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First GM canola crops delivered to bins

By COLIN BETTLES

CUNDERDIN farmer David Fulwood became the first WA grower to harvest Genetically Modified (GM) canola for commercial gain, when he cleared his 48 hectare crop last Friday and delivered two truckloads' worth to the CBH Metro Grains Centre in Forrestfield over the weekend.

The GM canola is being grown as part of the large scale commercial trials in WA this season, allowed under an exemption to the GM Crops Free Areas Act 2003, which is now under review.

Mr Fulwood said he was pleased with the crop's overall agronomic performance and its high oil content.

However, he conceded there was room to improve the 1.5 tonnes per hectare that it finally yielded.

"I thought it would yield higher but with the dry finish the hybrids run out of steam a bit," he said.

"The key point for me is that it is not a yield trial.

"If the legislation is changed and we are allowed to grow Roundup Ready canola in the future, new varieties will come through the pipeline a lot faster and they will yield better.

"This variety came straight off the shelf and is not specifically designed for WA conditions.

"Overall I'm very happy with the weed control and the performance of the whole package, and especially sowing a very clean break crop.

"It was not just about the yield performance; it was about the agronomics and weed control and they have proved themselves as far as I'm concerned."

Mr Fulwood said the 1.5t/ha yield was "nothing to be sneezed at" and 25 per cent higher than what he had budgeted for at the start of the year.

He said it was the first time he had grown a hybrid canola crop and expected their performance would only improve over time.

"The bulk was there and the weeds did not have a chance," he said.

"I'm looking forward to using the technology in the future and having more varieties bred for WA conditions in future."

Norm Jenzen is another of the 17 WA growers participating in the large scale commercial GM canola trials.

Mr Jenzen said he harvested his canola on Sunday, and delivered it to CBH Forrestfield on Monday.

He said the 44ha trial yielded around 1t/ha and also had high oil content of around 44pc.

"I was very impressed with the end result," he

said.

"Especially the weed control, the paddock is squeaky clean now and has a very good future.

"All we need now is for the politicians to make sure they get this decision right and allow us to use GM technology next season."

Monsanto canola business lead Tony May said the other growers would start harvesting their GM canola soon.

"Over the next few weeks we will start to see the results come in and that will give farmers the chance to compare their Roundup Ready canola to their traditional canola systems," he said.

"That is an important part of this trial for us because it will help demonstrate what some of the benefits to the technology are.

"Up to harvest it has all been about weed control and the herbicide component of the system.

"The farmers have been very happy with that aspect of the trial and they like the look of the crop.

"What we need to see now is the actual yield, oil content and other quality parameters and also to watch it go through the CBH system.

"Segregation is the key to the analysis, in terms of how strip tests operate and the different protocols and systems that demonstrate segregation can be maintained in the supply chain."

Mr May said of the 850ha trials, he was expecting about 1500t of GM canola to be harvested, depending how well it yielded in the south.

Agriculture and Food Department agricultural systems research manager David Bowran said not all the GM growers' results would be used in the Department's report on the trials, that will be used to help shape Agriculture and Food Minister Terry Redman's Cabinet recommendation.

"We have been doing a review of the processes as we have gone along and already have draft material," he said.

"We would like to see as many of the growers in the GM canola trials put their grain into the system as soon as possible, because it will make it quicker for us to ensure we can get something to the Minister before Christmas.

"We will take as many bits of information as we can get and if there are a couple of farmers outside of that we will accept that.

"It would be ideal for us if we had all of the growers in the central agricultural region put it into the system, because they have options of delivering to Mt Kokeby or the Metro Grains Centre.

"That would be ideal for us but we don't need all the grain from all the growers to compile the report.



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“It’s really not vital.

“We’d love to have as many as possible and anyone who gets it in before the middle of December will be great.

“But if there are a few people who are late, I don’t think we would be overly concerned by that.”

Mr May said if farmers were keen to grow the technology in WA next year, they could face delays.

“There is a period of time that it will take for us to bring the technology to WA, that’s distribution,

getting seed set up and really educating farmers and getting them accredited,” he said.

“I don’t know what the increase will be but we certainly have a lot of support and farmers who are interested in using the technology next year.”

In NSW and Victoria GM canola production went from 10,000ha in 2008 to 40,000ha.

“I think WA farmers have a track record of taking up new technology and varieties so I expect it will be a rapid uptake,” Mr May said.



□ Cunderdin farmer David Fulwood in his GM canola crop last week, that yielded 1.5 tonnes per hectare.