

A New Cash Crop Alternative

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service in 1936 and the family lost their seven-generations-owned Wedlitz Farm there to Nazi takeover. In 1952, he emigrated to the United States and became manager at Fox Lease Farms in Virginia. Under Haberland's guidance, Fox Lease gained national recognition for its fine-bred registered Holsteins.

Ted, Jr., and Diane returned to Fox Lease following their marriage in 1983 to handle the 1,000 acres of crops. When Ted, Sr. retired in 1986, the young couple went to work on a Mt. Joy dairy farm to pursue their interest in farming.

Eighteen months later, they purchased a small dairy farm in Berks County and began milking

30 cows, including a core of 15 head owned from Ted's 4-H career. Within a year they received an "irresistible" offer from a buyer who wanted the farm. Through a Lancaster Farming ad, they located their present Thomasville R1 operation, formerly owned by Claude "Bud" Holmes.

"So we're in a new venture with an old friend," grins Ted of the canola planting which has so fascinated the neighborhood. "Dad's up every couple of weeks and has been watching it grow. It's been a big kick for him."

The 25 acres were planted to the tiny, round, black canola seeds last August 25, after silage corn was harvested. Soil tests called for 50 pounds nitrogen, 60 each of

phosphorus and potash and 5 of sulphur per acre.

"Canola is such a small seed that it needs to be handled like alfalfa in preparing a seedbed," Ted explains. And, while European growers have specialized canola seeders, Haberland had to improvise.

After chisel plowing, the seedbed was disked and culti-packed twice. A grain drill, minus the hoses in front of the drill disks, was used to direct seed the canola at the rate of 6 pounds per acre. After seeding, the bed was culti-packed once more for good seed-to-soil contact.

In about a week, the seedlings, "looking like little tiny bow-ties" were up, ideally six to ten plants per square foot. By late October, the Haberbands were pleased with the stand, which turned a brilliant crimson in fall's chilly temperatures.

"Early planting seems to be a key to a good stand," Haberland believes. "Canola has a tap root that needs to develop. There's not much height in the fall, just leaves and tap root. It should have 10 to 12 leaves per crown to be ready to go into winter, when the tops completely die off. And it cannot take wet spots; canola must good winter drained soils."

By early May, the sunny yellow blooms atop the five-foot stem covered the fields with color and kept the local honeybee population working overtime. Dozens of tiny, fingerlike pods, already filling with the pin-head-size seeds, protruded off branches from each main stem.

The Haberbands frequently host European visitors, including youth exchanges. They've praised the stand, and marvel at the lack of pests on it. Lack of cold winters in growing areas there encourage insect and fungus infestations.

"Dad has told us that with a good canola crop you should be able to pull on a plant at one edge of the field and it should shake at the other edge," Haberland observes of the crop's tendency to tangle together into a thick mass of growth. "And a crop with decent yields should start to lay over as it matures."

"We like to plant a fall grain for



Diane and Ted Haberland examine the developing seed pods on the canola stand.

generating early summer cash flow and then double crop corn or soybeans," adds Haberland. "But we didn't really need the straw from barley and canola matures earlier for double cropping. We'll probably follow it with beans."

The Thomasville dairyman plans to harvest the canola with a soybean head, in early June. Seed moisture should ideally be at nine percent at harvest for the highest concentration of oil and to prevent rancidity. Haberland, Sr. has cautioned the couple that all harvest and hauling equipment must be as free as possible of leaks and cracks.

"Dad says that if trucks or equipment won't hold water, they won't hold canola, either," Haberland says of the fine seed.

"You can handle the seed and actually feel the oil from it," he says of this oil-rich crop. Promoted as one of the healthiest vegetable oils, canola oil is seeing increased use for frying by consumer-health-conscious fast food chains.

"Canola oil is available in some local supermarkets," notes Diane,

who has taken to reading cooking oil labels in search of marketers of the product.

According to Haberland, canola protein meal has tremendous livestock feeding characteristics as an oilseed by-product. However, due to its expense, he figures alternatives as more economical.

The recent opening of Iron Curtain countries to increased world trade has been a factor, Haberland believes, in making canola varieties available that will tolerate area winter temperatures.

"Poland had the strains of those seeds," he adds. "Before leadership changes in Poland and the opening of the country, they weren't available here."

The Haberbands credit York Agway for assistance in locating a supply of seed for planting. Aggrow was instrumental in contracting the crop to Albright's Mill in Kempton.

Running an input cost analysis, Haberland tallied slightly over \$90 per acre of planting and harvest costs. That included six pounds of seed at \$2.72 per pound, \$35.50 of fertilizer, \$10 for tillage and \$30 harvest and trucking. And, while his father recalls yields of 35 bushel per acre, prior to commercial fertilizer usage and with old seed varieties, Haberland hopes for at least a 50-bushel yield and a \$5/bushel price. Price per bushel, he says, usually runs somewhat parallel that of soybeans.

While the canola was in final ripening stages, the Haberbands were filling their forage silo with another less familiar silage crop, triticale.

"It gives more tonnage than barley and is ready later than rye. Our heavy soils just won't support equipment most years early enough to chop rye. It gives us a ten-day harvest window, and can head out and still give a 18-20 percent feed," Haberland adds. Last year's triticale silage yielded six tons dry matter per acre. Corn or beans follows the forage crop.

"We like to try new things," agree the Haberbands. "We don't necessarily need to be first, but we don't want to be the last."

The Haberbands enjoy sharing their experience with these locally lesser known crops and are willing to talk with other farmers considering planting them. They may be reached at New Wedlitz Farm, Thomasville R1, 17364, phone 717-259-8406.



Nearly lost in the five-foot-tall canola are from left, Beth, 6; Theo, 5; and Elsa, 3; the Haberland youngsters.

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