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OILSEEDS NEWS - MEDIA RELEASES

DON'T RACE INTO CANOLA UNLESS GRAZING (WA)

Grain growers in Western Australia are dusting off their seeders, following excellent rains in some regions. Canola is one of the first crops off the blocks, and agronomists have been fielding requests for 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 earlier sowing date is preferred.

Department of Agriculture and Food Western Australia agronomist Mohammad Amjad advised growers to not sow canola before Anzac Day, unless the crops are intended for grazing.

“Some growers began planting late maturing canola varieties before Easter, with the plan to graze them to delay flowering and take advantage of the crop for winter feed,” he said.

He said for most areas, Anzac Day is the ideal sowing date for canola in Western Australia. Early maturing varieties should not be sown early and late maturing varieties should not be sown late, he warned.

On the flipside, sowing of canola beyond the optimal date increases the risk of crops maturing under increasingly hot and dry conditions, and generally leads to lower yields and oil content. The yield penalty from sowing late can be very high in seasons with dry springs.

Rainfall has been patchy across the state, but the southwest part of the State had received excellent falls, with highest autumn rain recordings of 107 millimetres of in Albany and 96mm at Narrogin.

Late April and early May sowings are ideal for early to mid maturing varieties in the northern region, according to Geraldton-based consulting agronomist, Grant Thompson, director of Crop Circle Consulting.

He said if canola crops were sown in the northern region before mid April, they are likely to race into flowering. This is due to warm April weather hastening the crop’s development.

“Also, if planted too early, our crops can sometimes suffer from transient heat and moisture stress in April or early May until the true breaking rains occur, leaving us open to diamondback moth and weed web moth attack,” Mr Thompson said.

Better Oilseeds project coordinator, Felicity Pritchard, said very early sown canola is at 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. The 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.

Research in the eastern states has found canola crops are to be grazed, they should be ideally sown three to four weeks earlier than normal, according to CSIRO’s John Kirkegaard.

Dr Kirkegaard said early-sown crops need to 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.

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