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AUSTRALIA READY FOR GM CANOLA - LET THE EVIDENCE SPEAK

In 2003-04 a number of canola growing states in Australia introduced moratoria preventing the commercial cultivation of approved GM canola varieties based on supposed marketing and trading uncertainties.

Between 2003 and 2007, the grains industry scoped and addressed these matters, to the extent that it is now ready to incorporate GM canola into the grain supply chain, alongside the many other grades and classifications of cereals, course grains, oilseeds and pulses, upon cessation of the moratoria.

During 2007 moratoria reviews have been conducted in Victoria, South Australia and New South Wales, in addition to Tasmania where a review is still underway. Outcomes from the reviews in Victoria, South Australia and New South Wales are due in the near future.

Considerable data has been collected regarding the marketing and trading considerations for GM canola and Australian agriculture has declared that the moratoria should be lifted while continuing to provide choice to stakeholders right along the grain supply chain – from seed producers to consumers.

The following provides a summary of the evidence, capacity and commitment of the grains industry and highlights why it is time for Australia to catch up with the world.

Fact: GM canola – a global commodity
Genetically modified canola is grown traded and consumed around the world. Approximately 87 per cent of the canola crop in Canada, the world's biggest canola producer, is planted to GM varieties. This canola is marketed around the world including into Japan which is often portrayed as a 'non-GM' country. Japan also buys Australian canola and while a very small amount of Australian canola is segregated and sold as non-GM, most is co-mingled with Canada's GM canola.

Canada does not regularly market canola to Europe however it should be noted that (1) Europe is largely self sufficient and has only been an occasional market, and (2) Europe's biofuel policy will see an increase in demand from Europe for canola which Canada will capitalise on.

GM crops are now being grown in EU countries – for example, GM corn in Spain.

Fact: Australia – GM crop experience
Australia has grown GM cotton since 1996 with more than 90 per cent of Australia's cotton crop now consisting of GM varieties. Since the commercial introduction of GM cotton Australia has experienced no negative market or trade implications in relation to the fibre, cottonseed oil or cottonseed meal produced from GM cotton.

Australia has imported GM soybean meal and oil for many years to meet human and animal feed requirements. Due to the ongoing drought, Australian food producers and processors imported more than 50,000 tonnes of GM canola from Canada to overcome local domestic shortages. These imports have been managed through the domestic supply chain and delivered to meet customer specifications.

Fact: Australian food producers – innovation drivers
Australia's farmers are rapid adopters of new technology, and through their investment in research and development, drive innovation. Since 1996 farm representative bodies, namely national and state farm associations and commodity councils have debated the GM topic and now have a common policy

position, agreeing that GM canola should proceed to commercialisation and that the moratoria should be lifted. (http://www.afaa.com.au/n_industry_policies_landing.asp)
If the moratoria are not lifted, Australian farmers will be left behind by their counterparts in the USA, Canada, South Africa and South America, China and India – countries where the adoption of GM varieties is both rapid and extensive. In a recent study, ABARE found that "a continuation of the current moratoriums and extension to other GM crops is expected to result in a loss of gross national product of $3 billion, over the next ten years".

Fact: Clear benefits from long term study
Canadian canola growers have reported considerable benefits from growing GM canola. A study conducted by the Canola Council of Canada reported that growers chose to grow GM varieties for easier and better weed control, better yields, higher returns and more profit, to reduce costs and to clean up fields.

In Australia, recently published work by Charles Sturt University researchers showed that a GM canola variety consistently delivered superior weed control, higher yields and oil quality and better profits when compared to current varieties in a traditional five year crop rotation system.
(http://news.csu.edu.au/director/latestnews.cfm?itemID=363C755F0F03ED5034B67FEC742E1469&printtemplate=release)

A recently released review conducted by the University of Melbourne stated that if half the current canola types grown were replaced with GM canola the impact in Australia would be:

- 640 tonnes less triazine herbicide would be used each year
- An extra 225,000 hectares of canola would be grown each year by direct drilling or minimum tilling
- Average national canola yields would increase by eight per cent - from 1.17 tonnes to 1.28 tonnes per hectare
- An additional 200,000 tonnes of canola would be grown in low rainfall regions
- Wheat production, in rotation, would increase by 80,000 tonnes on the additional canola areas.

(http://www.jcci.unimelb.edu.au/Canola2007.pdf)

Fact: Choice – meeting customer demands
In August 2007 the Australian grain industry launched a statement entitled "Delivering Market Choice with GM canola". This statement, endorsed by 29 key grain supply chain organisations, recognised:

- the integrity, capacity, and demonstrated ability of the Australian grain supply chain;
- that choice for all supply chain participants is key; and
- that there is a commitment to deliver choice along the supply chain.

This document was underpinned by a 102-page document entitled "Principles for process management of grain within the Australian supply chain" which detailed the principles and processes being utilised or able to be implemented within the Australian grain industry if the moratoria are lifted.

Over recent weeks two food processors have emerged in the media stating their desire for non-GM canola and in doing so, have asked their respective state governments to maintain the moratoria on GM canola. While the moratoria may meet the current commercial interests of these food suppliers, it denies the many other supply chain participants the opportunity to explore the benefits of GM canola. Choice must remain the underlying principle in this decision-making process to ensure that all supply chain participants have equal opportunity to access the products which provide benefits to their business.

Fact: Let the evidence speak
Choice, supported by excellent science is the key.

The GM canola types in question were approved by Australia's Federal Regulator in 2003 as safe for human health and the environment. In approving the varieties, the Regulator noted that their safety was comparable to the conventional varieties which Australia produces. These varieties have been grown, traded and consumed for over decade around the world without concern.

To date, Australian farmers have been denied access to GM canola due to market or trade uncertainties, however, this matter has now been fully explored and addressed by the grain supply chain.

The evidence is clear – the Australian grains industry has recognised that choice is key and is committed to continue delivering it. Australian agriculture has further endorsed the positive potential of gene technology and agreed that Australian agriculture should have access to the approved GM canola varieties with the lifting of the moratoria.