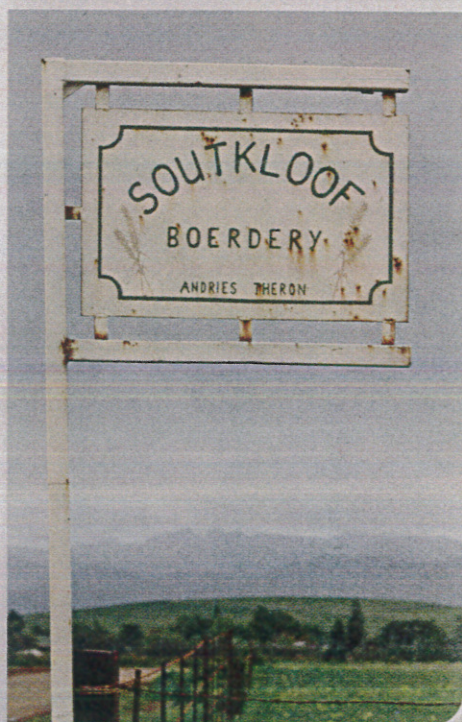




LEFT:
Frikkie Theron of Moorreesburg, winner of the 2010 Swartland Canola Competition.

BELOW LEFT:
The family farm, Soutkloof Boerdery, home to six generations of the Theron family.

BELOW:
Frikkie's advice with canola is to choose the right cultivar, control weeds and manage input costs.
PHOTOS:
DENENE ERASMUS



Clever tips from young canola champion

At just 25, **Frikkie Theron** of Koringberg near Moorreesburg is winner of the 2010 Swartland Canola Competition. For him, the key to profitable canola farming is to choose cultivars well suited to the area, and which will achieve good yields. He believes in keeping input costs as low as possible. **Denene Erasmus** reports.

“Canola isn’t a difficult crop to grow – just plant the right cultivars and keep input costs to a minimum,” says Frikkie Theron, a young grain and sheep farmer from Soutkloof Boerdery of Koringberg near Moorreesburg.

And he should know. At the tender age of just 25, Frikkie was named the winner of the 2010 Swartland Canola Competition. He also won the prizes for best yield per hectare and best gross profit margin per hectare after producing 1,97t/ha of canola.

A THRIVING FARMING ENTERPRISE

Frikkie has only been farming since 2008, but his aptitude should come as no surprise.

"My family has now been farming on this land for six generations, and being the only son, my future was pretty much set in stone. Not that I was forced into farming, as far back as I can remember being a farmer has always been what I wanted to do with my life," says Frikkie.

"The farm is managed under a crop rotation cycle. We plant a range of crops, although unfortunately they're all winter crops, 50% wheat and 50% medics. We combine the canola, lupins and oats with the medics system."

"We basically have a wheat and medics rotation cycle. Wheat is planted every second year and rotated with canola, lupins, oats or medics.

"We decided on canola because of its cash crop potential, especially now that the world canola price is close to US\$12 per bushel (about R83).

"Sheep are also an important part of our diversification."

CHOOSING THE RIGHT CULTIVAR

Cultivar choice is one of the most important aspects of successful canola production, says Frikkie.

"We plant three different cultivars, Hyola 61, Cobbler and Agamax," he explains. "I decided on these using the cultivar guide provided by the Protein Research Foundation (PRF). It evaluates cultivars in the different areas around the country to determine which are best adapted to specific areas."

According to the PRF's *Canola Manual*, new hybrid cultivars can significantly increase yields, but

generally don't produce fertile seeds. This means farmers will have to buy in new seed every year (see box: **Canola Manual**).

The manual also states that resistance to disease, particularly fungal diseases such as blackleg, is an important cultivar property and, as such, is one of the most important selection criteria for new cultivars.

"I think some farmers still have this perception that canola is a very high-risk crop because in our area specifically the plants are very susceptible to pod shatter due to wind damage and uneven ripening," explains Frikkie.

"To mitigate pod shatter and ensure even ripening, swathing is a common practice. Last year we used straight combining with reasonable success, although we had to pay for drying the seed.

'WHEAT YIELDS COULD INCREASE 20% IN THE FIRST YEAR AFTER PLANTING CANOLA.'

"The good news is that there's always a market for canola, and new cultivars have much better overall plant health and better yields, which means that income per hectare is better, plus if you farm with disease-resistant cultivars you can further reduce input costs," says Frikkie.

BENEFITS OF PLANTING CANOLA

"One of the main reasons we plant canola is that, by including it in our crop rotation system, we can increase the yield of our next wheat crop," says Frikkie.

