



Media Release

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GM Crops - Learn from North America, but don't equate experiences

Australia is in a unique position to learn from overseas experiences with genetically modified (GM) crops, but this information must be considered in an Australian context according to Agrifood Awareness Australia.

"It is critical for Australian farmers to assess GM crops from an Australian perspective," said Paula Fitzgerald, Executive Manager, Agrifood Awareness Australia.

"Australia is one of few countries that has both gene technology and GM food labelling laws in place," she said. "Our gene technology legislation, under the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator, is considered to be one of the strictest in the world," she said.

"Considerable debate is taking place in North America about the handling of GM crops, however, GM and non-GM products are largely unsegregated in this region," she said. "In Australia, a totally different approach is being taken," she said.

"An industry group - the Gene Technology Grains Committee - is currently working to develop guidelines for the introduction of GM canola," she said. "These guidelines aim to deliver coexistence - to allow growers to choose the method of agricultural production best suited to their business system, including GM, conventional and organic," she said.

"The guidelines will take into account scientific research conducted in the Australian environment, including work on pollen flow," she said.

"Recent research results from the CRC for Weed Management Systems showed that in a study involving 48 million canola seeds from 63 fields across southern Australia, the pollen carried was in such small amounts that it was well below internationally recognised levels of unwanted genetic transfer," she said. "This world-first research is particularly important for those concerned about cross pollination," she said.

"In judging GM crops, Australian farmers must also look at the broader applications of biotechnology, including research to identify genes for frost and drought tolerance and the introduction of these to target varieties," she said.

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