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OILSEEDS NEWS

CANOLA BENCHMARKING TO 'RAISE THE BAR' IN THE WIMMERA

Canola growers in the Wimmera are keeping a close eye on their canola crops to gather information that will help them make better management decisions in future years. Crops are being benchmarked to compare performance with the average of other crops in the region.



Raising the bar: Murra Warra canola grower Ian Schmidt is taking part in Canolacheck this year to make better-informed decisions.

Oilseeds Industry Development Officer, Felicity Pritchard, said that a number of Wimmera growers were using the opportunity to re-assess how they manage canola crops as part of the Canolacheck program run through the NSW Department of Primary Industries.

Each grower will receive a report after harvest, comparing yields and management strategies of their crop with the district average, the top 20 per cent, and the lowest 20 per cent yielding

crops. Individual growers can only identify their own crops, and confidentiality of growers is assured.

Murra Warra grain grower Ian Schmidt said that he was keen to keep canola in his rotation, but would like to know how to grow canola more productively in drier years.

“Canola’s good. We need it as another break crop in the rotation”, he said.

“I hope that by being involved in the benchmarking, I’ll be able to lift the productivity of canola, to make it a sustainable crop in the rotation.”

Ms Pritchard said that benchmarking not only helps growers assess their crop performance, but also encourages growers to monitor their crops and helps agronomists give better advice.

She said that most agronomic recommendations for growing canola were based on data gathered from crop monitoring in the highly successful years of the Canolacheck program, the early to mid 1990s, but there hasn’t been much information gathered since then.

“In an ideal situation, we would have 20 years of benchmarking data, to use as a basis to fine-tune recommendations for different seasons,” she said.

“Most of the recommendations for growing canola in the Wimmera came from research and benchmarking done in seasons with above average or average rainfall, so we really need more information to help growers make more informed decisions in drier years, like we have been experiencing.”

Ms Pritchard said that another ten canola growers in the Wimmera were needed this year to have a good dataset.

To be involved in canola benchmarking, please contact Felicity Pritchard on 0427 600 228 or (03) 5382 4396.



DOUBLE CROPPING PUT TO THE TEST

The profitability and practicality of growing winter and summer grain or feed crops on irrigation in the one year will be put to the test this year, in the first of a three-year project coordinated by the Irrigated Cropping Forum.

Trials at Madowla Park, east of Echuca were sown in May by the Victorian Department of Primary Industries, with the aim of lifting yearly gross margins to \$2000 per hectare in a year, by growing winter and summer crops in succession.

The first phase of the project has been established, with the trial site sown to the winter crops barley, canola, faba beans, clover, wheat and oaten hay.

“These crops have characteristics that make them more suitable for double cropping, such as shorter maturity or less height, so as to make the summer phase easier or more timely,” said DPI senior agronomist, Damian Jones.

The winter crops will be followed by maize for silage and grain, soybeans and forage sorghum.

“Originally we aimed to produce 20 tonnes per hectare per year, but then we decided that a rotation of maize followed by oaten hay may produce 27 tonnes per hectare of product, but may be less profitable than 7 tonnes per hectare of canola and soybeans,” said Mr Jones.

The trials are funded by the Grains Research and Development Corporation.

Congupna grain grower Craig Reynolds said that the main reason he double crops is to maximise the water use efficiency by growing winter crops to take advantage of moisture left over from the preceding summer crop.

“It’s a flexible system and can be quite profitable, and allows us to maximise the usefulness of the winter rainfall and variable irrigation allocations,” said Mr Reynolds.

Mr Reynolds grows oaten or clover hay or barley for grain in winter followed by soybeans for human-consumption or maize in the summer.

He aims to sow and harvest on the same day in mid-November, with the aid of controlled traffic equipment to minimise soil compaction.

(For more information, contact Craig Reynolds on 0427 288 211, or Damian Jones on (03) 5450 9525.)

CANE INDUSTRY REPS VISIT WIMMERA

A delegation of representatives of the sugar cane industry descended upon the Wimmera this week, to meet with grain grower groups, and were amazed by the openness and dedication that they witnessed.

The group from northern Queensland came to discuss the opportunity to add soybeans to their farming system, and to learn more about how successful farming groups share their knowledge and resources, in the face of restructuring of the sugar cane industry.

The group met in Horsham on Tuesday with Department of Primary Industries Senior Agronomist Dale Grey to learn about his experiences with soybeans, and with Sue Knights who leads a national oilseed agronomy project, as well as Oilseeds Industry Development Officer, Felicity Pritchard.

They then headed north to meet with the Wallup Topcrop group, who won the inaugural national Topcrop group award in 1998, to attend a Topcrop meeting and inspect local crops.

“We don’t have anything like this in the cane industry,” said Burdekin soybean and cane grower and farming group coordinator Andrew Lashmar.



**North meets south:
Northern Queensland sugarcane representative met the Wallup Topcrop group to learn about grower groups.**

“They do some great things, like the ‘stuff ups and successes’ day, for instance. The cane growers could really benefit from doing some of the things that the Wallup Topcrop group do. It’s just completely different from the way the cane industry has been operating,” he said.

“A lot of the cane groups aren’t very social, instead being focused on farming systems.”

Mr Lashmar said he was keen to bring a bigger group of cane growers back to the Wimmera to meet the Wallup Topcrop group again.

On Thursday the delegation headed to Rupanyup and Lubeck to meet with grain growers Andrew Weidemann and Peter Taylor to discuss their rotations and farming equipment.

They then met with Harm van Rees of the Birchip Cropping Group to view the group’s satellite demonstration sites, and discussed the prospect of interacting with each other through activities like an exchange farmer program, similar to exchange student programs.

(For more details, contact Andrew Lashmar, 0428 188 127.)

