

WINTER GRAIN

More canola in the Overberg as farmers opt for lower risk

Canola plantings in the Overberg increased by 68% last year, up from a low base of 14 000ha planted in 2012 to 23 500ha in 2013.

Grain services manager at Overberg Agri, Johan Lusse, said canola plantings were likely to increase by 10% to 20% this year with farmers planting less barley and oats.

He said farmers were increasingly replacing barley with wheat or canola, because these crops were less risky in terms of susceptibility to rain damage in the harvest season.

Apart from canola being a lower risk crop, profitability was another strong driver motivating the increase in plantings.

Lusse said farmers were getting relatively good prices for canola, which meant that this crop was now in a position to compete with wheat and barley.

Grain SA's representative in the Overberg, Richard Krige, who is a grain farmer from Caledon, told *Farmer's Weekly* that with the increase in canola plantings there was a need for control options for fungal disease that affected the crop.

"If farmers can get access to fungicides registered for use on canola it would help reduce the risk of fungal diseases spreading and increase yield," he said.

Looking back on the 2013/2014 grain and oilseeds harvest in the Overberg region, Krige said that unseasonal rain during the harvest season had resulted in lower than expected crop losses.

Overall, farmers had an above-average harvest, and high yields had compensated in part for what had been lost in

terms of quality due to rain during harvest.

The region's wheat harvest was roughly the same volume as expected according to late season crop estimates.

Lusse said that they had received 203 000t of wheat, which was about 3 000t more than expected.

"Total wheat plantings in the Overberg increased from 52 200ha in 2012 to 60 600ha planted in 2013. However, yields were down due to adverse weather conditions resulting in the total crop being about 4 000t less than in 2012.

Lusse said that about 2% of the wheat they had taken in had been graded as feed grade wheat instead of food grade wheat. Due to the lower quality of wheat and an increase in the location differential, which especially affected the Safex price farmers in the Western Cape earned for wheat, farmers had earned on average R330/t less in 2013 than in the previous year.

FARMERS WERE GETTING RELATIVELY GOOD PRICES FOR CANOLA, SO THIS CROP COULD COMPETE WITH WHEAT AND BARLEY

The area planted to barley in the Overberg region had decreased from 50 500ha in 2012 to 44 700ha in 2013 and this could decrease further in 2014.

Lusse said the quality of barley was much better in 2013 than it had been in 2012 and that they had received about 122 000t of malting grade barley, compared with 21 500t received in 2012. — *Denene Erasmus*



ABOVE: Thrips, shown here on sugarcane, can destroy up to 23% of the sucrose yield.

RIGHT: An enlarged view of thrips. PHOTOS COURTESY OF SASRI



PESTS

Thrips populations boom in summer heat

Sugarcane growers in KwaZulu-Natal are contending with the annual outbreak of thrips (*Fulmekiola serrata*), which was first detected in SA sugarcane in 2005 and has become a major pest during peak summer months.

"Thrips follows a fixed pattern where the population is low throughout the year but peaks sharply from late November to late February. That is when most of the damage is done on young cane," said Marius Adendorff, South African Sugarcane Research Institute (Sasri) extension specialist for Pongola.

Thrips can destroy up to 23% of the sucrose yield. It is a common problem in the sugar areas and Sasri is conducting research and trials on irrigated and non-irrigated cane to determine the impact on the crop and the most effective control methods for thrips, Adendorff said.

"The real damage on irrigated cane could be less

because of the lower level of stress that cane is put under," said Adendorff.

Sasri's principal entomologist, Graeme Leslie, said thrips populations had escalated since 2005, but dropped off in 2010/2011.

"The population peaks since 2010/2011 were not as great as in previous years but this could be part of a long-term cycle," he said.

Sugarcane thrips lacerates the leaf tissue of sugarcane and suck the plant sap, usually from the top section of a young leaf. It causes yellow blotches on leaves that retard growth by reducing photosynthesis in the

"Growers can control thrips by changing planting dates, avoiding having young cane (three to four months old) from December to February during the thrips peak period, selecting less susceptible varieties and using registered insecticides," said Leslie. — *Robyn Joubert*