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OILSEEDS NEWS

CANOLA WINDROWING CHALLENGES

Deciding on the best time to windrow canola crops will be more challenging this year, with many crops at variable stages of maturity due to staggered germinations of plants earlier in the season.



But growers need to be careful to not windrow too early, as this will lead to greater yield losses and low oil content, according to Oilseeds Industry Development Officer, Felicity Pritchard.

RIGHT ON TIME: Deciding the best time to windrow canola crops with staggered germination will be challenging. *Photo courtesy Victorian DPI.*

very variable maturities was when the risk of yield losses from shattering the older pods was more than the risk of windrowing the greener pods too early.

Ms Pritchard said that the best time to windrow crops with

“Trials conducted by the Victorian Department of Primary Industries in the mid-1990s showed that yields and oil content are lower in canola windrowed too early.”

Telangatuk windrowing contractor and canola grower, Tom Dunstan, said that assessing the optimum time to windrow will be difficult this season.

“I’ll just have to check all parts of the paddocks and take an average,” he said.

“I’ll have to work out an acceptable loss both ways –in other words, how much will be lost from shattering and how much will be lost from being windrowed too early.”

Mr Dunstan said that he had observed many crops that had been windrowed far too early in recent years, when seeds from the uppermost pods were not firm.

“There’s a narrow window in which to windrow. Most windrowing is done by contractors who move through the district, and some people are persuaded to cut their crop before it’s really ready,” he said.

Mr Dunstan also said that in recent years some growers have assumed that the crop is ready for windrowing when individual plants have prematurely ripened as a result of disease, insect damage, soil compaction, and in years past, waterlogging.

He said that the problem was more evident in older varieties where a small number of growers have retained seed over a number years for sowing, as blackleg resistance was inadequate.

“I’ve seen some crops windrowed when they’ve been that green,” he said. “People think: ‘oh well, it won’t shatter’, but they end up with lower oil content.”

“But the majority of people did a good job of windrowing.”

The Canola Council of Canada's website illustrates seed colour changes and the best time to windrow. See <http://www.canola-council.org/properstage.aspx>.

MANAGING FAILED CANOLA CROPS

The continuing dry combined with skyrocketing fodder prices have sent northern Victorian producers into a flurry of activity as many cereal and canola crops are being cut for hay or silage. And livestock owners are warned to take care when introducing canola to their sheep and cattle.



Cobram Topcrop agronomist with the Victorian Department of Primary Industries, Dale Grey, said that he was inundated with enquiries about making canola silage.

CUTTING HIS LOSSES: Natimuk canola grower, Michael Sudholz, centre, pictured with St Helen's Plains farmer Daryl Hill, left, and Toolondo farmer

“Mowers are going crazy here - we have growers cutting their whole acreage as well,” said Mr Grey.

Canola can produce good quality fodder which is a good source of fibre. But protein, digestibility and energy can vary considerably. The Victorian DPI FEEDTEST® service can conduct tests on samples of canola hay and silage products.

New South Wales DPI District Agronomist, Paul Parker has prepared information sheets to help canola growers and livestock producers make the most of failed canola crops.

He said that failed canola crops and canola hay and silage are all high quality feed which is readily eaten by stock in a drought and the incidence of problems is very low.

However, sickness and sudden death of livestock have sometimes been reported in previous years and care must be taken to minimise potential risks, he said.

“Given the large area of canola crops that have been fed to stock, either as a standing crop or as hay or silage, over the past 12 years there, has been a very low incidence of stock problem. Good management practices should continue this low level of problems,” he said.

Mr Parker said that the majority of problems investigated were more likely in stock which are introduced to the new feed with an empty gut.

Although nitrate poisoning and other toxins in canola could cause animal death, stock are more easily able to cope with these if they are allowed to adapt slowly to the new feed source.

“It is particularly important to ensure that they have at least a partial gut fill when introduced to the feed,” he said

The brittle nature of canola hay has also been reported as being the cause of a very small number of cattle deaths after puncturing their paunch.

“Hungry stock should never be put into the paddock of a failed canola crop,” said Mr Parker.

Mr Parker said that grazing should be initially restricted to short periods or offered alternative feeds in addition to canola. Supplementary feed should be offered.

Producers should consider introducing only a small number of stock to the new feed and observe them closely for a few days. If there are no problems, the rest of the mob or herd can be introduced, he said.



Mr Parker also said that canola growers cutting their crops must observe withholding periods for chemicals, and need to seriously consider the risk of soil erosion from bare paddocks.

MAKE HAY: Growers across Victoria are cutting canola crops for hay following a disastrous season.

For more information, contact Mr Dale Grey on (03) 5871 0600, or FEEDTEST® on (03) 5573 0900. To obtain a copy of

the information sheets, contact Paul Parker on (02) 6382 1077 or 0427 401 582 or Felicity Pritchard on 0427 600 228.
