

Speculating on the Future of Dryland Mustard

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by Tim Kalinowski



Howard Love of Mustard 21 speaks about the need to increase mustard acreage in Canada to stay competitive in the global marketplace. Photos by Tim Kalinowski

Mustard is an excellent dryland crop with a strong international market, but it has been steadily losing acres to other crops such as canola the past number of years. It's of growing concern, says Howard Love of Mustard 21, who recently spoke at the Farming Smarter Field Day in Cypress County near Medicine Hat. Love was showing off some of the new varieties of hybrid mustard seed being developed by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada in Saskatchewan. The Medicine Hat location is one of several test plots for these new seed varieties across the prairies.

"We need to ensure Canada maintains a consistent supply of mustard into the world market, and quality is number one," explains Love. "Much of mustard is being sold into Europe, and we have got to stay clean of GMOs and contamination by our major canola crop. That's a challenge."

"Maintaining the supply is a challenge because other crops have been increasing yields," he continues. "Look what's happened with the canola story. Right now, the data out of the Saskatchewan brown soil

zone the yield of canola would be double what the yellow mustard is. We need to increase the yield of mustard to remain competitive."

Love says mustard already has several natural advantages over canola as a crop in arid zones, but does not have the massive research dollars backing it that canola does.

He is optimistic that with the inclusion of newer brown (Czech) mustard and oriental varieties an opportunity may now exist to help mustard take strong steps forward as a crop on the prairies.

Whereas the yellow mustard variety is mainly used in condiments, brown and oriental varieties have the more exclusive spice market at their fingertips.

"And with the brown mustard you have a closer relatedness to canola," says Love.

"The good news is if you are plant breeder is you can use the same types of tools that we are using in canola to create hybrids.

"The bad news is as soon as you produce steriles of this mustard, you have to worry about the pollen of the hybrid canola. It will actually facilitate pollination. We do not want anything that is genetically modified anywhere near our (mustard) plants."

Love says while yellow mustard is a good market, and brown and oriental may be on the rise, the recent anti-green tone coming out of the United States may possibly put a damper on the biofuel prospects of another mustard variety called brassica carinata. This mustard variety has important potential as an alternative type of jet fuel, and has been gaining prominence in the biofuels market the past several years.

Love feels the market for this product will likely remain speculative, and in the research and development phase, for many years to come.

"I think it has potential," he confirms. "As a species, it's a very tough species. And from the point of view of heat, it's probably one of the better ones we've got."



Participants at the Farming Smarter Field Day near Medicine Hat heard a lot about the new possibilities regarding dryland mustard earlier this month.