



WA Court decision on GM contamination highlights need for reform

The National Association for Sustainable Agriculture (NASAA), has today called on State and Federal regulators to provide greater certainty on the application of National Standards for Organic and Biodynamic Produce.

The call comes following the Supreme Court of Western Australia's decision in the Marsh vs Baxter case.

Justice Martin dismissed WA organic farmer Steve Marsh's claim that his land was contaminated by Genetically Modified (GM) canola grown by his neighbor, conventional farmer Graham Baxter.

This is a significant blow for the Marshes and the organic sector of Australia.

NASAA maintains that it acted responsibly in withdrawing Organic Certification rights to Mr Marsh's farm despite Justice Martin finding the decertification was 'erroneous'.

NASAA General Manager Ben Copeman said that the Courts decision not to recognise NASAA's decertification as warranted, highlights the need for greater regulatory certainty for organic producers.

"We found GM canola growing on organically certified land. The court found that there was no risk of GM contamination.

While tolerance thresholds for GM contamination are governed by the Federal Government under the National Standard for Organic and Biodynamic Produce, it is not a legislated standard and is not recognised by the courts," Mr Copeman said.

Australia's most important grain customers, such as Japan, China and Korea, do not want GM in their food chains and have zero tolerance to GM contamination.

"Without any legally recognised form of protection, Australian organic farmland and produce is left vulnerable to contamination from conventional farming methods including GM crops. This could seriously threaten the sectors access to domestic and international organic markets.

Mr Copeman said, "This decision also removes redress for conventional farmers who want to remain GM-free and may open a Pandora's Box of conflicts between neighbours and farming communities.

"Farmers across Australia, are left with an uncertain future. The need to recognise and support greater commercial security for both organic and conventional farming is now an issue of national importance.

"The issue of how organic and non-organic farmers can co-exist while respecting each other's right to farm in the way they choose will not go away and needs to be resolved," he said.

The NASAA Organic Certification Standard is recognised worldwide as a leading and reliable assurance that the produce is GM free.

"Australian organic standards and related export regulations have a good international reputation in key markets within SE Asia, China, Japan, USA and the European Union.

"Any unreasonable risk of contamination can lead to a loss of recognition and acceptance of Australian certified organic produce and those markets being inaccessible to Australian famers," he said.

The world organic market is estimated to be worth around \$60 billion, with the Australian market at about \$1.3 billion. Forecasts consistently project positive growth in both domestic and international markets.

In March 2014, NASAA signed a world-first agreement with a leading Chinese certification body to streamline the process of organic certification for the export of Australian products to China, with the potential to double the value of the Australian organic sector.

Progress on this agreement and others like this will be put at risk if Australia is seen to be unable to ensure the security of its organic produce.



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About NASAA:

The National Association for Sustainable Agriculture, Australia (NASAA) was formed in 1986 and supports the education of industry and consumers on organic, biodynamic and sustainable agricultural practices.

NASAA was Australia's first organic certifier.

Today, its certification arm, NASAA Certified Organic (NCO), provides certification and inspection services to assist Certified Organic operators access every organic market in the World.

NCO certifies more than 1,000 operators in 13 countries, certifying some 5.5m ha of agricultural land worldwide.