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OILSEEDS NEWS - MEDIA RELEASES

EAGER GROWERS KEEN FOR EARLY START

Grain growers in south-eastern Australia are dusting off their seeders, and some are keen to get started as soon as they can, following excellent March and early April rains and good subsoil moisture in many areas. Canola is one of the first crops off the blocks, and agronomists have been inundated with calls requesting information on how early it can be sown.



But growers are advised to stick to the recommended sowing dates, unless they are planning to graze crops, where an early sowing date is preferred.

PROMISING: Daniel 'Bully' Keam will grow canola for the first time in 12 years on his northern Wimmera property following excellent rain.

Picture: Felicity Pritchard.

Better Oilseeds project coordinator, Felicity Pritchard, said in most canola growing regions in Victoria and New South Wales, the optimal sowing time is the last week of April, although slightly later in the Western District of Victoria. In South Australia, the third week of April is considered ideal.

Ms Pritchard said that canola can be sown up to a week earlier than these dates, but the risk is bulky crops more prone to lodging and a higher risk of frost damage during flowering and early pod fill.

However, CSIRO research has shown that early-sown canola grown in the high rainfall zone can be grazed for a short period around mid-June with little impact on the crop's yield or oil content. Grazing delays the development of the crop, reducing its bulkiness and its risk of frost damage, as well as providing a valuable feed source in winter.

If canola crops are to be grazed, they should be ideally sown three to four weeks earlier than normal, around early to mid April in southern New South Wales, according to CSIRO's John Kirkegaard.

Dr Kirkegaard said early-sown crops need to be managed carefully for insect pests.

Grazing canola in the medium to low rainfall zones carries more risk, with crops more likely to suffer yield penalties, he said.

Victorian Department of Primary Industries agronomist Dale Grey said the phones have been running hot with enquiries from growers itching to start sowing canola early following excellent rains in his region, as high as 261 millimetres for 2010 thus far at Corowa in New South Wales.

"Some paddocks in this area have excellent subsoil moisture and the rain has helped mineralise nitrogen which will be useful to canola and cereal crops this year," he said.

"The amount of moisture available depends on stubble cover and summer weed control," he said.

Mr Grey said some paddocks around Yarrowonga have between 25 and 30 mm of plant-available moisture in the top 50 centimetres of soil.

The DPI's Deanne Price said soil test results in the Victorian Wimmera last month were showing that some paddocks growing crops last year had no moisture available to plants this season. However, paddocks around Minyip which were fallowed last winter had 63 to 67 mm of plant-available moisture in the top 60 cm of soil.

According to Incitec Pivot's Technical and Development Manager Charlie Walker, there is an enormous range in moisture and nitrogen levels in soils in Victoria, even within the same region.

Ms Pritchard said that every 10 mm of plant-available subsoil moisture may translate into at least 150 kilograms per hectare of canola grain in medium rainfall environments.

“Canola is a good choice for a paddock with 65 mm of subsoil moisture in the medium rainfall zone. It has the potential to lift the yield by one tonne per hectare. It takes away so much of the production risk,” she said.

“High levels of available nitrogen in some paddocks following the rain also remove some of the costs associated with growing canola,” she said.

Grain grower, Daniel ‘Bully’ Keam, from Wallup in Victoria’s northern Wimmera is having a go at canola for the first time in about 12 years following good summer and autumn rain. He will grow an open-pollinated Clearfield variety on a long-fallowed paddock.

Mr Keam said he is primarily growing the crop for its weed control and disease break benefits to future crops in the paddock, but is very hopeful of making a profit from it this season.

KEEP AN EYE ON SULPHUR IN CANOLA FOR 2010

A leading plant nutrition expert is reminding growers not to overlook sulphur requirements of their canola crops this season.

“While most growers would have planned to meet the nitrogen demand for their canola, sulphur is often overlooked as a critical nutrient for this crop,” said Rob Norton, International Plant Nutrition Institute Regional Director, based in Horsham, Victoria.

“With a good start to the 2010 season and some stored water in the soil profile, it is likely that canola will feature on the cropping program of grain producers again.

“Sulphur deficiency has become more common now that single superphosphate, with 11 per cent sulphur, is rarely used,” Dr Norton said.

Canola has a high sulphur demand, so it will show up this deficiency first, he said.

Wheat removes about 1.5 kilograms of sulphur in every tonne of grain, while canola removes around seven times as much. Symptoms include yellowing of leaves while veins remain pale green, and reddening under the leaves. Flowers are pale rather than bright yellow.

Dr Norton said high rates of nitrogen will also induce a sulphur deficiency as the sulphur is often the next most limiting nutrient. In Canada, growers use seven times as much nitrogen than sulphur as a guide to balanced fertiliser use.

Growers who have had soil tests can check the 'KCl-40' value, and if this is less than about 12 parts per million, then additional sulphur should be considered, he advised.

“At these soil test levels, sulphur should be applied to at least balance the expected removal of sulphur in grain,” Dr Norton said.

Sulphur exists in at least two fertiliser forms – elemental sulphur and sulphate-sulphur. Elemental sulphur must be converted to sulphate-sulphur for plant uptake, but this process can be slow and at least some sulphur should be applied as sulphate.

Several products can be used to meet sulphate requirements, such as ammonium sulphate, sulphur-fortified urea, sulphur-fortified MAP, superphosphate and gypsum.

“In experiments in the Victorian Mallee and Wimmera last year, good quality gypsum was less effective than ammonium sulphate on canola. This may be due to either the placement of the nutrients or the acidifying effect of ammonium sulphate on the soil, or both,” said Dr Norton.

Topdressing during vegetative growth with sulphate-sulphur can also be effective in meeting sulphur demand by the crop.

For more information see <http://anz.ipni.net/articles/ANZ0016-EN>



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