

Friday, 8 February 2008

SOUTH AUSTRALIA WILL STAY GM-FREE

Premier Mike Rann and the Minister for Agriculture Rory McEwen says South Australia has chosen to stay GM free to help maintain its clean and green image which has been especially important in marketing our food and wine products to the world.

Mr Rann says Cabinet has decided to maintain the current moratorium from growing GM canola in South Australia beyond the end of April this year when the current regulations lapse.

“This means there will be no market or trade impacts on the integrity of South Australia’s traditional or organic production systems.

“We made this decision – which we believe is the right one – because we are yet to be convinced allowing GM crops will have a positive impact on the marketing of our food and wine to our important export destinations around the world.”

The State Government will today release the findings of the GM Crops Advisory Committee, which was formed last year to review the current legislation, the *Genetically Modified Crops Management Act 2004*.

“The committee received more than 230 submissions and 480 letters both for and against growing GM crops from a wide range of industry, farmers, farming groups, companies, individuals and national organisations.

“The Committee recommended the lifting of the current moratorium in SA, except on Kangaroo Island, after April 28 this year when the current regulations lapse.

“However we have also considered a number of significant market signals that have occurred since then that has led us to believe that maintaining the status quo is more responsible.

“For example:

- Foodland issued a statement saying it would be ensuring all of its home brand products were GM-free,
- Japanese meat importers reaffirmed they wanted a guarantee that none of the meat products they purchased had come from cattle that had eaten GM grains, and
- ABARE indicated that in some of this season’s markets there were significant premiums for GM-free canola.

“It makes sense for us to maintain our current position until there’s more certainty regarding the impact of exporting GM grains.”

Agriculture Minister Rory McEwen says South Australia produces the second highest volume of grain crops in Australia with the greatest volume being grown in Western Australia.

“Significantly, Western Australia has decided, with I am told the overwhelming support of its farming community, to stay GM-free. So has Tasmania.

“At this stage, we believe the benefits of maintaining the current moratorium far outweigh any benefits of overturning it.

“I’m particularly concerned about the future impact on our marketing of SA food products.

“I’m well aware there’s a divergence of opinion within the states with New South Wales and Victoria recently deciding to allow GM canola to be grown this year, while Western Australia and Tasmania continue to maintain bans.

“But we must be mindful that there’s simply no turning back once the moratorium has been lifted. Maintaining the moratorium now will enable us to monitor developments elsewhere.”

Minister McEwen says that in South Australia there is no immediate need to give the go-ahead for what would have been only a small number of growers wanting to grow crops from the two GM canola seeds developed by companies, Monsanto and Bayer.

“We will be watching to see how NSW and Victoria address the key issues of segregation and regulation in their States, as well as monitoring the benefits of keeping a moratorium in WA and Tasmania,” Mr McEwen said.

“The GM Crops Advisory committee’s report revealed a wide range of views and while lifting the current moratorium was supported by a majority of farmers who made submissions, the Government has decided it makes more sense to maintain the status quo for the time being.”

Mr McEwen said there would now be a six-week public consultation period where interested parties would have the opportunity for further comment on the changes to the regulations in the Act that will continue the current moratorium in SA.