



Media Release

Wednesday 13 March 2002

GMOs – Guiding Meaningful Opinions *Gene technology booklet launched at WAFF AGM*

A new booklet addressing key gene technology issues will be launched today, Wednesday 13 March, at the Western Australian Farmers' Federation (WAFF) Annual General Meeting in Perth.

Speaking at the event, Ms Paula Fitzgerald, Executive Manager, Agrifood Awareness Australia said, "Gene technology is having, and will continue to have, a large impact on Australia's farming community".

"While Australia currently only has two genetically modified (GM) commercial crops – cotton and carnations – there are several other crops currently being trialled, including GM canola.

"During the past twelve months there has been considerable debate about the management of GM crops, including calls for GM Free Zones," she said. "Such demands need to be carefully understood, as implications for farmers could be enormous, potentially restricting cropping options".

"Farmers are naturally concerned about market access, but GM Free Zones may prove to be short-sighted, denying farmers the opportunity to grow new improved varieties," she said. "The answer may lie in the development of systems which allow for all types of agriculture to operate together – be they conventional, organic or genetically modified".

"Each GM product or crop needs to be judged on an individual basis, rather than making blanket decisions," she said.

"We must ensure that farmers have the ability to select the crop or product best suited to their individual business needs," she said.

“Like all new technologies, gene technology brings both benefits and risks, and it is important that the potential risks are managed, in order for the benefits to be realised,” she said.

“Beyond the farming community, gene technology is also being discussed at the consumer level,” she said. “This new booklet, *Gene Technology in Australia – Fact not Fiction*, is designed to present gene technology information in an easy-to-read format, particularly for those who have little knowledge about farming practices”.

“The booklet has been reviewed for technical accuracy by a wide range of experts, and covers many topics including the science, regulatory framework, food labelling and a range of gene technology opinions,” she said.

“I am pleased to launch this new booklet, and believe it will contribute to an ongoing, informed and credible, gene technology debate,” she said.

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Paula Fitzgerald is speaking at the WAFF Annual General Meeting at 1.35pm on Wednesday, 13 March at the Ascot Raceway in Perth.

Copies of the booklet, *Gene Technology in Australia – Fact not Fiction*, can be downloaded from the Agrifood Awareness Australia website (<http://www.afa.com.au>) or by contacting the office on 02 6273 9535.

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