

ONTARIO CANOLA GROWERS NEWSLETTER

Spring 2025

Canola growers across Ontario are gearing up for another busy planting season as spring conditions begin to align across much of the province. With soil temperatures steadily rising and moisture levels stabilizing in key growing regions, farmers are optimistic about strong planting progress over the coming weeks. The Ontario Canola Growers Association (OCGA) is also continuing into the new season with steady leadership, as Will Runnalls remains at the helm as Chairman. Runnalls, a seasoned farmer from New Liskeard area is an advocate for funding research and encouraging more growers to take up canola. "We're seeing increasing interest in canola as a rotation crop, and we're continuing to support growers with the tools and information they need for a successful year," said Runnalls. OCGA is looking to hold a couple field events this year so please stay tuned and check our website and sign up on our Facebook Page. Under normal circumstances OCGA would predict an increase in canola acreage but with much uncertainty in the US and China regarding tariffs, it's hard to know. The U.S. is Canada's number one market for canola exports and is highly integrated with the Canadian canola industry. Total export value in 2024 reached \$7.7 billion, with record high volumes including 3.3 million metric tonnes (MMT) of canola oil and 3.8 MMT of canola meal. Canola is the single largest contributor to farm crop cash receipts – grown by nearly 40,000 farmers across the country.



Canola Challenge 2025 — Bring in the Winning Yield!

Visit OCGA's website at www.ontariocanolagrowers.ca for online forms and details

1st place winner – \$2,000 cash

2nd place winner – \$1,000 cash

3rd place winner – \$ 500 cash

How Do You Enter? What are the Rules?

1. Work with a supporting agronomist;
2. Minimum 10 acre canola plot.
3. Record yield from 1 acre of your field. Must be recorded by weigh wagon and verified by your supporting agronomist.
4. Submit your cropping and yield information on results by:
 - Winter Canola– August 31, 2025
 - Spring Canola– October 10, 2025

Thank You to our Canola Challenges Sponsors!



Relay intercropping in Ontario: Advancing Multi-Crop Productivity

Co-Written by Dr. Eric Page & Dr. Lori Phillips, AAFC Harrow

Over the past five years, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's (AAFC) Ontario Living Lab has been investigating the challenges and benefits of implementing relay intercropping on farms. At Van Meer Farms near Tillsonburg, farmer Greg Vermeersch worked alongside researchers to address production challenges while highlighting the ecosystem services provided by extended periods of living roots in the soil. The benefits of relay intercropping extend far beyond yield, particularly in improving soil health. Research led by Dr. Lori Phillips, a soil microbiologist, examined how Greg Vermeersch's relay intercropping practices influenced the soil microbiome on his farm. Soil samples were collected from soybean, winter cereal, and control (no cereal) rows at various points during the growing season. DNA analysis and quantitative PCR (a molecular laboratory method) were used to measure microbial processes related to carbon, nitrogen, and phosphorus cycling. The findings revealed that intercropping increased bacterial and fungal populations by 30% and 90%, respectively, while also enhancing the soil's ability to decompose crop residues and cycle nitrogen. For instance, cellulose decomposition capacity increased by over 125% in intercropped fields, potentially improving organic matter storage in sandy soils.

Adding winter canola to the mix

Profitability is without a doubt one of the key consideration for farmers looking to try relay intercropping for the first time. With this in mind, Grain Farmers of Ontario supported a collaborative research project between AAFC and the University of Guelph to examine whether winter canola, a high value oilseed, could bring additional value to a relay intercropped system with soybean. In research led by Marinda De Gier (a graduate student at the University of Guelph) winter canola was seeded in wide rows in late August/early September at four locations across southern Ontario—Elora, Woodstock, Harrow, and Woodslee. The following spring, soybeans were inter-seeded into the standing canola before bolting (Photo). Given that winter canola stands are known to produce dense canopies early in the spring, this research aimed to investigate how these canopies could be modified by changing the winter canola seeding density and/or the quantity of nitrogen fertilizer applied in the spring.

Results of this research clearly demonstrate that managing nitrogen inputs is essential to the success of relay intercropped system with winter canola. While spring nitrogen significantly boosted winter canola yields by an average of 0.9 Mg/ha, it reduced soybean yields due to the impact on the canola canopy. More nitrogen resulted in bigger winter canola and less resources (i.e., light, water, nutrients) for the developing soybean seedlings. In general, soybeans grown in a relay intercropped system yielded 59% less than sole crop soybeans, demonstrating the challenges of growing under a winter canola canopy. Never the less, when the total grain production in relay intercropped systems (canola + soybean) was compared to sole crop soybeans, there was no difference in the biological productivity of the cropping systems.

