



MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY; THE MID-WEST AND WHEATBELT

MEDIA STATEMENT

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New varieties could reinvigorate crop option.

Two new varieties of chickpea developed in Western Australia could help reinvigorate a crop option devastated by an infectious disease, Agriculture Minister Kim Chance said today.

Launching the new varieties, 'Nafice' and 'Almaz', Mr Chance said both offered significantly improved resistance to *Ascochyta* blight, the most serious disease of commercial chickpea crops in WA.

The Minister said since *Ascochyta* blight was first observed in WA in 1999, the area of chickpeas in the State had dropped from 80,000ha to 5,000ha.

"The future of the chickpea industry hinges on provision of varieties with high levels of resistance to *ascochyta*," Mr Chance said.

"This is a significant development. Chickpeas are high value crops and offer growers the chance to diversify. There is also significant export potential if chickpeas can again become a viable crop for WA.

"The potential size of the industry in Australia is more than \$70million per annum and there are also rotational benefits from a legume crop following cereal and canola crops.

"In WA, the potential for the new varieties is 30,000ha, mainly on suitable, free draining soils in medium rainfall areas at Dongara, Mingenew, Moora, the Avon Valley, Katanning, Darkan-

Williams and Speddingup.”

The new varieties were developed with the support of the Department of Agriculture, Council of Grain Growers Organisations, Grains Research Development Council and the University of Western Australia, through The Centre for Legumes in Mediterranean Agriculture’s Germplasm Research.

The development process involved close co-operation with the International Centre for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas, Syria, and the Aegean Agricultural Research Institute, Izmir, Turkey.

The names of the new varieties were chosen to acknowledge the superior quality of the varieties and the initial crossing made at the centre in Syria. The names will also assist in product marketing to the Middle East, Europe, Indian sub-continent and other countries because Nafice means ‘very precious’ in Arabic and Almaz means ‘diamond’.

The Gallop Government is protecting and enhancing WA’s unique environment.

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Caption: Mr Chris Gillam (Irwin farmer), Prof. Kadambot Siddique (CLIMA), Dr Rajendra Malhotra (ICARDA) and Ms Kerry Regan (DAWA) in a bulk-up crop of the new chickpea variety Almaz