

GM crop moratorium's time is up

29 October 2019 (Canberra) – In this challenging time of drought, and with a changing climate only going to make farming harder, South Australian growers need access to every available safe and effective technology that can assist them to farm in a more environmentally sustainable way.

CropLife Australia has today commended the South Australian Select Committee for their work in reviewing the Moratorium on the Cultivation of Genetically Modified Crops in South Australia. The plant science industry is pleased that the removal of the moratorium received more support from Committee members as opposed to delaying its removal for several more years or keeping it altogether.

While the report contains differing views regarding agricultural biotechnology, the scientific evidence and real-world experience of GM makes it clear that now is the time to lift the GM moratorium on mainland South Australia.

It is important to remember that the price premiums South Australian growers have enjoyed on their produce are due to their high-quality products, not because of the GM moratorium.

This has been conclusively proven by multiple independent reports and reviews, and in practice by farmers across the rest of mainland Australia where GM crops are grown. The GM crop moratorium has had a cumulative cost of \$33 million to the state's canola industry over 2004-2018, with no tangible trade or marketing benefits.

Removing the GM crop moratorium on mainland South Australia will not have any impact on price premiums.

GM crops currently being trialed and developed could help South Australian farmers combat environmental stresses such as drought, acidic soils, salinity and frost, and provide health benefits to consumers with products such as fortified cereals, healthier starches and oils modified to be lower in saturated fats and with improved cooking qualities.

South Australia has a long and successful history in research and development of plant breeding innovations. Aside from the direct benefits to the state's farmers, lifting the moratorium will boost agricultural research within South Australia, leading to the production of new crop varieties specifically designed for the South Australian environment and major environmental benefits.

GM crops are as safe for human health and the environment as their conventional counterparts and provide significant environmental benefits. GM crops are the most analysed and tested food technology in human history.

For over 20 years, approved genetically modified crops have been grown in Australia and around the world, resulting in 183 million hectares of land being saved from full tillage cropping. This has led to improved water storage, significant reduction in soil erosion and native forests being saved from becoming agricultural production land. GM crops are responsible for savings in CO2 emissions of 27 billion kg – the equivalent of removing 90 per cent of passenger cars registered in Australia from the road for one year.

Removing the GM moratorium is not about forcing farmers to grow GM crops. This is about all farmers simply having a choice to grow whichever approved crops – including GM crops – best suit their land and business model so that no farmer loses out.

The 2017 decision to extend the GM moratorium until 2025 was a baseless and crass political maneuver. Any delay to removing South Australia's GM moratorium serves no purpose and would only deny the state's farming sector access to important innovations. The facts are clear, South Australian growers are missing out on the environmental, agronomic and financial benefits of growing approved GM crops.

It's time for South Australia to unshackle agricultural innovation and embrace gene technology, to acknowledge that the science community is unified on the safety of GM crops and their current and future benefits.

If South Australia is serious about its clean and green image, then gene technology is one of the tools to ensure the South Australian environment and farming sector continues to thrive.

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About CropLife Australia

CropLife Australia is the national peak industry organisation representing the plant science sector in Australia. CropLife's members are the world-leading innovators, developers, manufacturers and formulators of crop protection and crop biotechnology products. The plant science industry, worth more than \$20 billion a year to Australian agricultural production, provides products to protect crops against pests, weeds and diseases, as well as developing crop biotechnologies key to the nation's agricultural productivity, profitability and sustainability. CropLife is part of the plant science industry's 91 country international federation.