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OILSEEDS NEWS

CUTTING THE RISKS OF GROWING CANOLA

Canola need not be a financially risky crop for growers, according to industry figures which say that some production costs can be cut or delayed until growers have a better picture of the crop's potential yield.

Oilseed Industry Development Officer, Felicity Pritchard, said the biggest opportunity to reduce financial risk was by holding off some of the nitrogen fertiliser. And new research in Victoria and South Australia will put this to the test this season.

“Fertiliser costs around \$75 a hectare for canola in the Victorian Wimmera - and nitrogen fertiliser is the single biggest cost to canola growers,” she said.

“Research has found that there is usually no penalty for splitting nitrogen fertiliser applications, provided there are reasonable levels of nitrogen in the soil at the start of the season,” she said.

“By applying only starter nitrogen at sowing, growers have the time to reassess the need for additional nitrogen later - before stem elongation - when they have a better idea of how the season is shaping up and a more accurate estimate of potential yield”.

Horsham-based agricultural consultant John Robertson of AGwise Services said that he has recommended to his growers to split nitrogen fertiliser applications for the past three seasons.

Last year, this saved his clients around \$36 a hectare, as they opted to not topdress.

At this year's Grains Research and Development Corporation Update in Bendigo, advisors heard that many growers felt reluctant to split the nitrogen application for canola.

The Birchip Cropping Group will conduct a trial this year at Longerenong and Birchip to compare the profitability of applying urea by pre-drilling compared with split applications and also no nitrogen fertiliser.

Trials in South Australia will also assess the effect of timing of nitrogen applications on canola as part of the national "Better Canola" project, funded by the Grains Research and Development Corporation and the Australian Oilseeds Federation.

Ms Pritchard said that for some growers there will be opportunities for reducing other up-front costs such as sowing rates, phosphorus and sulphur fertiliser rates and seed dressings. But this needs to be assessed on a paddock-by-paddock basis, she said.

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