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MEDIA RELEASE

JOINT STATEMENT: Scientists support progress on GM canola in WA

Influential agricultural science specialists from across Australia enthusiastically support and encourage the Western Australian government's intent to fully commercialise approved GM varieties of canola from the 2010 cropping season.

They say that the WA government will join both the New South Wales and Victorian governments in providing a new and proven technology to farmers to improve productivity, sustainability and international competitiveness.

The scientists include:

- Professor Peter Gresshoff, Director, ARC Centre of Excellence Integrated Legume Research
- Dr TJ Higgins, former Deputy Chief, CSIRO Plant Industry
- Professor Peter Langridge, CEO, Australian Centre for Plant Functional Genomics
- Dr Jim Peacock, Immediate-Past Chief Scientist, Australia
- Professor Stephen Powles, Director of the Western Australian Herbicide Resistance Initiative, University of Western Australia
- Professor Jim Pratley, Charles Sturt University
- Dr Christopher Preston, The University of Adelaide
- Professor Rick Roush, University of Melbourne
- Dr Rex Stanton, EH Graham Centre for Agricultural Innovation
- Professor Mark Tester, Director, Australian Plant Phenomics Facility
- Dr Glen Tong, CEO, Cooperative Research Centre for Molecular Plant Breeding
- Dr David Tribe, University of Melbourne

In supporting this move, the scientists join with the major representative farming organisations in Australia, including both WA-based farm bodies, to commercialise approved varieties of GM canola in a manner that provides choice in the adoption of valuable agricultural technology.

Dr Jim Peacock says Australia can no longer ignore a decade of proof and success, "GM crops for feed, fibre and food are a reality of Australian life; they have been successfully grown, traded and consumed in Australia and around the world since 1996; all gene technology research and resulting products are highly regulated in Australia to ensure human health and environmental safety and those who campaign against GM crops conveniently overlook the science."

The scientists agree that there are no safety concerns about any of the approved GM crops. Dr David Tribe of the University of Melbourne says, "Every major scientific and health organization in the world has endorsed the safety of approved GM crops to human health and the environment."

Equally, there is no basis to the marketing concerns that are sometimes highlighted in the media: Europe and Japan have continued to import millions of tonnes of GM grain

products. Further, countries such as Spain, France and Germany and others in Europe have allowed their farmers to grow GM varieties, including corn and soy.

Although there has been speculation that there would be premiums for 'GM free', the fact remains that there are no premiums large enough to offset the net profits of GM varieties.

"After more than a decade of GM crop production elsewhere - and since 1996 in the vast canola and wheat plains of Canada - the only thing WA farmers have to show for their 'non-GM' status is the fact that they've been forced to forego tens of millions of dollars in revenue", notes Rick Roush, Dean of Land and Environment, University of Melbourne.

Farmers use approved GM canola varieties as another production system tool to provide:

- An alternative and effective way to control ryegrass, radish and other weeds
- Less use of, and reliance on, residual herbicides
- Reduced soil tillage requirements
- Large diesel fuel savings
- Fewer CO2 emissions
- Improved canola oil quality

"In Canada, average canola yields have increased by 27 per cent since 1996. Over the same period, Australian yields have stagnated or even declined", says Professor Roush.

Professor Jim Pratley of CSU adds that his research in a five-year trial, "has shown that one of the GM canola varieties consistently delivered superior weed control, higher yields and oil quality and better profits."

Dr Chris Preston of the University of Adelaide says the environment has also borne the burden of WA's GM crop ban. "GM crops have already demonstrated around the world over the last decade significant advantages to the environment, including reduction in pesticide use (5-90 per cent crop), reductions in tillage (which means lower fuel use and erosion), and reduced CO2 emissions on the order of billions of kg from better carbon storage in soil and reduced fuel consumption."

GM cotton, which historically contributed some 40 per cent of Australia's cooking oil, has been a great success, assisting the cotton industry to reduce its environmental footprint by decreasing pesticide use by up to 90 per cent. Growers willingly plant GM varieties where the economic and environmental returns are clear.

Western Australia's CBH regularly handles many millions of tonnes of grains, representing several hundred-thousand separate truckloads, delivered into more than fifty segregations per customer specifications. GM varieties are just another part of these routine operations.

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