

Member Update

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TOPIC: Status of Genetically Modified Wheat in Australia

DISTRIBUTION: GTA Members – Primary contact list. Please circulate to all appropriate internal parties.

1. Purpose

To provide GTA members and industry with an update and reference point on the status of Genetically Modified (GM) wheat in Australia.

2. Background

There have been some media articles regarding HB4 wheat seeking regulatory approval as a food product in Australia (and New Zealand). This has raised some questions from customers and others regarding its status in Australia.

This Member Update clarifies the current status of GM wheat in Australia and specifically the status of HB4 wheat.

HB4 wheat is a genetically modified wheat line using the sunflower HaHB4 gene to confer increased tolerance to environmental stresses such as drought, avoiding reduction of crop yield. It has been developed by Trigall Genetics.

3. Current Status in Australia

There is no commercial production of GM wheat in Australia and no GM wheat approved for environmental release.

Government Regulation

- Genetical Modification (GM) of GM wheat in Australia is regulated by two Government authorities:
 - Office of Gene Technology Regulator ([OGTR](#)) - who regulate research and any commercial GM technology (including medical, pharmaceutical, industrial as well as agricultural products).
 - Food Standards Australia and New Zealand ([FSANZ](#)) – who have a role in regulating any GM food products and food ingredients.
- There are some OGTR [approved field trials of GM wheat](#). These do not include HB4 wheat.

4. HB4 wheat Application – Food Products

Trigall Genetics has submitted an application to FSANZ to have food products from HB4 wheat assessed for inclusion in Schedule 26 of the Food Standards Code (Link here: [A1232](#)). The application did not seek approval to cultivate HB4 wheat in Australia or New Zealand. FSANZ approved the variation on 27 April 2022 and is expected to be gazetted soon. This means:

- Food products from HB4 wheat may enter the Australian and New Zealand food supply via imported processed products, either in the form of **wheat flour** or as finished products such as **baked goods**.
- All foods imported into Australia must comply with strict biosecurity requirements and the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code.

- Existing labelling requirements for GM foods apply to foods from HB4 wheat i.e. a food or a food ingredient derived from HB4 wheat would need to be labelled as 'genetically modified' if it contained novel DNA or novel protein. Existing exemptions from GM labelling requirements, including the exemption for food sold in restaurants, will apply to HB4 wheat.

HB4 has been assessed in other (non-Australian) jurisdictions

Trigall Genetics is seeking food approvals in various jurisdictions as part of their global stewardship strategy. This includes:

- **Argentina** for commercial (closed system) cultivation and food consumption (approved)
- **Brazil** for flour food and feed consumption (approved)
- **Colombia** for feed (approved)
- **USA** for food safety - the FDA have concluded their assessment and determined that the product does not require a pre-market approval by FDA. Production of HB4 wheat in the US is yet to be approved.

5. HB4 wheat Application – No Environmental Release

There has not (as at 1 July 2022) been an application to OGTR for the environmental release of the HB4 wheat.

If an application to OGTR is made, and in the event, it was successful, it would be expected to be a minimum of 5 years (and likely longer) before any commercial production could be possible.

Evaluation of the HB4 wheat in Australia will require a licence from the OGTR for a limited and controlled release.

- The application assessment process takes approximately 9 months to obtain an approval. Licences will impose strict conditions associated with the limited and controlled release of HB4 wheat for evaluation.
- At least 2 years of field evaluation would be required before an application could then be made to OGTR for a commercial release licence.
- Commercial release licence assessments take approximately 12 months.

6. Market Choice Framework

The Australian grain industry has adopted the Market Choice Framework for the management of GM and non-GM canola in the supply chain. This supply chain stewardship approach is a proven framework that could be considered for adoption of industry should GM varieties of various commodities gain regulatory approval and be released for commercial production.

7. Further Information

GTA members can provide this information to customers and other stakeholders seeking clarification of the status of commercial production of GM wheat in Australia (i.e. there is none).

Further queries please contact admin@graintrade.org.au

END.