

TOP FABBA BEAN AGRONOMY

QUESTIONS, STUDIED AND ANSWERED

Four years of fieldwork have yielded insight on issues from herbicide residue to micronutrients to disease management.



Trina Dubitz, Pulse Research Technologist with Alberta Agriculture and Forestry, combines faba beans for Robyne Bowness Davidson's work to provide growers with management options.

When the price of faba beans shot up in 2015, many Alberta farmers decided to grow this pulse crop for the first time. Robyne Bowness Davidson's phone started ringing soon after.

As Pulse Research Scientist with Alberta Agriculture and Forestry, she fielded a wide range of agronomy questions about faba beans. For some topics, Alberta-specific faba bean research didn't exist or hadn't been updated in decades.

Beginning in 2016, with support from Alberta Pulse Growers and others, Bowness Davidson set about answering some key questions. Fieldwork at Falher, St. Albert, Lacombe and Lethbridge provided new, Alberta-specific data to back agronomist recommendations and growers' production practices. Here's a quick summary.

Question: I've heard that pre-seed herbicides can damage faba beans. Do they?

In 2017 and 2018, Bowness Davidson assessed numerous pre-seed herbicides for their impact on faba beans. In Lethbridge, some applications made according to label guidelines caused damage. At other times, enhanced rates and off-label timing did not. For this reason, growers might be best to stick with what worked in Lacombe.

"The response in Lacombe was exactly what we'd expect," Bowness Davidson said. "If you double the rate, or you spray too close to emergence, or spray after planting, or don't follow label, then you'll have damage to the fabas. If you do everything you're supposed to do, it should be fine."

She also advises growers to carefully read the label on wheat herbicides

used the year before planting faba beans, and will continue studying this usage in 2020.

Question: Someone's trying to sell me micronutrients for faba beans. Good idea?

"At four locations over three years, sprayed individually or in different combinations, we didn't see a response to the micronutrients," Bowness Davidson said. "It's not that micronutrients aren't important, they are, but our soils generally seem to have enough. Spending that extra \$2 or \$3 per acre hoping to get some extra yield might not be a sound investment according to our research so far."

Question: What's the best fungicide for chocolate spot and ascochyta?

Most recent years haven't been conducive to these key faba bean diseases, which makes them difficult to study.

"With 2016 being kind of a questionable year for harvest, and 2017 and 2018 being very dry in Alberta, we weren't finding that we had really great data," Bowness Davidson said. "With the cool, wet conditions in 2019, though, we got some excellent data and we'll keep working on fungicide application in 2020."

Since 2015, Bowness Davidson has assembled Alberta data to answer some of growers' top faba bean questions. Today's market price might not be as good as it was in 2015, but the case for growing faba beans in Alberta is strong.

"We have really good growing conditions and lots of moisture generally, we have rich soils, warm days and cool nights," Bowness Davidson said. "I think in central Alberta especially, up in the Peace, and southern Alberta when there's access to irrigation, I'd say faba beans are a very good fit for Alberta."