

## **Planning for a successful cropping year in 2003**

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The 2002 season has failed for many cropping farmers in the north-west of the State. Some will harvest seed, but in many areas even that will not be possible. It is now time to start planning for 2003 to minimise the risks of failed crops in the coming season. Assuming that it will rain next year, we must ensure that we have the right cropping mix, that there is no legacy of residual herbicides and no cost blow outs. The planning process could follow the following lines:

- Inspect paddocks now and make a list of the weeds which will set seed - it is important to do this in all paddocks, not just those which may be harvestable (including pasture paddocks going back to crop next year). Take special note of weeds such as brome, ryegrass, wild oats, radish, vetch and musk weed. Many of these weeds are either impossible or at least expensive to control in the following crop. Next year's crop selection will have to take into account this year's weeds.
- Spray out failed crops if weeds are present. For example, failed canola crops are often full of grass weeds - these crops should be chemically fallowed. Cultivating the paddock is another option, but this will make them more susceptible to wind erosion. It may be better to spray these paddocks out now and then cultivate them, if required, over summer.
- Pasture topping grass pasture paddocks is essential if going into crop next year. Many of these grazed paddocks are full of brome grass which is only 2 to 3cm high but has seed heads. When spraying out pastures to prepare them for a cereal in 2003, consider adding metsulfuron (Ally) or chlorsulfuron (Glean) to the knock-down herbicide for residual summer weed control (such as blue weed or heliotrope). Closely check the replanting intervals when using these residual herbicides and talk to your agronomist if unsure.
- If your crops have failed this year, consider sowing a proportion of your program the same as this year. You will then be able to take advantage of the fertilisers already applied (for example Urea and Gypsum on canola paddocks) and have fewer concerns with residual herbicides. Canola back to canola should not be a problem on canola paddocks that have been grazed, sprayed out and cultivated over summer. Wheat on wheat is also not a problem as long as you take into account the amount of stubble remaining behind to minimise the risk of Yellow Leaf Spot next year.
- When planning a rotation you must review your herbicide records and ensure that you have had at least a 2 season break for the following herbicides (if planning a susceptible crop in 2003):
  - Group B herbicides: Glean, Logran, Monza, Midas, On-Duty, Spinnaker and Raptor
  - Group C: Atrazine and Simazine
  - Group I: Lontrel

You must check the replanting intervals if you have used these herbicides in the last two years. In dry seasons, the residual period can be very long - especially on alkaline soils. Seek help from your agronomist if unsure.

- If you used On-Duty on Clearfield Canola this year, then the only option for next year is to sow Clearfield Canola again or Clearfield JNZ (a special wheat which is tolerant to the Imi group of herbicides). Note that Clearfield JNZ does not have tolerance or resistance to eelworm. This must be considered, specially in the Mallee.
- After developing a rotation for next year, you will need to make a harsh judgement on the worst case scenario for this year's harvest. Do you have enough seed? If not, then it is important to organise this now.
- To keep expenditure in check next year consider reducing fertiliser inputs:
  - BCG trial work after the 1994 dry season clearly showed that P and N fertiliser applied in the year of the drought is still available the following season
  - consider not using Urea at sowing next year if the paddock has been pre-drilled this year (you can always apply more N during the season if 2003 turns into a good year)
  - if you have applied normal rates of P in the last four years then consider reducing P inputs next year (BCG trial work has shown no loss of yield with lower rates of P after a dry season)
  - the decision on N and P rates are dependent on how much you have used in the last few years and your soil type will also have an effect on how much is carried over. Seek help from your agronomist if not sure.
- Trifluralin also has a longer residual in a dry year. Consider reducing, or not using, the same rates of trifluralin next year if you used high rates this year. Also if you used other residual herbicides this year (for example if you used atrazine on TT canola in 2002 and you are planning to sow wheat next season then do not use, or at least reduce the rate of, trifluralin next year. The combined effect of residual atrazine and trifluralin could be devastating for the planned wheat crop.

If you follow these steps at least you can be assured that your management has been optimum for a successful start to the 2003 season, and that there are no unexpected legacies coming out of this drought year. All you then need is rain - and lots of it! Good luck.