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When given the choice, farmers choose GM

Figures released overnight by the International Service for Acquisition of Agri-Biotech Applications (ISAAA) show that the adoption of genetically modified (GM) crops increased by 9 million hectares, or 7% last year. In 2009, 14 million farmers planted GM crops over a global area the size of the Northern Territory (134 million hectares). This represents 9% of the 1.5 billion hectares of cropland in the world and proves that, given the choice, farmers turn to innovative methods.

One of the biggest areas of GM production in Australia has been in cotton. GM cotton has been one of the most widely planted crops globally, with more than 90% of cotton crops in Australia, Canada and the USA deriving from GM. But it wasn't just the western world which rapidly adopted GM cotton. GM cotton has also revolutionised the Indian cotton industry, which has moved from being an importer of cotton to the world's largest exporter in seven years. In 2009 87% of Indian cotton farmers planted GM varieties.

Australia has only two GM crops – GM cotton and GM canola. In 2009, 93% of Canadian canola was GM and there continues to be no evidence that Canadians are having trouble selling this product. Canada is the world's largest exporter of canola and Japan, one of the largest importers, imported over 2 million tonnes from the Canadians in 2009. This is higher than the forecast canola production for the whole of Australia in 2009-10 which is 1.77 million tonnes. Australia typically exports around 35% of our canola to Japan.

Following the lifting of the moratoria on GM canola in NSW and Victoria in 2008, 62 growers planted 5,000 hectares of GM canola in Victoria, but in 2009 this number had increased to 200 growers planting 27,000 hectares. An additional 30,000 hectares of GM canola is expected to be planted in WA this year following the WA Government's decision to give its growers choice.

Farmers of other GM crops are also adopting the technology in large numbers. GM sugarbeets were commercialised only 3 years ago in the US and Canada and by 2009 they comprised over 95% of the sugarbeet crop in both of these countries.

85% of maize that is grown in the US is GM.

These results show that the vast majority of farmers choose to plant GM crops when they are given the opportunity to do so.

The high rates of adoption reflect the economic and environmental benefits of GM crops.

- In the period from 1996-2008, GM crops are estimated to have delivered US$51.9 billion to farmer pockets and reduced pesticide use in these crops by 8.4%.
- Reduced ploughing, facilitated by GM crops, increased the storage of carbon in soils. In 2008 alone this was estimated as removing 14.4 billion kg of CO_2 from the atmosphere or the equivalent of removing nearly 7 million cars off the road for a year.

These benefits are recognised by farmers from around the world. In a poll taken at the start of 2010, farmers from the UK, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, the US and Canada were asked what they saw as the most important tools for addressing future global food needs. The largest group of responses (with nearly 40% of the vote) from the thousands of farmers who responded was 'new technologies and Genetic Modification'.

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