

WHEN FABA BEANS EXPAND, FABA AGRONOMY WILL BE READY

Faba bean acres in Alberta have dropped significantly in recent years from their all-time high of 100,000. Prices haven't been doing enough to tempt former faba bean growers to take another look.

Still, there's reason to believe better days are ahead. Faba beans' high protein content seems to suit the food industry's growing demand for plant protein. The high protein content in faba bean flour combined with the neutral colour of faba bean will be of great value when fractionation plants are running across Western Canada.

In 2020, Lakeland College pulse crop researcher Robyne Davidson wrapped up a five-year study on agronomic practices for faba beans. Her idea was to remove barriers that were keeping Alberta farmers out of faba bean production. The result is an agronomy playbook that growers can consult when needed.

One key finding is that fungicide use is likely only economically justified under heavy disease pressure and/or high crop prices. Routine fungicide use could safely be avoided.

Davidson explained: "After five years of data on research questions targeting herbicide residues, fungicide application and nutrient response, the industry is in a much better situation with information to support producers interested in growing faba beans."



Protein content between 32% and 35% is attracting processors to lupin.

GETTING LUPINS READY TO SHINE

With emerging disease issues in crops grown on the Canadian prairies, there has been an increased focus on diversity, increasing crop rotations and the sustainability of Canadian farms.

Pulse crops play a key role. In fact, what growers could really use are more pulse crop options to reduce the rotational frequency of field pea and lentil.

Meanwhile, a new group of ambitious pulse processors are leading a shift toward high-protein, plant-based products to address consumers' dietary needs.

As Lakeland College pulse researcher Robyne Davidson sees it, both roads lead to lupin. Given lupin's 32% to 35% protein content and efficient processing profile, she sees tremendous potential for lupin in the fractionation industry.

In 2021, Davidson will start a new research project that aims to add depth and detail to what science and agronomy already know about lupin. By the time the market calls for lupin, farmers will know more about how to grow it.

"Widespread production of a crop without proper investigation and a solid agronomic package would be a recipe for disaster," Davidson said. "This research will investigate geographic adaptability, herbicide use, disease concerns, fungicide use, insect pests, maturity and optimum harvest practices for the lupin crop."