

14 March 2008

NSW FARMERS' ACCESS TO GM CANOLA WELCOMED

CropLife Australia welcomes today's announcement by the NSW Minister for Primary Industries, Hon Ian Macdonald, that NSW farmers have been given access to an important new farming tool.

With today's approval to commercially grow GM canola in NSW, the State's farmers now 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 it does 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 NSW producers. Australian GM canola also has approval for import to Europe.

"The NSW Government has made a considered and responsible decision in allowing GM canola to be commercially grown in the state. Minister Macdonald has implemented the recommendations of an Expert Committee following a thorough independent public review last year which recognised 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 NSW 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 and three segregations for canola.

"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 NSW Government that will allow significant agronomic, environmental and productivity benefits to become available to Australian growers, the wider grains industry and consumers."

CropLife Australia is the peak body representing the producers of crop protection and crop biotechnology products in Australia.

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