



## IN SOME DISTRICTS, THE AREA CULTIVATED DURING THE SUMMER FALLOW HAS INCREASED ON RECENT YEARS

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### KEY MESSAGES

- From reports received it appears that the area of cultivated fallow has generally increased by 20 to 30% this summer. Specific district increases are reported below.
- Different motivations for cultivating fallow are reported from different districts but generally relate to either; weed management, physical soil condition issues or ending or starting a pasture phase. Producers ability to sow into current stubble loadings was not a major driver of cultivation.
- Cheaper diesel was not a major driver for cultivation but it appears to have made the decision to cultivate easier.
- Producers will burn to reduce stubble loads for sowing if needed.
- Farmers generally reported higher cultivation activity than crop consultants.

### BACKGROUND

During February a common discussion point was the apparent increase in cultivation of fallows this year.

On 26 February simple question was emailed to producers and consultants;

*“Hope you can help. I am just collecting up some information as part of CWFS’s Rain n Grain n Stubble project. If you could quickly just reply this email to me and answer the following questions.*

**“It appears that in some districts this year more fallows have**

been cultivated than in previous recent years.”

1/Do you think this statement is true?

2/Can you put any amount of hectares the statement?

3/If more cultivation has occurred what is driving this decision:

- a/ summer rainfall
- b/ hard to kill summer weeds
- c/ cheap diesel
- d/ all of the above
- e/ something else. Please nominate.

4/What districts are represented by your response?”

## RESULTS

It is estimated that the reported responses represent between 150 000 and 170 000 ha, question 2 in the email was poorly structured. 62 email responses were received and further targeted conversations and telephone calls to producers and consultants were made in CWFS districts were few response had been received. Overall about 80 individuals were contacted. Comments made about practises outside of traditional CWFS districts may not be reliable as it commonly relies on only 2 responses.

**West of Forbes including Jemalong, Corinella, Gunning Gap** districts generally reported a 20 to 30 % increase with the changing from a pasture phase to a cropping phase and hard to kill summer weeds being the main motivation.

**Trundle, Tullamore districts** provided mixed reports from nil increase to 30%. It appears that cultivation of vetch cover crop residue and windmill grass incursions resulted in any increase.

**Lake Cargelligo, Euabalong, Tullibigeal districts** reported an increase of between 15 and 30%. These districts reported the most diverse range of motivations for an increased level of cultivation. Ending of a pasture phase was common. Other reasons provided included hard to kill summer weeds and an inability to use 2,4, D because of nearby susceptible crops, lime incorporation and fire mitigation. This was the only area to suggest fire mitigation but it followed practical considerations of cultivating paddocks that fronted the major roads and a matrix across the farm to allow for safe refuges for stock and machinery in the event of a major fire.

**North West of Condobolin, Euabalong West and north to Tottenham** Interestingly individual producers felt that there was an increase across the district in cultivation but they themselves had generally not changed. Those reporting increased cultivation on their properties cited recent research highlighting benefits of strategic tillage. Some committed continuous croppers felt much of the cultivation observed was related to tradition (one even suggesting genetics) rather than agronomic benefit.

**North of Forbes, Tichborne, Parkes, Alectown, Peak Hill** reports varied from nil to 50%. Consultants reported a significant increase in “stubble cultivation using chains and small discs” as opposed to soil cultivation. Windmill and barnyard grass, increased areas of lime application and incorporation, preparation of a seedbed for reliable use of trifluralin and sakura herbicides were the main factors reported. Some producers had purchased speed tillers and a speed tiller contractor had also established in the area. Similar to cheaper diesel the use of these machines made the decision to cultivate easier rather than be the primary reason to cultivate.

**Tottenham north to Nyngan** no change reported

**Rankins Springs, Binya, Myall Park.** Reports suggested no general increase with cultivation being used for specific issues such as levelling and renovation of paddock surface.

**Hillston, Merriwagga** Reports suggest a small increase above the traditional area of long fallow normally

cultivated. This appears to have been driven this year by January rainfall and producers not spraying quickly, resulting in stressed weeds and poor spraying results.

### **Non-traditional CWFS district reports**

**Lockhart, Yerong Creek, The Rock** Increased cultivation of fallows using speed tillers. Producers cited planned trifluralin use, attempting to increase N mineralisation and removing old pastures as the main drivers.

**Harden, Boorowa, Cootamundra, Junee** mixed responses. If an increase has occurred bringing areas back into cropping, lime incorporation and weed management are the suggested reasons.

**Temora, Barmedman, Wyalong.** Limited response but suggest a 25% increase on average citing insect pests and increased N mineralisation as reasons.

**East of Forbes** No general increase reported but wider usage of “stubble cutters” rather than soil cultivation. Heavy stubble loads maybe burnt as sowing approaches.

**East and North of Dubbo** Increased cultivation reported due to summer weeds not being sprayed earlier enough in January and then becoming stressed.

**Liverpool Plains** - No change

**Brewarrina** - No change

**Moree, Gwydir, Namoi districts** Reports suggest a 10% increase in long fallow country which had sealed off due to low level of ground cover. Hard to kill summer weeds were also mentioned.

**Upper North South Australia** reports suggest an increase due to heavy rains during January which resulted in hard to kill stressed weeds but no more than in previous years were January rain has been received.

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