

Counting on canola in 2015



Canola is no longer a crop that farmers can neglect. It is a valuable cash crop that can achieve high yields, provided that producers make careful cultivar selections and manage the crop correctly. **Jacques Claassen** reports on what is expected of the 2015 season.

Will 2015 see a decline in canola plantings, following production problems last season? The question is currently being debated, but the answer will be known only in a month or two.

At the time of writing this article in mid-April, canola plantings had commenced in the Swellendam area of the Western Cape, following early winter rainfall. To the west, however, farmers still awaited the start of the rainy season. Depending on rainfall, canola plantings could occur as late as June.

Meanwhile, seed seemed to be more readily available at an earlier stage, and five new cultivars have been released.

Despite the production problems experienced during the 2014 season, a total record crop of 122 000t was harvested. This was thanks to a year-on-year increase of roughly 31% in plantings. An area of more than 92 000ha was planted to canola and almost three-quarters of the harvest – 74% – came from the area between Caledon and Mossel Bay in the Southern Cape. The remainder was from the Western Cape's Swartland area. This is according to Franco le Roux, agricultural resource manager at Southern Oil (Soill) in Swellendam.

After three relatively cool production years which saw outstanding yields of between 1,4t/ha and

ABOVE:
In areas where canola is not likely to suffer wind damage and pod shatter, the crop can be harvested directly.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF FRANCO LE ROUX, SOUTHERN OIL (PTY) LTD

1,8t/ha, the 2014 canola crop proved to be a very average 1,31t/ha. This was as a result of much warmer weather conditions during the flowering stage, which negatively affected pod development. When in bloom, canola plants tend to wean themselves if high temperatures and drought stress occur.

2015 CANOLA PROJECTIONS

The graph on the opposite page shows areas planted to canola and crop yields from 1992 to 2014, as well as projections for 2015, which are dependent on normal weather patterns.

Although Le Roux expects that the total 2015 plantings might decrease by 11,6% to 82 000ha, he says that the total crop size

could be the same as last year's – provided weather patterns are suitable.

"This is my gut feel. Apart from the weather, which should play along, my projections are based on the fact that farmers have access to more knowledge about canola cultivars and technical production practices.

TOTAL CROP SIZE FOR 2015 COULD BE THE SAME AS LAST YEAR'S

They also have better harvesting equipment, such as self-propelled swathers or windrowers," he says.

Chairperson of the Proteïn Research Foundation (PRF) and the Canola Work Group,



ABOVE: Dirk van Papendorp (middle) and his partners in the Tweekop farming enterprise, Arno (left) and Pieter Steenkamp. JACQUES CLAASSEN



INSERT: Franco le Roux, agricultural resource manager at Southern Oil. COURTESY OF SOUTHERN OIL (PTY) LTD



Gerhard Scholtemeijer, has a more bullish outlook. "We experienced a bit of a hiccup last year, but it wasn't a huge blow," he explains. "Until now we had no clear indication that there will be a sharp decline in canola plantings this year. In fact, agricultural co-ops expect the 2015 plantings to be very close to the total area planted last year," he says, adding that weather patterns during winter will be the determining factor. More and more international companies were taking note of South Africa's canola industry and were currently talking to the PRF, says Scholtemeijer. He adds that the PRF's goal is to encourage canola

plantings so that these reached 150 000ha within the next five years. "Farmers are realising that canola is a cash crop in its own right, although canola production requires a bit more time and commitment than wheat and maize."

