ONE-OF-A-KIND AGRICULTURAL research in the U.S. is being conducted at UAF, where scientists are growing non-genetically modified Polish canola.

Canadians began releasing canola as an edible product during World War II. The UAF research hails back to the 1970s, when rapeseed (an inedible close cousin to canola) trials were conducted for industrial oil.

Along the way, Professor Mingchu Zhang had obstacles to overcome, such as securing breeding stock, which is difficult to get, and the goal of meeting market standards (less than 2 percent green seeds) for an edible product.

The culmination of the research is Deltana canola, which is perfectly suited for growing in the Interior. “There is very high potential if we can convince people to do it,” Zhang said. “It’s non-GMO; it has purity.”

Alaska grown canola can be used for cooking oil or as meal for animal feed. In addition to being a nutritious crop, canola may offer relief to farms that deplete soil by continuously growing barley. “Canola is a good rotational crop for Delta,” Zhang said. Processing will require special equipment and hefty investments, but Zhang believes Deltana will prove beneficial for Alaska and predicts international markets will be interested.