

GM canola to secure canola's place in growers' rotations

Even though canola has been a steady staple in the rotation of many growers' winter crop cycles, its ranking has fallen in recent years due to poor seasonal conditions, fluctuating market prices and in some areas, weed management issues.

If early reaction from the 110 growers in Victoria and New South Wales who planted commercial varieties of Roundup Ready canola is anything to go by, it may soon start reinvigorating interest by many others to plant more canola.

Growers pleased

Geoff Rethus, a Horsham-based farmer of 30 years in Victoria's Wimmera, planted about 130 hectares of GT61, a Roundup Ready variety developed by Nuseed, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Nufarm Australia, in mid-May. "I've been very pleased with the crop's performance. Without gaining access to this technology, it's unlikely I would have continued to plant much canola in years ahead," Geoff explained.

Andrew Weidemann, another farmer based in nearby Rupanyup, echoed Geoff's sentiments. "GM canola gives growers a choice of superior weed control technology reducing the reliance on soil residual herbicides which will make canola production a more important rotational crop and hopefully increase the area sown to canola in the future," he said.

"It also allows farmers to be more com-

petitive for crop production with other major exporting countries."

The percentage of GM crops planted in Canada now exceeds 85 per cent of the country's total amount sown each year.

"Recent studies of Canadian growers report that more than 75 per cent said their paddocks were cleaner the following year and approximately the same percentage said they used Roundup Ready varieties because they're easier and more convenient than non-GM varieties," said Lachie McKinnon, General Manager-Australasia for Nufarm Australia.

"The Canola Council of Canada released a report stating growers plan to double national production of canola from seven million tonnes a year to 15 million tonnes by 2015. This goal speaks volumes about what most Canadian canola growers think of GM technology," he said.

Reduced tillage

Tony May, Canola Business Lead for Monsanto, owner of the Roundup Ready technology trait, said there are also several studies from overseas which report that this technology is conducive to reduced tillage techniques, cuts pesticide usage and leads to significant decreases in greenhouse gas emissions.

Approximately 100 growers in Victoria and New South Wales planted, on average, 80 to 100 hectares each of a Round-

up Ready variety from either Nuseed, Pacific Seeds or Pioneer Hi-Bred, following a rigorous accreditation program run by Monsanto.

Industry experts say this amount, which will cover the equivalent of about 10,000 hectares in the two states, will total approximately one per cent of the overall amount of canola grown in Australia during 2008.

In fact, many observers say that Roundup Ready canola is following in the footsteps of the very successful GM cotton that growers have been using in Australia for more than 10 years.

"Cotton biotechnology has seen not only improved returns to growers, but in environmental benefits such as in reduced soil degradation and reduction in pesticide use," Tony said.

"The Roundup Ready canola system offers better yield potential than other systems and gives growers early season control of a broad spectrum of weeds and the option of using an economical second application for multiple weed flushes," he added.

"The true key to Roundup Ready's long-term success, however, is a combination of the investment and expertise of three leading seed companies – Nuseed, Pioneer and Pacific Seeds – each focussed on developing better varieties for Australian growers," Tony concluded. ■



Geoff Rethus on the right examining his crop with Danielle Moore, a Territory Manager for Nufarm Australia.



GM technology cuts pesticide use.