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Farmers want GM laws repealed

JODIE THOMSON

As the State's first commercial trials of genetically modified canola burst into flower, debate is raging over a review of WA laws banning widespread use of the technology.

Farm groups have called for the GM Crops Free Areas Act to be repealed, claiming it had disadvantaged growers by inhibiting access to critical technology.

But opponents warn that consumers remain wary of the technology and have called for a continuation of the legislation, which prohibits GM crop production unless an exemption is granted by the State Agriculture Minister.

In a submission to a Government review, Pastoralists and Graziers Association member Leon Bradley said the legislation was "oppressive

and destructive" for farmers by denying them access to a "harmless and beneficial" technology.

The National Farmers' Federation said WA farmers deserved access to the technology, with the use of GM canola in NSW and Victoria increasing four-fold since commercial production began there last year.

But Greenpeace argued in a draft submission that consumers did not want GM foods and retaining the Act was critical to maintaining WA's clean, green image.

"Independent polling by Newspoll in 2008 shows that the majority of Australians are uncomfortable with eating (GM) food," Greenpeace said.

There were concerns about potential loss of export markets, problems with crop segregation

and issues of legal liability if contamination occurred. Cunderdin farmer David Fulwood is one of 17 farmers trying GM canola this season and believes GM crops could be a big technological boost for WA farmers.

Standing in a chest-high crop of flowering Roundup Ready canola yesterday, Mr Fulwood said the variety was looking good so far.

The crop would give him greater flexibility with weed management and because the chemical used was not residual, it had less environmental impact than some other spray options for canola.

GM crops such as soybeans, corn, cotton and canola had been grown internationally for more than a decade, he said.

Written submissions to the review close on September 11.



High-tech crop: Cunderdin farmer David Fulwood says his GM canola will give him greater flexibility with weed management. Picture: Sharon Smith



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Farmers hope for fields of gold as first GM crops flower



Stalemate: Cunderdin farmer David Fulwood, pictured with father Malcolm, believes genetically modified canola could bring many benefits. But debate rages over laws banning GM crops. **Report, P6**

Picture: Sharon Smith