

# 'Super' canola seen as key to tougher crops

SARAH QUINTON

Australian and Chinese researchers are trading genetic information to create the world's first "super canola", designed to grow in some of WA's harshest regions.

The project involving the University of Western Australia, Huazhong Agricultural University and Zhejiang University in China aims to develop a new Brassica species producing higher yielding crops for food for human and animal consumption and biofuels.

Current canola oilseed plants from the Brassica family have a narrow gene pool, lacking hardiness and vigour important for adaptation to changing climates.

Existing canola has two sets of genomes and the project aims to add an extra set of genomes to the genetic structure, adding important traits allowing it to be grown in marginal rainfall areas.

UWA researcher Annaliese Mason said canola was a naturally occurring hybrid and the project would advance it to the next stage.

"This would not be a genetically modified plant. We are giving evolution a helping hand," she said.

Council of Grain Growers Organisations chairman Bruce Piper said the new variety would mean WA farmers could change from monoculture crops to rotational cropping in marginal rainfall areas.

"Now they will have more assured crop yields," Mr Piper said.

UWA Institute of Agriculture director Kadambot Siddique said the potential for the new variety could mean that crops could be grown in dry areas of WA.



Collaboration: Students Yi Ming Guo from China and Annaliese Mason from UWA. Picture: Bill Hatto

## Community News

# Happily ever after?

by BEN DINEEN-DICKINSON

ONE-hundred fairytale characters gathered on the steps of parliament house last Wednesday to urge the WA government to extend a moratorium on genetically modified crops.

Dressed in costume to highlight the "myths" about the promised safety of GM food, the crowd gave WA agriculture minister Terry Redman a frosty reception.

WA conservation council spokesperson Dr Maggie Lillith told the *Voice* "over 80 per cent of submissions received so far in the review have called for the act [banning GM] to be retained... it's obvious from these submissions that people don't want GM crops grown in this state".



• Anti-GM protestors at parliament house.

"Not surprisingly, most of those requesting that the moratorium be lifted are large companies... and oil producers, all of which are clearly ignoring their customers' requests for non-GM."

Canola farmer Janette Liddelow said she was concerned about claims GM crops gave farmers choice.

"The reality is that GM denies farmers a choice, the choice of growing and marketing themselves as GM-free."

The minister accepted letters from the crowd, including one from the Organic and Biodynamic Farmers Group that threatened legal action should they be affected by crop contamination.