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OILSEEDS NEWS

VAST MAJORITY OF CANOLA GROWERS WANT CHOICE ON GM: SURVEY TELLS



Steve Marcroft. PHOTO: Felicity Pritchard.

A newly-released report of a survey of Australian canola growers and advisors has revealed that more than 80 per cent would consider growing genetically modified canola to improve weed control and herbicide resistant weed management.

And it is believed that Australian canola production will increase dramatically if herbicide tolerant GM varieties replace the triazine tolerant

varieties, which are popular in Australia, but have low yield potential.

The startling result was revealed last week while the industry is in the process of reviewing State-based moratoria in the eastern States.

The report, undertaken by Inshgtrix on behalf of the Grains Research and Development Corporation and Australian Oilseeds Federation, stated that of the 142 growers and advisors interviewed –

comprising 85 per cent growers – more than 45 per cent said that they would seriously consider growing Roundup Ready® or Liberty Link (InVigor®) canola, if it was available. A further 37 per cent said they might consider growing it, while the remainder would not consider it.

The survey also revealed that more than 60 per cent of canola growers currently use varieties tolerant to the triazine herbicides, which naturally yield around 13 per cent less than conventional varieties.

The report also showed that the main reasons farmers grow canola is for its benefits in the crop rotation and also to control weeds and manage herbicide resistance.

Oilseeds Industry Development Officer, Felicity Pritchard, said that many growers have said they were interested in the GM varieties for the benefits they would bring in controlling difficult weeds and in giving them more options to rotate herbicide groups and use lower-risk herbicides to better manage herbicide resistant weeds.

Project coordinator, Steve Marcroft, said that he expects a major increase in canola production in Australia if the GM varieties replace the current triazine tolerant (TT) types.

“If most of the TT varieties currently grown were replaced with GM varieties, the industry should see a large increase in production,” he said.

Ms Pritchard said that many growers were unaware of the yield penalty of TT varieties, as these varieties were tested in separate trials under National Variety Testing. She also said that in many years, TT varieties are sown earlier than conventional types because of their better weed control options, which can compensate for the yield loss.

“The GM herbicide tolerant varieties do not have the inherent yield penalty that the TT varieties do, and can also be sown earlier, which means they can potentially yield more than the varieties that growers currently have access to in Australia”.

However, she said that it is likely that only very small quantities of seed will be available for sowing next year if the moratoria are lifted, and seed of InVigor® hybrid varieties will not be available in 2008.

Media enquiries about the survey: Steve Marcroft 0409 978 941.

IRRIGATORS ADVISED TO WATER CANOLA FIRST



CANOLA FIRST: Irrigated canola needs water earlier than cereals. PHOTO: Felicity Pritchard

Irrigators in southern New South Wales and northern Victoria have been advised to water their canola crops first to make the most of the season before the crop loses its potential, if they are intending to harvest the crop.

Coleambally District Agronomist, Kieran O’Keeffe, of the New South Wales Department of Primary Industries, said that the general rule is to water canola before other crops, if limited water is available.

“The critical stage for watering canola is earlier than cereals,” he said.

“The current rainfall forecasts aren’t looking too promising, so if crops are not watered, they can lose their potential. If

growers wait until water allocations go up, it may be too late to get a full yield response,” he said.

Growers who are fortunate enough to have water are once again faced with the difficult choices of watering their canola crops, irrigating other winter crops or selling their water. It is too early to make the decision to cut dryland canola crops for hay.

Coleambally grower Keith Burge said that he had sown 300 hectares of winter crop this season, 74 of which is canola.

“I’ve only got enough water for one irrigation, and I have to decide whether to use it on the barley or the canola,” he said.

“The canola is starting to flower and badly needs a drink. I only have enough water to water half of it, and the rest will have to go by the wayside,” he said.

“There’s not enough bulk in it at this stage to cut for hay”.

The most critical growth stage for water stress in canola is during flowering.

DPI irrigation officer, Rob Hoogers, said that water should go on four to seven days before the critical stage of crops.

“The first watering on long fallow, sod-sown (direct drilled) and pre-irrigated paddocks should take 0.8 to 1.5 megalitres per hectare, but on last year’s wheat paddocks with no subsoil moisture, this can take 2.5 megalitres per hectare or more,” he said.

