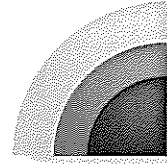




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First GM canola planted

SARAH QUINTON

The first commercial planting of genetically modified canola was sown at the weekend, just months after the State Government lifted a ban on growing GM crops.

About 105,000 tonnes of GM canola seed was ordered by 250 farmers, who are expected to plant about 30,000ha of GM canola this season.

Mullewa farmer Andrew Messina planted 250ha of the controversial seed on Sunday and said that like any new technology designed to improve yields and weed control, he wanted to experiment.

"It really has come down to the fact that we've been waiting a long time to get this technology and it would be remiss of us not to try it," he said. "We see it as a weed management tool, not necessarily for yields."

In January, the State Government lifted a ban on growing GM canola after a trial of growing, segregating and exporting GM canola was found to be successful.

Of the 7.5 million hectares expected to be planted this season, 850,000ha will be used to grow canola, including GM canola.

Great Northern Rural Services principal agronomist Tony Rosser said that in the northern agricultural region, 16 growers planned to sow 2000ha of Roundup Ready canola this season.

"For the most part, growers are recognising the potential value of this new product and they are trying it this season to get a handle on how it will fit into their future programs," he said.

"We have those farmers that are eager to experiment with new technology and those growers who will watch and observe the first year and learn from others' experience."

Mr Rosser said farmers would also evaluate whether GM would become a future farming reality or whether the varieties on offer required further breeding.