CB Farming News

AUGUST 2012 PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES ISSUE THREE

Left; Canola in wheat stubble, inter row sowing at its best.
Right; Taurus Canola sown in March ready for grazing in June.

CB Farming News 2012 - 3rd edition

Its that time of year again, where the nights get shorter, the days get warmer and you can just about see the grass/crops grow!

Although it hasn't been the best beginning to a season we've had, most crops able to get up and established on what rain we've had, to access good subsoil moisture. While we still need more good spring rains to finish the crops off, at this stage things are still looking positive.

However, it has also become more evident as we've covered the country side in the last month that those who have been employing a consistent system, where stubbles are maintained and incorporating soluble calcium into their system, we are able to best take advantage of early season moisture and get more consistent germinations. This reinforces just how important it is to have a well structured system in place. When we have dry starts or lower than average growing season rainfall, your chances of still getting reasonable yields off your paddocks are possible.

It has been a very similar case for those who are running pasture based systems, in that those who have had well structured plans in place, have consistently had more feed available as growth slowed down coming into winter. They have had a base feed source of Lucerne, perennial rye grass and plantain, they have had a good early autumn feed source, allowing them to get their annuals well and truly established before the cold set in and slowed growth.

Early season dual purpose crops - adding value to you system.

As mentioned in the last newsletter, many growers are now using grain and graze crops to not only take advantage of early season moisture, but to lower the risk of their program by adding value to their farm through grazing. This not only provides a good feed source for animals, it allows you to space out your sowing program, which not only takes pressure off the main sowing program, but allows crops to establish in a warmer environment. This can prove to be a very useful strategy when incorporating break crops into marginal or hostile areas, particularly sub soil constraints.

Despite the patchy autumn break in Northern Victoria and southern NSW, crops are still looking promising.

An excellent example of that this year was one grower in central NSW, where he was able to get Canola established in a high Aluminum soil, see photo above, while there was good moisture and soil temperature available in late summer/early autumn. This has not only provided him with some

Dry land sorghum ready for harvest in southern NSW.

Forage brassica and vetch has proved to be a valuable feed source for sheep, while providing the benefits of both a brassica and a legume.

opportunistic feed for sheep, it has also enabled him to get a break crop into his system where he may not have been able to in the past. Due to the aluminum band in the soil, crops have struggled to get established in the past. The crop was able to establish while the soil temperature was still up and the crop was able to push through that aluminum band, which it would have struggled to do so if the soil temperature was lower.

By simply incorporating a couple of different options into your cropping program, you can easily reduce risk and increase the profitability of your farm.

Summer silage options - start planning now to guarantee seed.

In the last edition of our newsletter, we spoke about alternative options to maize silage. While maize is a good silage option, and we're certainly not against any one wanting to grow it, there are other options out there which can be easier to manage, especially in terms of irrigation scheduling and fertilizer inputs. The other options that we've been looking into are white grain sorghum and soybeans. While these two crops won't quite grow the same tonnage as maize, they certainly offer more flexibility in terms of ease of management. With soybean silage providing a great protein source. The main points to think about before making a decision are when do you want the feed? in other words, do you need quantity or quality? Or are you better off using the same area for grazing? There is a lot of time and money involved in growing and feeding out silage, while it costs virtually nothing to graze paddocks. Once you've made a decision, order the seed ASAP to guarantee you get the variety you want.

- Gross margin for soybean silage yielding 6tDM/ha = $600.
- Gross margin for white grain sorghum yielding 10tDM/ha, = $900.

*estimates only, please contact either myself or Col for more a detailed break down.

We also have a full feed value analysis of a white grain sorghum silage pit from last summer available for those interested.

Dry land Sorghum - taking advantage of increased summer rainfalls.

Over the last couple of summers we have seen a significant increase in summer rainfall. And if we are to believe what climate experts tell us, such events are going to become more frequent. As a result, their has been a number of growers able to opportunistically produce a dry land sorghum crop. Although it is difficult to know whether you will receive enough rainfall, being a very efficient water user, it has been possible for growers to pull off 2-3t/ha crops with minimal inputs.

