



# Canola takes hold in the SWARTLAND

Swartland canola production has increased by a whopping 38%, a Malmesbury farmers' study group has found. This provides a definite answer to the question of whether this valuable oilseed is fulfilling its long-awaited potential. **Kobus van Tonder** summarises the findings.

**A**S A RELATIVELY NEW commercial crop, canola was quickly dubbed the crown prince of alternative rotational crops in the Western Cape wheat-producing areas. This no longer seems to be the case, as in recent years the yellow-flowered crop has not lived up to expectations.

Yet there is much advantage farmers can derive from using canola in rotation with winter wheat as the main crop. After all, canola and wheat make an almost

natural pair. After strong initial growth in the Western Cape, canola reached a production ceiling way short of its true potential, once considered to be about 100 000ha in the Western Cape alone, where growing conditions are the best in the country. Only on a few occasions did the canola crop exceed 40 000ha.

New cultivars now make it possible to double the size of canola plantings, as it's no longer necessary to wait four years before returning to land previously

- Swartland wheat farmers are taking an increasing interest in growing canola, with production up 38% in the past season.
- Canola is an excellent rotation crop for wheat.
- About 38 000t of canola seed is expected to be produced in the Western Cape.



It's not by chance that canola is conquering new land in the Swartland. Data collected from 20 top farmers clearly demonstrate canola's sustainability as a viable alternative crop in rotation with wheat.

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under canola. Some farmers have planted canola successfully biannually, despite the accepted practice to rotate canola within a minimum of three years.

## The Swartland's approach to canola

Things seem to be different in the Swartland where a growing number of wheat farmers are taking a keen interest in canola cultivation. The past season alone has seen an increase of 38% in canola planting in the Swartland, with the total area under cultivation this past season standing at 11 300ha.

Most of these plantings are from the southern, rainier part of the Swartland with Malmesbury at the centre. Moorreesburg, with slightly less rain, contributed about 1 000ha, where more emphasis is placed on medics, used as grazing, as the traditional main rotational crop with wheat.

A surprise this year was Porterville, which saw a strong growth in canola production, albeit from a low base. More canola is expected to be produced there in future.

The Swartland is seen as a major growth area for canola as a rotational cash crop. Meanwhile, the pitfalls of monoculture are finally catching up with farmers. Proved by research to be destructive to land and bank balance, this once widely established practice seems to be coming to an end. In addition, the current low wheat price does not encourage farmers to produce more, despite a critical national wheat shortage.

According to Kellie Becker, managing director of Swellendam-based refinery Southern Oil, canola seed production in the Swartland increased to over 10 000t, about 80% of the total harvest. The remaining 20% was used as grazing. About 38 000 tons of canola seed is expected

## The study group's findings

Gross Margin =	Directly allocatable variable costs (R/ha) = R		2,835.81				
Gross Income - DAVC							
Price / ton	0.75	1	1.25	1.5	1.75	2	
	t/ha	t/ha	t/ha	t/ha	t/ha	t/ha	t/ha
3500	R -210.81	R 664.19	R 1,539.19	R 2,414.19	R 3,289.19	R 4,164.19	
3450	R -248.31	R 614.19	R 1,476.69	R 2,339.19	R 3,201.69	R 4,064.19	
3400	R -285.81	R 564.19	R 1,414.19	R 2,264.19	R 3,114.19	R 3,964.19	
3350	R -323.31	R 514.19	R 1,351.69	R 2,189.19	R 3,026.69	R 3,864.19	
3300	R -360.81	R 464.19	R 1,289.19	R 2,114.19	R 2,939.19	R 3,764.19	
3250	R -398.31	R 414.19	R 1,226.69	R 2,039.19	R 2,851.69	R 3,664.19	
3200	R -435.81	R 364.19	R 1,164.19	R 1,964.19	R 2,764.19	R 3,564.19	
3150	R -473.31	R 314.19	R 1,101.69	R 1,889.19	R 2,676.69	R 3,464.19	
3100	R -510.81	R 264.19	R 1,039.19	R 1,814.19	R 2,589.19	R 3,364.19	
3050	R -548.31	R 214.19	R 976.69	R 1,739.19	R 2,501.69	R 3,264.19	
3000	R -585.81	R 164.19	R 914.19	R 1,664.19	R 2,414.19	R 3,164.19	
2950	R -623.31	R 114.19	R 851.69	R 1,589.19	R 2,326.69	R 3,064.19	
2900	R -660.81	R 64.19	R 789.19	R 1,514.19	R 2,239.19	R 2,964.19	
2850	R -698.31	R 14.19	R 726.69	R 1,439.19	R 2,151.69	R 2,864.19	
2800	R -735.81	R -35.81	R 664.19	R 1,364.19	R 2,064.19	R 2,764.19	
2750	R -773.31	R -85.81	R 601.69	R 1,289.19	R 1,976.69	R 2,664.19	
2700	R -810.81	R -135.81	R 539.19	R 1,214.19	R 1,889.19	R 2,564.19	
2650	R -848.31	R -185.81	R 476.69	R 1,139.19	R 1,801.69	R 2,464.19	
2600	R -885.81	R -235.81	R 414.19	R 1,064.19	R 1,714.19	R 2,364.19	
2550	R -923.31	R -285.81	R 351.69	R 989.19	R 1,626.69	R 2,264.19	
2500	R -960.81	R -335.81	R 289.19	R 914.19	R 1,539.19	R 2,164.19	
2450	R -998.31	R -385.81	R 226.69	R 839.19	R 1,451.69	R 2,064.19	
2400	R -1,035.81	R -435.81	R 164.19	R 764.19	R 1,364.19	R 1,964.19	