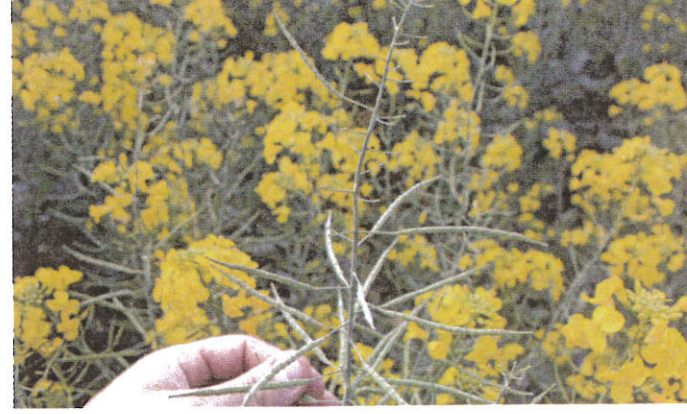
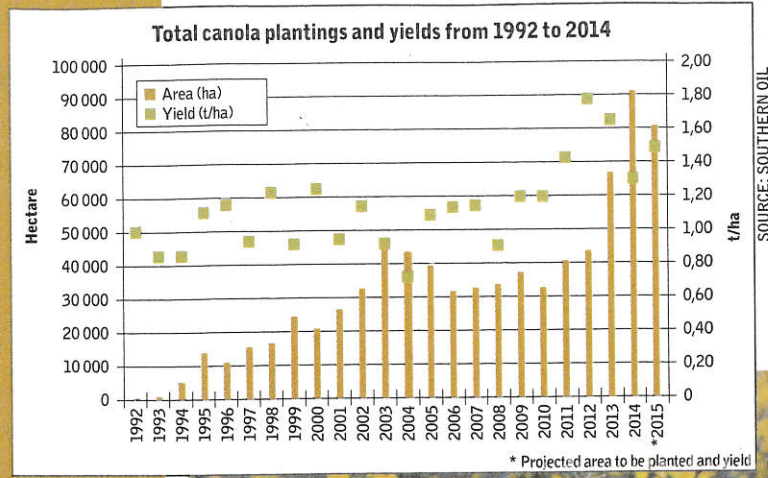
MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

According to Le Roux, canola producers must pay attention to the following factors, as they are usually a producer's biggest challenges:

- **Disease and weed management** Choose the right portfolio of cultivars for a specific area, substitute cultivars from year to year and apply optimum crop

ABOVE: In areas where there is a risk of wind damage and pod shatter, canola should first be swathed before being threshed. Swathing should be done when there is 60% seed colouring.

ABOVE RIGHT: When in bloom, canola plants usually wear themselves in the event of high temperatures and drought stress. Warmer weather during the flowering stage, however, is detrimental for pod development. This occurred in 2014.



rotation for better disease and weed control. Do not limit weed control to problematic lands, but carry it out on all canola lands. Every year, choose new cultivars that contain genes resistant to blackleg. This is especially important in the case of short rotations, such as when planting canola within a period of three years on the same land. The larger the planting, the more blackleg spores there will be in the air. To achieve a yield of 1,5t/ha or more, apply fertiliser correctly and spray against fungal diseases such as blackleg wherever necessary, and on time. Controlling blackleg can be expensive, but it is especially important for cultivars with a weak resistance against this disease, as well as on lands with a history of blackleg. The best way to control blackleg is to plant canola only

every fourth year on the same land. Carry out foliar feedings on time. Choose a mixture of short and long growers. This will lengthen the period in which land can be swathed to two weeks.

- **Snail management** If conservation agriculture and minimum tillage are being used, it is important to control snails. This should be followed up proactively before the snails damage the canola lands. Snails should also be monitored in canola lands when wheat and barley are planted.
- **Sclerotinia management** Monitor this fungus regularly to determine if spraying is necessary. Crop rotation can also play a big preventative role in managing it.
- **Seed depth and number per hectare** Make it your goal to obtain a well-established stand of between 40 plants/m² and

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List of new canola cultivars

