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OILSEEDS NEWS

CANOLA HAY LIFTS GROWERS' CONFIDENCE



One of the upshots of the drought is the development of a whole new market for canola hay. This has given growers more confidence to sow canola in the knowledge that they should be able receive an income from it even if the season is poor.

And the response of dairy farmers to canola hay has been generally very positive with canola hay being classed as one of the best value-for-money feeds available.

OPTIONS: Canola hay has lifted the confidence of grain growers to sow canola this season.

Wimmera-based consultant, Brooke Thompson of CropFacts said that growers who cut their

canola for hay last year, “did very well”.

“They’re pretty happy with it. Everyone’s quite keen to have the back-up option of canola hay if it’s a dry spring,” she said.

Field Services Manager, Adriana Robaina, with the Warrnambool Cheese and Butter Factory said that she had received a good response to canola hay.

“Dairy farmers in this area have bought canola hay for the first time and the response has been quite positive, and the feedback from all my staff has been positive too,” she said.

“Some canola hay had 18 to 20 pc protein, which is the same as lucerne hay, but \$150 a tonne cheaper.”

Ms Robaina said that in a normal year, lucerne would be preferable, but canola hay could still have a place if priced low enough in comparison.

She said that like all hay and silage, canola hay quality varied last year.

“Most has been really high quality, although some has been not so good, so we’ve encouraged farmers to use FEEDTEST or ask the grower questions about how the crop was managed.”

“Initially we had some concerns about stock poisoning from using canola hay. But we now know that it can be safe if we follow the guidelines.”

Ms Robaina believed that canola growers would benefit from more technical information on how to best manage canola crops for hay.

This issue is likely to be addressed in a proposed series of trials across Victoria this year, coordinated by Horsham consultant, Dr Steve Marcroft, as part of the National

Oilseed Agronomy Project. The project is funded by the Australian Oilseeds Federation and the Grains Research and Development Corporation.

Ms Robaina said that canola cut in early spring and conditioned was usually good quality, whereas crops that had been cut late and baled without conditioning were more variable.

Echuca DPI dairy officer, Brett Robertson said that most reports he had heard were positive.

“People are putting canola hay in feed mixes and are having fairly good results,” he said.

However, he said that some canola crops were cut too late or too low, which resulted in dirty hay with little leaf matter. He also said that canola hay that had been conditioned was the best, and hay from frosted crops in the Western District appeared to be better quality than hay cut in other areas.

“If it’s dry again, the demand will be there for canola hay,” he said.
