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Ongoing canola tests yield no silver bullet solutions for producers

Ultimate Canola Challenge Boron applications are showing no value in Alberta tests

*Posted Jul. 31st, 2014 by [Barb Glen](#)*

CYPRESS COUNTY, Alta. — Agronomist Autumn Barnes stands in front of numerous canola plots that look almost identical.

They are part of the Ultimate Canola Challenge organized by the Canola Council of Canada and undertaken by applied research groups, and federal and provincial agriculture departments to explore ways to increase canola yields.

With one year of data behind the challenge, Barnes says the exploration hasn't revealed any eureka moments.

“We weren't able to find something that could improve upon doing everything right the first time,” the canola council agronomist told those gathered at a Cypress County field day near Medicine Hat July 17.

“The ultimate canola challenge was brought about to see if there's anything that we can do to improve upon our best management practices. We wanted to see if there were any products that we could add, on top of doing everything right, that will give us that extra yield bump.”

So far the answer is no, but research will continue this year and more data is expected to yield more definitive results. The same tests are being done on plots in Lethbridge and seven other Alberta sites. Plots at the research site near Medicine Hat involved one check and 12 treatments.

Barnes said the check plot was given the groceries. It was seeded to achieve seven or eight plants per sq. foot, and based on soil tests, was given 20 pounds per acre of phosphorus with the seed, 75 lb. of side-banded nitrogen and 15 lb. of sulfur.

Other plots each received one different treatment, including 125 lb. of nitrogen at seeding, a seed primer, a stress relief product, top-dressed UAN, boron applied at the four to six leaf stage, boron applied at flowering, a higher seeding rate, a reduced rate of nitrogen at seeding another type of seed primer and a biostimulation product.

Each treatment was replicated four times to obtain reliable data.

Barnes said last year's trials showed no significant yield differences from any of the treatments, and this year visual differences are few. Yield data will be gathered after harvest.

She said the council receives many questions about the efficacy of additional boron. Some Ontario studies have indicated a response, but prairie trials haven't shown the same result.

"We haven't been able to see a consistent response from boron at flowering," she said. "So far the bulk of the scientific evidence indicates that it probably doesn't (improve yield)."

In the challenge, boron was applied at .75 litres per acre in the four to six leaf stage and at one litre per acre on the plot where it was applied at flowering.

"It's something that people want to try every year and it's something people do try every year, but from the replicated data and from the scientific data, there's not evidence to show that it's something worth spending your money on."

Barnes said the changed fertilizer registration system can make it difficult for producers to find reliable data about new products, so independent and reliable research is needed.