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OILSEEDS NEWS

VAST MAJORITY OF CANOLA GROWERS WANT CHOICE ON GM: SURVEY TELLS



Steve Marcroft. PHOTO: Felicity Pritchard.

A newly-released report of a survey of Australian canola growers and advisors has revealed that more than 80 per cent would consider growing genetically modified canola to improve weed control and herbicide resistant weed management.

And it is believed that Australian canola production will increase dramatically if herbicide tolerant GM varieties replace the triazine tolerant

varieties, which are popular in Australia, but have low yield potential.

The startling result was revealed last week while the industry is in the process of reviewing State-based moratoria in the eastern States.

The report, undertaken by Inshtrix on behalf of the Grains Research and Development Corporation and Australian Oilseeds Federation, stated that of the 142 growers and advisors interviewed –

comprising 85 per cent growers – more than 45 per cent said that they would seriously consider growing Roundup Ready® or Liberty Link (InVigor®) canola, if it was available. A further 37 per cent said they might consider growing it, while the remainder would not consider it.

The survey also revealed that more than 60 per cent of canola growers currently use varieties tolerant to the triazine herbicides, which naturally yield around 13 per cent less than conventional varieties.

The report also showed that the main reasons farmers grow canola is for its benefits in the crop rotation and also to control weeds and manage herbicide resistance.

Oilseeds Industry Development Officer, Felicity Pritchard, said that many growers have said they were interested in the GM varieties for the benefits they would bring in controlling difficult weeds and in giving them more options to rotate herbicide groups and use lower-risk herbicides to better manage herbicide resistant weeds.

Project coordinator, Steve Marcroft, said that he expects a major increase in canola production in Australia if the GM varieties replace the current triazine tolerant (TT) types.

“If most of the TT varieties currently grown were replaced with GM varieties, the industry should see a large increase in production,” he said.

Ms Pritchard said that many growers were unaware of the yield penalty of TT varieties, as these varieties were tested in separate trials under National Variety Testing. She also said that in many years, TT varieties are sown earlier than conventional types because of their better weed control options, which can compensate for the yield loss.

“The GM herbicide tolerant varieties do not have the inherent yield penalty that the TT varieties do, and can also be sown earlier, which means they can potentially yield more than the varieties that growers currently have access to in Australia”.

However, she said that it is likely that only very small quantities of seed will be available for sowing next year if the moratoria are lifted, and seed of InVigor® hybrid varieties will not be available in 2008.

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