

WINTER CROPS

Drought-proof cropping program

THE combination of minimum till cropping, seed trials and using a variety of knockdowns has helped third-generation southern Riverina farmer, Matthew Packer, maintain his cropping program during the drought.

Running a mixed farming enterprise comprising Merino and first-cross lambs, and a small commercial cattle business north-east of Balldale, Mr Packer has maintained sowing 400 hectares of wheat, canola and triticale during the worst season on record.

While he received an appalling yield for 2005 crops due to the season, Mr Packer has maintained the majority of protein and yield in his cereals using a combination of variety and herbicide trials.

With the addition of Ventura – a higher-protein wheat variety – to his program this year, along with Diamondbird, he aims to increase protein levels for his wheat.

The change in Triticale seed from Abacus to Kosciuszko was to produce a higher yield than previous crops.

“The Kosciuszko has out-performed other varieties in local trials by the department (Department of Primary Industries), but we need to do our own trials with some varieties, and if we don’t get the results we want we change it,” he said.

Mr Packer uses two canola varieties in his program – Sapphire, a conventional sowing seed, and 46c76 Clearfield, a minimum till variety.

He said the key was not to commit to certain varieties or sowing

By PENNY WATTS

areas too early in the cropping program.

He said he always made allowances to change the program if necessary – depending on seasonal and sowing conditions.

“Weather patterns seem to be returning to normal now, but we’ll see what this year’s results will be first, because using a variety for just one year doesn’t tell the whole story,” he said.

His 950-hectare property, “Goombargana”, is nestled at the base of the Goombargana Hill, in grey, loamy soils.

While the annual rainfall reaches 550 millimetres, Mr Packer said the protection his country received from the hill made up for seasonal conditions.

He said a difference of two weeks in ripening between crops on opposite sides of the hill gave him additional moisture profile, and last season he received protection from Stripe Rust pollen.

Using a rotation of canola/wheat/triticale or wheat, Mr Packer plans to bring lucerne into his rotation to add nitrogen to soils and give crops a break.

He uses minimum-till, but plans to move into no-till sowing within a few years, looking at inter-row sowing and using a disc seeder to retain stubble.

Currently, he uses a Stubble Cruncher before an International 511 with a 4.2 metre-wide Johns Undercarriage minimum till machine.



He sows at a 50mm depth using 225mm (nine inch) spacings.

Mr Packer has almost completed an initial liming program on the property.

Applications of gypsum before

canola sowing have improved water penetration.

Split applications of urea – 50 kilograms a hectare and 100kg/ha on canola and two applications totalling 100kg/ha on

Balldale cruncher

MOVING from conventional sowing techniques to minimum-till almost 10 years ago hasn’t been without its challenges, according to Balldale cropper, Matthew Packer.

Mr Packer (pictured with his dog, Chopper) said the continuous battle to get canola stubble through sowing implements was always a test.

But using a Stubble Cruncher to knock down and cut has helped him retain stubble before sowing and reduce soil disturbance.

“In a normal year we’d have major problems with trash in the crops,” Mr Packer said.

“We’ve been trying a variety of knockdowns and methods to combat this, but the Cruncher seems to be doing the job.”

He said the Stubble Cruncher, designed by Ariaiah Park farmer, Colin Harper, cut 15-centimetre lengths in one pass, leaving stock feed value and giving sheep better access to the paddock.

wheat crops – add nitrogen to soils, while the combination of Roundup and SpraySeed rotation creates a nice, cost-effective balance for pre-emergents, Mr Packer said.

In Brief

Fighting weeds

THE E.H. Graham Centre for Agricultural Innovation – an alliance between the NSW Department of Primary Industries and Charles Sturt University – has been successful in obtaining funding for a three-year, \$580,000 project through the Grains Research Development Council (GRDC) for research into managing weed populations and

combating herbicide resistance in southern NSW.

Graham Centre director, Professor Deirdre Lemerle, said the project would investigate combinations of non-herbicide strategies to manage pasture and cropping weeds in southern NSW farming systems.

“The development of herbicide resistance in our major problem weeds has forced a rethink on weed

management strategies, and growers need to be aware of the effectiveness of weed control throughout the lifecycles of the weeds,” she said.

The project team will work with farmer groups, agronomists and consultants to investigate the impact of management strategies on weed population dynamics and the economic consequences of managing herbicide resistance.

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