



## MEDIA RELEASE

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### GM canola – no need for Perth placards and protests

The varieties of canola bred with the assistance of gene technology and grown through New South Wales, Victoria, Western Australia and elsewhere around the world are above and beyond doubt.

Yet, a small number of people decline to accept international scientific consensus and continue to campaign against the choice-based adoption of the technology by the agriculture sector and food producers.

Executive Director of Agrifood Awareness Australia, Paula Fitzgerald, says the campaign of doubt-mongering is disingenuous and misguided, and is based on mis-information.

“As the Federal Minister for Science said in the Great Hall of Parliament House in Canberra last November at the launch of the Prime Minister's prizes for science, ‘quackery certainly doesn't deserve equal time as credible research’.

“There are no doubts about safety. The approved varieties of GM canola were thoroughly assessed by Australia's regulatory bodies nearly a decade ago as ‘safe for human health and the environment’. Safety is the first priority. Why would it be anything other than that?”

“GM crops have been commercially grown, traded and consumed around the world since 1996 without issue; billions of meals have been made and consumed that contain one or more GM crop ingredients or whole foods; GM crops are a proven and completely legitimate agricultural technology.”

Paula Fitzgerald says contrary to the claims of a few, the GM varieties unquestionably provide numerous benefits to agriculture. They are a highly valued farming reality that provide:

- farming system benefits through reduced tillage and less fuel usage
- environmental benefits through safer and fewer herbicide applications
- canola industry sustainability through consistent high-yielding production and increased competitiveness on the world trading stage.

“Let's never overlook that canola is a highly-bred plant: the original rapeseeds had a high oleic acid content which reduced palatability, so through an intensive genetic selection and breeding program in the 1970's the CANadians bred a plant that had Oil with Low Acid – CANOLA!

“Then agricultural scientists just took the process one step further with the aid of the GM techniques used in soybeans, cotton and corn to provide canola farmers with a new variety with valuable weed control attributes.

“Incidentally, people should compare the Australian adoption of GM canola and cotton. GM varieties now account for more than 90% of the cotton produced in Australia. Both crops result in less ag-chemical use, and both crops produce edible oils for cooking and meal for livestock supplements. So, why all the fuss about canola?”

Farmers and the broader grains industry appreciate that R&D businesses need a return on their long-term investments, and as most modern plant breeding is now done by public-private

collaborations, patents and royalties are required to fund the work. It is the global mechanism to provide incentive to innovate. Farmers choose to either use or not use GM varieties based on economic and agronomic considerations.

In only the 3rd year of its commercial production in Australia, hundreds of farmers chose to grow nearly 133,300 hectares of GM canola in NSW, Victoria and Western Australia last year – nearly 12% of the total canola crop. The WA Minister for Agriculture has done nothing more than give farmers access to canola varieties that the rest of the world has used for the last 15 years.

Ms Fitzgerald says, “The reality is that to have one local issue arise in WA when there has been so much GM canola grown in WA, NSW and Victoria this year, and around the world for the last 15 years, doesn’t mean the system is broken. Simply, farms using different farming systems and producing different crops can and do co-exist where people allow them to.

**“There is no need for placards and protests; there is only a need for common-sense and sound-science.”**

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GM fast facts:

- Australian and international regulatory authorities and their scientific community’s regard approved GM crop varieties as safe for human health and the environment
- Hundreds of farmers grew near 133,000 hectares of GM canola varieties in 2010 – near 12% of the Australian canola crop
- GM canola is simply another grain variety that is routinely handled from farm to cupboard by the grains industry, according to its proven world-class protocols and procedures
- In 2006-7, the grains industry examined the international and domestic supply-chains to understand what was required to ensure market and customer requirements were met and align with scientific facts. The *‘Delivering Market Choice with GM canola’* document shows how GM canola production can co-exist with other industries under globally accepted standards and tolerances
- ABARE reported in 2007 that ‘The commercialisation of GM canola in Australia is likely to have only negligible direct impacts on the organic canola, livestock and honey industries’
- The FAO estimates that the number of humans on the planet will rise from six billion in 2000 to nearly nine billion in 2050, and food demand will rise by 70%. Given historical increases in food production, it is improbable that farming systems based on conventional science and ‘organics’ will be able to supply this increase in demand.
- In 2009, 134 million hectares of crops bred with the aid of gene technology were planted in 26 countries (including in Europe). It is estimated that GM varieties of corn, soybean, cotton & canola have delivered tens of millions of tonnes of extra food and fibre since 1996.

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