Cultivar	Origin	Time of flowering	Time until physiologically ripe	Suitable areas	Where to be cautious* (based on speed of growth cycle)	Characteristic type	Blackleg resistance	Yield during last season in trials	Growth vigour
Belinda	Europe	Medium	Medium	Swartland and Southern Cape	Suitable for most areas	Conventional hybrid	Unknown (fared well in 2014 trials)	Excellent	Excellent
Hyiola 559 TT**	Australia	Medium	Medium/late	Swartland and Southern Cape	Where rain stops early (Sept) and the temperature rises early	Triazine-hybrid	Good resistance	Good in the TT group	Good
44Y87	Australia	Medium/late	Medium	Swartland and Southern Cape	Where rain stops early (Sept) and the temperature rises early	Clearfield-hybrid*	Resistance to moderate resistance (as treated with Jockey)	Excellent	Excellent
45Y88	Australia	Medium/late	Medium/late	Swartland and Southern Cape	Where rain stops early (Sept) and the temperature rises early	Clearfield-hybrid	Resistance to moderate resistance (as treated with Jockey)	Excellent	Excellent
Diamond	Australia	Early	Early	Swartland and Southern Cape	Suitable for most areas. Longer growers might be better for areas that remain cold and wet late in the season	Conventional cultivar	Resistance to moderate resistance (as treated with Jockey)	Excellent (tested only in Elite-trials)	Good to excellent

* For example, the Eendekuil area that becomes dry early during the Western Cape winter and shows an early rise in temperatures.

** TT: Triazine-tolerant. TT-cultivars have an expected yield between 15% and 30% lower than CL and conventional cultivars.

* Imazamox-tolerant.

SOURCE: PIET LOMBARD (M-TECH), DIRECTORATE: PLANT SCIENCES, CHIEF DIRECTORATE: RESEARCH, TECHNOLOGY AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICES, DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, WESTERN CAPE GOVERNMENT.

← 60 plants/m². Plant about 3kg seed/ha; the exact figure will depend on the thousand-kernel mass of every cultivar.

Do not plant the seeds deeper than 1cm to 2,5cm. Due to its small size, only 15kg/ha to 20kg/ha nitrogen (N) should be placed alongside the seed when planting in order to prevent burning. The rest of the N should be placed deeper.

• Limiting yield losses

Swathe the plants to limit yield losses due to pod shatter or wind damage. Swathing should be carried out when 60% of the seed is coloured.

NEW CULTIVARS

Five new imported canola cultivars will be available for the 2015 season to add to the 12 cultivars currently available in South Africa. This follows trials conducted in the Swartland and Southern Cape, according to Piet Lombard from the Directorate: Plant Sciences

at the Western Cape's Department of Agriculture. (See table above)

MITIGATING RISK

Le Roux maintains that canola deserves its rightful place in the portfolio of cash crops on farms in the Swartland and Southern Cape. This, he says, is necessary to spread risk, and due to the advantages it offers in a crop rotation system. Canola is an oil seed crop, and thus spreads a small grain producer's risks even more – the prices of oil seed and small grains are not dependent on each other.

Dirk van Papendorp, from the Tweekop farming enterprise between Swellendam and Heidelberg, agrees. Van Papendorp, who started planting canola in 1993, sows small grains and canola on a combined area of 1 700ha. Due to Tweekop's planning for 2015, which is based on projected farming income per hectare and managing its cash flow,



ABOVE: Canola seeds should not be planted deeper than 1cm to 2,5cm. To prevent burning the small seed, fertiliser should be placed alongside the seed, and at a rate of 15kg/ha to 20kg/ha N.

a decision was taken to downscale its canola plantings from last year's 600ha to 450ha. Relatively good barley prices and yields also played a role in this decision.

Van Papendorp plants canola every second year on the same lands, and admits that his 2014 yield has been down to an average of 1,1t/ha, in contrast with the normal average of between 1,5t/ha and 1,6t/ha. He adds that he should increase his crop rotations to longer periods.

Although he is positive about the role that canola plays on crop farms in the Western Cape's winter rainfall areas, he says he is looking forward to cultivars that offer more consistent yield. According to him, it is still a problem that South Africa does not have any canola cultivars of its own, and that all cultivars are imported.

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