

Media Coverage

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Business Strategy | Communication | Public Policy



The screenshot shows a news article on the Adelaide Now website. The article title is "Business calls for end to ban on GM crops". The byline is "Miles Kemp | The Advertiser | October 19, 2011 12:00am". The article features a main image of a man (John Orton) carrying his son (Henry) on his shoulders in a field of yellow flowers. A smaller image on the right shows a man standing by a river. The article text states: "BUSINESS SA has called for the state ban on genetically modified crops to be lifted for the sake of the food industry and consumers. SA is the only mainland state to have a legal ban on GM commercial crop production and crop trials. Business SA chief executive Peter Vaughan says the ban is holding back our food industry".

Business calls for end to ban on GM crops

BUSINESS SA has called for the state ban on genetically modified crops to be lifted for the sake of the food industry and consumers.

SA is the only mainland state to have a legal ban on GM commercial crop production and crop trials.

Business SA chief executive Peter Vaughan says the ban is holding back our food industry.

"It is essential that our food-processing sector implements some key initiatives to ensure our long-term contribution to the global food supply chain," he said.

"Genetically modified crops have overcome many of the challenging conditions faced by growers, and an extensive trial would address the issues, concerns and benefits."

A spokesman for Agriculture Minister Michael O'Brien said the SA position of maintaining a ban until a review in 2014 would not change and was a 2010 election promise.

Opponents of GM crops, which have modified DNA to increase yield and pest resistance, argue the potential health effects are unknown and contamination of GM-free products could destroy Australia's export industry to countries that maintain a GM ban.

Advocates argue the benefits would particularly help SA through increased yields in a dry climate as well as more pest and drought resistant crops.

Padthaway canola farmer John Orton, 32, said he was keen to experiment with GM crops as they needed less chemical spraying.

"I would be very keen to give it a go if it was legal here, and at 70km from the Victorian border it is inevitable the seeds will make it here anyway," he said.

The chief executive of industry lobby group AusBiotech, Dr Anna Lavelle, said the SA ban was politically motivated and did not make sense, especially as the state potentially had much to gain from pest and drought-resistant crops. AusBiotech, whose 3000 industry members include the South Australian Government and the State Government body Biotechnology SA, is holding its national conference in Adelaide.

"South Australia is out of step with the other states except Tasmania and it should consider the issue on the science and the benefits rather than the electoral comfort because very often people have a fear of new technology because of ignorance," Dr Lavelle said.

"Tasmania's position is a marketing one in that being GM-free may help them in the marketplace, but South Australia's position is more ideological.

"The negatives are that if SA companies want partners to help invest in new technology then those partners will more likely join with firms in the other states, and also the large increase in the use of costly and unsafe chemicals to cope with increasing pest and fungal infections."

Dr Lavelle said the conversion to GM cotton cropping in 90 per cent of Australia had reduced insecticide spraying from up to 36 times per crop cycle to as little as twice.

The SA wine industry is often cited as one of the major beneficiaries of GM crop production as crops are becoming resistant to anti-fungal spraying.

But Winemakers Federation of Australia spokesman Nick Carne said the organisation opposed GM technology based on a 2003 policy agreed to within the industry. "It is the Australian wine industry's position that no genetically modified organisms be used," he said.

Eyre Peninsula grain and sheep farmer Heather Baldock welcomed the Business SA announcement.

Ms Baldock is national convener of the Producers Forum, a lobby group of pro-biotechnology farmers who want GM technology. She is presiding member of the State Government's Eyre Peninsula Natural Resources Management Board.

"Food producers need to grow more safe, nutritious and affordable foods on less farming land with less resources (water, phosphorous etc) in the face of an expanding Australian and global population and climate change," she said.

"Genetically modified crops offer another tool in the food growers' tool box to undertake this role.

"I strongly support Business SA's call to the Select Committee on Australia's Food Processing Sector to allow GM crop trials so that traits such as drought, frost and saline tolerance as well as greater food nutrition can be trialled in food crops.

"These crops developed with biotechnology allow growers to manage pests, disease, weeds and crop nutrient requirements with less use of chemicals resulting in improved health of the soil, biodiversity, waterways and people involved in the growing of these crops."

Mr Vaughan said Business SA was not denigrating naturally produced food crops, but the future of SA agriculture should also be considered. "It is also important to get the balance right between ensuring our long-term food supply and recognising the benefits of producing naturally grown products," he said.