

## Promising start to grain harvest

Production of grain in the Western Cape seems promising, even at the start of the harvest.

Wheat production will be lower than last year, at 1,79 million tons compared with 1,87 million tons, with the area under wheat declining from about 505 500ha to 476 570ha, according to the forecast by the Crop Estimates Committee (CEC).

The drop in the area under production could be ascribed to farmers in the Swartland who were planting more canola for financial reasons, said RD Erasmus, deputy chairperson of the National Barley Industry Committee.

"Canola earnings have been promising over the past two years, and the crop yields great benefits when incorporated into the rotation system," he said.

In the southern Cape, farmers tended to plant more canola over barley, even though the area under barley production was larger than last year, he said.

The barley harvest would amount to 317 893t, compared with last year's 267 500t, with an increase in the production area from 81 320ha to 85 125ha, according to the CEC forecast.

At the time of going to print, about 95% of the barley harvest from Heidelberg, Riversdale and Swellendam in the southern Cape was in. Yield and quality had both been better than expected, according to Erasmus. It was too early to talk about the Overberg harvest, however, as only 10% was complete at this stage.

"It could be a good harvest if the weather keeps," Erasmus said.

The canola harvest seemed to be slightly lower than expected. The CEC forecast that canola production would increase from last year's 112 000t to 147 250t, with the area under production increasing from 72 165ha to 95 000ha.

Another estimate – by Kellie Becker, managing director of canola processor, Southern Oil – put the harvest at around 87 000t, with the area under production at 130 000ha to 135 000ha. Becker said that although many farms had been subjected to heat stress in August and September, it seemed that insufficient chill during flowering would have a more adverse impact on production on a few farms in the southern Cape.

**RIGHT:**  
Insufficient chill during the flowering phase of canola could lower crop yield.  
DENENE ERASMUS



For the rest of the Western Cape, yield and quality looked promising, and Becker was expecting an average harvest.

The CEC forecast for wheat production was spot on, according to Toit Wessels, provincial co-ordinator of farmer development at Grain SA. He said the harvest looked to be average in the Heidelberg, Riversdale and Swellendam regions, but average to a little above average in the Overberg, specifically Bredasdorp and Caledon, due to better climatic conditions.

The Swartland harvest looked promising, but bollworm in the Swartland and Overberg had forced farmers to take measures to prevent damage. These had pushed up input costs.

On the whole, wheat, canola and barley harvests had been about two weeks early due to climatic conditions, with canola up to a month early in the Swellendam and Heidelberg regions.

It was too early to estimate the impact of the hot weather on late wheat cultivars, Wessels said. – *Glenneis Kriel*