

## Prospects for Oilseed Rape Growing in Lithuania

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Development of domestic food industry has become one of the major concerns in Lithuania since independence has been restored. A great attention is focussed on vegetable oil production, where oilseed rape is a key crop.

In 1991 a new strategy for rapeseed production and processing was evaluated in Lithuania. It included the following main objectives :

- \* to produce rape as a cash crop,
- \* to produce edible oil to substitute import
- \* to produce protein for animal husbandry, also to substitute import and improve the productivity in livestock.

In 1995, the total arable land area made up 2,360 thousand ha in Lithuania, in which oil seed rape accounted for 13,9 thousand ha or about 0,59 %.

With a view to promoting oilseed rape cultivation in Lithuania an Oilseed Rape Cultivation Development Programme has been prepared. An oilseed Rape Foundation has been developed from which credits have been provided to farmers and agricultural companies willing to grow oilseed rape. Establishment of this credit has stimulated an increase in the production area.

The area of rapeseed varies from year to year because of the changing purchasing prices of grain and other crops. For the last 7 years, the area under oilseed rape was slightly increased (Table 1).

The most suitable soils for growing oilseed rape are in the Central part of Lithuania. In the Eastern and Southern parts of the country, the soils are light and sandy, in the Western part the soils are acidulous and less usable for rapeseed growing. Oilseed rape of winter varieties are normally higher yielding than spring ones, and earlier harvest is more attractive when winter cereals are to follow. The prognosis was that about 60 % of the national rapeseed crop will be sown with winter varieties. However, very poor overwintering in the last 2-3 years resulted in a marked reduction in the area under winter oilseed rape, and in 1996 amounted only to 856 ha (7,2 %). Therefore, the growing of spring oilseed rape is going to be more reliable and profitable.

Since 1991, low quality cultivars have been superseded by double low cultivars. NPZ winter rape cultivar Accord turned to show the best performance in Lithuania. It was registered and is considered a standard variety. Apex and Valesca are grown on a smaller scope. Among spring rape varieties the DLF Trifolium cultivar Star is recognized as a standard, and Swalof Weibull cultivar Sponsor is recently registered. IRIS is grown on a rather wide scope as well.

Although oilseed rape has been grown in Lithuania for a short period of time the occurrence of diseases and pests of this crop is rather high. Winter rape is being damaged by dark spot (*Alternaria spp.*), blackleg (*Phoma*

Table 1 : Oilseed rape sowing area and crop production in Lithuania in 1990-1996

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Sowing area (th.ha)	11.2	8.7	5.2	2.1	12.0	13.9	12.7
Crop production (th.t)	24.3	12.5	7.6	3.1	13.2	18.9	22.6
Crop yield (dt/ha)	21.8	14.3	14.5	15.0	11.0	13.6	19.2

*lingam*) and grey mould (*Botrytis cinerea*) every year. The occurrence of *Sclerotinia sclerotiorum* is more seldom. Every year spring rape is infected with dark spot disease. Pollen beetles (*Meligethes aeneus*) are spread both on winter and spring rape. Oilseed rape growers in Lithuania use insecticides against pollen beetles every year, but fungicides against diseases are still not used wide enough. Herbicides such as Treflan, Lasso, Butisan or Teridox, sometimes Lontrel against *Matricaria*, are used for weed control in oilseed rape.

The oil industry is still in the process of establishment in Lithuania. Several small oil crushing factories are under construction and some of them are already in operation. The reconstruction of the main rapeseed oil crushing factory «Obeliu aliejus» was finished in 1996 and the industrial capacity of this

plant is 18.000 tons of seeds and 6.000 tons of oil for food and 12.000 tons of meal. The objective of the rape oil industry expansion is not only to meet the demand for food oil, but also by using oilseed rape cake to reduce protein deficiency in livestock forage.

The demand for edible oil in Lithuania is 50.000 litres. In order to become self-sufficient in oil, it is necessary to expand oilseed rape growing and processing. By the year 2.000 it is planned to grow 25/30 thousand hectares of oilseed rape in Lithuania. Initially, the bigger part of the grown produce will be exported, and we expect that later it will be processed locally. Lack of good machinery such as special combine-harvesters, drying and cleaning facilities is a limiting factor in the development of oilseed rape growing.