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Contact: Angela Dansby
angela@uscanola.com

No Need for CARB to Curb Canola Oil Use in Biofuel Production

WASHINGTON, DC — The California Air Resources Board's (CARB's) proposed 20 percent cap on biofuels made from canola and soybean oils for the state's low-carbon fuel standard (LCFS) is arbitrary, unnecessary and unwise. Limiting the use of renewable, plant-based biofuels made from crops grown on existing cropland in North America will result in greater reliance on foreign feedstocks of less certain origin and inhibit the ability to reach emission reduction goals.

"Canola and other crop-based biofuels are already subject to Induced Land Use Change and indirect emissions analysis, making a cap redundant and unnecessary," says Tim Mickelson, president of the U.S. Canola Association (USCA) and N.D. canola grower. "Moreover, capping renewable, plant-based feedstocks without any scientific basis sends a signal to markets that California's LCFS program is arbitrary and unpredictable. This will undercut existing investments and potentially eliminate future innovation in what has been the most commercially viable source of emission-reducing fuels."

California reached its previous emissions reduction targets thanks mostly to biomass-based diesel. As a result of that success, it is ramping up future emission reduction targets and will need biofuels, especially biodiesel and renewable diesel, as a low-cost way to help reach them. Canola oil can significantly contribute without a cap. An expectation that the diesel pool in California can be entirely replaced by electrification is questionable at best.

"The availability of alternative markets for excess canola production allows farmers to include canola as a sustainable rotational crop on existing farmland," adds Mickelson. "History shows that the agricultural and biofuel industries can respond to demand quickly with sustainable expansion and innovation. Canola acreage and yields in the primary growing state of North Dakota and in the Pacific Northwest continue to grow prudently and efforts are underway to significantly expand winter canola in the southeast and Great Plains. Crushing capacity is also expanding in tandem."

U.S. canola production has grown modestly, but steadily over the past few decades, reaching more than 2.3 million acres in 2023. There is potential for continued domestic expansion, including winter canola as a double crop option in the Pacific Northwest, Great Plains and Southeast. Double-cropping winter canola with soybeans, for example, provides additional vegetable oil feedstock on existing cropland and fallow land. However, this innovative practice will not get established with farmers if biofuel policies and markets are subject to arbitrary actions such as CARB's proposed cap.

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The U.S. Canola Association is a non-profit commodity organization whose mission is to increase domestic canola production to meet growing demand for healthy oil, meal and protein by promoting policies and conditions favorable to growing, marketing, processing and using U.S. canola.