

Canola Bits

Bringing Canola Rotation to Winter Wheat Producers

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In cooperation with the Great Plains Canola Association

Welcome to the first in a series of articles devoted to information on production techniques, current local and federal issues, and activities and information of interest on winter canola in the southern Great Plains. This first issue is devoted to explaining the Okanola project initiated by OSU and where we are with winter canola today.

What is canola? Canola is a broadleaf crop developed in the early 1970's from the rapeseed plant using traditional plant breeding methods. Canola is special because the seed contains about 40% oil with less than 2% erucic acid in the oil. The term canola is an acronym for Canada "CAN" oil low acid "OLA". This trait allows canola oil to be used as high quality heart-healthy cooking oil and the meal left after crushing the oil out is a high quality protein feedstock typically used for livestock. In 1985, the US-FDA ruled that canola was safe for human consumption and in 2006 the FDA approved a qualified health claim for canola oil for improved human heart health. The United States currently imports over two million acres of production per year just to meet our increasing consumer demand for healthier edible oils. Winter canola varieties adapted to the southern Great Plains have only been developed within the past few years. Much like wheat, spring varieties are grown in the northern states and Canada. Canola oil is also used in cosmetics, hydraulic fluids, printing inks, margarine, and prepackaged foods. Canola oil is also a high quality biodiesel, but the demand for cooking oil currently prevents much use of canola oil for fuel.

Our mission statement for the Okanola Project clearly defines OSU's long term goals.

Mission Statement: To provide research, education, and demonstration to stimulate the development of winter canola as a major profitable rotational crop with winter wheat.

Why did we decide to introduce a new crop to Oklahoma wheat growers?

- Oklahoma wheat growers suffer severe competitive disadvantage due to their widespread practice of growing only wheat for decades. Pest problems have multiplied and yields have failed to increase over time, in stark contrast to steady and major increases in yields of wheat and other crops elsewhere.
- The Okanola Project was conceived in 2003 as a vehicle to introduce winter-hardy canola as a profitable rotational crop for Oklahoma wheat growers to aid in pest management, improve wheat yields and quality, and facilitate adoption of no-till crop production methods by wheat growers.
- Winter canola has been commercially grown in OK for only 5 years. The first adapted winter hardy variety was released by Kansas State University breeders in 2001. Before that time, canola could not be successfully grown in Oklahoma.

As with any new crop, we had much to learn and we have all been learning quickly.

OK farmers can now feel confident about growing a crop of winter canola, and we are working vigorously to make the crop even more profitable.

1. Basic production technologies have been developed through research and on-farm trials.