

Stubble crunching

By Sally White

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Not all the machinery at this year's Aq-Quip was for sale.

In fact, it was the prospect of being able to hire a machine, wear it out and give it back for a cost of less than \$4 a hectare that stopped many farmers in their tracks.

That was the promise tied to the Stubble Cruncher - a unique piece of gear designed to turn stubble into a manageable asset.

Getting retained stubble to break down quickly - both to help the soil and prevent it blocking up machinery at sowing - has proved one of the conservation farming's biggest challenges.

For southern NSW farmer, Col Harper, "Taravale", Ariah Park, the annual battle of getting his sowing implements through thick canola stubble was enough to spark him into action.

The result was the Stubble Cruncher.

Based on a series of rollers, it effectively cuts the stubble into 150 millimetre lengths, fracturing the stalk open and allowing it to break down faster.

He took the prototype to K Line in Cowra, which mounted a series of five rollers onto a harrow bar, creating a 12 metre Stubble Cruncher.

After seeing how it handled his own canola stubble, Mr Harper decided to hire his cruncher out to other growers.

Stubble Cruncher representative at Ag-Quip, David Longmire, said there were now four cruncher units working around the State, with one machine now likely to be permanently based in the north.

Mr Longmire said it was a new region for the

Stubble Cruncher, with much of the unit's work previously done in the Central West and further south.

Based on the interest shown at Aq-Quip, however, he said its future in the north looked promising.

Critically, Mr Longmire said the cruncher did not destroy the feed value of the paddock by bulldozing everything to the ground.

He said the cruncher was available for dry hire at a cost of about \$4/hectare (\$1.65/acre), with farmers required to operate the unit themselves using their own tractor.

This made it economical for those farming small areas who could not justify the purchase of their own stubble handling gear or who were likely to find it difficult to attract a contractor.

**Contact Harper's Stubble Cruncher
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