

# Canola, key alternative to wheat in the Western Cape

By Hugo Lochner, Plaas Media

The Protein Research Foundation (PRF) recently hosted a canola information day in Hopefield in the Western Cape. The topics discussed included climate change and risk management, cultivar evaluation and selection, cover crops, the latest research on *Sclerotinia* and black stem, determining crop losses and the oilseeds market.

## Growth in canola plantings

During the information day, Andries Theron, chairperson of the PRF, said the current season is the best it has been in ten years. "Over the past decade, we've become accustomed to planting on dryland while waiting for the June rain. However, this year the rain arrived on time and precipitation was enough to ensure ideal conditions for good germination and yield."

Theron reported that canola plantings in the Western Cape increased from 400ha in 1994 to more than 95 000ha this season. The average yield per hectare also increased while the total canola yield amounted to nearly 165 000 tons in 2020.

Prices of R6 500 to R6 700 per ton were realised this past season. "At these prices and with a yield of 1,8 to two tons per hectare and more, grain producers in the Western Cape can profit from producing canola," Theron said.

The wheat industry in the Western Cape is currently overproducing, while the province is the biggest importer of oilcake for animal feed. Cattle producers in the province import approximately 340 000 tons of soya oilcake per annum. "The canola industry needs to share in the 340 000 tons. This will not only benefit the Western Cape's grain producers, but the country's entire economy."

## Climate change

Prof Stephanie Midgley of the Western Cape Department of Agriculture said the consensus is that climate change will cause temperatures in the Western Cape to rise even more. By 2050, temperatures could be 1,5 to 3°C warmer, with more hot and fewer cool days and nights.

The effect of climate change on wheat yield on dryland can vary between a

decrease of 25% to an increase of 10%, depending on greenhouse gases.

## The value of agriculture

According to Prof Ferdie Meyer of the Bureau for Food and Agricultural Policy (BFAP), the value of agriculture in rural areas is underestimated as it offers support to small businesses. Agriculture contributes more to the gross domestic product (GDP) than the official 2% – especially considering that agricultural processing contributes 5% to GDP. He emphasised that primary agriculture creates 7% and agricultural processing 3% of all jobs in South Africa.

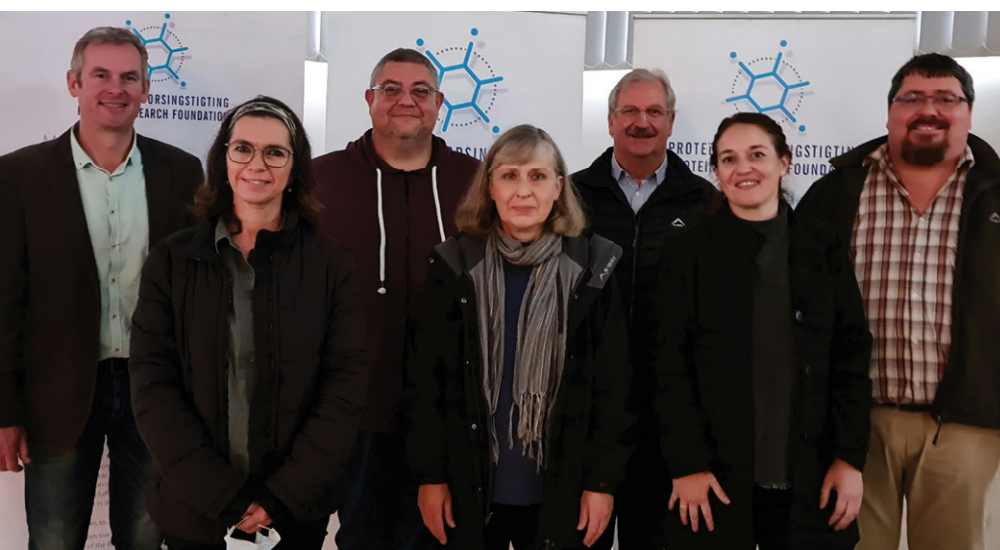
In 2020, the agricultural sector grew by 13% and was the only sector in South Africa showing positive growth. Meyer added that international trade is crucial to South Africa's economy. Last year, total agricultural exports amounted to US\$10,8 billion while total imports were US\$6,4 billion.

## Land reform

Land reform is crucial for South Africa. "More black producers must be established sustainably. We also need to negotiate with government. If, for example, new market access is negotiated, the question posed will be: Who will have access to these markets?"

According to Meyer, land reform in South Africa has progressed more than what is generally considered. In total, 67% of the objectives of the National Development Plan have already been achieved. This progress is acknowledged among the top brass in government.

"The National Development Plan is excellent and for the most part, our policy framework is not bad at all. However, infrastructure is the biggest obstacle. We are lagging, especially in terms of roads and dams," said Meyer. 🇿🇦



From the left are Prof Ferdie Meyer of BFAP, Lizette Nowers, Dr Johan Strauss and Prof Stephanie Midgley, all from the Western Cape Department of Agriculture, Andries Theron, chairperson of the PRF, and Huibré Schreuder and Dr Gert van Coller, both from the Western Cape Department of Agriculture.

For more information, contact the Protein Research Foundation at 011 803 2579 or 011 803 1894, or send an email to [pns@proteinresearch.net](mailto:pns@proteinresearch.net).