



# 'BRIDGE TOO FAR'

## GM issues stuck in narrow debate



**A**N EXTENDED ban on genetically modified crops in South Australia will protect its 'clean and green' image until at least 2019, according to the State Government.

But many farmers beg to differ. And support is growing for the benefits of Roundup Ready GM Canola – presently available only in Western Australia, New South Wales and Victoria.

Geranium cereal farmer Daniel Morgan (pictured) says the technology offers a variety of benefits.

"Weed control is merely one point of this whole argument and I think we need to take the focus off that," he said.

"With the adoption of GM technology we would be able to combat many of the pressing issues in the Mallee, such as frost, drought and infertile soils.

"We've been trying for 30 years to develop tolerant cereals by conventional breeding and it's a bridge too far.

"But we can breed virtually anything with this technology.

"The GM debate is about far more than Roundup Ready Canola, but I think we get too bogged down in that aspect of it."

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• Photo: Terry Genoville



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# GM 'black and white' ban query

By MALCOLM SUTTON

**T**HE State Government has not made a 'black and white' pledge on genetically-modified crops despite a promise to ban them for another six years, according to Opposition agriculture spokesman Adrian Pederick.

He says the wording of agriculture Minister Gail Gago's recent statement left an opening for the government to go back on a promise to ban GM crops until 2019.

"Ms Gago said she would not lift the ban unless things change," Mr Pederick said.

"Perhaps they need to explain the reasons under which they may lift the moratorium, such as what are the criteria for change?"

In December, Ms Gago said she had refused a Federal Government request to reconsider a ban on GM crops.

"The Federal Government recently reviewed the *Gene Technology Act* and recommended that those states with GM moratoria that have not been reviewed in the past three years commit to reviewing them by the end of 2014," she had said.

"I have written to the Federal Government and told them that we will not be doing this."

The State's "clean green food bowl" gave it a competitive edge in the market by attracting greater market prices and there were continuing concerns within the community about the long-term impacts of GM foods.

"There would need to be compelling reasons before there is any change to our current policy," Ms Gago said.

Tarlee Biodynamic and organic operation Four-Leaf Milling managing director Gavin Dunn said there appeared to be a market advantage for non-GM canola.

He welcomed the ongoing ban, but said it was too broad a statement to say a non-GM market advantage stretched across all agricultural produce.

"As soon as something else comes out, you would have to look at that on an individual basis," Mr Dunn said.

"There are so many issues that come into it."

GM crops could have a role in feeding the world, especially when it came to overcoming issues such as drought and frost.

"If it can be done, it could have some advantages," Mr Dunn said.

"But the technology is too unproven, and there are factors coming out about it on a regular basis."

Western Australian no-till advocate Bill Crabtree says SA is missing out on tremendous benefits by upholding its ban.

Herbicides were losing the war against weeds that were slowly, but surely growing in resistance.

"They're not very strong and every five years another one falls over," he said.

"In SA, the last one that takes out grasses from broadleaf crops is just about to fall over.

"It used to be at 200 millilitres a hectare, but now people are using it at 600ml/ha."

Mr Crabtree was in the United States during 1996 and described the take-up of Roundup-ready Canola that year as being the "quickest uptake in the world of any agricultural technology".

The GM canola was designed to withstand the active ingredient in Roundup - glyphosate - giving farmers a stronger option to knock out a broad spectrum of weeds.

"What you'll probably have to do if you don't adopt Roundup ready GM technology is go back to tillage and cultivation, and Adelaide will become a dust bowl again," Mr Crabtree said.

But Organic Federation of Australia deputy chairman Tim Marshall said using GM technology for weeds would contribute to increased herbicide resistance in the long term.

"Putting herbicide resistance into a crop means people can and will use those chemicals more carelessly and prolifically when they don't necessarily need to use them," he said.

"It will result in more use of herbicide.

"Our organic farmers use many different techniques,

including the very careful planning of their crop rotations, integration of stock into grain systems, and alternative types of cultivation.

"We're not necessarily saying everybody has to be organic, but we don't think this business of GM will live up to its promises."

Mr Marshall said GM technology offered nothing that organic farming could not already provide, with drought resistance possible by putting more carbon through the soil and farming in a sustainable manner.

Ms Gago said that any consideration about lifting the ban would have to be based on the risk factors to markets and trade.

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- TIM MARSHALL

## KeyPoints

- Moratorium extended to 2019
- Libs question 'wording' of pledge
- SAFF backs GM technology



