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OILSEEDS NEWS

RETAINING SEED MAY BE FALSE ECONOMY

The use of farmer-retained seed for canola is on the rise, according to industry players, who have warned that potential losses in yield and quality are not compensated for by the cost-savings on seed.

Oilseed Industry Development Officer, Felicity Pritchard, said she has received reports of an increasing number of growers opting to use seed from their own canola crops, despite research showing the potential for big yield and financial losses.

She said that if growers sowed retained canola seed, it should be only one generation away from certified seed, and should be laboratory-tested for germination before sowing. If the retained seed is of poor quality, it should not be used for sowing, she said.

A yield loss of less than 0.1 tonne per hectare would be more costly than buying in retained seed in most cases, Ms Pritchard said.

Research undertaken by Victorian and South Australian agriculture departments in the late 1990s led by Dr Steve Marcroft, demonstrated an average 12 per cent yield decline with retained seed, and in one case, complete crop failure. Canadian research also came up with similar results.

In favourable seasons, canola can compensate for poorer seedling emergence most of the time. But the research showed in years or locations with drier finishes to the season, canola crops grown with certified seed yielded an average 12 per cent more than farmer-retained seed, when the retained seed was of poorer quality.

The research found that yields ranged from a mere 0.1 up to 1.2 tonnes per hectare for farmer-retained seed, compared with a more consistent 1.0 to 1.2 tonnes per hectare for certified seed.

This range in yields for retained seed would cost a grower \$396 a hectare, assuming today's price of \$360 a tonne, and well and truly outweighs the cost of buying new seed.

“When considering retaining seed, farmers should be aware of the costs associated with germination testing, grading, storage, and potential weed problems. Farmers should never retain seed from a crop which was planted from retained seed due to potential changes in the variety's characteristics,” the research authors stated.

“Canola is a crop which both self-pollinates and outcrosses (fertilised by other plants). As a result of outcrossing of individual plants with different characteristics, the characteristics of a variety can drift slightly from one generation to the next.

In most instances, the characteristics for which the variety was originally selected tend to regress, while the undesirable characteristics tend to become more prominent.”
