

# Local invention puts crunch back into stubble

(Dated: 18/2/2002)

An interested crowd of farmers and agricultural observers converged on Wednesday to witness the first public demonstration of a locally made and developed machine - the stubble cruncher. Born from the practical farming needs of an Ariah Park family, the cruncher was created by Colin Harper.

Speaking of the ideas behind the invention, Mr Harper said he had battled with handling canola stubble for years.

He tried several other methods, including harrowing, rotary harrowing and slashing. However, Mr Harper said this final method can be slow, expensive, and dangerous during the fire season.

He drew the initial inspiration for his stubble cruncher from using his bulldozer and observing the actions of the tracks.

"It gave me the rolling, chopping action idea," he said.

In 2000, he made an eight foot version of the stubble cruncher which proved effective in cutting the canola stubble right up until May, despite the growing toughness of the material.

Mr Harper said the cruncher design incorporates rolling pipes, with steel posts welded onto them.

The machine cuts canola stubble, while bruising and splitting wheat stubble.

It then lays the straw on the ground, which provides a good mulch.

In canola stubble, Mr Harper said cultivation equipment is able to work through the mulch. According to Mr Harper, the machine works in well with his farming practices, satisfying the need to try and retain stubble on paddocks.

"I basically developed it for canola, but everyone wants to know how it goes on wheat stubble" he said.

Mr Harper is now looking to hire the new machine out to farmers.

In an effort to keep the costs down, he said farmers could provide their own tractor and labour.

On the day of the demonstration, he had two farmers indicate they would be keen to try the cruncher out.

Local farmer, Trent Tsoa-Lee, said he was interested in hiring the machine as soon as next week.

"I think it's a great idea because we've been looking to get the stubble down," Mr Tsoa-Lee said.

With current dry conditions, he said slashing was no longer an option, and he was looking for techniques which retained nutrients in the soil.

"I believe burning is not very environmentally friendly" he added.

Mr Tsoa-Lee was among approximately 44 farmers and interested observers who attended the demonstration day for the stubble cruncher on Tuesday.

Mr Harper said the number of people in attendance had exceeded his expectations.

While they remain untried, Mr Harper said the possibilities for the stubble cruncher extend to other areas including thistles, particularly saffron, and paddy melons.