



**FELICITY PRITCHARD**  
Oilseed Industry Development Officer –  
Victoria and southern New South Wales  
Irrigated Cropping Forum  
Grains Innovation Park  
110 Natimuk Road, Horsham, Vic 3401  
Ph: (03) 5382 4396 or 0427 600 228

Thursday, 16 August 2007  
No. 34

## OILSEEDS NEWS

### TAKING THE SAFF OPTION: RESURGENCE IN SAFFLOWER PLANTINGS



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

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.

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](http://www.australianoilseeds.com) .

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