

SE Early General News
HD **Bignell rejects GM-food "bias" claim after rally**
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THE worldwide March Against Monsanto rally last weekend may have drawn a crowd of up to 300 people in Adelaide, but the attendance of state Agriculture Minister Leon Bignell is stirring controversy among SA graingrowers.

Grain Producers SA chief executive Darren Arney said Mr Bignell's participation in the rally was proof he was "biased" against genetically modified crops in SA.

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He said the government was not listening to the needs of the grain industry as one of the biggest export-earning industries in this state.

"The march is also a rally against the legal use of crop-protection products to deliver clean, fresh food," Mr Arney said.

"So it is not clear as to whether the state government is suggesting that we shouldn't be using chemicals in primary production at all, even though their departments use them for weed control, such as in forests."

He said Mr Bignell's concerns that there could be long-term health ramifications that were not yet known about GM crops contradicted statements by Food Standards Australia New Zealand, which said it had never identified any safety concerns with any of the GM foods it had assessed, nor had national regulators assessing the same food independently.

"GPSA is also calling on the state government to publicly disclose the figures that prove by being GM-free, the SA economy is receiving an economic benefit," Mr Arney said.

"Last harvest, SA canola was **sold** for \$15 a tonne less than Vic canola where GMs are grown, showing there was no financial benefit to grain producers being GM free."

But Mr Bignell said if GPSA wanted to accuse him of bias against GM foods, then he should also be called biased against fruit fly and phylloxera.

"I'm biased against anything that could harm our reputation for having premium food and **wine** from a clean environment," he said.

Kangaroo Island Pure Grain was "a great example" of how farmers had reached premium prices by banding together to market their GM-free produce together.

"I've actually asked PIRSA to get a discussion going with people right around the state, including Viterro and the GPSA, to talk about why we can't band together under a common SA GM-free **brand**."

He recently returned from Shanghai where **Chinese** officials and food buyers were "adamant" they wanted non-GM foods, as were Japanese and European Union delegations.

He was certainly not against the use of chemicals on-farm, nor specialised breeding and similar research being undertaken at the Waite Institute. But GM food was "completely different".

"This is about putting different species together and modifying the genes as they are, and I think where I'm coming from is where the consumer is at the moment," Mr Bignell said.

"I've never had a consumer come to me and say 'we want to eat more GM food'.

"As a government we have to listen to consumers as well."

Mr Bignell said that while he could accept that Food Standards had tested successfully and found no safety concerns with the GM food it had assessed, so far as he was aware there had never been any conclusive multi-generation research released on the long-term impacts of GM food.

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