CANOLA

Canola plantings increase by almost 20%

Total canola plantings in SA increased by roughly 18% year-on-year, from 72 000ha in 2013 to 85 000ha planted this year.

Plantings in all areas of the Western Cape have increased, according to Swellendam-based canola processing company, Southern Oil's (Soill) agricultural resource officer Franco le Roux. The area planted to canola in the southern Cape and Overberg regions is expected to amount to 65 000ha, compared with 56 000ha planted in 2013. Plantings in the Swartland were estimated at 20 000ha, up from 16 000ha.

Le Roux said more farmers were including canola in their crop rotation systems not only for its benefits in weed management and soil health, but because canola offered more favourable returns compared with the regions' traditional grain crops of barley and wheat. The total harvest this year was expected to amount to 145 000t, up from 112 000t last year.

Soill is the only major canola processing plant in SA and according to Le Roux the facility has sufficient crushing capacity to accommodate the increase in production. He said there was adequate demand for locally produced vegetable and oil cake, because SA imported about 60% of all edible oils consumed in the country and roughly half of the oil cake used as feed in the livestock industry.

The Western Cape Department of Agriculture's specialist agronomist for the Swartland region, Sakkie Slabbert, said canola plantings in the area were looking better than last year and farmers were expecting a good harvest.

ABOVE: Since 2010 canola production in South Africa has increased from 35 000ha planted to 85 000ha. DENENE ERASMUS

He said for farmers in the Swartland, like elsewhere in the Western Cape, it made financial sense to include canola in their crop production systems as a rotational crop with wheat because canola offered better returns. This was due in part to the impact that the location differential of roughly R580/t had on farmers' net earnings for wheat.

According to the Bureau for Food and Agricultural Policy's baseline agricultural outlook for 2014 to 2023, production would increase over the next 10 years to about 180 000t. The report said that although the local price was projected to decline over the next two seasons, the introduction of new cultivars including genetically modified varieties would have a positive long-term effect on average yields and the average gross income per hectare. – *Denene Erasmus*

BIOFUEL

Mandatory biofuel blending targets unlikely to be met in time

The mandatory blending of petrol and diesel with biofuel comes into effect on 1 October 2015 even as prospective manufacturers will be unable to produce enough biofuel by that time to meet SA's blending targets.

The Department of Energy (DoE) has delayed signing off on the Final Position Paper on the SA Biofuels Regulatory Framework (Position Paper) as revised blending regulations had to be drafted after it was decided that sugarcane could also be used as a biofuels feedstock alongside sorghum.

To meet the minimum 2% level of biofuels in the national liquid fuels supply, SA would have to produce 400 million litres of biofuels per year.

"This target will probably not be met by October 2015," said the DoE's chief director of hydrocarbons policy, Muzi Mkhize. He told *Farmer's Weekly* that while the effective date for mandatory blending was still 1 October 2015, this placed no obligation on licensed manufacturers to start producing biofuel by this date, or on fuel companies to adhere to blending targets if sufficient quantities of biofuel were not available.

Mkhize did not want to commit to a date when the Position Paper would be published, saying only that he was confident it would be achieved before the end of the year.

The Position Paper detailed, amongst others, government's financial support or subsidising of the framework for the biofuels industry, proposing a levy of between 4,5 cents and 6,5 cents per litre for the 20 years commencing on 1 October 2015.

Raoul Goosen, the Industrial Development Corporation's (IDC) specialist for green industries, told *Farmer's Weekly* that construction on a planned bioethanol facility in Cradock would start only once a regulatory framework for biofuels blending was in place.

The facility, funded by the IDC, would have the capacity to produce 90 million litres of sorghum-based bioethanol per year.

"It will take two to three years from the start of construction until the facility will be in full production," he said.

Goosen said that since other licensed manufacturers were also stalling construction until the Position Paper was published, it was unlikely there would be enough products available in SA for the fuel industry to adhere to the mandatory blending regulations by October 2015.
– *Denene Erasmus*