

# Roadside canola won't go wild

Canola is a poor competitor with established roadside plants and is unlikely to develop wild populations, four years of research has shown. And other research has shown that concerns of roadside canola crossing with other canola plants are unfounded.

The University of Melbourne surveyed more than 200 km of Wimmera and southern Mallee roadsides in 2002, 2003, 2004 and 2006, and found low densities of canola every year. But in most cases there was no correlation between population location and density from one year to the next.

Agronomy lecturer, Dr Rob Norton, said: "Canola is not a roadside weed that persists. The plants you see come from seeds dropped during transport, establish, grow, possibly set seed, but don't persist with new generations."

"The Office of the Gene Technology Regulator in its risk assessment of GM canola recognised that canola is a poor competitor with established plants. Roadside canola can be controlled in the normal way by slashing, grading and with different herbicides," he said.

"Every year we do the survey, the results essentially come up the same."

Rob and his students recorded the numbers of canola plants along every single kilometre of road and found that where the populations peaked in one year, this generally did not follow in subsequent years.

"If a population was building up in density, it would keep on building up in that one place," he said. "There is no evidence of an ongoing population of roadside weeds in the same place."

## A 'one year population'

He said roadside canola is effectively a 'one year population'.

"We looked more closely at spots with a high density of canola plants and found that virtually everything was within two metres of the bitumen, that is, in the area that had been graded. The canola was only able to establish where the soil had been disturbed," he said.

"Of interest, the density of canola along roadsides is no more common where canola was the crop in the adjacent paddock."

The Cooperative Research Centre for Weeds published research in 2004 to determine if volunteer canola populations are the results of grain spills or from a build up of a 'seed bank' at the site.

## Cross pollination is rare

The research, published by Jeanine Baker and Chris Preston of the University of Adelaide compared the DNA of the seeds with the DNA of the parent plant, and found they were identical.

"This suggests that cross pollination is rare in roadside canola populations, even when more than one cultivar (variety) is present in the population."

"Therefore the spread of herbicide tolerance genes between canola plants along roadsides would be slow and provide plenty of opportunities for control to be undertaken," said Chris.

"In addition, we found multiple cultivars present in large roadside populations, confirming these populations were the result of multiple seed spills and not from an established seed bank."

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**Rob Norton – concerns about roadside canola turning 'wild' are unfounded.**