

RISK AND REWARD EARLY SOWN CANOLA

Grower case study: Mike Dodd



Buntine grower Mike Dodd with canola sown into stripper stubble.

Photo: Mike Dodd

SNAPSHOT

Grower: Mike Dodd
Location: Buntine, Western Australia
Average rainfall: 320mm
Farm size: 5500ha
Enterprises: canola, wheat, barley and lupins
Soil type: sandy loam to deep red sand

A mid-April start date for sowing canola is the target for Buntine grain grower Mike Dodd, who typically plants about 20 to 30 per cent of his cropping program to canola.

Mike, who farms with his wife and son, has been growing canola for the past 15 years and believes it has almost always been their best-returning crop. Their canola plantings have increased from 12 per cent of their 5500ha program 10 years ago to 35 per cent in 2022. This increase has mainly been driven by price, along with improved chemical

control options with genetically modified (GM) varieties and timely weather events providing ideal sowing windows. The Dodds also grow wheat, barley and lupins as part of the cropping program.

The Dodds will typically target 15 to 20 April to start dry sowing canola, unless earlier opportunities arise. In 2021 they started on 15 April after tropical Cyclone Seroja provided significant opening rains, and in 2022 they started on 9 April on the back of another ex-tropical cyclone system.

Although they started early in 2022, Mike says he will still only put a

percentage in this early to spread the risk, taking the opportunities for areas of the farm that had some subsoil moisture from summer rainfall.

“This year (2022) the rainfall event came through on 26 March and we didn’t start straight away. We had 30 millimetres of rain in February and 50mm off that ex-tropical cyclone system at the end of March, but we could only do two paddocks, as the rest of the farm didn’t get near that amount of rain in those events. If we went all in early and then didn’t get rain for over a month, the yield penalty would have been huge.”

The 2022 year was stop/start for the Dodds in getting seeding underway. They had four starts at sowing canola over a five-week period, with a mix of seeding into moisture and seeding dry. Mid-May is their cut-off for seeding canola.

MAKING SOWING DECISIONS

Mike bases his sowing decisions on stored soil moisture and tracks year-round rainfall across all blocks to inform them. He also considers the flowering window to target 80 per cent completion of flowering before the potential September heat stresses. He puts most of his decision-making down to trusting his experience. “It comes down to gut feel in the end – farmers are good at that.”

Mike’s other focus is on sowing into conditions that maximise germination success. “If you can get it to germinate, you are halfway there as canola will hang on, it’s a resilient crop, although it looks soft at times. Even on a dry year, to have the crop up and out of the ground is better than it struggling to germinate. The later you go, the colder it gets, and germination takes longer.”

CHOOSING THE RIGHT TYPE

The Dodds have used or trialled a lot of canola technologies over the past 15 years, but now grow 100 per cent GM canola varieties and sow with a deep blade system (DBS) seeder and multi-stream box. Mike says that RoundUp Ready® technology has been a game-changer for them in providing improved chemical weed control options for their rotation.

In terms of varieties sown, it also comes down to seed availability. It is hard to predict the season ahead and know what seed will be available to

plan around ideal variety sowing times, so they always order some longer and shorter season varieties.

In 2021, they used seven different varieties with InVigor® R 4022P as their preferred variety, but have also sown a lot of Hyola® Battalion XC and Hyola® Garrison XC in 2022 for their imidazolinone (IMI) tolerance.

In relation to input management for their canola program, they will always use 50L Flexi-N banded at sowing with adequate seed separation (approximately 40 to 100mm) regardless of the time of seeding and conditions. Mike says this has been proven to be a good base for them and then they will play the season with top-up nitrogen after that.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

Going forward, Mike plans to increase the amount of early sown canola in their program to take full advantage of the extended growing season. This allows for an opportunity to increase yield, even though there is a risk of no follow-up rain. However, in Mike’s opinion, the rewards of going early outweigh the risks.

The economic analysis that was completed on Liebe Group’s ‘Early sown canola’ trial in 2022 shows the profit reward of going early (however, it was a very wet year). It will be interesting to see what the 2023 trial’s economic analysis shows in a drier year.

Photo: Paul Jones



	Time of sowing 1 (early)	Time of sowing 2 (normal)
Paddock	10	21
Variety	InVigor® R 4022P	InVigor® R 4022P
Sowing date	9 April 2022 (wet)	10 May 2022 (dry)
Rainfall at sowing	30mm – January 2022	25mm – 27 March 2022
	50mm – 27 March	6mm – April
		13mm – 13 May
Comments (26 May 2022)	Germinated well – within 4 days	Germinated 16 May
	Currently at 7 to 8-leaf stage	Currently at cotyledon stage
Comments (29 July 2022)	Recent rains have really allowed this crop to come into full flower and start showing good potential. A few DBM (Diamondback moth) have been noticed but at very low levels.	At the early flowering stage, this crop is not only enjoying the extra moisture but the available nitrogen that has come with it. Very much a wait-and-see for now.
Yields (t/ha)	2.7t/ha	2.2t/ha

Photo: Paul Jones



GRDC PROJECT**LIE2204-002SAX**

The Liebe Group growers identified a lack of data in sowing canola before mid-April in the north-eastern grain growing region of Western Australia. To address these concerns, GRDC invested in a two-year 'NGN risk and reward of very early canola' project to help growers better understand the risk and reward of sowing canola early and the decision-making process and logistical challenges with sowing times and varietal choice. As part of the project, trials were set up in 2022 and three growers (Mike Dodd, Dylan Hirsch and Boyd Carter) recorded their trial results.



DISCLAIMER Any recommendations, suggestions or opinions contained in this publication do not necessarily represent the policy or views of the Grains Research and Development Corporation. No person should act on the basis of the contents of this publication without first obtaining specific, independent professional advice.

The Grains Research and Development Corporation will not be liable for any loss, damage, cost or expense incurred or arising by reason of any person using or relying on the information in this publication.

CAUTION: RESEARCH ON UNREGISTERED AGRICULTURAL CHEMICAL USE Any research with unregistered agricultural chemicals or of unregistered products reported in this document does not constitute a recommendation for that particular use by the authors or the authors' organisations. All agricultural chemical applications must accord with the currently registered label for that particular agricultural chemical, crop, pest and region.

Copyright © All material published in this Fact Sheet is copyright protected and may not be reproduced in any form without written permission from GRDC.