



Media Release

23 December 2008

GM - WA decision goes for green

The Western Australian government's announcement to allow GM canola in 2009 builds on the recent GM cotton decision and will provide growers with the opportunity to assess new plant varieties which deliver sustainability benefits.

"Today's announcement reflects the science and the facts that approved GM food and fibre crops are an important tool in meeting our agriculture and food production challenges," said Ms Paula Fitzgerald, Executive Director, Agrifood Awareness Australia.

"108 farmers in New South Wales and Victoria have grown Australia's first GM canola crop this year and are reporting positive results including better weed control and increased yields," she said.

"Western Australian growers will now have the opportunity, 13 years after their Canadian competitors, to assess these new varieties for their own farming systems," she said.

"Growers in WA have been growing herbicide resistant canola for years, but these new varieties developed with the assistance of gene technology, will provide new opportunities, particularly increased yields of canola, a greater choice of weed control options, and the use of more environmentally friendly herbicides," she said.

The Australian grains industry has long recognised the requirements of all customers. With regards to GM canola, the industry has demonstrated its commitment to delivering choice through the statement entitled 'Delivering market choice with GM canola'.

In the statement, major participants in Australia's grain supply chain, including CBH, the PGA and WA Farmers, committed to introduce GM canola in a manner that:

- Maintained or enhanced trade in Australian canola
- Enabled market choice along the supply chain
- Would be open and transparent
- Provided confidence to all stakeholders, including customers, consumers and governments.

"The industry's capacity to meet market requirements and deliver choice is well recognised, and the Western Australian government's appreciation of the value in adopting this technology is to be acknowledged," she said.

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FURTHER INFORMATION:

Paula Fitzgerald, Agrifood Awareness Australia, 02 6273 9535 or 0418 160 943.

OTHER CONTACTS:

GM canola growers – GM canola growing experience in 2008:

- Mr Graham Barron - GM canola grower - 0427 759 051
- Mr Andrew Weidemann – GM canola grower – 0428 504 544

Crop scientist and herbicide resistance expert:

- Dr Chris Preston – University of Adelaide – 0438 892 362

Australian Oilseed industry:

- Mr Robert Green – Australian Oilseeds Federation - 0418 123 179

GM canola in WA in 2009:

- Ms Keryn McLean – Monsanto Australia - 03 9522 7165 or 0409 536 446

The key GM facts

- Globally, in 2007, 114.3 million hectares of GM crops were planted around the world, by 12 million farmers in 23 countries, representing a 67-fold increase since the new varieties first became available in 1996.
- Gene technology in Australia is regulated by the Federal Office of the Gene Technology Regulator (OGTR).
- All GM foods must undergo a rigorous safety assessment by Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) before they can be sold in Australia.
- GM cotton has been grown in Queensland and New South Wales since 1996. These varieties are insect resistant, herbicide tolerant or a combination of both.
- GM cotton, accounting for over 90 per cent of the industry, has delivered an 85 per cent reduction in pesticide use, reduced fuel use, enhanced water-use efficiency and minimised cultivation, which in-turn reduces the carbon footprint.
- Over 85 per cent of the Canadian canola crop is now sown to GM varieties and these have been marketed to Japan, China, Korea, Bangladesh and other south-east Asian markets.
- 108 farmers planted Australia's first GM canola crop in NSW and Victoria this year. They are reporting better weed control and increased yields.
- A recent Bureau of Rural Sciences (BRS) report (available at <http://affashop.gov.au/product.asp?prodid=14174>) supports earlier conclusions from Charles Sturt and Melbourne Universities (see: <http://www.icci.unimelb.edu.au/canola2007.html>) that GM canola can provide growers with higher yields and a greater choice of weed control options including more environmentally friendly herbicides.
- The Australian grains industry has long recognised the requirements of all its customers. With regards to GM canola, the industry has committed to delivering choice through its statement "Delivering market choice with GM canola" (available at http://www.afa.com.au/pdf/Delivering_Market_Choice_with_GM_canola.pdf).