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**Canola – A New Crop for the
Southern Great Plains**

Canola is a special type of rapeseed. It differs from standard or industrial rapeseed because it has less than 2 percent erucic acid in the oil and less than 30 micromoles glucosinolate per gram of the oil-free meal. These two quality standards allow canola oil to be used as edible, healthy cooking oil and the meal as a high-quality protein supplement for livestock.

Rapeseed was grown in Europe extensively in the 13th century, but it has been cultivated in Asia for thousands of years. The oil was used in Asia for cooking, but in Europe it was used for lamp oil and lubrication. During World War II, Canada grew millions of acres to be used as a marine lubricant, but production declined as diesel engines replaced steam engines.

Canada began developing rapeseed with low levels of erucic acid in the oil in 1957 to meet the growing demand for cooking oil. Interest in low erucic acid rapeseed increased, and Canadian production reached 1 million acres in 1965. The term “canola” was trademarked by the Western Canadian Oilseed Crushers Association in 1978 and is used to describe rapeseed genetically low in erucic acid and glucosinolates, “CANadian Oil Low Acid.” Canola is also known as “double-low” or “double-zero” rapeseed, or oilseed rape.

In 1985, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration conferred “generally recognized as safe” (GRAS) status to rapeseed oil containing less than 2 percent erucic acid. One year later, the American Heart Association urged Americans to reduce saturated fat intake. This increased demand for canola oil because it contains 7 percent saturated fat, the lowest level of any commercial vegetable oil.

In 2006, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration authorized products containing canola oil to bear a qualified health claim stating canola oil has the ability to reduce the risk of coronary heart disease due to its unsaturated fat content.

As a result, numerous U.S. restaurants and other food service entities have publicly announced their current or planned use of canola oil as a *trans* fat-free, low saturated fat cooking oil.

Around 75 per cent of the canola oil consumed in the US is imported. After canola seed is crushed, the remaining meal is used as a protein supplement for livestock.

Canola production is increasing to satisfy the growing demand for canola oil and meal. It is well-suited for Great Plains agriculture and shows great promise for expanded acreage because of the large amount of monoculture wheat grown in the region. Winter survival of the canola plants has been a concern in the southern Great Plains. Through cooperative research efforts and public and private breeders, winter-tolerant varieties have been developed that produce yields that are comparable to other winter canola growing areas of the world.

More than 1 million acres of canola are planted annually in the US. Oklahoma plantings of canola have grown from 42000 acres in 2008 to 300000 acres in the fall of 2013 for harvest in 2014 (Graph 1).

Excerpted from the Great Plains Canola Production Handbook, published 2012.

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Canola Oil – Consumption Grows Steadily

Between 2005 and 2013, canola consumption more than doubled – from 5.6 to 13.1 lbs. per capita. Consumers are increasingly attracted to canola oil because of its healthy attributes (Table 1):

- ✓ Heart-healthy **canola oil is helping Americans meet recommended fat intake** and reduce risk of heart disease and type 2 diabetes.
- ✓ Canola oil is one of healthiest edible oils in the world.
- ✓ Canola seed produces oil that has the least saturated fat and most omega-3 fat of any common cooking oil.
- ✓ Canola oil is free of *trans* fat and cholesterol.
- ✓ Canola oil is extremely versatile with a light texture, neutral taste, and a high smoke point.

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