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OILSEEDS NEWS

GROWERS GEAR UP FOR SOWING

Grain growers are preparing for winter crop sowing following steady rises in prices and opening rains in parts of Victoria, central west New South Wales and southeast South Australia.

April rainfall tallies for the cropping regions of Victoria ranged from 11 millimetres in Ouyen to 57 millimetres around Hamilton, where growers have welcomed the autumn break.



Canola's necessary: Chris Pendlebury is watching the weather before sowing 170 hectares of canola.

Western District grower Anthony Casanova said that he will start his cropping program with feed oats and canola around 10 May. He intends to sow 120 hectares of two canola varieties, following 25 millimetres in late April.

“I grow canola because it's worthwhile in its own right, and also for ryegrass control and to set the paddock up for the cereal rotation,” said Mr Casanova from his Westmere property, between Streatham and Lake Bolac.

Katamatite grower Chris Pendlebury will keep a close eye on the weather in the next two weeks before commencing sowing 170 hectares of canola, following 12 millimetres of rain on the last weekend in April.

“I don’t want to sow into half dry, half moist soil. If we have a two week dry stretch, I have no qualms about dry sowing,” said Mr Pendlebury.

With the exception of the 2002 drought, Mr Pendlebury has had good success with canola. Last year, his dryland crop of canola yielded 2.4 tonnes per hectare with 42 to 43 per cent oil following timely spring rains, despite a 10 June sowing .

His results have seen other local growers asking him for advice on canola growing. Mr Pendlebury has found crop nutrition one of the crucial keys to his success.

“Most times, I have a gross margin of \$500 a hectare. Last year, the gross margins for my cereals were just under \$500 a hectare,” he said.

And the better price this year is a further attraction for Mr Pendlebury: “I’m thinking about locking in a price for ten to 15 per cent of my crop. I don’t normally lock it in until I know that it has started to grow. It’s \$368 a tonne at Numurkah at the moment. That’s a good number.”

Mr Pendlebury firmly believes that canola has an important place in his rotation.

“Canola’s necessary in the rotation to grow a good cereal crop, and a cereal is essential to growing a good canola crop. Legumes are important as well.”

In the Wimmera, Wallup grower Rick McKenzie is waiting for another 25 millimetres of rain by the end of May before sowing a triazine tolerant variety of (TT) canola, after receiving 30 millimetres during April.

“I’ve never grown a TT before,” said Mr McKenzie. “I’m trying to clean up the paddocks a bit better. I’ve got a few broadleaf weeds, ryegrass and brome.”

Unlike many of his neighbours, Mr McKenzie has kept canola in his rotation.

“Canola’s a good break crop. You can’t keep growing the same thing all the time. Once you get it up and out of the ground, it’s a pretty tough plant – as long as you get a reasonable spring, and there’s no reason why you wouldn’t.”

Mr McKenzie is considering forward selling some of his canola crop during the season, spurred on by the fact that the current price of canola is about \$80 a tonne more than the price he received last harvest.

“I’ll wait until the crop’s flowering and then I’ll look at the price. I think I’ll have to get into a bit more forward selling this year,” said Mr McKenzie.

KANIVA FARMER WHO GROWS HIS OWN FUEL BECOMES SCIENCE AWARD FINALIST



Recognition: Steven Hobbs received a certificate from Geoff Howard for being a finalist in the major DPI Science Award.

A Kaniva farmer who uses his own canola crops to power his vehicles was recently recognised for his efforts and for being a finalist in the major annual Victorian DPI Science Award.

On Friday at Grains Innovation Park in Horsham, the Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Geoff Howard, presented a certificate to Steven Hobbs, who grows crops to produce bio-diesel fuel.

“Mr Hobbs has established a small scale processing operation that transforms vegetable oil into fuel with the same characteristics as conventional fossil diesel fuel but reduces emissions by up to 60 per cent,” Mr Howard said.

“Most importantly, the fuel is also renewable.”

“Given the problems of global warming and the fact that fossil fuel reserves are finite, the importance of this sort of innovation is obvious,” Mr Howard said.

Mr Hobbs said the concept of growing your own fuel was not new.

He said farmers in the early years would set aside 25 per cent of their own land to grow oats for their horses, the organic tractors of their times.

Mr Hobbs said he is currently building a plant to produce 300,000 litres of oil per year and will be sourcing canola from local growers. He is also looking at the potential of mustard seed as a biofuel with DPI Horsham researcher, Wayne Burton.

Mr Hobbs said that about eight per cent of his crop rotation is enough to supply his farm's entire energy needs.

He has been selling the canola meal to local feedlotter and also using some to add condition to his beef cattle. This year, Mr Hobbs is contemplating using the meal to grow lambs in a feedlot, potentially selling them for \$90 a head, rather than his current return of \$60 a head.

Mr Hobbs' work resulted in him being a finalist in this year's \$10,000 Hugh McKay Award.

For more information, contact Steven Hobbs on 0419 003 752.
