

The time for questioning the merits and safety of genetically-modified crops has well and truly passed, says
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PRIOR to visiting Australia recently, I was surprised to learn that much of the debate regarding whether to allow production of commercial genetically-modified crops is still being driven by outdated outlandish claims that this technology is still unproven — or worse, that it does not create value for farmers and consumers.

As someone who has worked for more than 25 years on the cutting edge of agricultural biotechnology, it's disappointing to believe any credence can be given to claims these technologies are not yet proven.

Since the introduction of GM crops in 1994, their uptake has been nothing less than amazing, experiencing an unprecedented 60-fold increase, totalling more than 1.3 billion hectares during their first decade of use.

Today, more than 10 million farmers in 22 countries, including the US, Canada, China, Brazil and India, cultivate more than 100 million hectares each year of GM crops.

Farmers have adopted this technology because it adds value to their operations.

No one is forcing them to buy high-value seeds, which increase their output and reduce their chemical input costs.

While the states of Victoria and NSW have recently overturned their moratoria against growing commercial GM canola crops, it would seem there are still misgivings on the part of other Australian states about GM technology.

No products in history have been subject to as stringent and rigorous testing to assess their safety for both humans and animals.

There has not been a single authenticated case of any adverse effect on human health through the consumption of any commercially available GM food.

Australia would do well to consider what restrictions on



Technology adopted: GM crops are grown in 22 countries worldwide.

GM benefits are proven

GM technology have done to the once dynamic state of plant sciences in Europe.

The demonisation of biotechnology has seriously damaged Europe's position as a leader in the research, development and commercialisation of innovative agricultural technologies.

Many of Europe's top agricultural scientists have followed the industry's migration to North America or are pursuing careers outside agriculture.

Let's remember agriculture is booming worldwide.

Prices for all major agricultural products have increased significantly over the past couple of years, driven by increased demand from China, which is likely to continue for decades to come.

The simple truth is that rising demand for food and animal feed will not go away.

Many factors, including arable land and water shortages, drought and global warming, lead us to the inescapable conclusion that the only way to increase yields and meet ever-growing demand is through the development of new technologies.

Is it mere coincidence that two emerging leaders in the development of important agricultural biotechnologies are China and India, the world's two most populated countries, who understand the critical role technology will play in feeding their huge populations?

Australia has long held a respected place in agricultural research globally, from high-profile organisations such as the CSIRO through to emerging biotechnology companies like Hexima Limited.

Hexima is developing technologies to control insect and fungal pathogens, which are

highly sought after by multinational seed companies.

Hexima's recent successful initial public offer on the Australian Stock Exchange was over-subscribed, suggesting that Australia's capital markets understand the potential offered by GM technology.

All safety, trade and market access issues have now been well and truly laid to rest for the products on the market.

Adequate processes are in place to ensure new products are also safe and effective.

Surely it is time all Australian growers be allowed access to the most advanced production systems available, to ensure their businesses remain both sustainable and competitive.

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