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Rapeseed production in Kazakhstan: history, status quo, and outlook for the future

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Kazakhstan is a large, landlocked country with a low population density. Massive plant production in the country started in the 1960s. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, independent Kazakhstan went through a difficult transformation period. Nowadays, the country cultivates about 23 million hectares, of which more than 50% is wheat production.

Kazakhstan is one of the biggest spring wheat producers in the world. Oil crops are cultivated on 3 million hectares. Among oil crops, linseed and sunflower are the major cultivars, followed by safflower and rapeseed.

In the 2000s, the government started diversifying agricultural production to increase the sector's effectiveness. The monoculture wheat had been supplemented with other cereals (barley, rye), oil crops, corn, etc.

The land expansion under oil crops was one of the major outputs of this policy. Then, the spring rapeseed area started to increase in Kazakhstan (from about 5,000 hectares in 2000 to 365,000 hectares in 2018). However, the development of rapeseed production was not smooth. The lack of infrastructure (processing facilities, logistics issues), weak growing practices, natural disasters (drought, cold, diamondback moth), and export restrictions were the main factors constraining rapeseed areas in Kazakhstan.

Kazakhstani rapeseed growers prefer spring varieties. GMOs are not allowed in the country. The major seed supplier is Rapool, followed by Pioneer and other foreign companies. The local efforts in rapeseed breeding are limited to the open-pollinated varieties with a small growing area. Herbicide-resistant, non-GMO hybrids are widely planted by Kazakhstani rapeseed growers.

These days, Kazakhstan has stable rapeseed growers mainly situated in northern areas, several local rapeseed crushers, diversified export destinations, and governmental support for rapeseed producers. Thus, rapeseed remains one of the most important export oil crops in Kazakhstan with potential for further growth.

