

Western Australia GM research facility faces safety scrutiny

When the multi-million dollar GM research station was opened in 2011 in Merredin, 300 kilometres east of Perth, it boasted it was to be the nation's first multi-user, purpose-built facility to evaluate the benefits of new genetically modified crops such as GM wheat, barley and lupins. The ten year trial program is part of Western Australia's Department of Agriculture and Food's (DAFWA) New Genes for New Environments (NGNE) initiative.

Some Merredin locals are concerned the so-called 'state-of-the-art centre' is falling into disrepair, eroding public confidence in GM research in the state. "I'm not necessarily for GM but I am for research into GM," says 'Jill', who wishes to remain anonymous. "It's really visible to anyone on Goldfields Road or Great Eastern Highway driving past that the facility is in a really damaged condition."

'Jill' isn't a farmer but she knows plenty of grain producers in the Wheatbelt who are relying on findings from these GM trials to have the option to grow new GM crops down the track. She also thinks the alleged mismanagement at the research station will make the perfect ammunition for the anti-GM lobby. "If the research into GM is compromised through mismanagement or lack of protocols being followed, then that would set the whole GM debate back years," she said. "We don't want to give anti-GM lobby a chance to beat up something and stop vital research."

There are no GM trials currently planted at Merredin NGNE facilities.

Dr Mark Sweetingham, DAFWA's Grains Industry Executive Director, acknowledges the Merredin research facility appears run-down. "Rather than race out and do a quick patch up job on it (the bird net), we've decided that because we're trying to build this facility to provide a service to the grains industry in the next ten to fifteen years we're looking at a complete re-engineering of the way we're putting that net up and we're dealing with a structural engineer at the moment," he said.

Read the full, original article: [Doubt cast over safety of GM research centre in WA](#)