

Juncea canola expands oilseeds into the low rainfall zone

By Felicity Pritchard

Good things come to those who wait. And for grain growers in the low rainfall areas of Australia, it appears that the long wait for a viable Mallee-type break crop is over.

Twenty five intensive years of breeding of juncea (pronounced 'jun-see-a') canola by the Victorian Department of Primary Industries in conjunction with Viterra in Canada is now paying off, with an estimated 15,000 hectares sown this season.

Agronomic benefits

Canola has long been considered one of the best break crops for cereal production. Numerous studies have concluded that

canola crops improve subsequent wheat yields by an average 20 per cent.

The benefits come largely from the root disease break a broadleaf crop provides. Weed control is also a major factor, particularly when using herbicide tolerant types.

But canola has been considered a higher-risk crop in low rainfall areas, with cereals tending to produce more reliable yields in dry seasons with lower production costs than break crops.

Juncea canola was developed to provide Mallee growers with a break crop option that could withstand low rainfall better than normal canola. Three varieties are

currently available – one a conventional and the other two Clearfield types, with tolerance to certain group B herbicides.

Juncea canola is the same species as Indian mustard, but unlike mustard, it has the same oil and meal quality as normal canola. Canola and juncea canola have very strict standards which apply to their quality. The maximum level of erucic acid, a component of the oil, must be less than two per cent, while the monounsaturated oil, oleic acid must exceed 55 per cent.

The chemicals renowned for giving mustard its 'hot' taste, glucosinolates, must also be present in only very low levels in canola, unlike traditional Indian mustard. It is also very different quality from mustard used for biodiesel.

Grower feedback

This season, many growers in the Victorian Mallee are testing juncea canola for the first time. They are very enthusiastic about the idea of a break crop suited for the Mallee – particularly when coming out of a 12 year drought.

Birchip grower Alan Cook is growing juncea canola for the first time and so far is impressed with what he has seen.

"I've got about 500 acres (200 hectares) of Oasis CL in. My agronomist Brendan Reinheimer got me onto it," he said.

"I sowed normal canola just after Easter, two days before a big rain. We had almost no rain for two months after that. I sowed the mustard (juncea canola) in early June and by early July it had already caught up," Alan said.

He said many other growers in his area have put in juncea canola, with a receival site located at Donald in the northern Wimmera of Victoria. But he is considering delivering directly to Melbourne to benefit from a price premium.

Most growers in the Mallee sowed their juncea canola in April or May, and the two main varieties sown are the Clearfield types, Oasis CL and Sahara CL.

Pacific Seeds agronomist Anton Mannes said juncea canola crops in Victoria look "fantastic". He said every grower he has dealt with intends to increase the area of the crop substantially next year.



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Potential for the future

Juncea canola could significantly expand oilseed production in Australia, with an estimated potential area of up to 340,000 hectares in eastern Australia alone. This, in turn, will lead to more sustainable disease management and higher yields of cereals.

It is also likely that up to 200,000 hectares could be sown to pulses and oilseeds in the major low rainfall regions of South Australia including 100,000 hectares which could be sown to juncea canola.

This increased level of production would rely on improved yields being attained, low costs of production and an increased level of agronomic knowledge for farmers in these regions.

Production would be expected to vary greatly from year to year with area sown dependant on the timing of the seasonal break and yield being reliant on spring rainfall and the level of stored moisture.

Senior Research Agronomist with SARDI, Trent Potter said that the major incentive for farmers to increase the levels of break crops grown is the improved yields of cereals grown in rotation.

“While farmers say that they do not specifically need to make money out of grow-

ing break crops it is important that yields are high enough to at least break even with costs at a minimum.”

The NSW DPI have produced two Primefacts for south western and north western New South Wales containing information on growing juncea canola in these regions. Visit <http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/field/field-crops/oilseeds> to see these.

The University of Melbourne, along with SARDI, the Victorian DPI and NSW DPI have also recently produced a factsheet for Victoria and South Australia, which will soon be available through the GRDC.

Further information: Felicity Pritchard, Joint coordinator Better Oilseeds project and PACE – Pritchard Agricultural Consulting and Extension: Ph: (03) 5382 4396; Mob: 0427 600 228 ■



Birchip farmer Alan Cook in the Clearfield type juncea canola, Oasis CL.



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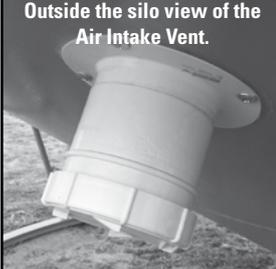
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