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An improved rapeseed variety — Wesway

An experimental crop of rapeseed at Mount Barker

Wesway, a new blackleg-resistant variety of rapeseed, has been released by the Department of Agriculture. It has about the same degree of resistance to blackleg as the variety Wesreo which was released last year, but it matures earlier. Maturity is similar to that of Midas allowing Wesway to be safely planted further inland and over a wider range of planting times.

Department of Agriculture plant breeder, Dr Narendra Roy bred Wesway by a cross in 1973 between the varieties Ramses and Oro.

Ramses is a European winter variety which is extremely late maturing under Western Australian conditions, and has a high erucic acid content in its oil, but carries a useful level of resistance to blackleg.

Oro lacks blackleg resistance but is early maturing for a napus variety of rapeseed and is low in erucic acid. The progeny of the cross were selected for blackleg resistance and earliness at the Department's Mount Barker Research Station. These crosses were sown on the stubble of a rapeseed crop which had been heavily infected with blackleg. Selection of these crosses for low erucic acid was done in the Department's grain quality laboratory.

Dr Roy describes Wesway as a *Brassica napus* type of rape, taller growing than Wesreo or Midas. It has good seedling vigour and is less likely to be affected by weed competition at early stages of growth. When blackleg is present, both Wesway and Wesreo are much higher yielding than Midas, the best susceptible variety.

Wesway has large seeds which contain 42 to 44 per cent of oil with a very low erucic acid content (less than 1 per cent).

The release comes at a time when interest in rapeseed growing is returning. South coast growers are now thinking about planting much larger areas than in recent years, when blackleg made rapeseed growing hazardous and mostly uneconomic.

Seed of Wesway has been released to growers in the west Midlands, Great Southern and south coastal regions.