Research done in South Africa shows that in comparison to a wheat monoculture system over



ABOVE: The Theron's plant a range of crops and also farm with Merinos. They believe diversification is a good way to spread risk.

a five-year period, wheat yields could increase 20% in the first wheat year after planting canola. In the second and third year after canola, the wheat yields rose a further 11% and 8% respectively.

Canola in a rotation system also reduces disease. The *Canola Manual* explains that non-cereal crops such as canola don't serve as a host for the pathogens that affect wheat. Including it in rotation breaks the disease chain. Canola in a rotation system also enables more effective weed control because it increases the variety of herbicides that can be used. Canola is a broadleaf crop, in contrast to cereal crops like wheat and barley, and both triazine- and imazamox-tolerant canola cultivars are available.

"Canola helps control ryegrass and other annual grasses more effectively and more cost-efficiently," says Frikkie. "The herbicides we use to control grasses in canola, such as triazine-based chemicals, are cheaper than the ones we have to use to try and control annual grasses in wheat."

The *Canola Manual* also states that by alternating the use

- At 25 Frikkie is the winner of the 2010 Swartland Canola Competition.
- For him, the key to producing canola is to choose the right cultivar and to keep input costs at a minimum.
- As a young farmer Frikkie is confident that there is a future for him in South Africa.

FAST FACTS

of the greater variety of available herbicides, the development of herbicide-resistant weeds such as ryegrass can be controlled.

Frikkie also points out that the canola plant has a tap-root system that can penetrate the soil to a depth of 1m. This loosens the soil deeply, helping to improve the root systems of subsequent cereal crops.

"We also find that with the soil somewhat loosened by the canola's root system, our planter works more efficiently, uses less fuel and has less wear and tear on the machine, especially in drier conditions," he says.

PREPARING THE SOIL AND PLANTING

"About six years ago we converted to a planter system," explains Frikkie.

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◀ "We now plant on dry soil and do very little soil preparation before planting. If we have early rain before we start planting, we spray a broad spectrum herbicide such as glyphosate (Roundup) to kill any weeds that have emerged."

He uses a 7,5m wide Equilizer Zero Till planter with an inter-row spacing of 275mm to plant seed at about 3kg/ha to 5kg/ha, depending on the cultivar.

The planter also makes it possible to prepare the soil and plant with one pass. Instead of ploughing the soil before sowing the seed, fertiliser and a herbicide are broadcast directly into the stubble of the previous crop.

little difference between fertilising wheat and canola, although canola needs more sulphur.

"This year we mainly used ammonium nitrate at planting, followed by a urea top dressing. At planting we normally apply 30kg/ha of ammonium nitrate, 12kg/ha of phosphate and 6kg/ha of sulphur, followed by one or two top-dressings according to the rainfall.

"We try to manage the pH levels in the soil at around 5,5 to 6."

According to the *Canola Manual*, important trace elements for canola production include zinc, manganese, boron, copper and molybdenum.



RIGHT:
In 2010 Frikkie managed to produce 1,97t/ha of canola.

BELOW:
Southkloof Boerdery is situated halfway between Moorreesburg and Piketberg in Koringberg in the Swartland.

Canola Manual

The Protein Research Foundation (PRF) has been actively promoting canola in South Africa and specifically in Western Cape for over a decade. Under the auspices of the PRF, the *Canola Manual*, a complete canola guide, was compiled to help farmers with all aspects of canola production and serve as a reference work for all involved in the industry.

• For more information contact the PRF on 011 803 2579 or e-mail pns@proteinresearch.net.

'BE AWARE OF WHAT HAPPENS AROUND YOU BUT FOCUS CLOSELY ON FARMING.'

"At planting we apply granular fertiliser and a herbicide with the seed to suppress weeds such as ryegrass," Frikkie adds. "We'll only spray herbicides later in the season if it's necessary.

"We determine fertiliser application according to a soil analysis. Up until now there has been

A FUTURE FOR SOUTH AFRICA'S YOUNG FARMERS

Frikkie says that it's important for young farmers in South Africa to stay informed about what's happening in the agricultural sector and be aware of the political climate. But he is confident that

there will be a future for him as a farmer in this country.

"I think you should be aware of what is happening around you, but it's even more important to closely focus on farming," he says. "Spread your risks by diversifying and manage each aspect of your farm as cost-effectively as possible to try and reduce

your costs and improve your profit margins."

What advice does he have for other young farmers? "Don't get your father angry," jokes Frikkie.

On a more serious note, he advises, "Listen to the advice of older and more experienced farmers."

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