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New canola beats drought

UNWELCOME dry conditions this season have slowed but not stopped the growth of a new species of canola being trialled by Victorian growers for the first time this year.

The release of dune, Australia's first variety of *Brassica juncea* canola, is promising to provide grain growers in lower rainfall areas (275-350mm) with a profitable and reliable canola break crop.

Dune was developed by Department of Primary Industries oilseed breeder Wayne Burton, in conjunction with the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool in Canada, with funding from the Grains Research and Development Corporation.

It is marketed by Pacific Seeds.

Dune tolerates dry conditions better than traditional canola.

"It is standing up to the dry this year," Mr Burton said.

"But it's not bullet-proof.

"If you don't get enough rain for finishing off wheat crops, then you won't have enough rain for dune. But dune is still better than (traditional canola) *Brassica napus*."



Drought tolerance:
NOT GM.

Golden crop: Josh Dunstan is pleased with his paddock of juncea canola grown this year for the first time.

Only a limited amount of dune seed was available this year, under closed loop marketing arrangements.

St Arnaud farmer Josh Dunstan was lucky enough to get seed this year.

Mr Dunstan had turned his back on growing canola after poor results over the past six years.

"Canola is a great break crop," he said. "The taproot gets down into the subsoil and it gives a good disease and weed break to set up the

following wheat crop.

"I didn't want to lose canola out of the rotation but it has become too expensive to grow for what it returns."

On hearing about dune, Mr Dunstan made a late decision to include it in this year's program, sowing 45ha on barley stubble that would otherwise have been left as fallow.

He sowed the crop on June 9, and although it received no follow-up rain, he said it shot out of the ground and had caught up with other canola

crops in the district by August.

"Most people sowed their canola in May, when we got about 100mm of rain," he said.

Rainfall since sowing dune has been scarce for Mr Dunstan, with just 9mm in June, 48mm in July, 8mm in August and 11mm to mid-September.

The crop also survived two weeks of frosts in July.

Mr Dunstan said he hoped that with follow-up falls, the crop would yield one tonne/ha.

"It's better than we've been getting from traditional canola

and better than I would expect from growing conventional varieties this season," he said.

Other crops on the property are also showing signs of stress from the seasonal conditions, with the wheat struggling most.

Mr Burton said a Clearfield variety of dune, called oasis, was expected to be released to Victorian growers in 2009.

He was also developing triazine-tolerant juncea canola varieties, but the first of these was not expected to be released until 2010 or 2011.