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GM crops lobby sees golden opportunity

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WA's major farming groups are pushing for trials of genetically modified canola under a new government, but opponents warn that unleashing the controversial technology will ruin the State's clean and green image.

The farming industry is expecting a more lenient stance from the new government to test the technology and ultimately produce commercial GM crops in WA.

"Industry will be looking to engage in discussions with this government where as they saw absolutely no way forward with the Carpenter Government," the chairman of industry body AusBiotech, Ian Edwards, said.

In contrast to the Carpenter Government's pre-election commitment, the Liberal Party supported a commercial GM canola trial of up to 1000ha and the immediate planting of GM cotton in the Ord region.

It also committed to a review of the blanket ban on all GM crops. The Nationals support lifting the ban on non-food crops, such as GM cotton.

Both WAFarmers and the Pastoralists and Graziers Association believe a GM canola trial can be planted by autumn next year. Both groups are calling for an immediate review of the moratorium, arguing the



technology could reduce chemical use and boost yields.

“We consider GM techniques are conventional agriculture now, it’s like we are being asked to use draft horses when the rest of the world has moved on to tractors,” PGA Western Graingrowers chairman Leon Bradley said.

But other grain growers, the organic farmers, the State’s vegetable growers and environmental groups still oppose a lifting of the ban or broadacre trials.

Conservation Council director Piers Verstegen said commercial GM canola trials posed a high risk of crosscontamination and could prevent WA accessing markets that demanded non-GM product.

A spokesman for premier-elect Colin Barnett said it would be presumptuous to talk of timelines for GM crop trials while government was in transition.

Pingelly grain grower Jon English said farmers needed every tool available to make a profit under current financial strains and GM crops such as canola were among those tools. “They need to do trials to see what will work for farmers in WA,” he said.

Commercial GM canola crops were introduced in NSW and Victoria this year.

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