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Wednesday, 02 May 2007
No. 31

OILSEEDS NEWS

CANOLA COMEBACK

Widespread rainfall across southern Australia last weekend has initiated a flurry of activity across many parts, with canola sowing already underway.

Many growers are making the most of the timely break to use the opportunity to return canola into their rotations.



PERFECT TIMING: Mark Jasper is sowing 80 hectares of canola today at the Longerenong College farm.

In the Victorian Wimmera, growers have taken advantage of ideal conditions for growing canola in paddocks where there is a good level of subsoil moisture - some returning to the crop for the first time in years.

Longerenong College Farm Manager, Mark Jasper, who sowed 80 hectares today, said that this was his first opportunity to sow canola early in many years, following 70 millimetres (mm) of rainfall on the weekend.

The decision to sow canola was due to the extremely high levels of nitrogen in the soil (following summer rains on vetch stubble) which would drastically cut fertiliser costs - and 71 mm of plant-available subsoil moisture, potentially providing an extra 1.05 tonnes per hectare in grain yield.

In the northern Wimmera, Tarranyurk grower Roy Rogers is re-introducing canola into his cropping program for the first time in three years to take advantage of the optimum conditions for canola.

“It’s just the perfect setup really,” he said, adding that he will sow 80 hectares of a Clearfield variety this afternoon.

He said that canola will give him the opportunity to address a grass weed problem that had been developing in recent years with his tighter cereal and vetch rotation.

In the Victorian Mallee, senior agronomist with the Victorian Department of Primary Industries, Rob Sonogan said that many growers had made the decision in the last few days to sow one or two paddocks of canola, following excellent rainfall events in February and again last weekend.

“Most Mallee farms have had at least two inches (50 mm) of rain, with as much as three to four inches in areas like Walpeup and Underbool, on top of a full (soil) profile of moisture.”

He said that good summer rains had lifted the levels of plant-available soil nitrogen, meaning fertiliser costs will be significantly reduced. The rains also allowed for good weed control.

But Mr Sonogan warned Mallee growers against cultivating for weed control this year, as the wet soil would allow weeds to “relocate”, or re-grow, which has not been an issue in recent dry seasons.

In central Victoria, the area of canola is expected to rise by 40 per cent compared with the low base of last year following 25 to 30 mm rain, according to Greg Toomey, senior agronomist with Landmark at Elmore.

Mr Toomey said that all growers who planned to sow canola are doing so, along with many “speculators”.

“It’s put pressure on our seed stocks,” Mr Toomey said.

He said that his clients were confident in sowing canola this season, despite no subsoil moisture, following the recent perfectly-timed rain.

“It’s the start of May, when you should be sowing canola, the seasonal outlook is good, the price is good, and Elmore’s rainfall is generally pretty reliable.”

Mr Toomey added that last year’s experience gave central Victorian growers more confidence to sow canola, in the knowledge that they could cut the crop for hay or silage if it produced sufficient biomass but lacked potential yield.

But west of Geelong in the “high rainfall zone” of the Western District, only 15 to 25 mm fell on bone dry paddocks, and most growers are waiting for follow-up rain before bringing their seeders out of the shed, according to Williams and Jackson agronomist, Eoin Flett. Mr Flett believes that the area of canola will probably be down this year in his region.

Further west near Hamilton, rainfall totals of 40 to 50 mm have allowed many growers to start sowing, but there is no urgency to sow canola in early May, according to Victorian DPI agronomist Steve Holden.

In southern New South Wales, Elders agronomist Andrew Barber, based in Wagga Wagga said that all tentative canola seed orders have been confirmed in recent days, following 20 to 50 mm rain.

“The major reason people are sowing canola around here this year is that most are backed into a corner with their rotations - and the price is over \$400 a tonne.”

However, dry subsoils mean that follow-up rain will soon be needed.

He said that the last three years have not favoured canola in southern New South Wales, with either late breaks of the season or poor prices cutting canola from many growers’ cropping program.

“But this year the confidence in canola is there,” he said.
