

Present situation in rapeseed growing in the Czech Republic and its entering EU

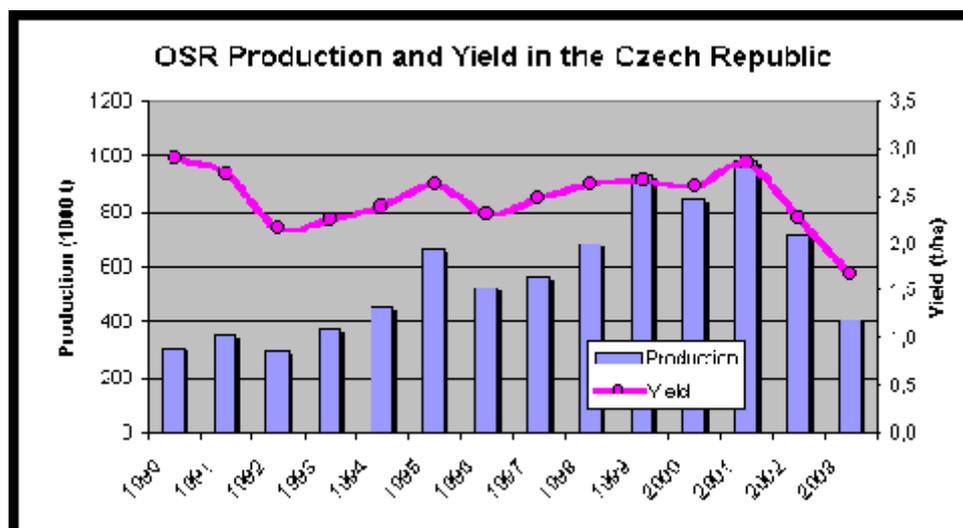
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The Czech Republic has ranked among the biggest European rapeseed producers over the last ten years (fifth place in production). From 1998 to 2001, rapeseed could enjoy favourable weather conditions and we recorded good and stable yields with culmination in 2001 ; the production approaching 1 million t was the biggest one in our history.

A period of problems started after these successful years. Short and adverse autumn periods in 2001 and 2002 resulted in poor and weak rapeseed plants with lower resistance to other stresses during the growing season. Especially in 2002/03 there were very hard climatic conditions in the Czech Republic, which brought about catastrophic yields (16-17 dt in average). We had extremely strong winters and very inconvenient weather at the end of winter/early spring. In the region of Moravia, 60-80% of winter cereals and oilseed rape were destroyed, and in Bohemia roughly 20%.

Considering late spring conditions and lack of money, farmers had no possibility to sow substitutive spring crops. That is why they had also very damaged and weak fields, more than in any other year, without perspective. The soil was deeply frozen after the snow melted very slowly and even in the middle of April rapeseed was very small, but at the end of April the crop flowered, as usual.



Again in 2003, we suffered another period of extraordinary stresses with very low precipitations in May, June, July on one hand, and extremely high summer temperatures on the other hand (leading to the yield of 1,68 t/ha, the worst result recorded since 1979, which means over a period of 24 years. If the year 2001 was highly successful, the year 2003 was particularly poor.

The financial situation in Czech agriculture is getting bad. It reduces inputs to arable land, but not areas of cultivated land. Many farmers producing rapeseed sow big areas without possibilities to finish crop management in necessary quality and intensity.

The Czech Republic is entering EU

Despite this failure over the last two years, Czech farmers will be one of the most important European rapeseed growers, based on production and crop management level. Also the geographical location and relatively good infrastructure for easy transport in particular to Germany are advantageous.

For a successful rapeseed growing, we can use :

- Large-scale production, which utilizes modern and powerful machines and technologies
- Contemporary knowledge, varieties, hybrids and European pesticides for a good crop management
- Economical inputs' experience
- 25% of EU direct payments + probably 30% from the national sources (???)

Entering EU means many changes for the Czech farmers. The most important change we can expect concerns administration and exploitation of financial sources. It will be necessary to get used to new rules and their compliance. Our farmers'success or fiasco will depend notably on the ability to work under new circumstances and capability to compete on the European market.