to be harvested in the Western Cape.

Canola can also be used as animal fodder, either as direct grazing or as a component of commercial feed. As an oilseed, canola is relatively low in fibre and high in protein, highly valued by farmers in most of the Swartland who are at times restricted by the feed crops they can grow. The commercial animal-feed industry also values canola.

### Results from the study group

The Malmesbury wheat study group's data for 2009 show that canola production is highly sustainable. The findings confirm canola's profitability and overall usefulness in parts of the Swartland, as was previously indicated by scientific research.

Besides canola, the participants incorporated lupins, medics and oats as alternatives in their rotation systems with wheat.

They could therefore come to conclusions without bias towards a particular crop. The study shows that canola is one of the most viable alternative crops in rotation with wheat as the main crop. Indeed, canola is currently threatening to even outperform wheat in profitability, given the current prices of both crops.

The direct input cost to establish 1ha of canola during the 2009 season averaged R2 835,81, says Hardus van Vuuren, agricultural adviser at Malmesbury based Kaap Agri. Given a yield of 1,25t/ha and a price of R2 800/t, the gross margin per hectare can be calculated as follows:

$$R2\ 800/t @ 1,25/ha = R3\ 500 \text{ minus} \\ R2\ 835,81 = R664,19 \text{ (gross margin).}$$

Hardus cautions that at this point of the calculation, fixed costs have not yet been taken into account, yet the potential for possible profit is clearly evident.

For example, should yield be increased by a mere 0,25t/ha, with input costs remaining static, the gross margin nearly doubles to R1 364/ha.

This illustrates how profitable a crop canola can be, says Hardus. The benefits don't stop there. Wheat

### *'Choosing the right moment for harvesting can be a tricky affair.'*

after canola yields better and can be more cheaply produced as many weeds are taken out during the canola cycle, resulting in a major herbicide saving.

According to Hardus, this saving on herbicide in a canola/wheat rotation amounts to about R260/ha when compared to monoculture wheat.

### Canola problems

Unfavourable soil and weather conditions can play havoc with a stand of canola. It's quite sensitive to pH, which tends to negatively impact on its potential. Many farmers experience problems with weak and uneven germination. Slugs can also ruin



Canola can bear heavily, but getting all those tiny seeds into the bag is still a major challenge.

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a good stand of canola, and choosing the right moment for harvesting can be tricky.

### Other research efforts

Until recently reliable information on which to make sound management decisions was not available. Leading to a reluctance amongst farmers to grow canola. But it has changed since then.

At few years ago, the Protein Research Foundation (PRF), which is dedicated to increasing protein needs of animal nutrition, facilitated research on the profitability of canola.

A former chief director of economics and marketing for the Department of Agriculture in Pretoria, Deon Joubert, headed up the project. Some of the best brains in the business also came on board and produced convincing figures that left no doubt about canola's profitability and usefulness.

Less known is canola seed's valuable oilcake, which makes good feed. Canola oil and oilcake are in short supply locally, and is imported at a high cost, says PRF managing director, Gerhard Scholtemeijer.

Not much has happened since then, but the foundation is currently stepping up its efforts to encourage canola production for the benefit of farmers and the entire country.

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