

CROPPING



CANOLA TRIAL: Koonunga farmer Brett Nietschke and SARDI's Trent Potter at the Mid North High Rainfall Zone canola trial. Inset: There are a number of steps farmers can take to maximise the production of their canola crops.

Crop prospects up after recent rains

RECENT, much-needed rainfall over much of Australia has provided a necessary top-up to soil moisture, and is providing growing confidence in forecasted canola yields, according to the latest Australian Oilseeds Federation crop report.

While frost has had some adverse impact – with some crops in the South Australia's Mid North even having a dusting of snow – there is now risk to the crops from warm weather.

With seed filling under way in most districts, cooler conditions in the coming weeks will ensure optimal oil and fatty acid formation.

In SA – like New South Wales and Victoria – growers welcomed rain in the past few weeks, with up to 25 millimetres falling in the Mid North and more than 25mm in the South East and on Eyre Peninsula.

Frosts have been an issue in the Mallee and Upper SE, with the impact unknown at this stage.

Only low levels of insect damage have been reported.

Internationally, with the United States Department of Agriculture latest report indicating a surprise lift in US soybean estimates, there has been a consequent softening of prices.

The boost in US production, of 6.2 million tonnes, helped boost overall global production forecasts by 4.6mt from the previous month.

Closing stocks are also expected to rise, however stocks will remain tight until the South American crop is harvested.

And this will be to the detriment of prices in the coming months. Despite delayed planting because of excess rain, the prospect of an El Nino event (wetter conditions) over the growing season has eased, and at this stage the outlook is for an average season.

Canadian and Australian canola crop downward revisions in recent months have also put pressure on canola stocks, with projections for the lowest canola supplies in four years.

Any increase in price, combined with expected better production in the EU, could reduce European demand for Australian canola.

The national 2012-2013 canola crop estimate is for 2.735mt, from 2.245mha. This compares with 3.185mt from 1.815mha last season.

In SA, the estimate is for 413,500t of canola to be produced from 295,000ha. This is slightly down on last year's production of 455,000t from 255,000ha.

Despite a tough season, Western Australia is still expected to be the nation's biggest producer, with estimates at 860,500t from an area of 906,000ha.

CONTAIN BLACKLEG

Researcher backs post-windrowing strategies to limit yield loss

By PAULA THOMPSON

THE start of canola windrowing across South Australia presents the perfect opportunity for growers to get into the paddock and check blackleg levels.

This was one of the key messages from SARDI researcher Trent Potter at the recent Mid North High Rainfall Zone annual crop walk, attended by close to 200 people.

"I'm really keen to see farmers get out, cut crops at windrowing and have a look to see how bad or good the blackleg levels are on their farm," he said.

Mr Potter recommended that, immediately after windrowing, farmers ideally pull-up 50 stalks randomly, cut off the roots and estimate the amount of disease in the stem cross-section.

A dark-coloured stem is a symptom on blackleg.

Yield loss occurs when more than half of the cross-section is discoloured.

While blackleg can cause severe yield loss of up to 50 per cent, it is a disease that

5 Critical Factors

- 1 Monitoring crucial for best yields
- 2 Choose cultivars carefully
- 3 Never sow into last year's canola stubble
- 4 Try not to rely on fungicides
- 5 Determine farm's blackleg risk

can be successfully managed.

"If you have a lot of plants with blackleg, you know you've got to change your crop management," Mr Potter said.

"You should be looking at varieties that have got high levels of resistance. You also need to look at how far the crop is from last year's canola stubbles. If the crop is located 500 metres or more away from last year's stubble, you're reducing the risk of blackleg."

Variety selection is a key tool to avoid blackleg.

The higher the incidence of growing the same varieties, the higher the likelihood of blackleg.

All canola cultivars have been placed into groups - ranging from A to G - based on their resistance.

By rotating resistance groups, growers can avoid resistance breakdown and reduce disease severity.

"If, for instance, you're growing a Group D cultivar and cutting plants and finding issues with blackleg, if you swap to a different group then you'll have a good chance of growing that group very successfully," Mr Potter said.

Mr Potter said rainfall could be a gauge of the risk of blackleg.

"The higher the rainfall, the higher the risk of blackleg, particularly with rain over autumn," he said.

Mr Potter recommended growers obtain a copy of the new GRDC blackleg management guide fact sheet. New blackleg ratings and resistance groups would be released through the GRDC early next

year.

Mr Potter said one of the most important steps farmers could take to get the most out of their canola was avoiding fertiliser burn.

"You really need to keep fertiliser away from the seeding row," he said.

"Particularly with costs of hybrid seed up to \$25 a kilogram, it's a shame to waste any seed."

Mr Potter said the pest landscape had changed in recent years.

"You've got millipedes, earth mites and slugs all having a go at canola crops," he said.

"Ten years ago, it was only red legged earth mites farmers needed to worry about.

"It's so important that after spraying, farmers go back and check their crops, to see if there's any pests still there."

Mr Potter recommended farmers 'baby' their canola crops out of the ground, taking any extra steps necessary to ensure top crops.

"Once canola is out of the ground, it's 80pc there," he said.

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