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VICTORIAN FARMERS' ACCESS TO GM CANOLA WELCOMED

CropLife Australia welcomes the fact that Victorian farmers will have access to an important new farming tool this weekend. With the lifting of the ban on GM canola, the State's farmers will have the choice to grow new varieties of canola that will help them to compete in international markets while meeting community expectations for environmentally sustainable agriculture.

The CEO of CropLife Australia, Paula Matthewson, emphasised that despite activists claiming the contrary, there are significant market opportunities for Australian GM canola.

"It is time to inject some balance into the GM canola debate", she said. "Japan is the world's biggest importer of GM canola, with an annual requirement of approximately 2.3 million tonnes," she said. "Japan imports four times as much GM canola from Canada as non-GM from us, but for the same price. Then they mix the non-GM canola and GM canola together before processing it into canola oil. Other countries such as China, Korea and Bangladesh are also big importers of GM canola and will present great export opportunities for Victorian producers. Australian GM canola also has approval for import to Europe.

"The Victorian Government has made a responsible decision in allowing the ban on GM canola to be lifted. Premier Brumby and Minister Helper have implemented the recommendations of a thorough public review of the moratorium recognising the importance of choice in agricultural markets and the Australian grains industry's ability to deliver choice to the market with GM canola.

"In giving growers the right to choose approved GM canola as well as conventional varieties, the Government is helping them to be more productive and deliver significant environmental benefits through an important new tool to complement farmers' integrated weed management and low till agricultural practices.

"As the developers and providers of crop biotechnology products, CropLife's members are assisting Australian farmers to be responsible stewards of GM crops. Our members do so by providing farmers with the information and knowledge they need to successfully and sustainably produce GM canola well into the future.

"CropLife is also confident that this stewardship will be replicated throughout the grains commodity supply chain," Ms Matthewson said. "The recent independent reviews in NSW, Victoria and South Australia have all concluded that Australia has a professional, mature and sophisticated supply chain well equipped to segregate and deliver both GM and non-GM canola to meet customer needs.

"This exposes the latest scare tactic being peddled by GM opponents," Ms Matthewson said. "The independent reviews also found that there are no new or hidden liability issues with biotech crops and that farmers face no greater risk than they do now when delivering grain to meet specific segregations for specific markets. Australia currently provides segregations for at least nine different market classes of wheat.

"Governments and farmers alike know that there is a well developed common law capacity to protect the legal rights of all parties from farmers through to technology providers," she said.

"The accidental incidence of approved GM crops will not require court cases pitching farmers against farmers. Past incidences involving overseas farmers has only occurred because of illegal use of the technology.

"This has been an important decision by the Victorian Government that will allow significant agronomic, environmental and productivity benefits to become available to Australian growers, the wider grains industry and consumers."

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