



# FUELS ain't FUELS! Crops, "conservation farming" and cropland fires

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**Cropland fires** are fast, fierce and have caused human fatalities, as well as massive animal, property, social and environmental losses. In my 2016 pilot survey, 86% of grain producing farmers answered "Yes definitely" or "Yes probably" to the question, do modern farming techniques contribute to altered fire behaviour?

**The biggest change probably has been the huge increase in oil seed with canola predominantly, which burns very, very fast and very, very hot, and that's pretty hard to stop. There's a massive volume of crop material, but there's a huge residual as well, so the loads on the ground are just enormous. Crop yields have increased I would suggest by 50 percent over the last 20 years at least, so you've doubled the burnable material that's there to go up and so, of course, it goes like nuts.**  
"Bob", farmer, 2015

While many people think canola stubble would be less of a fire risk than a thicker wheat stubble, this fire [Pinery] disproved that myth. The fire was ferocious, particularly through the canola stubble where the ewes were.  
*(Reflections on the Pinery fire, p27. Pinery Fire Community Action Group, 2016).*

**Firebreaks and spraying fence lines** mightn't stop the fire but give you something to burn back to. This could be made mandatory with a council by-law, so everyone has to do it. *A little bit of loss could mean that a lot of people are safer.*  
"Paul", farmer, 2015

**Pasture or legume crops**, they wouldn't carry a fire as quickly as certainly your canola stubble would, so that's an option that the farmer would have, if there's stock or buildings nearby.  
"Trevor", farmer, 2015

## INCREASING FARM 'FIRE-FITNESS'

- Review the use of firebreaks, crop selection and location
- Initiate financial incentives:
  - ❖ Government fees and levies
  - ❖ Municipal discounts
  - ❖ Community best practice rewards
  - ❖ Property value-adding
- Further research planned – the link between fire, crop types and modern farming practices

