

Canola in Australia 1993

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Canola has been grown in the winter rainfall cropping belt of southern Australia for almost 25 years, but it was not until 1988 that the crop began to make a significant contribution to oilseed production in Australia. By world standards, production is still quite small but it has increased rapidly since 1988 to reach almost 300,000 t in 1993, from a planted area of 175,000 ha. Plantings are expected to increase again in 1994, possibly by as much as 50 per cent.

Canola is now the main oilseed grown in Australia, with production being double that of sunflower and three times that of soybean. Canola production is exceeded by cotton seed production, a by-product of the cotton fibre industry.

A major factor in the success of canola is its suitability and profitability in southern Australia's farming systems. One of its advantages is that it is grown in the cooler part of the year when rainfall is most reliable and effective, whereas other oilseeds such as sunflower and soybean must be grown over summer and require either reliable summer rainfall or irrigation, both of which are limited.

A second advantage of canola is its role as a break crop in our predominantly cereal based farming systems, where it reduces cereal disease losses and improves soil moisture utilisation. It raises the profitability of cropping : directly through the profitability of the canola itself and indirectly through the higher yields of the wheat crops which follow it. It has been necessary to mount an intensive and sustained extension program since 1988 to convince farmers of the real benefits of growing canola and to help them to manage the crop for high yields. Improved nitrogen and sulphur nutrition has had a major impact in lifting yields.

Australian varieties are *Brassica napus* spring types, similar to those grown in Canada, but

somewhat later in maturity. Crops are planted in autumn (April, May) and harvested in late spring (November, December). The current success of the industry began with the release in 1988 of the first varieties to combine high yield, high oil and meal quality and a high level of resistance to blackleg stem canker (*Leptosphaeria maculans*). Since 1988, significant further gains in yield and quality have been made, culminating with the release of «Dunkeld» by the Department of Agriculture, Victoria for planting in 1994. Dunkeld has a much higher oil content (3 percentage points) than current varieties without any loss of protein and has improved seedling and vegetative vigour.

Domestic demand for canola has increased almost 3-fold in the last five years, rising to about 200,000 tonnes of seed in 1993/94. Production surpluses are being exported to Japan. Canola oil and meal now hold more than 20% of the domestic vegetable oil and oilseed meal markets, a share which has increased rapidly in recent years, at the expense of sunflower and soybean.

The increasing health consciousness of consumers continues to increase demand for fats which are high in monounsaturates and low in saturates. This trend has been particularly helpful for products based on canola oil. The Australian table spreads market of 139,000 tonnes per annum is dominated by margarines (74%) compared to butter and blends (26%). In the margarine segment, canola labelled products have grown to 13% of the market (1993) up from zero four years earlier. Canola labelled products now constitute 20% of the bottled oils market (1993).

Growth in production, consumption and exports of canola seems likely to continue in Australia in the medium term.

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