Economic analysis of relay intercropping with winter canola proved its potential viability, though profitability remained lower than that of sole cropping systems. Sole soybean systems achieved the highest net income, averaging \$1,002 CAD per hectare, while monocrop winter canola generated \$691 CAD per hectare. Relay intercropped systems produced net incomes between \$443 and \$579 CAD per hectare, highlighting the trade-offs associated with managing two crops simultaneously. Higher input costs, including additional planting and harvesting operations, were a primary factor reducing the economic advantage of relay intercropping. Nevertheless, the system offers advantages beyond immediate profits, including improved land-use efficiency, enhanced soil health, and diversified rotations.

For farmers considering relay intercropping, starting with small-scale trials is recommended. Adjusting nitrogen application rates, optimizing planting configurations, and refining timing for planting and harvest operations can help farmers adapt the system to their specific conditions. While challenges remain, such as managing competition and mitigating environmental risks, relay intercropping represents a promising pathway for sustainable and resilient farming in Ontario. With continued research and adoption, this innovative system has the potential to redefine multi-cropping practices and strengthen Ontario's agricultural landscape



News From the West: Quick Crop Establishment Lowers Risk of Flea Beetle



Flea beetles remain the top ranked canola pest, according to the latest grower survey. The Canola Council of Canada 2024 grower survey asked respondents to name the diseases, weeds and insects of greatest economic risk to canola. Flea beetles were the most common answer in 2024, as they were in the 2022 and 2020 surveys.

While flea beetles seem to be unavoidable, growers can reduce the risk. John Gavloski, entomologist with Manitoba Agriculture, says canola crops that reach the four-leaf stage within three to four weeks of seeding are less likely to need protection from a foliar pesticide spray. Canola crops that require in-season foliar sprays are often slow-establishing and non-competitive.

Weather can be a major factor in rapid stand establishment. Canola sown in warm, moist soil will emerge quickly and uniformly. Warm conditions without moisture will often favour flea beetles over the crop. Whatever the weather, the following agronomy steps put the crop in the best possible scenario against flea beetles.

Target 5-8 plants per sq foot

Canola crops that establish quickly and have five to eight plants per square foot usually face minimal risk from flea beetle feeding. More plants mean fewer beetles per plant – a situation more likely to keep leaf area loss below the threshold of 25 per cent. The graphic shown here is a visual representation of this point.

Seed shallow into warm, moist soil

A later seeding date may reduce the flea beetle risk if it means warmer soils and faster growth. Note that later-established canola crops could be flowering on hotter days and may have increased fall frost risk.

Consider advanced seed treatment

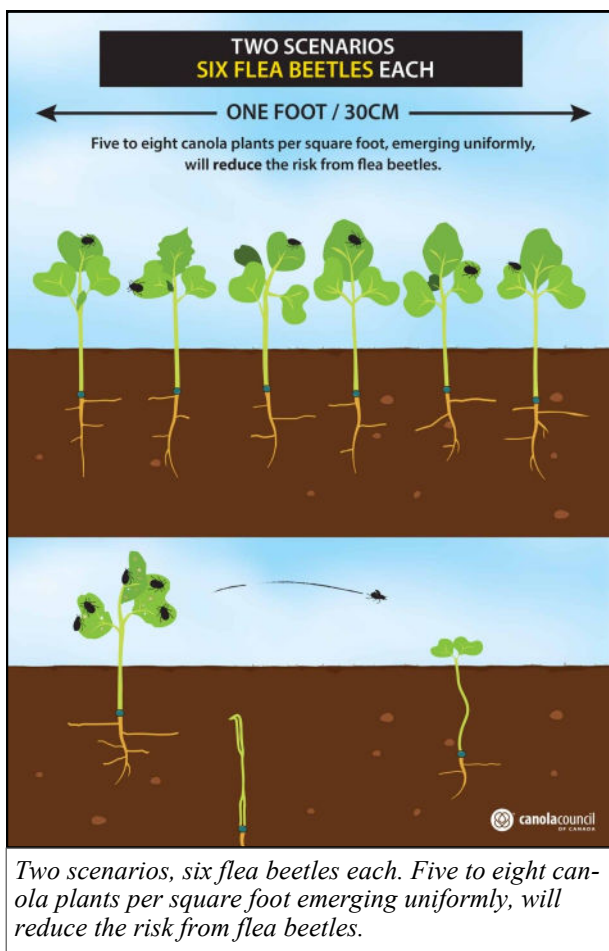
Advanced seed treatments will improve flea beetle protection in high-risk areas. However, seed treatments don't work as well or are not actively taken up when the plant is not growing or when moisture is inadequate for the transfer of active ingredient from seed coat to seedling. Flea beetles need to take a bite of the canola seedling to take in the seed treatment insecticide.

Use safe rates of seed-placed fertilizer

The recommendation is to use only phosphorus in the seed row and no more than 20 lb./ac. of actual phosphate. Higher rates of seed-placed fertilizer add more stress, slow the pace of growth and reduce the stand.

Till versus no-till

While canola planted into warmer blackened soil may emerge faster, that same warm ground cleared of obstacles also tends to attract more flea beetles. Also consider that crop residue retains soil moisture, which can contribute to more rapid emergence when moisture is limited.



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