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GM Canola choice for NSW Farmers

The NSW Farmers' Association says the State Government's decision to end the four year moratorium on Genetically Modified canola crops is a win for the future prosperity of agriculture.

NSW Farmers' Association President Jock Laurie says giving farmers the choice of using GM technology is the key to the sector remaining internationally competitive, and is line with the Association's policy.

"The Association for some time has been seeking the removal of the GM crop moratorium, as we believe farmers should have the right to make an informed decision on the type of crops they grow," Mr Laurie said.

"This is a win for the environment, with GM crops potentially meaning fewer emissions and less chemical use, heather soil and more sustainable farming practices," he said.

Research at Charles Sturt University has shown in a five-year trial that one of the GM canola varieties consistently delivered superior weed control, higher yields and oil quality and better profits.

"Another report from Melbourne University found that if half the current canola types were replaced with GM canola, Australia would decrease its herbicide use, increase the area planted to canola, and improve yields in both canola and wheat cropping rotations.

"Importantly, the removal of the moratorium, with existing strict health and environment assessments through the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator (OGTR), means those who wish to be non-GM are protected," Mr Laurie said.

As part of the change, an expert committee will be established to assess whether industry is prepared and capable of segregating GM and non-GM food crops.

The Minister will have the power to refuse approval to cultivate a specific crop if there is a failure to meet the criteria imposed by the expert committee, made up of pro and anti GM groups.

"We would commend Minister Ian Macdonald, who over 3 years has sought industry views through groups like the Minister's Advisory Council on GM Canola, on which the Association is represented," he said.

"The Association believes this development is possibly the start of a new chapter in Australian agriculture," Mr Laurie concluded.

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Fast fact: Agriculture is directly responsible for up to 40 per cent of the economic activity across regional and rural NSW