Although it won't be possible every year to pull off a dry land sorghum crop, when there is years when summer rainfall is forecast to be above normal, it is certainly an option to get a different crop variety into the system. It can return a handy little gross margin, while allowing to get good kills on problem weeds, using different groups of chemicals that will help to avoid resistance developing.

Break crops - Forage brassica and vetch.

Break crops are important in all cropping systems, yet there are many options and not all of them will suit everyone. However, one option that looks like it could provide quite a viable option is to use both forage brassica and vetch.

As you can see in the photo above, where they have been sown together in the same row and it has come up quite well. Using these two different plants, you can achieve a number of benefits. It provides excellent feed quality for animals, it allows you to clean grass weeds, while getting the beneficial effects of incorporating a brassica into your rotation, as well as the nitrogen fixing benefits of a legume.

Although it may not suit all systems, particularly those with out animals, it is yet another option you can consider when planning your next break crop.

French Yellow clover (yellow serradella).

While we're on the subject of break crops, I thought I would also mention a little on french yellow clover. It is well suited to deep acid sandy soils and grows well on relatively low rainfall, where sub clover can struggle. It's deep root system, see photo below, and its high hard seed content can enable it to persist for many years. It provides excellent feed quality for animals and tend to stay greener for longer in spring than sub clovers. It also does not contain oestrogens so will not cause sheep infertility.

Mark's Mumble - Peak production.

With milk prices starting off much lower this season, it is important that your herd reaches its peak production.
If you have any questions or concerns about your animals, feel free to ring or email Mark to discuss it.

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Upcoming Field walks

There will be a number of upcoming field walks in the coming months in various regions. We will be looking at various crops and varieties, as well as different cropping systems. Planned dates are below;

Temora ;29th August

Nth Vic/Sth NSW; 5th September

Mallee; 12th September

W.A; 19th September

Nth Vic/Sth NSW; 3rd October

Copper trail results

Some very interesting trial results have come from copper recently that were conducted in Kulin, Western Australia in 2011. Both CSBP and one of our farmers independent trials demonstrated the importance of copper supply to fertilizer response.

Significant results are as follows;

CSBP trial;

-16 units of N and 9 Units of P banded, No Cu applied. *Yield = 1.19t/ha

-No fert banded in 2011, although 2010 had 13 units of N and 7 units of P banded and no crop removed. 5L/ha of 50% Copper Oxide was foliar applied at Z30. *Yield = 2.44t/ha

Main results

- 1.25t/ha response to foliar application of StrataSol Copper.

Farmers independent trial;

1.5L/ha Tracer copper was applied at Z32.

-An increase of .9% in grain protein in copper trial was observed compared to no copper.

-An increase of approximately .5t/ha in copper trial compared to no copper.

The main point to take away from these trial results are just how important trace elements can be in determining grain yield. If a plant is significantly deficient, it can have a dramatic effect on yield. However, because you are dealing with 'trace' elements, you must be sure that the crop requires it before application, as it is very easy for trace elements to become toxic to plants, as they only require such small amounts. Such significant results would not have been seen if the trial site had not been so deficient in copper.

Soil moisture probes - optimizing growth potential.

In order to optimize the growth potential of irrigated crops, you need to have irrigation schedules spot on. Through the use of moisture probes, you can accurately know how much moisture your crop is using each day, through measuring available moisture at various depths. This means you can more accurately schedule irrigation intervals, meaning the crop spends less time in states of either moisture stress and total saturation, resulting in a better crop with a higher yield potential.

Anecdotal accounts from farmers, which are backed up with the data provided by the sensors, suggests that moisture probes make it very easy to determine irrigation scheduling, particularly the first and last irrigation events that are required. Furthermore, when used in combination with modern irrigation techniques, particularly automation, it can significantly reduce fuel and labour units required on farm.

