



press clip

# Farmers urged to move forward

By LUCY KNIGHT

**A**USTRALIA'S former chief scientist says the time for debate over genetically modified crops in Australia has passed and farmers need to "get out and talk-up their safety and benefits" or be left behind.

Jim Peacock, who was the country's top scientist between 2006 and 2008, told delegates at the National Farmers' Federation congress in Brisbane that it was time to trust the regulators and get on with growing crops that would have major benefits, not just for farmers, but also for human health and the environment.

Dr Peacock said there were about 125 million hectares of GM crops grown in the world, which was now a significant proportion of the total arable cropping area of the planet.

In each of these crops, between one and three genes had been added to the plant's existing

## Key points

- Scientist says GMs have "human health benefits"
- 125m ha of GM crops planted
- Call for "trust in regulatory authorities"

30,000 genes, yet those one to three genes had made a big difference to the plant, in protecting against weeds and insect pests, and now in boosting the health attributes of particular cereal and oil-based foods.

So far, the direct benefits had been to the farmer and to the environment, but GM crops and food products would soon start to have a direct affect for the con-

sumer.

In a couple of months time supermarkets would be marketing the first breakfast cereal made from a low-glycaemic index, high-fibre barley variety called Barley Max.

Trials showed it to be of "positive value in relation to glucose concentrations in the bloodstream and in the concentrations of fibre in the colon".

"This type of barley was first developed by GM research knowledge with the addition of one single gene aimed at stopping the action of another gene in barley, with marvellous results for human health," Dr Peacock said.

"The adjustment of the nutritional value of grains and other crop products will be one of the most important strategies in increasing the value and global competitiveness of our agricultural products in the future.

"The adjustment of the makeup of the starches, proteins, oils, and antioxidants in our food grains will be of extreme value to huge numbers of people around the world in preventative health."

Changes in these plants meant farmers would also be able to produce what the consumer really wanted to have, and what the market said was needed.

"In these situations there still needs to be full safety testing of the modified plants but I think it's clear that we can expect to have products on the supermarket shelves that will be of value and convenience to the consumer in the future," Dr Peacock said.

"I'm honestly convinced that the time for argument about the need, safety and benefits of GM

crops – including benefits to the environment, farmer and consumer – is gone. It's just not an argument any more.

"What we need to do is to make sure that in every single case proposed there should be the highest possible regime of safety testing and performance testing."

It was now time to trust the regulatory authorities, which were excellent, and they should be trusted to regulate food crops in the same way they were trusted with non-food crops, he said.



**GM CALL:** Farmers are being urged to embrace genetically modified crops by Australia's former chief scientist.