

The Safe Food Foundation

MEDIA RELEASE

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GM Canola buffer lifted from 5 metres to 1.1 km

Farmers would be well advised to re-consider planting GM canola after the latest development in the legal case between a WA organic farmer and his neighbour.

Steve Marsh of Kojonup lost organic certification for nearly 70 per cent of his 478-hectare farm after it was contaminated by GM canola that allegedly had blown onto his property from a neighbour's in late 2010.

He is suing his neighbour in the WA Supreme Court for his financial losses and seeking a permanent injunction prohibiting planting of GM canola within 2.5 km of his organic farm.

Meanwhile, after Mr Marsh lodged an application for an interim injunction in the WA Supreme Court, the parties have recently agreed to a consent order. This avoids the need for a contested hearing on the interim injunction application.

The consent order prohibits the planting of GM canola on the neighbour's farm within 1.1 kilometres of Steve Marsh's organic farm. In addition, the neighbour has agreed to harvest any GM canola he grows outside the 1.1 km buffer without swathing.

The Safe Food Foundation's Scott Kinnear has welcomed the development.

"There is no doubt that this is a big reality check for parties with a vested interest in promoting GM crops in Australia," he said.

"At trial Mr Marsh will seek a permanent injunction requiring a 2.5 kilometre buffer from his organic farm, but the agreed position of a 1.1 kilometre buffer without swathing is a good compromise prior to trial.

"We believe that this agreement confirms what non GM farmers have been saying all along, that a 5-metre buffer zone is completely inadequate. This position was put 10 years ago in the development of the GM cropping protocols and was completely ignored.

"GM farmers now need to think twice before planting GM canola this year and would be well advised to consider if there are any organic or non-GM farms near them, especially if they are down wind or within pollination distance of commercial bee activity.

"Farmers considering whether to risk their independence for a long-term relationship with a patent holder will be further discouraged by this huge and significant increase in the informal buffer zone.

"Steve Marsh – like any farmer – has the right to make a living from his farm. And he has a right to control what happens on his property.

"And Australian consumers who are increasingly opting for purer and fresher foods have a right to be able to buy unadulterated foods."

For more information:

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