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"Canola Bits
Winter Time concerns and needs

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The winter canola crop in Oklahoma looks exceptional this year. The crop is typically almost dormant at this time of the year, much like the winter wheat. It is normal for canola leaves to discolor, turn purple and die back in the winter. As the winter goes on more of the leaf tissue freezes and dries resulting in a mixture of brown and green leaves. The center of the plant, called the crown, does not die. The crown remains green and anchored to the soil. Good moisture and extended warm growing conditions during the fall of 2009 resulted in large canola plants in some fields. These should produce large high yielding plants in the spring. The improved varieties being grown now also have better winter tolerance than those being grown a few years ago. This is evident in the way the crown hugs the soil, and the way the new varieties hold their leaves longer into the fall. This can be seen on both big and small canola plants. Canola growth will resume in early spring (Feb-March) and new leaves will appear from the plant crown and soon thereafter the plants will begin to bolt. It is important to have spring topdressing done before bolting begins

January usually provides an opportune time for topdressing. Always refer to your soil test for fertility recommendations. As with wheat, spring topdressing can be applied in liquid or dry form. Canola generally requires 2.5 lbs of N per 50 lb bushel. Liquid nitrogen can be applied at high rates with little or no leaf burning. If leave burn does occur the canola will soon grow out of it. Canola also has a high demand for sulfur due to its high content of sulfur containing proteins. Sulfur can be added to the topdressing application at 10 to 20 lbs per acre if it was not applied in the fall. Ammonium sulfate or ammonium thio-sulfate is two good sources of sulfur and are readily available for plants to use. In contrast, elemental sulfur requires time to be oxidized to a sulfate form in order for plants utilize it. Therefore, we do not recommend applying elemental forms of sulfur in the spring.

Topdressing applications can be made with floaters or bigger wheeled sprayers, tracks in the field haven't been much of a problem when the canola is dormant. Once the canola resumes spring growth, it is better to minimize wheel traffic on the field.

Winter canola is a crop that requires a little more management than wheat, especially when you are a first time grower. So make sure you are observing the crop and taking care of its needs. As the weather warms up some in a few weeks start scouting your fields for diamond back moth, green peach and turnip aphids. Diamondback moth larvae will over winter and feed `in the crown of canola plants. If infestations are high, stand loss may occur. Green peach and turnip aphids usually feed on the underside of the canola leaves. Make sure to flip the leaves over and check under them.

If aphid numbers are high and an insecticide application is needed, be sure to use higher carrier volume and high enough pressure to get maximum penetration into the canopy and under the leaves. It may be advantageous to use some of the newer style nozzle tips that spray forwards and backwards at an angle, to help get the insecticide under the leaves. Read insecticide labels prior to using them.

As the spring approaches, many canola growers will be wondering whether they should sign a contract to lock in the price they will receive at harvest. Typically, canola prices peak from May to July because the northern harvest won't occur for several more months and crushers usually run low on canola by the beginning of summer. So, growers are well advised to watch the daily market if they plan to contract for price. Other growers will simply sell their canola across the scales and hope the price is good in June. It's never too early to start thinking about equipment or custom operations for harvest management. Canola producers have the option of swathing, pushing, or straight harvesting their 2010 canola crop. These different styles of harvesting management depend on what will fit best for each producers operation. Canola Prices for 2010 should range between $8.00 and $10.00 per bushel and be well above the projected wheat price.