



Media Release

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GM crops - field trials critical for informed judgement

Field trials of genetically modified (GM) crops are vital to assess the potential of gene technology and ensure Australia makes a considered decision about the technology's future according to Agrifood Awareness Australia.

Speaking at a Victorian Farmers' Federation meeting in Sealake, Victoria, Executive Manager of Agrifood Awareness Australia, Ms Paula Fitzgerald, said that while discussion and debate about gene technology were critical, it was also important for people to understand the role that field trials play in the process.

"It takes eight to thirteen years for a GM product to progress from an idea to a commercial reality," Ms Fitzgerald said. "During this time, the GM product undergoes a number of environmental and health risk assessments, and field trials play an important role in this.

"After several years in the laboratory and glasshouse, the first field trial is often only the size of an average suburban backyard," she said. "If the first field trial is successful, then the product undergoes further trials, closer to true paddock size.

"Field trials are necessary to ensure the crop poses no unmanageable risks and to assess the crop under Australian environmental conditions," she said. "The trials also allow the developer to select the best varieties to commercialise.

"All field trials in Australia must adhere to strict conditions and management guidelines," she said. "With Australia's new gene technology laws now in place, field trials also undergo inspections by the regulatory body.

"Each GM crop is judged on a case-by-case basis and may have different field management guidelines," she said. "In the case of a crop such as GM canola, a buffer zone surrounds the field trial – a zone established to minimise pollen transfer from the GM crop.

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“Over the past months several groups, particularly Shire Councils have indicated some uncertainty about GM crop trials, noting they would prefer to ‘wait and see’,” she said. “While a ‘wait and see’ approach may have some merits, it is critical to understand that without field trials, when and if they choose to end the ‘wait and see’ period, there will be no GM varieties available for them to grow commercially.

“Field trials provide the tools to fully assess GM crops, and are critical in assisting farmers to make informed decisions,” she said.

Paula Fitzgerald will be speaking at Victorian Farmers’ Federation (VFF) Regional Meeting in Sealake this evening. The Meeting will commence at 6pm at the Sealake Community Centre.

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