

Leading agricultural consultant Bill Crabtree has accused state Agriculture Minister Kim Chance of deliberately sabotaging the productivity of WA farmers.

Mr Crabtree's claims come at a time when WA's agricultural industry is set to return a record low crop, hurting from the lack of rain and bruised by ever increasing farming costs.

The pro-choice-GM advocate says the Agriculture Minister has repeatedly fed misinformation on GM technology to state parliament and in the media.

He is concerned that this misleading propaganda is scuttling the argument in favour of GM application and allowing the anti-GM lobby group (NCF) to control the debate. This is despite their group being unwilling to make public their membership consisting one highly vocal person in WA.

"The Minister for Agriculture Kim Chance has been short with the truth and is deliberately slowing the desire for farmers to embrace modern GM technology," he said.

"For three years (since 2004) WA farmers could have been growing GM canola with yields 20-40% more than their current triazine tolerant canolas."

Mr Crabtree's argument is supported by recently released scientific papers, showing the research work of respected "CSIRO-equivalent" Canadian scientists.

The papers show how Canadian farmers benefit by \$C100/ha from growing Roundup Ready canola over conventional canola.

Mr Crabtree says the benefits come from better weed control, higher yields, less herbicide use and fewer costs.

"This explains why farmers in Canada have embraced GM technology faster than any other technology ever offered to them, beginning in 1996," he said.

"Virtually all of their canola is GM now and it has become their "bread and butter" crop, displacing wheat as their main profit crop.

"These are the key benefits that Canadian farmers obtain and are denied to Australian farmers.

"Is there any wonder why an ever increasingly number of educated and increasingly vocal farmers are calling for Mr Chance to be removed from his portfolio for misleading the Parliament and the state on the GM issue?"

Mr Crabtree provided evidence of Hansard statements dated May 10 and May 11 this year, alleging 20 inaccurate statements about GM canola made by Mr Chance.

The main allegations include; there is no such thing as high-yielding (GM) canola at this stage; it is far more likely that oilseeds for biofuel will come from the likes of cranberries and mustards (*other than canola*); we will never see GM technology adopted in this country; our herbicide resistance is fundamentally to the herbicide Glyphosate; and we should bear in mind that Canada does not have the advantage that Australia has in the use of triazine-tolerant canola varieties; that is, our standard variety is triazine tolerant.

"These statements and others, twenty in all, are blatantly false and have significant ramifications for our industry," he said.

"The classic statement of Canadian's do not have TT canola, is profoundly sad. They breed it and they threw it out because it yielded 20-30% less than their conventional varieties - see Beckie *et al* 2005.

"Denying WA farmers the option to grow GM canola is, as UWA's Professor Alan Robson says, "like asking them to farm with one arm tied behind their back."

"WA is missing out on \$170 million per year and it is more likely triple this figure."

According to the WA consultant, the introduction of GM technology would see canola overtake barley as WA's second most popular crop.

Mr Crabtree claims the area grown is likely to quadruple from 0.35 million ha to 1.40 million ha within three years.

"Once WA farmers grow GM canola they will embrace it rapidly over the whole state," he said.

"They will embrace it even more quickly than no-tillage which has helped them enormously during the dry 2000's.

"Farmers will say to themselves why did we listen to the sceptics for so long, why didn't we go to Canada and see the benefits of GM technology for ourselves, why did I forfeit more than \$30,000 extra profit per year, and who fooled me for the promise of a market benefit that never eventuated?

"In five years time we will look back and say "why did we let the Minister mislead us for so long?" The Minister may say "we have a Ministerial GMO reference group to look into this". But this is just smokes and mirrors and a classic "Yes, Minister" approach, where "they form a committee to delay making a decision". Says Mr Crabtree.

Mr Crabtree says Mr Chance has an opportunity to rescue the situation.

"For Mr Chance to save any face he must now immediately lift the moratoria, in consultation with the supportive grains industry," the independent consultant said.

"The first step must be to approve the request from the Esperance Shire to enable that region to embrace GM canola. Assistance for such a proposal should come from his Department.

"This could begin, on a large area in 2007, and should be monitored for any possible issues that he may be realistically concerned for.

"The whole of the agricultural industry is ready to move on delay no more. It is costing us too much!

"The only obstacle is Chance. Who is he listening to? He is certainly not listening to our leading grower organisations or to advice from his own Ag Department".

"It is time to go GM in WA.