“These crops need to be carefully assessed for yield potential before applying that much water. It may be a good move to give a second water to a better paddock of 0.8 megalitres per hectare.

“If it stays dry and the first watering is too late, the yield response will not justify using the water on that crop,” he said.

TAKING THE SAFF OPTION: RESURGENCE IN SAFFLOWER PLANTINGS

After a decade of low rainfall, safflower crops are coming back in vogue in southwest Victoria and along parts of the Murray River as growers make the most of the return to more normal seasonal conditions.

The resurgence of the industry is just in time for an international conference and grower workshop on safflower which will be held in November next year in Wagga Wagga.

In the mid 1990s, eight per cent of Wimmera wheat crops monitored as part of the Topcrop program followed a safflower crop. This was predominantly in the southern Wimmera. The run of dry seasons since that era has not favoured safflower.



RETURN OF THE SAFFLOWER: Growers in irrigation and high rainfall areas are returning to safflower following a wet autumn. PHOTO COURTESY Sue Knights.

Darren Scott, senior agronomist with Heinrichs Merchandise in Horsham, said that safflower will be sown in the southern Wimmera in cropping paddocks that were “washed out” early in the season.

“We’ve got stored moisture, so it should be a good opportunity to grow safflower. It helps split up the timing

of operations a bit and it’s good preparation for bringing pasture country back into crops. It helps dry the soil out and it’s cheap,” he said.

Mr Scott advised that growers ideally needed a full profile of subsoil moisture to successfully grow safflower.

“Between 1980 and 1995, we didn’t worry about subsoil moisture (in the southern Wimmera). The wheat yields were usually better after safflower because it was a disease break and dried out paddocks. But in dry seasons, we found that wheat was poorer after safflower.”

Kerang agronomic consultant, Rob Fisher said that a number of his clients will sow safflower this season, starting later this week between and around Kerang and Echuca in northern Victoria and southern New South Wales.

“I haven’t seen safflower grown around here in the last few years,” he said.

“A few of my clients’ paddocks got waterlogged early in the season. They had about 50 millimetres (of rain) at the start of the season and couldn’t get on to their paddocks for a while. They’ve got some stored moisture on the heavy soils in irrigation zones.”

Graeme Robertson, who farms near Douglas on the southern edge of the Wimmera, plans to sow 70 hectares of safflower in late September in a paddock he describes as “quite damp”. Yields of his safflower have averaged 1.5 tonnes per hectare and in past years, prices have ranged from \$240 to \$420 a tonne. Mr Robertson sells his safflower through local grain buyers for export to Japan as birdseed.

“Safflower grows best with subsoil moisture and not much rain during its season. If it gets a heap of rain after sowing, it doesn’t search for moisture,” he said.

Conference organiser, Sue Knights said that safflower is seen as an opportunity crop in Australia, often used for spring sowing if seasonal conditions are suitable.

“The later sowing of safflower also gives more time for weed control and can help spread sowing and harvesting workloads. Safflower’s deep roots and ability to extract water from deep in the soil profile allows reasonable yields even with little post-sowing rain and the crop helps reduce the build-up of cereal diseases,” she said.

The Seventh International Safflower Conference will be held 3-6 November 2008. For further information, contact Sue Knights on (03) 5382 5427 or go to www.australianoilseeds.com .

VIRTUAL CANOLA CROP

The Virtual canola crop is back this year, giving growers, marketers, students and agronomists a peak at the state of this season's canola.

Weekly photos are placed on the Australian Oilseeds Federation's website of a Wimmera canola crop, with details of the condition of the crop and the weather it has experienced. A Mallee site will soon be added to the website.



Oilseeds Industry Development Officer, Felicity Pritchard,

developed the idea last year to allow people involved in the industry to come closer to the season's canola through their computer monitors. It is particularly popular with grain marketers based in capital cities, she said.

"This year's crop was sown a month ahead of last year's, and the difference is like chalk and cheese," she said.

This year's crop is now at the yellowing bud stage with full ground cover, and looking very healthy. At the same time last year, the virtual canola crop near Horsham was at the early bud formation

stage with only about 50 per cent ground cover and the leaves were wilting and turning a shade of blue due to the drought.

To view the Virtual canola crop, look up http://www.australianoilseeds.com/agronomy_centre .
