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OILSEEDS NEWS

HIGH RAINFALL GROWERS EMBRACE CANOLA IN 2007



ADVANTAGE CANOLA: Hamilton DPI agronomist Steve Holden encourages growers to manage blackleg as high-rainfall croppers embrace canola this year to take advantage of buoyant prices.

Canola plantings around Hamilton in the high rainfall cropping area of the Western District of Victoria are expected to increase by around 20% in response to buoyant prices and subsoil moisture following good January rains, according to agronomists.

Elders Hamilton agronomist Bryce Hedlan said that all of his cropping clients agreed to sow more canola this year.

“Most are thinking that there will be more cereals sown this year (in other regions), so they’re steering towards canola, as this is a safer area (than areas with lower rainfall),” he said.

Australian canola prices are currently about \$90 above the 10-year average, largely due to the drought. But the medium and long-term outlook is also positive, due to the global demand for biofuels,

Grower Graham Rentsch from Byaduk, 23 kilometres south of Hamilton, said that canola is an important crop in his rotation.

“It’s a break crop in the rotation and when the price is over \$400 a tonne, canola becomes a viable option,” he said.

Mr Rentsch’s canola grain yields averaged 1.8 tonnes per hectare last year, with the best parts of the paddock yielding up to three tonnes per hectare.

Hamilton DPI agronomist Steve Holden warned that growers in the area need to select canola varieties with good resistance to the disease blackleg, and to isolate this year’s crop from last year’s stubble by at least 500 metres.

Where blackleg has caused yield loss in the past, a fungicide seed dressing or with a fertiliser application may be a worthwhile investment, he said.

Last year canola proved to be a handy dual-purpose crop in a drought. Despite crops suffering from devastating frosts in late October, Western District growers were pleased with the profitability of canola when cut for hay last year.

Mr Holden said that last year hay crops were more profitable than grain crops in the district.

“Many crops in the Hamilton area yielded around seven to eight tonnes per hectare of hay and sold for around \$200 a tonne last year, giving a gross return of \$1400 to \$1600 a hectare.”

STATE GOVERNMENT DROUGHT RECOVERY PROGRAM SOON TO BE RELEASED



PLANNING TO RECOVER: Horsham DPI project development manager, Carl Sudholz, test his wares with industry representatives before the release of a farm budgeting computer program for drought recovery.

The Victorian Department of Primary Industries (DPI) is currently developing and testing a new computer program to enable farmers across Victoria to better manage their costs of production, planning, budgeting and recovery from drought.

The yet-to-be named program allows grain and sheep farmers to complete an entire 12 month plan and budget without any need for records or receipts.

The development of the program is a result of the Victorian Government's current drought relief initiatives.

DPI'S project development manager Carl Sudholz said the program was developed through funding provided by the State Government Drought Initiative announced in October.

“The program will require only very basic computer knowledge from landholders, who can use it to calculate the costs of production, profit margins and analyse the effect of climate variability on their business,” Mr Sudholz said.

The program is designed for crop, pasture and sheep production or a mixture of these. Users simply enter what they do in their farm management and the program does the rest.

“Common agricultural products can be selected from lists that are relevant to particular farming operations and inputs, with the user having the ability to add products and change costs. The program can be used on an individual basis to suit each farmer’s needs,” said Mr Sudholz.

A five-year business analysis based on decile rainfall averages for growing regions around Victoria and yield estimation based on water use efficiency are further features of the program.

The program will undergo further testing through workshops to be held around the state in February before its public release.

If you would be interested in being involved in upcoming workshops or trialling the program please contact the Department of Primary Industries, Horsham on (03) 5362 2111.
