

Recent Developments in Oilseed Rape in Germany at a Glance

Dr. Gisbert KLEY

DSV Lippstadt - UFOP

Notwithstanding declining market prices and drop of EU-subsidy payments in oilseed rape the production area in Germany did not diminish substantially.

Tab. 1 Winter oilseed rape production area

Crop	1000 ha	Therefrom for oleo-chemistry and biodiesel 1000 ha
1998	1,007	147
1999	1,198	368
2000	1,080	341

What are the reasons that can explain this development?

First: There is not much choice of alternative crops in arable rotations. The cereal production perhaps is at the limit of an affordable extension.

Second: Cereal prices also dropped substantially so that the relative competitiveness of winter oilseed rape did not worsen that much.

Third: From the new ecological tax imposed last year to mineral fuel emerged a positive impact on the consumption of biodiesel from rape seed oil and it opened an increasingly interesting market for oilseed rape growers. Therefore, the high share of oilseed production area designed for non-food-use 14.5 % in 1998, 30,7 % in 1999 and 31.5 % in 2000, respectively.

Fourth: The more the share of cereal crops increased in the arable rotation the more grew the positive effect of oilseed rape on the yield level of the following two subsequent cereal crops. In input/output calculations this effect economically amounts to roughly 250 DM per ha, which equals to roughly 20 % of the gross revenue from market prices and therefore represents an important element in the competitiveness of winter oilseed rape.

Fifth: The evolution of rape seed yields through the release of new varieties, in particular the first matured hybrid types using the msl-hybrid system (msl = male sterility Lembke). Those hybrids generate an 8 to 10 % increase in yields compared to the until now used open pollinating varieties. Their production share amounts actually to more than 20 % of the total area of oilseed rape grown in Germany. It is interesting to know that the msl-hybrid system does not generate problems to maintain low levels of glucosinolates.

From the beginning of the launching of the first zero-erucic-acid varieties of oilseed rape, i.e. in 1975, German plant breeders have sustainably tried to convince consumers of the benefits and the advantages of rape seed oil as vegetable oil in human nutrition and were seeking, for many years, the support of the crushing industry and the food manufacturers for promoting rape seed oil by labelling and specific declaration.

Finally, during 1999/2000, a co-operation of German plant breeders, UFOP (Union for the Promotion of Oil and Protein Crops) and the German Farmers Union could manage that, under the guidance and consistent work of CMA (Central Marketing Agency of the German agricultural industry), a comprehensive marketing campaign is initiated, which also includes the readiness of some important parts of the crushing industry to label rape seed oil in future, thus making the nameless daily use vegetable oil to a brand, which shall be positioned in the forefront of the shelves. In this context it is notable to know that UFOP is to establish a new working Committee on Human Nutrition, which shall ensure the scientific basement to support all marketing activities for rape seed oil in human nutrition.

A bit surprisingly, on June 21, 2000, the German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, representing a green-socialist ministry, started an initiative to agree with the German plant breeders and the seed industry in particular, but also with the related farm industry, i.e. elevators, food processing and distribution chains on setting up a program of farm scale production of genetically modified (GM) varieties to overcome the actual blockade in the release of GM-varieties.

The idea for such a program foresees a gradually increasing growing area of GM-crops on farm, but the area will be limited to an extent which is not confirmed yet. But the acreage shall be large enough to produce volumes, which can be handled by the elevators and the processing industry on usual scales. The Chancellor is seeking a consent with the related industry not to exceed the agreed growing area and to put the entire production chain under a kind of surveillance program which is not defined yet, but is designed to assess data and experiences for further convincing the public and the related industry, in particular that of food processing and food distribution, of benefits and advantages of GM-crops, and of the non-occurrence of adverse effects.

It is notable to see that such a program is on the actual agenda in Germany, which perhaps is also supportive for other countries in Europe to bridge the gap to the Americans.