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OILSEEDS NEWS

MANAGING FAILED CANOLA CROPS

The continuing dry combined with skyrocketing fodder prices have sent northern Victorian producers into a flurry of activity as many cereal and canola crops are being cut for hay or silage. And livestock owners are warned to take care when introducing canola to their sheep and cattle.

Cobram Topcrop agronomist with the Victorian Department of Primary Industries, Dale Grey, said that he was inundated with enquiries about making canola silage.



CUTTING HIS LOSSES: Natimuk canola grower, Michael Sudholz, centre, pictured with St Helen's Plains farmer Daryl Hill, left, and Toolondo farmer Jamie Hausler, has cut his 130 hectare canola crop for hay and is considering cutting another 100 hectares.

“Mowers are going crazy here - we have growers cutting their whole acreage as well,” said Mr Grey.

Canola can produce good quality fodder which is a good source of fibre. But protein, digestibility and energy can vary considerably. The Victorian DPI FEEDTEST® service can conduct tests on samples of canola hay and silage products.

New South Wales DPI District Agronomist, Paul Parker has prepared information sheets to help canola growers and livestock producers make the most of failed canola crops.

He said that failed canola crops and canola hay and silage are all high quality feed which is readily eaten by stock in a drought and the incidence of problems is very low.

However, sickness and sudden death of livestock have sometimes been reported in previous years and care must be taken to minimise potential risks, he said.

“Given the large area of canola crops that have been fed to stock, either as a standing crop or as hay or silage, over the past 12 years there, has been a very low incidence of stock problem. Good management practices should continue this low level of problems,” he said.

Mr Parker said that the majority of problems investigated were more likely in stock which are introduced to the new feed with an empty gut.

Although nitrate poisoning and other toxins in canola could cause animal death, stock are more easily able to cope with these if they are allowed to adapt slowly to the new feed source.

“It is particularly important to ensure that they have at least a partial gut fill when introduced to the feed,” he said

The brittle nature of canola hay has also been reported as being the cause of a very small number of cattle deaths after puncturing their paunch.

“Hungry stock should never be put into the paddock of a failed canola crop,” said Mr Parker.

Mr Parker said that grazing should be initially restricted to short periods or offered alternative feeds in addition to canola. Supplementary feed should be offered.

Producers should consider introducing only a small number of stock to the new feed and observe them closely for a few days. If there are no problems, the rest of the mob or herd can be introduced, he said.



MAKE HAY: Growers across Victoria are cutting canola crops for hay following a disastrous season.

Mr Parker also said that canola growers cutting their crops must observe withholding periods for chemicals, and need to seriously consider the risk of soil erosion from bare paddocks.

For more information, contact Mr Dale Grey on (03) 5871 0600, or FEEDTEST® on (03) 5573 0900. To obtain a copy of the information sheets, contact

Paul Parker on (02) 6382 1077 or 0427 401 582 or Felicity Pritchard on 0427 600 228.
