RealAgriculture

Pulse School: Precision planting shows promise for pulses

Kara Oosterhuis/RealAgriculture

YouTube Video Link

Usually when a farmer considers using a planter in Western Canada, it's to plant canola crops, not pulse crops. But there are those exploring that option in Alberta.

Scott Gillespie, independent agronomist with Plants Dig Soil Consulting, has been working at scaling up plot trials he first saw at Farming Smarter. In this episode of Pulse School, Gillespie joins Kara Oosterhuis to talk about those plots and how this planting method works out for pulse crops.

"It was fairly impressive to see the consistency of the stand and how well it did — even in dryland, in a very dry area, near Medicine Hat," says Gillespie, about the plot trials.

Fast forward to this year and one of Gillespie's clients said they were interested in precision planting seed canola, but also wanted to know what else a planter could be good for. The client grows soybeans and yellow field peas — for soybeans, Gillespie says they're a good fit, but for field peas, the quantity of seed would be an issue, especially with the precision planter's 15-inch spacing.

In plots, high seeding rates are easily achieved; however, in the field, to reach that same target seeding rate, it's a lot more seed to run through the planter, at a lot slower seeding pace. Gillespie had to reset his expectations of the seeds per square foot that were planted.

For the field pea stand, it worked out to seven plants per square foot, just below the recommended plant stand density from the pulse growers association.

The pea crop was sprayed with herbicide at the appropriate time, but because of the slow start to the season, the canopy closed over about a week later than normal. Gillespie suggests considering a cover crop to help out with that excess bare ground — like annual ryegrass or perhaps some clovers, that would grow low to the ground and wouldn't interfere with harvest. A cover crop has to be compatible with next year's crop, too.

Overall, a few tweaks have to be made to make precision planting work for pulse crops, but the method has potential.