

# Higher Canola Plantings Forecast for Australia in 1997

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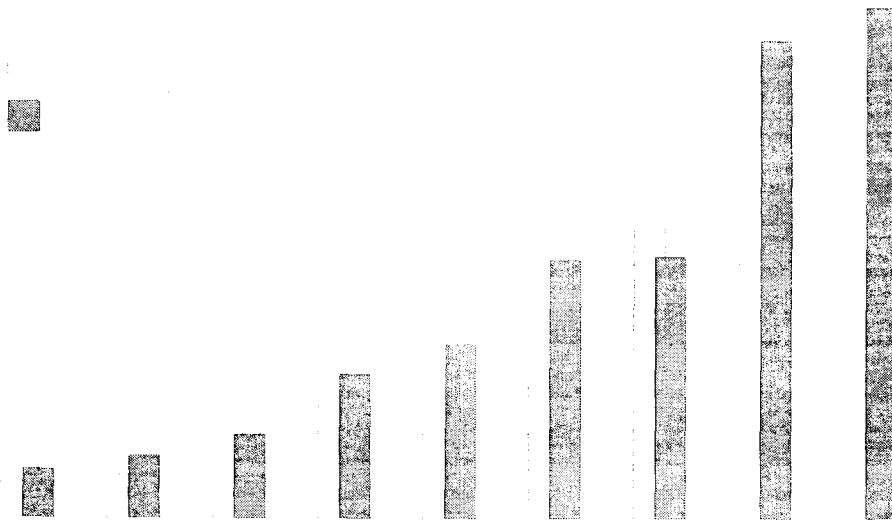
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The 1996 Australian canola crop (harvested December 1996) is estimated at 600,000 tonnes from a harvested area of 370,000 hectares, for an average yield of about 1.6 t/ha. This is a production record, exceeding the 1995 record of 561,000 tonnes from 406,000 hectares and about 1.4 t/ha.

A very favourable season in the eastern states produced above average yields, giving higher production from a smaller area, compared to 1995. Seed oil content was also above average, particularly in New South Wales and Victoria.

The smaller canola planting in 1996 was a direct result of increased wheat sowings following projected high wheat prices early in the year. As these continued to fall during the growing season many farmers wished they had planted more canola. The late arrival of planting rains in South Australia and Western Australia was also a factor in the smaller area planted.



The high oil cultivar Dunkeld accounted for a third of national plantings in 1996, based on its strong 60% market share in Victoria and 30% in each of New South Wales and South Australia.

The high yielding cultivar Oscar accounted for a quarter of the national market, based on its strong performance and reliability in New South Wales where it has half the market and South

Australia where it has a one third share.

The quick maturing cultivar Narendra is largely confined to Western Australia, where it holds over 40% of the market.

### **Bigger 1997 crop forecast**

The good returns from canola in 1996 and anticipated lower wheat prices is likely to see a major expansion in canola plantings in 1997, possibly by 50%. The biggest increase is expected in Western Australia where the area could double.

In addition to the good returns from canola in recent years, rotational benefits provide a strong incentive for Australian cereal farmers to grow canola. It has proved to be the most effective break crop against cereal root rots and commonly lifts yields of following wheat crops by 25-30%, compared to growing continuous wheat. Increased canola plantings seem logical, following a huge wheat crop in 1996.

The release of an improved early maturing variety will allow further expansion into lower rainfall areas this year. The release of several new triazine herbicide resistant varieties will allow canola to be grown in areas and on farms considered too weedy for conventional varieties.

Some farmers are moving away from conventional cultivation and the use of pre emergent, soil incorporated herbicides such as trifluralin so as to avoid soil erosion on their undulating farms. They are looking to the new triazine resistant varieties for effective weed control, when used in conjunction with direct drill/no till sowing techniques.

The new triazine resistant variety Karoo performed very well in 1996 and will be the main variety of this type to be grown in 1997. Triazine resistant varieties are expected to make up 25-30% of total sowings, when the crop is planted May.