

Part 3. Biofuels and Other Alternative Crops

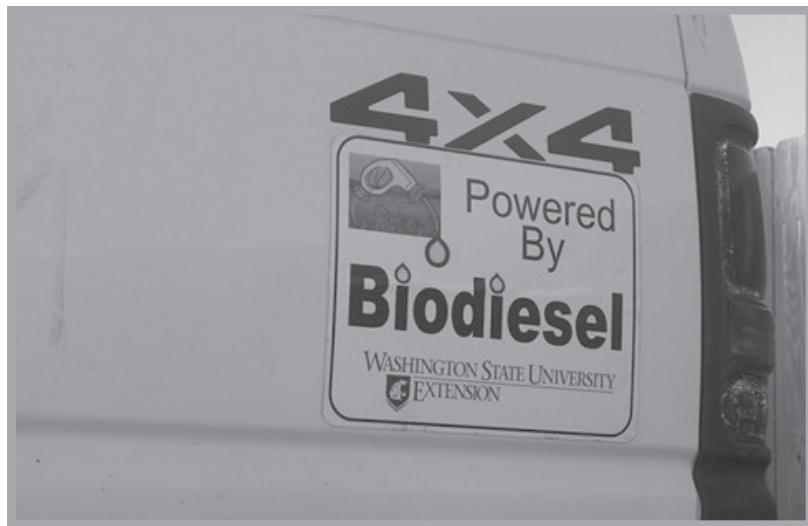
The Rise of the Canola Industry in Washington State

KAREN SOWERS¹, MARY BETH LANG² AND BILL PAN¹

¹DEPT. OF CROP AND SOIL SCIENCES, WSU; ²WASHINGTON STATE DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Canola has been produced on limited acreage in Washington State since the 1980's, yet in recent years the sight of a bright yellow field of flowering canola has become more commonplace, particularly in eastern Washington. State canola acreage more than doubled from 15,000 acres in 2012 to 37,000 acres in 2013, and recent Prospective Plantings data released by USDA-NASS indicate a continued increase for 2014 to 45,000 acres. Why the increased interest in canola production in the predominantly cereal-based cropping systems of WA? The answer may be different depending on who is asked. To a grower, the benefits of canola in many situations result in an improved bottom line in the entire rotation, regardless of rainfall zone. Increased yield of following cereal crop that can be used with deficit irrigation

zone. Increased yield of following cereal crops, improved weed control, breaking disease and insect pest cycles, and a crop that can be used with deficit irrigation are commonly cited as benefits. To state legislators, it's the opportunity to



produce renewable energy and create a new industry in Washington that benefits farmers and our rural communities. In 2007, the WA legislature allocated monies to WSU to initiate the Washington State Biofuels Cropping Systems Research & Extension Project (WBCS) to evaluate alternative crops that may have the potential to meet some of the increasing demand for biofuel production. In addition, state funding was applied to support an in-state industry of crushers and biodiesel plants to process the crop, and policies were put in place to promote in-state use of biodiesel. Fast forward to 2014 and, thanks to continued funding from the state, the WBCS team of researchers, grad students and technicians continue to make

great strides in finding best management practices for winter and spring canola in various crop rotations and rainfall zones across the state; education and outreach opportunities abound; there are local processors with an insatiable demand for canola; and the state is purchasing more than 1 million gallons of biodiesel annually to fuel the state ferries system and state vehicles. A vision is being realized for WA-produced oilseeds, crushed and processed in-state, and utilized for biodiesel, animal feed and food-grade canola oil, resulting in environmental and economic benefits for Washington State.