Canola to Western NSW

Grower Experience:

Ian Davis Gap View
Lake Cargelligo 2672

Overview:
Ian Davis has grown canola three times on long fallow paddocks with good legume pasture histories. He has not achieved results with canola that are comparable with a wheat gross margin. Ian believes that canola requires a mild finish to give good yield and oil content and is therefore not suited to the Lake Cargelligo district. The Lake Cargelligo and District Gross Margin Crop Competition confirms his experience as canola invariably finished near the bottom of the gross margins. Ian has a legume pasture phase in his rotation which maintains soil nutrients and humus and he grows 75% of his wheat on long fallows.

At Gap View, 10 km west of Lake Cargelligo, we grew canola for 3 years; 1993, 94 and 95. I stopped growing canola as I was not satisfied A typical rotation would be; long fallow wheat/skip a year/undersown long fallow wheat/pasture for 3-4 years. Another alternative would be long fallow wheat/wheat/skip **a** year/undersown long fallow wheat. The first rotation with only two wheat crops would be used if the first year's wheat crop was very high yielding. Pastures are a lucerne/ clover mix, usually sown on a long fallow paddock to ensure a better moisture profile, and maintained in reasonable order with spray topping. Prime lambs are the main enterprise using the pastures. Merino ewes are crossed with Coolalee rams, lambing percentages average 120% and I have been happy with returns from this enterprise. Pastures also add nitrogen and humus and are a disease break for the following cropping cycle. In 1993 I grew 80 Ha of canola which yielded 1.8T/Ha. I chose a good long fallow paddock out of a legume pasture phase, it was a late with it's gross margin, it just did not compare to wheat. I grow about 3000 acres of crop each year, 2300 of which is long fallow. spring but I was happy with the yield. DAP and some urea was used but the crop was grown cheaply. In 1994 I sowed another 80 Ha long fallow paddock with a good lucerne/clover pasture history. Growing season rain was only 2.5 inches and the yield was lT/Ha, but oil content only 34 - 35%. In 1995 200 Ha of my best country was sown to canola. Growing season rain was 8 inches and the crop looked magnificent, but it was dry in late October and the result was poor, only yielding IT/Ha; the same as the extremely dry 1994 crop. If this paddock was sown to wheat in 1995, going by surrounding paddock results and knowledge of the paddock under the canola, it would have grown 2.8 T/Ha of PH13 wheat, the price for this about $160-$170/T. Canola prices at the time were about $300/T. Gross receipts for wheat would have been about $460/Ha and for canola only $300/Ha.

The Lake Cargelligo and Districts Gross Margin Crop Competition confirms my experience with canola in this district. Canola invariably runs near the bottom of the gross margin competition. I do not believe that canola suits this district, it needs a mild finish for the oil content to be good. The hot fast finishes that we experience 3 out of 4 years in this district cause the seed to shrivel up.

I see the value of canola in an intensive cropping system but I believe it is more profitable for me to grow wheat with a good pasture phase in the rotation to manage soil structure and nutrients. Prime lambs have made profitable use of my pastures and long fallow wheat crops have had far superior gross margins than canola at Gap View. I have a concern about herbicide resistance (particularly to Roundup) in minimum till intensive cropping cycles. The use of a pasture phase, moderate use of chemical fallowing (usually one spray out of pasture phase then tillage) and high percentage of long fallow crops appears to be a profitable and sustainable way to manage the rotation.