



GM canola not compulsory – just another option

IT IS important to remember that GM canola cultivation is not compulsory, but is simply a valuable option for farmers, according to Agriculture Region MLC Brian Ellis.

Mr Ellis, a third generation farmer who grows canola, said he has given the GM option careful consideration from a hands-on perspective.

“There are immediate benefits such as the reduced use of hazardous weed control chemicals (which must be routinely sprayed pre-emergence in non-GM crops), along with the chance to improve yields and develop drought resistant varieties,” Mr Ellis said.

He said the decision to allow local GM cultivation brings WA into line with NSW and Victoria, where growers have been growing GM canola commercially since 2008.

This fulfilled a key election promise to allow planting of GM cotton in the Ord Irrigation Scheme and the approval of commercial-size trials of canola.

The WA trials involved five Roundup Ready varieties on 19 commercial-scale plantings (seven to 70 hectares each) and 33 small-scale plantings (2,250 to 4,040 sqm each), totaling 860 ha.

DAFWA’s Wicherina site (40 kilometres east of Geraldton) was the first to be harvested.

Mr Ellis said there were strict

protocols in place prior to the trials’ approval and during cultivation and harvest.

Before new GM crops are approved for use in Australia they are subject to rigorous scientific assessment by the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator, including the potential spread and persistence of the crop and the potential to become a weed.

The process is transparent, and all licence approvals are available on the Regulator’s website.

Committees which advise the regulator include experts from disciplines such as agriculture, herbicide resistance, biology, medicine, immunology, ethics, religion, philosophy and public health, as well as community representatives.

In addition, if a product of gene technology is destined for human consumption it has to be assessed against a rigorous set of standards and approved by Food Standards Australia New Zealand.

“The argument that our world trade status may be affected doesn’t hold water given that there are now 23 countries around the world which grow GM canola – and there is always the opportunity for non-GM growers to continue to supply niche markets,” Mr Ellis said.

“Claims by alarmists that non-GM growers would be at risk of contamination do not stack up if you look at the facts.”

The DAFWA report on the WA trials indicated there were 11 minor events, but all were managed effectively and segregation from paddock to port was achieved.

Mr Ellis said that he had looked at the incidents and was sufficiently confident of management practices that it would not deter him from growing a mix of GM and conventional canola on his property some time in the future.

In the recent WA harvest CBH took delivery of the GM canola through two receival facilities only (at Mount Kokeby between Brookton and Beverley, and at the Metro Grain Centre at Forrestfield).

A set of site-specific protocols for the receival, testing, storage and out-turn of GM canola at CBH sites to AOF standards was developed to provide a dedicated grain flow-path that ensured relevant standards and customer expectations were met.

All non-GM loads delivered to CBH by GM trial farmers were tested at delivery to ensure that no contamination occurred. Tests showed no presence of Roundup Ready canola, indicating that segregation was effective.

Mr Ellis said the fact that all the GM canola delivered to CBH had been marketed and is due to be exported in February is a positive sign



Careful consideration: Brian Ellis MLC, Member for the Agricultural Region, can see immediate benefits from GM canola after having given the subject careful consideration.