

Opinion to The West Australian: **Kim Chance Blind to GM Facts**

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Former Agricultural Minister Kim Chance has continued to ignore the widely documented environmental and economic advantages of GM crops, with statements almost as wild as his claim in the WA Parliament that eating GM food would make you grow a tail! Limited by space, we correct here just some of the claims that Mr Chance made about GM crops on 28 January in The West Australian (page 20).

Consumers do consume GM foods. GM canola oil has no DNA or protein and cannot be distinguished in any way from non-GM canola. For the past 15 years, most of us have been eating fish and chips cooked in Australian cottonseed oil produced from GM cotton, which also has no GM component. Most pork and poultry and some beef and sheep meats grown in WA come from animals fed GM soy meal imported from the Americas. Yeasts and enzymes produced by GM organisms have been used to produce wine, cheese, bread and beer since the 1980s.

The EU allows GM crops. The EU has been importing Canadian canola oil derived from GM canola through the United Arab Emirates and China for about five years and has been consuming it safely. GM corn is grown in some EU countries, and the EU has imported millions of tonnes of GM soybeans for more than a decade.

Consumers and farmers benefit from GM crops. GM crops have reduced the use of persistent pesticides and reduced tillage around the world, with huge benefits in reducing soil erosion and carbon emissions, and have done so with increased yields in canola, which ultimately lowers production costs and prices. GM canola will reduce our over-reliance on the herbicide atrazine, which is being increasingly banned around the world.

Canadian growers recognize GM canola as an outstanding success story. More than 90% of the Canadian crop is GM and exports have continued to soar. In the early 1990s, Australia grew about 1.7 Mt of canola while Canada grew about 2.5 Mt. Since the advent of Canadian GM canola in 1996, canola production has quadrupled to 10 Mt, but Australia's has dropped.

Independent GM trials showed yield advantages. Last year, the 12 Australia-wide GM canola trials showed the best open pollinated GM canola had 13% higher yields than the best non-GM atrazine-tolerant canola. This is a 240 kg/ha grain yield increase with GM canola. With canola currently achieving \$420 per tonne, this is \$100 per hectare more. While GM seed may cost \$50/ha more, the GM herbicide package is about \$20/ha less than for atrazine tolerant canola. So a farmer would be in front by \$80/ha and, for some farmers, this may be all the profit there is in some years. This is why GM canola is important to farmers and rural communities.

GM Crops are supported by growers. Chance notes that 90% of 400 submissions to the GM Crops Free Act were against GMs. What Chance fails to point out is that many of the anti GM submissions were form letters, not from farmers, and most did not address the issues raised in the review. The WAFarmers and the PGA, representing thousands of farmers in WA, sent only one submission each and both requested a lifting of the ban on GM crops. Not one credible representative farmer organisation in WA is against letting farmers have a choice of growing GM crops. Shouldn't farmers decide their market opportunities, not non-

farmers? Would you let someone else tell you how to run your business if they had no risk of harm, and you were at risk for a lower income?

There is no strong market demand for remaining GM free. The Australian Bureau of Agriculture and Resource Economics and many other independent studies consistently show no market premium for non-GM canola. The internet also shows this – compare Fremantle (non-GM) canola with Vancouver (GM) canola. The international canola exchange is based on Canadian GM canola and there is actually a discount for our non-GM canola over GM canola of \$20 (or 5%) per tonne.

Growers can continue to produce non-GM canola. Two years of GM canola cultivation in the Eastern states show segregation is possible, and farmers are able to grow and sell non-GM canola and co-exist. The 2009 WA government trials confirmed this.

GM companies do allow testing of their products. There are hundreds of papers in the scientific literature by University and Government scientists worldwide looking at everything from agronomic performance to fitness for consumption.

Many of ex-Minister Chance's other erroneous arguments over many years are addressed on the website www.no-till.com.au. We are not blind to the concerns about GM, and indeed reject some proposed applications of GM, but it is Chance who remains blind to the evidence that GM crops can help reduce environmental risks while increasing the financial survival of farmers. Fortunately, with the issue tested in an election, Western Australia has moved on without him.