

Media Release May 26, 2008

## Cooperative Research Centre for Molecular Plant Breeding (MPBCRC)

**\*Top Chefs should stick to cooking rather than spreading false GM propaganda.\***

Chefs should stick to cooking rather than spreading false propaganda about scientific matters that they know nothing about, says the CEO of a leading research body.

Dr Glenn Tong, CEO of Molecular Plant Breeding CRC, was commenting following media reports over the weekend that a number of top chefs nationally have signed an anti-GM Chefs Charter, a Greenpeace initiative to be launched this Thursday, calling on consumers to boycott restaurants that don't commit to being GM free.

Dr Tong says it is enormously self indulgent of well to do chefs who can select from a bounteous range of foods to dictate from their comfortable surroundings what people can eat - when many are facing starvation - and in the face of global warming.

"Australians need to know that GM crops have been endorsed by the World Health Organisation and our Federal regulatory body Food Standards Australia and New Zealand," he says.

"The vast majority of the scientific community also supports GM crops. To date, some 25 Nobel Laureates have signed a petition endorsing GM crops.

"We should also not forget that the vast majority of the community wants their food in plentiful supply at all times - even when it is out of season and in the middle of a drought - and at their favorite 24 hour supermarket.

"Organic farming may work for small niche markets like top end restaurants but it won't be able to handle the supply demands of the masses.

"Cooking is one of the great art forms enjoyed by a civilised society and chefs are undeniably superb artists. But they must appreciate that with a finite amount of arable land, a fast growing population and climatic conditions like drought, GM crops are a powerful tool that

we should not ignore," Dr Tong says.

"It is all very well for chefs and other western society anti-GM activists to sit comfortably around a table laden with a variety of foods, railing sanctimoniously against the purported evils of GM, when in too many countries starvation is an ever present threat. This threat can be significantly alleviated by GM technology.

"As just one example, development of GM crops that are drought tolerant offer a real prospect of helping people, many of whom are starving.

"Opposition to GM is a matter of faith over reason, for it flies in the face of all logical arguments and scientific evidence," Dr Tong says.

"Two pressing reasons emerge why GM'S full benefits must be allowed to manifest themselves.

"First, population and the fertile farming land that feeds it.

"The unstoppable wave of global population growth and the decline in arable land due to climate change and urbanisation means that we have to be able to grow more food on a given area of land.

"One of the principal advantages of GM crops is that they can produce higher yields per land area.

"Climate change is the other pressing reality.

"Gene technology provides the opportunity of producing crops that can be grown much more efficiently in drought areas.

"Currently, 35 to 50 % of the world's wheat is grown in drought-affected regions.

"This will be vital in growing wheat and cereals in arid countries like Australia and other areas that will become drier.

"New research into drought tolerant varieties could significantly increase the world's wheat supply.

"Much more needs to be done to communicate the facts about GM crops.

"Very large populations, in the USA and Canada , have consumed GM crops for over a decade, with no ill effect.

"Canada, one of our major trade competitors, has been selling GM canola to a number of export markets including Japan and Australia for many years," Dr Tong says.

"MPBCRC and its commercial partners have invested millions of dollars and over a decade of hard work into developing GM crops and pastures to help farmers adapt to climate change and improve their productivity and profitability. The anti-GM charter that these chefs have signed up to is an insult to farmers and consumers." Dr Tong says.

MPBCRC was formed in July 2003 under the Cooperative Research Centres Program funded by the Commonwealth Government.

It aims to develop new technologies in plant molecular biology and implement effective strategies for their use in cereal and pasture grass improvement programs.

The technologies developed by MPBCRC are being commercialised and delivered through the involvement of breeding and seed organisations in Australia and around the world.

MPBCRC's head office is at Bundoora, Melbourne, and its 200 research staff are located at various core and participant organisations in Melbourne, Adelaide, Horsham, Hamilton, Perth and Mexico .