

OSU and ODA Examine Potential for Canola as an Oil Crop

by Bend Weekly News Sources

Oregon State University scientists are working with the Oregon Department of Agriculture on preliminary research that they hope will launch a larger effort to study canola as a source for biofuels in Oregon. The state's Department of Agriculture is working to identify funding options to assist the OSU research and extension efforts to examine the potential for canola and other alternative crops for biofuels.

A preliminary fact sheet based on findings from both new and long-term research by researchers from OSU's College of Agricultural Sciences outlines some of the potential advantages and challenges, as well as areas where more information is needed related to producing canola for biofuel. The fact sheet is available on the college's website (<http://agsci.oregonstate.edu/research/information.html>).

Canola plant Interest in growing canola for biofuel is increasing rapidly in Oregon, as is the nationwide interest in alternative fuels. As Oregonians search for home-grown sources of energy, canola offers potential as a high-producing oilseed for biofuel and as a crop well-suited to growing in Oregon. However, without safeguards in place, canola may also pose potential risk to established and relatively high-value specialty seed and vegetable production industries in some parts of Oregon.

For several years OSU researchers at the Columbia Basin Agricultural Research Center in Pendleton have studied cultivars of canola and methods of growing them in eastern Oregon, particularly as a rotation crop with wheat. Breeding studies are ongoing in collaboration with the University of Idaho.

In addition, OSU researchers have conducted limited cultivar trials of canola and other types of oilseed crops at OSU's Hyslop Research Farm in Corvallis and at the Central Oregon Research and Extension Center near Madras. These studies accompany a large body of research on many other crops undertaken by researchers in OSU's College of Agricultural Sciences, Agricultural Experiment Station, and Extension.

Oregon growers in the Columbia Basin have been growing canola as a rotational crop with dryland wheat for many years. There are about 3,000 acres of canola grown in eastern Oregon, most used for oil or foundation seed stocks for Canada. Willamette Valley growers produce canola on a small scale (about 30 acres) for foundation seed.

According to the Oregon Department of Agriculture, growing canola for oil on large acreages in areas with existing vegetable and seed production requires particular attention to avoiding potential risks to those industries. Therefore in 2005, the ODA established protected districts where canola production is prohibited except under special permit, in order to minimize undesirable cross-pollination, disease and pest buildup, and establishment of volunteers.

Protected districts include the Willamette Valley, parts of Central Oregon, parts of northeastern Oregon, and a three-mile strip along the Idaho border in Malheur County.

ODA's restrictions in protected districts will be reviewed in 2007. Until then, OSU will continue to provide ODA with scientific information about canola and other oilseed and biofuel options in Oregon.

For more information on the collaboration, contact OSU's Russ Karow (541-737-2821) or Jan Auyong (541-737-1915) of the College of Agricultural Sciences, or the Oregon Department of Agriculture's Brent Searle, a policy analyst, (503-986-4558) or Dan Hilburn, plant division administrator (503-986-4663).

About the OSU College of Agricultural Sciences: The college contributes in many ways to the economic and environmental sustainability of Oregon and the Pacific Northwest. The college's faculty are leaders in agriculture and food systems, natural resources management, life sciences and rural economic development research.

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