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CALL FOR COMMON-SENSE WITH GM CANOLA CLAIMS

The law courts are not the common-sense, realistic approach to dealing with minor accidental issues in Australian agriculture.

Grain Producers Australia (GPA) Chairman, and NSW grain grower, Pete Mailler, says Australia's entire grain supply-chain, from paddock to plate, is based on proven and internationally accepted protocols and procedures that ensure the requirements of markets and customers are met.

“This convention should apply to all production systems on a national basis.

“Parties involved both directly and behind-the-scenes in an apparent issue in WA about GM canola allegedly moving between two farms should recognise this fact.

“A scramble to lawyers and courts pitting producers and production systems generally against each other is unnecessary and counter-productive.”

The matter goes back to early December 2010 when a Kojonup district organic producer claimed to have found GM variety canola plants and seed on his property. He suggested it blew onto his land from a neighbouring property where the GM variety was being grown. The media has been following the claims; the latest developments being that Mr Marsh has legal representation and has talked about taking legal action, he has also suggested some recent rains may impact on other factors. Minimal actual data has been provided to date.

Grain Producers Australia is the peak body responsible for representing all grain producers at the national level, and Mr Mailler suggests the parties should first seek to understand what actually occurred.

“Then, the industry is in a position to be able to deal with it in an informed, mature and systematic manner that is based on good science and established procedures as it has always done.

“I do not understand why the National Association of Sustainable Agriculture Australia would de-certify a member over an accidental incursion. Importantly, the Australian organic standard does not mirror the international standard that provides tolerances and leeways, reflecting how biological systems and agricultural supply chains work.”

The action of NASAA has served to elevate a matter between two neighbours to a national media issue.

“It is easy to become a little cynical and wonder if the media hype and legal sabre rattling are motivated by ideology rather than sound science and principles of coexistence.



Pete Mailler, Chairman GPA

“The reality is that to have one local issue arise when there has been tens of thousands of hectares of GM canola grown in WA, NSW and Vic this year, and around the world for the last 15 years, doesn’t mean the system is broken.”

“It would be folly to suggest that organic production systems do not impact on neighbouring conventional producers. Indeed every production system has some impact on neighbours at some time. While growers have a right to choose their own production system, the concept of co-existence works both ways and we do not need unnecessary wholesale regulatory changes and a tightening up of the circumstances for the use of legitimate and proven farming tools.”

“GPA urges all parties involved in the WA matter to maintain an objective and science based approach to the issue and let common sense prevail. The grains industry generally needs tolerance and understanding in place of the manoeuvrings we are now seeing around this issue, to ensure we get the best outcome for all producers.”

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
- There is a global need to increase production of food staples while decreasing the environmental impact of doing so – GM canola offers:
 - a range of farming system benefits through reduced tillage and less fuel usage
 - environmental benefits through safer and less application of herbicides
 - a more sustainable canola industry through potentially higher yields, more consistent production and increased competitiveness on the world trading stage
- Australia’s cotton industry is an example of why GM is so important, and the success of that industry is often overlooked in the ongoing debate over GM canola. This matter has not been raised during either the 15 years of growing GM cotton in NSW and Queensland which are large cattle and grain production areas with significant numbers of organic producers
- GM canola is simply another variety of a grain that is routinely handled from farm to cupboard by the grains industry, according to its proven world-class procedures and protocols
- Neighbours and residents in all communities – both urban and rural – regularly supposed incompatibility issues. These are resolved by the parties identifying their issues and working out a solution to their mutual benefit according to the norms of society. Farming is no different
- GM canola growers are required to complete accreditation courses and adhere to a crop management plan
- Farm and agricultural systems management is based on using the proven foundations of agricultural science; hence, any debate about this issue needs to be science-based.

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