Although those probes seem expensive, it can cost as much as $4000 to set up the best quality probes, they can easily pay for them selfs by improving yields and water scheduling. For example, if this past season you had been irrigating a summer crop, and the use of a moisture probe improved yields by just half a tone, it would comfortably pay for it self.

- 3t/ha of soybeans @$500 x 50ha = $75,000.

- 3.5t/ha soybeans @ $500 x 50ha = $87,500.

Thats an increase profit of $10,000 just by getting irrigation scheduling better over one crop. If such a probe was used for 2 crops a year for 5 years, it doesn't take long to work out how valuable a small investment into a high quality soil moisture probe can be. There are a lot of presumptions made for that example, but the point is that there are many potential savings to be had from the use of such technologies if used correctly.

Furthermore, these probes could prove equally effective for dry land farming, simply by making sowing and fertilizer decisions on how much available moisture there is.

If your interested, please get in contact with us and we would be more than happy to discuss some options with you.

Nitrogen fertilizers - A double edged sword.

While there are definitely significant benefits to be gained in production through the use of nitrogen fertilizers, you must account for the negative effects they can have on soil health.

Nitrogen fertilizers make it possible to achieve high yielding crops, but what is it doing to your soils health? While extremely effective at increasing yield, they also acidify your soil and can make them go extremely hard. In fact, anecdotal stories have urea used during WW2 to create bush airstrips that were as hard as concrete. That is were the use of soil ameliorates play an integral roll in the health of your soils, and why we always recommend the use of soluble calcium when using Nitrogen.

Soluble calcium not only helps counteract the acidification affect of Nitrogen fertilizers, it helps create a less hostile environment for good bacteria and fungi to live in, which will in turn help fix Nitrogen to your soils for free. The more Nitrogen that your soils can fix from the atmosphere for free, the better it is for the crop, the health of the soil, and most importantly, your pocket.

Seasonal Price Outlook - Grain, Dairy, Lamb, Beef.

Grain - Global Grain prices have rallied in recent weeks on the back of news of drought affected crops in the states and lower than expected yield forecasts in europe. At this stage it is looking like grain prices could be excellent at harvest. Canola is also continuing to remain strong on the international and domestic markets.

Dairy - Murray-Goulburn have released their opening price of $4.50, down 8% on last year. Fonterra are yet to release their opening price but are forecasting a season ending price for 2012/13 of $4.70-$5, which will be well before the 2011/12 season ending price.

Lamb - Meat and Livestock Australia's Eastern States Trade Lamb Indicator prices are well down on the record prices of last year, but still remain strong. Prices have risen slightly for trade lamb, heavy lamb and mutton in recent weeks.

Beef - Beef prices have remained strong over the past 3 months, with the Meat and livestock Australia's Eastern Young Cattle Indictor just nudging past a three year high for this time of year. Levels are currently well above those of two years ago.

CB Farming fishing trip and farm tour - Darwin.

As many of you will know, CB Farming, along with Malijo Consultancy, recently went up to Darwin for a fishing trip and farm tour.

The trip consisted of a tour of farms around Darwin to give clients a look at some different farming systems as well as a different set of problems that farmers face in a different region. From all reports the tour was very enjoyable and provided a great insight into farming in the N.T and the challenges they face.

Many thanks to Shaun Healy from Territory Rural who organized the farm tour, as well as Chris and Phil Howie, and Colin Fink for letting us look at their properties.

The fishing trip consisted of 3 days fishing off of Dundee beach, which was thoroughly enjoyed by all, apparently a little too much by some, with a couple of guys feeling a little green around the gills out on the water.

All in all the trip was thoroughly enjoyed by all, with the honor of the biggest fish caught going to Brock Clymo, bad luck Col!

On a more important note, while it might seem just like a bit of fun in the sun, getting away from the farm and having a chance to relax is more important than you think. Sometimes the best decision you can make on farm is to simply take a break, get away from all the stress, clear the mind and relax, it will still be there when you get home. After all, a de-stressed mind is a clear one, which is able to make clear, confident decisions.

A delicious golden snapper!

Regards,

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