



GM seed set to flow

By COLIN BETTLES



AGRICULTURAL Region MLC Brian Ellis wants to steer the focus away from the politics and towards the looming practicalities of the State Government's decision to allow Genetically Modified (GM) canola to be grown in WA this season.

Seed companies are also predicting up to 50,000 hectares could be grown and seed supply will be reliable, despite the high demand.

Mr Ellis said it was important to remember that GM canola cultivation was not compulsory and that farmers had choice.

He said GM canola was, "simply a valuable option for farmers".

Mr Ellis is a third generation farmer at Bindi Bindi, where his family has grown canola on a regular basis.

Mr Ellis said he had given the GM option careful consideration from a hands-on perspective and was intending to grow the controversial crop on the family farm this year.

"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," he said.

The State Government's decision brings WA into line with NSW and Victoria, where growers have been able to grow GM canola commercially since 2008.

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

Seed companies are also confident there will be a steady supply of GM canola seed for those growers interested in planting it on their farms this year.

Pacific Seeds Canola business manager Justin Kudnig said the four seed companies that supply GM seed to WA growers had done their

forecast orders and were predicting between 30,000ha and 50,000ha would be planted this year.

If 50,000ha is planted, it could lead to a potential yield of 75,000 tonnes in WA's debut GM season.

The four companies that supply GM seed in WA are Pacific Seeds, Nuseed, Canola Breeders WA and Pioneer Hi-Bred.

"Most of the seed companies were getting indicative forecast orders or expressions of interest from re-sellers, prior to the moratorium being lifted in WA," Mr Kudnig said.

"Now that the decision has been made and the ban lifted, orders have been firmed up and converted and we will be able to supply 100 per cent of the confirmed orders.

"We are taking a lot of orders for our Roundup Ready hybrid lines."

Mr Kudnig said the speed the orders were coming in at may lead to a shortage of Roundup Ready canola by the end of February, when Monsanto had completed its accreditation courses for GM growers.

He said the range of interested growers spread from Geraldton to Esperance, with most interest coming from the central and southern Wheatbelt, where most of last season's trials were held.

Mr Kudnig said there was not as much interest in GM from growers in the north.

Mr Ellis said 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.

That assessment includes testing of the potential spread and persistence of the crop and the potential to become a weed.

Mr Ellis said the process was transparent and all licence approvals were 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," he said.

"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.

"There is always the opportunity for non-GM growers to continue to supply niche markets.

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

Mr Ellis said 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 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.



Farm Weekly

Thursday 4/2/2010

Page: 3

Section: Supplements

Region: WA Circulation: 13,745

Type: Rural

Size: 582.95 sq.cms.

Frequency: ---T---

Brief: PARLWA-WA
Page 2 of 2



MORAWA grower and pro-GM campaigner Bill Crabtree said he had done an assessment of GM canola's performance in the National Variety Trials and was looking forward to planting about 500 hectare on his farm next season.

Mr Crabtree said he had some

GM seed lined up and was "thoroughly looking forward to growing it".

"The high yields have shown up for GM canola in the NVT trial results from 2009," he said.

"GM yields 15 per cent better than Cobbler which is the best

open pollinated TT variety."

Mr Crabtree said he would use the GM canola to clean up his paddocks with the most weeds.

"I plan to plant dry around mid-April and then spray with Roundup after the first rain," he said.

