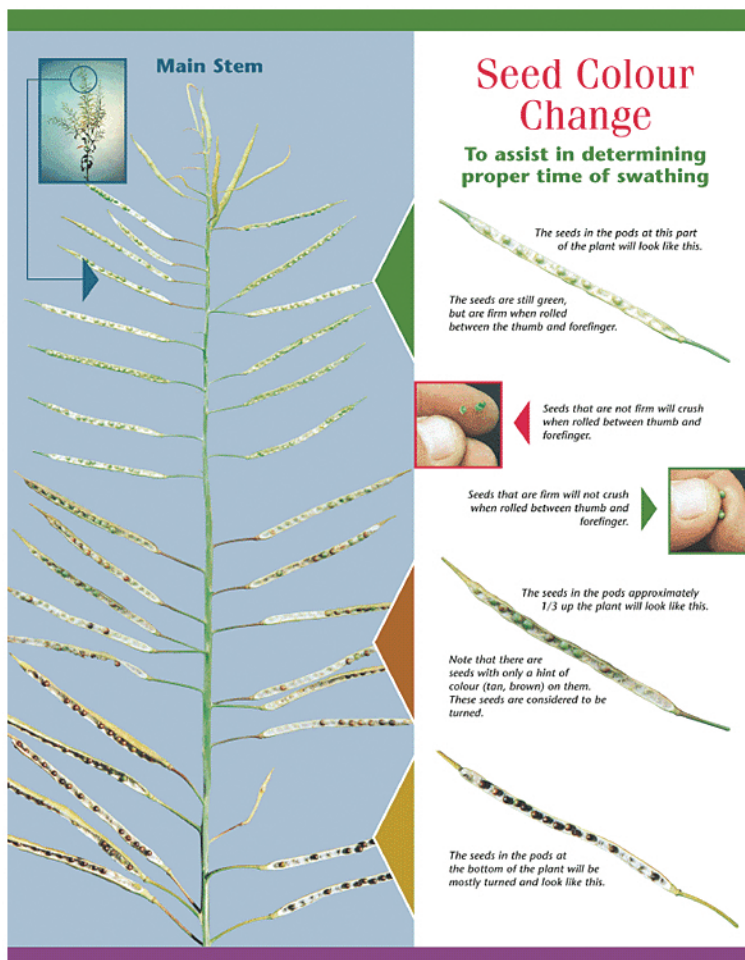


BATTLE RIVER AGRONOMY UPDATE

Given the variability in many of the canola fields I am seeing right now and the fact that harvest is fast approaching, I thought this would be a good time to review the never ending question of when to swath the canola. Too early and valuable yield can be lost in the form of shrinkage – too late and excessive shattering can cause equally large and more easily seen losses. In a year like this when many of the canopies are thin, the canola tends to branch out to cover the ground and take advantage of the open spaces. This has two results – the maturity of the canola is delayed as the pods on the branches develop later than the main stalk would, and we can no longer use only the main stem as our guide for when to swath, as the branches now hold a considerable portion of the yield.

The chart below (compliments of the Canola Council of Canada) shows how colour change in the seed progresses up the main stem. In a normal year, where most of the yield is contained in the main stem, swathing can occur (in most varieties) any time after there is 40% seed colour change without the risk of losing too much yield. In a year like this, if you follow the chart you will be leaving yield in the field. Check seed colour change on the branches as well as on the main stem and try to delay the swathing operation a little longer than you would normally be accustomed to. Instead of aiming for 40 – 60% seed colour change for the main stem, shoot for 50 – 70 % colour change averaged across the main stem and the branches of the entire plant. This will allow the later maturing branches a chance to mature properly before the swathing operation occurs. DeKalb varieties have to be handled a little differently than other canola as they tend to have issue with green seed counts, so if you are growing one of these varieties, you need to show even more patience and delay swathing even more. If you don't you may end up paying for it with reduced canola quality when it comes time to sell your crop.



The key to a successful canola harvest this year will be to show patience not only at swathing time, but also at combining time. Remember that slowing down from 4 mph to 3 mph will usually reduce the combine losses with canola by at least 1 bushel per acre. This would mean an increased profit of about \$1,500 on a quarter section field. (Based on research done by the Canola Council of Canada). So remember to slow down, time your operations appropriately and have a safe and profitable harvest!