



## Rapeseed cultivation: a promising initiative towards oilseed production

The Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) has assessed the pilot rapeseed cultivation project which was conducted in the previous season on 76 hectares across the Central and Southern regions.



Ms. Merry Kahsay

According to Ms. Merry Kahsay, Agronomy expert at the Crop and Livestock Development Division, the MoA began rapeseed multiplication in 2010 through the National Agricultural Research Institute (NARI). Even though rapeseed cultivation in Eritrea goes back to 10 years, its introduction to farmers has been delayed for several reasons, particularly because of post-harvest and oil processing issues.

During the rainy season of 2021, the MoA undertook another initiative to demonstrate rapeseed cultivation in piloted areas of Central and Southern Region, Ms. Merry explained. In line with this initiative, the MoA tested an oil extracting machine in its Kehawta workshop to encourage farmers

to produce rapeseed for oil production.

She also outlined that before distributing the seed, which was supplied by NARI, the MoA conducted a series of public awareness raising programs. These covered numerous topics, including rapeseed management, fertilizer and moisture requirement, sowing time, sowing rate and methodology, weeding and thinning, pests and diseases, and harvesting.

Subsequently, 58 hectares of land in six sub-regions of the Southern region (Dubarwa, Medefera, EmniHayli, Dekemhare, Segeneyti and Adi qeyih) and 18 hectares of land in the Central region (sub-regions of Asmara, Galanefhi, and Berik) were piloted, Ms. Merry indicated.

In total, 300 farmers participated in the project, including 32 females.

“Learning from the previous challenges and experiences, the Ministry has a plan to expand rapeseed multiplication vigorously in the coming season to make it one of the important oil crops, like sesame and cotton, which are cultivated mostly in the Gash Barka region,” Ms. Merry stated.

Mr. Tekle Teferi is a senior researcher at the Crop Improvement Division of the NARI. According to him, rapeseed crop was primarily introduced in Halhale for trial purposes in 2010. At that time, a number of improved rapeseed varieties were imported and a series of trials were carried out to examine their climatic adaptation and yield potential in different areas. Afterward, two varieties which demonstrated satisfactory performance were selected for multiplication and then distributed to farmers through the Agricultural Extension Department.



Mr. Tekle explained that the yield of rapeseed is greatly influenced by the availability of water and climatic suitability. The yield potential of the two selected rapeseed varieties ranges from 12-14 quintals per hectare under rainfed farming and 18-20 quintals



Mr. Tekle Teferi

per hectare if supplemented with irrigation. The crop reaches harvest between 90-120 days and does better in clay and clay loam soil with good drainage.

Mr. Tekle underscored that rapeseed is an oil crop that has around 35 percent oil content. Moreover, it has a number of advantages in that it is a good and attractive source of pollen for honey bees and its bagasse and cake are also good fodder for animals. Overall, if rapeseed is properly managed, it can be a rewarding cash crop and has great

potential to be one of the most important oil crops in the country.

### **Experiences of Local Experts and Farmers Mendefera sub-region**

Mr. Mihreteab Negash is a crop production expert in the sub-region of Mendefera. He explained that the sub-region is famous for its multi-crop variety cultivation, which includes field crops, pulses, oil crops, and fruits and vegetables. Livestock production and beekeeping are also commonly practiced. He recalled that rapeseed was cultivated on a trial basis five years ago and went on to note that, "This year, we tried to cultivate it among six exemplary farmers, and the yield was promising." He concluded that



Mr. Mihreteab Negash

other farmers are also motivated to join the initiative if they can find a market for their harvest.

Mr. Kahsay Haile is one of the most progressive farmers in the region and he has been involved in different agricultural activities since 1999. He described how he has been acquainted with oil plants, like olive trees, for many years.



Mr. Kahsay Haile

"When I was asked by the Ministry of Agriculture to cultivate rapeseed in the previous summer, I didn't hesitate because I have an ambition to focus on oil seeds for commercial purposes. That's why I cultivated a number of olive trees in the past. Currently, my olive trees have begun bearing fruits," he explained.

Commenting on management practices and harvest, he indicated that the sub-region of Mendefera possesses suitable climatic conditions for rapeseed cultivation. After he had irrigated his farmland, he harvested around 23 quintals per hectare. Looking forward, Mr. Kahsay also stated that he will expand his activities further in the coming rainy season.

### **Segeneyti sub-region**

Mr. Iyassu Asefaw is head of the Agriculture Office in the sub-region of Segeneyti, an area with a large number of farmers involved in the rapeseed cultivation initiative.

Mr. Iyassu explained that there





Mr. Lyassu Asefaw

were 113 farmers from 18 villages involved in the initiative, working on more than 26 hectares of land. “We received 210 kilograms of seed and were recommended to plant 8 kilograms of rapeseed per hectare. Since it was our first time and we were aiming to multiply seeds, around 20 hectares were cultivated under irrigation. The rest were cultivated under rainfed conditions” he explained, before adding, “Even though we didn’t meet the ideal yield in our

first experience, we will strive to improve performance in the coming year.”.

To encourage farmers, the government purchased the harvested seed at approximately 25 percent higher than the actual market price.

Furthermore, Mr. Lyassu described how the initiative has expanded awareness and brought farmers together to share their experiences. Now, more farmers understand that rapeseed is important for biodiversity improvement. With bees especially drawn to its flowers, many beekeepers are also motivated to cultivate it in the coming season.

Finally, Mr. Lyassu stated that there were some minor challenges in that the crop was repeatedly attacked by weeds, especially

during its initial growth stages, while harvesting is laborious and susceptible to bird attack.

Mr. Teame Ghebreslasie is a vegetable farmer residing in Adi-Baekel, Segeneyti sub-zone. He is a successful farmer, particularly when it comes to wheat and potato seeds multiplication.

Mr. Teame explained that before planting rapeseed, training and support was provided by experts from the regional and central MoA offices.

He described his experience, stating, “I cultivated the seed on a half hectare of land and harvested around 2.33 quintals. While the yield could have been better, I am convinced that with experience and proper management it can easily be cultivated in our area. I have learnt a lot with regards to its management practices and will



Mr. Teame Ghebreslasie, harvesting his rapeseed crop

cultivate it in a more organized way in the coming season.”

Mr. Teame also mentioned its importance as a bee forage, and thanked the MoA for the initiative and support.

Another participant in the initiative was Priest Mehari Habtetsion, a farmer living in Degra-Merieto who cultivates vegetables and crops.

He recalled that he was slightly hesitant about the initiative because he lacked experience with cultivating rapeseed. “However, after I received adequate guidance



Priest Mehari Habtetsion

and information from the Ministry, I joined the initiative. I cultivated a half hectare of land and harvested around 3 quintals,” he explained. He also pointed out that the

experience he gained from participating in this pilot project would serve as a stepping stone to his future plans.

Global records indicate that following soya bean and palm oil, rapeseed is the third most important source of vegetable oil in the world. Its oil content ranges from 33-40 percent. The oil extractor machine modified by engineers from the MoA has been able to extract about 30 percent oil from previously harvested local seeds.

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