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OILSEEDS NEWS - MEDIA RELEASES

NOW IS TIME TO CHECK CANOLA FOR BLACKLEG DAMAGE



As windrowing time approaches, canola growers are being urged to spare a few moments to assess the severity of blackleg within their crops to reduce levels of the disease next season.

The timely reminder comes amid concerns from industry that growers may be considerably underestimating yield losses from blackleg and not taking the necessary precautions to keep disease levels down.

GEORGE BURDETT: Growers should monitor canola crops at windrowing for blackleg levels.
Photo: Felicity Pritchard.

Canola pathologist Steve Marcroft of Marcroft Grains Pathology said growers can monitor their crops immediately after windrowing by using secateurs to cut the base of plants collected randomly from the crop. A check of the crown (base) of the stem will quickly show whether the disease has caused a stem canker in the plant.

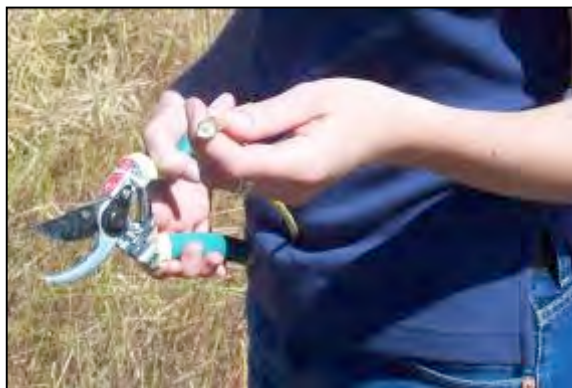
“Stem cankers are clearly visible at the crown of the plant,” said Dr Marcroft.



“Severe cankers may cause the plant to die or fall over as the stems become separated from their roots,” he said.

The disease is caused by a fungus which grows down the stem of a canola plant to its crown where it causes a canker. In severe infections, the plant is ringbarked and dies. In less severe infections, yield losses can still be significant as the plant struggles to draw water and nutrients

from the soil. The disease tends to be more severe with high rainfall.



DON'T IGNORE: Blackleg is easily monitored.

Photo: courtesy Vic

Understanding the level of disease in this year's crop will help growers confirm if the disease is significant on their farm and if they need to change management and adhere to industry recommendations in future years.

Grain grower George Burdett, from Willaura in the Victorian Western District said he learnt the hard way this year about the effect of blackleg on his canola and wanted to warn others to be vigilant.

One of his crops this season has suffered major yield loss from the disease, as a consequence of sowing it too close to a paddock which grew canola in 2008. Guidelines recommend sowing canola no closer than 500 metres from the previous year's canola stubble, as the disease spreads from stubble to newly emerged crops in autumn and winter.

“This year I got caught out by having it too close to a neighbour's canola stubble. I had heard of the 500 metre rule, but just ignored it. I've grown canola crops wall to wall in the



past but this is the first time I've been caught out. Once is one time too many," said Mr Burdett.

In regions like southwest Victoria, where the prevailing winds are from the west, blackleg is generally worse in crops sown within 500 metres of canola stubble located on the westerly side, as fungal spores are carried in rain droplets spread with the wind.

Mr Burdett said that he has always noticed his canola yields are lower on the northwest corner of his paddocks, the direction of the prevailing winds in his region.

"We always assumed it was due to the hot northwest winds, but on reflection, it could also be due to blackleg," he said.

Like most canola growers, Mr Burdett has not monitored his canola for blackleg at windrowing for many years.

"I will certainly be checking for blackleg levels at windrowing this year," he said.

Blackleg severity	Average yield loss
0-14%	0
15-44%	11%
45-74%	21%
75-100%	44%

According to a survey conducted on 75 crops in the Eyre Peninsula last year, 12 had average infection levels between 20 and 40 per cent, potentially costing around 7 to 14 per cent yield penalty. More than half of the 75 paddocks surveyed had internal blackleg infection levels below 10 per cent, and therefore unlikely to suffer a yield or oil content penalty.

Dr Marcroft said the best way to monitor crops for blackleg was to walk right across the paddock in a W-shape, randomly taking 100 plants and cutting the base of the plant to check the area of darkening within the stem. The blackleg severity is the average area (in percentage) of blackening of the internal stem.

For further details on blackleg management, refer to the Australian Blackleg Management Guide. The guides are available through Felicity Pritchard or Steve Marcroft on (03) 5362 2111 or under

http://www.australianoilseeds.com/___data/assets/pdf_file/0017/2744/BMguide.PDF.

Media enquiries: Steve Marcroft (03) 5362 2111.

WINDROW CANOLA AT THE RIGHT TIME

Canola growers will need to be assertive with windrowing contractors this season, following many reports of New South Wales crops being windrowed too early, stripping potential yield and oil content.

The message comes as a timely reminder to canola growers as windrowing time approaches.

Most windrowing is done by contractors who move from lower to higher rainfall regions and concerns are often raised that growers may agree to have their crops cut before they are ready.



Leigh Jenkins, District Agronomist at Warren with NSW Department of Industry and Investment said she had seen many crops in the Trangie, Gilgandra and Warren districts which have been windrowed when too green.



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.

On average, 40 to 60 per cent of seeds should show some colour change before windrowing. In low rainfall regions, the ideal level is closer to 60 per cent, as crops

RIGHT ON TIME: Windrowing canola too early costs oil content and grain yield.

Photo courtesy Victorian

have a shorter curing time.

The optimal time for windrowing is when the bottom third of pods contain brown to black seeds. The middle third of pods will have 80 per cent of seed green to greenish-red, with the remainder red-brown to light brown. Most seeds in the top third of pods will be green, but will be firm and pliable when rolled between the finger and thumb.

Ms Jenkins cautioned that pod colour could be deceptive, but the timing of windrowing should be determined by the colour of the seeds not the pods.

“If the seeds in the top pods are all green and still soft, it is too early,” she said.



Ms Jenkins said growers need to check crop maturity each day in the lead-up to windrowing.

“Checking each day not only helps growers ‘get their eye in’, but it also helps them see changes frequently. The closer to the windrowing date, the faster the crop tends to ripen,” she said.

Ms Jenkins said she checks seeds in the lowest pods first. The trick is that if you can’t peel open the bottom pod, it’s nowhere near ready.”

“If the bottom pods are brown-black and the middle pods are starting to turn (change colour), you’re in the right timeframe,” she said.

Ms Jenkins believed that new research was needed into time of windrowing modern canola varieties, which are different from the older types used in the research.
