily restricted, especially in the event that robust science supports the safety of the technology for use in the production of food,' said Mick Keogh.

'One of the more interesting conclusions from the papers included in the Journal is that when new technologies are being introduced, consumers are not necessarily reassured by scientists, but are much more likely to be reassured by non-scientists, especially those with whom they have shared values.'

'A conclusion from the papers is that irrespective of the science, it is consumer attitudes and public opinion that ultimately determine the scope of agriculture's "social licence to operate." Reliance on science alone as a basis for the justification of a practice or a technology is unlikely to be successful, and much more comprehensive and encompassing communication strategies are required between the agriculture sector and the community.'

This Spring 2015 edition of the *Farm Policy Journal,* 'Will consumers stop agricultural technology?', highlights the challenges inherent in communication about advances in agricultural technology to the wider community.

Articles included in the Spring 2015 Journal:

- Building Trust When Science and Consumers Collide, by Charlie Arnot, The Center for Food Integrity
- The Implications of Societal Risk Management on Agricultural Productivity, by Mark Swift, 2012 Nuffield Scholar and farmer

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Will consumers stop agricultural technology? (continued)

- Food, Genetic Engineering and Public Opinion: Do Popular Concerns Matter?, by Diederik van der Hoeven, Genetic Literacy Project
- Biotechnology Applications for Consumers in Developing Areas and Consumer Acceptance, by Emmanuel S Domonko, Brandon R McFadden and Conner Mullally; Department of Food and Resource Economics, University of Florida
- Review of Asian Consumer Attitudes Towards GM Food and Implications for Agricultural Technology Development in Australia, by Alice Woodhead, Tim Sun, Julie Cotter and Tek Maraseni; Australian Centre for Sustainable Business and Development, University of Southern Queensland
- Public Attitudes Relevant to Livestock Animal Welfare Policy, by Grahame Coleman and Vanessa Rohlf, Animal Welfare Science Centre, Faculty of Veterinary and Agricultural Sciences, University of Melbourne; Samia Toukhsati, Department of Cardiology, Austin Health; and Dominique Blache, School of Animal Biology, the University of Western Australia

The Spring 2015 quarter *Farm Policy Journal* is available online at the Australian Farm Institute website www.farminstitute.org.au or by phoning (02) 9690 1388.

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