



2014 SUMMER CROPPING



Local Land
Services
North West

AW148005

CONSIDERING SORGHUM AFTER THE DRY SPELL?

Despite the drier than average winter season, recent rainfall has somewhat increased the hope that this dry spell may end and a deliver a good season for a much needed summer crop. Thinking that the glass is half full, there are several summer crop options and sorghum is on the agenda. The main commercial companies, Heritage, Pioneer and Pacific Seeds all have varieties that have hit the markets in the last few seasons. In terms of yield, all have the capacity to be high yielding with enough rainfall and adequate nutrition. So choosing varieties should be based on the hybrid that is best suited to individual farming systems. Best practice suggests that planting several varieties spreads the production risk.

Traditionally sorghum should be planted from late September until early October. This ensures that flowering and grain fill occurs prior to the significant temperature rises that can result in moisture stress during peak yield building periods. This planting time should also avoid seedlings suffering from cold stress conditions. However, we also have a second opportunity when seasonal conditions permit to plant just prior to Christmas through to early January.

Generally, later plantings may suffer some yield penalties and can be subject to additional stress from increased midge pressure. However, adequate moisture and nutritional requirements ensure that good yields are still achievable.

The following three varieties released in the last few years all have a midge rating of 6 making them well suited to both traditional and late season planting. Pioneer's G33 is a mid/quick maturing variety with low green stay green traits and has moderate tillering capacity. Equally as well suited to the north is Pacific Seeds' MR Scorpio which is slightly longer season variety and has a slightly lower tillering rating. HSG-114 from Heritage Seeds is also a medium maturity variety and medium tillering. All have good vigour and standability.

Numerous trials by NSW Department of Primary Industries and the Northern Grower Alliance have found that Sorghum crops respond well to nitrogen fertilisers. The greatest likely yield benefits come from application of nitrogen prior to planting. However the NGA evaluated the effect of in-crop N applications showing that yields can be maintained if applied post emergence up to the 7 leaf stage.

Nutritionally and moisture requirements aside, optimising crop establishment and achieving an ideal plant population are the key to maximising yields. A 0.75, 1.0 or 1.5m solid plant configuration as well as single or double skip are all common to this region. Depth to soil moisture and foreseeable growing conditions should be taken into consideration when settling on a planting configuration. Some general thoughts are to match the row spacing to expected yield, plant slightly higher populations for lower tillering varieties and consider re-planting when plant populations are less than 12-15,000 plants/ha.

Once established, like most other crops, sorghum is subject to physiological and pest stresses. Some key recommendations:

- Lodging under moisture stress conditions during grain fill can be a common problem, so choose varieties with good lodging resistance.
- Significant yield losses can occur with poor weed management. Herbicide resistance the dry down is an emerging issue so rotate herbicide groups and stay on label.
- Monitoring insects regularly and control insect pests when necessary.
- Control of Heliothis (H.amigera) is warranted only when infestations attack the crop during grain development stages.
- Midge damage can be managed using a synthetic pyrethroid, however late plant crops can be additionally protected by planting a hybrid with a resistance rating of at least 4.
- A pre-harvest spray with glyphosate or Reglone® knockdown herbicides can be applied after physiological maturity is reached. Desiccation can hasten the dry down of crops allowing earlier and more efficient harvest to take place.

Even though sorghum is a drought tolerant crop, it responds very well to rainfall and might be worth a consideration. After all it does always rains after a dry spell.

For more information contact Brooke Sauer on (02) 6757 2551.

Liverpool Plains grower Craig Charters



Last season's conditions pay off for grower, minus drought

HEADING into summer, Liverpool Plains grower Craig Charters wants a repeat of last season, minus the crippling drought.

Mr Charters said the conditions were the worst he had seen, but strangely enough, his irrigated property "Gabo", Caroona, produced the best yields of his farming career.

"We had virtually no rain for the year except for a few showers and a storm in December. It was the worst drought I can remember," he said.

"Saying that, our sorghum, corn and cotton yields were exceptional, so I wish every year could be like that one."

Mr Charters, who runs "Gabo" and a smaller dryland property, "Spring Creek", with son Clint and wife Sharon and Clint's wife Amy, put the unlikely result down to variety choice, good soil conditions and well-planned irrigation.

"We look for straight-out yield when selecting grain sorghum varieties, as we have enough water for a full irrigation season.

"The heavy black soil in this area stores a lot of moisture and we generally have enough subsoil and surface moisture to achieve a good germination.

"We also don't get as much prolonged heat as other areas and the nights always cool right down, so that put us ahead."

The Charters generally plant sorghum in the first week of October, but due to the extreme drought conditions, they had to pre-water which took longer than expected.

This meant planting was delayed to the second week of November, pushing out

harvest to the end of April.

Their seeding program consisted of 150ha of cotton, 100ha of sorghum HSR Enforcer, 40ha of new sorghum variety MR-Taurus and 40ha of corn.

They pre-planted 180kg/ha of urea before seeding their sorghum, and planted the crop at a rate of 95,000 seeds/ha with 60kg Starter using a Kinze planter with the Precision Planting vacuum vSet meter configured for 90cm row spacing.

The sorghum then had a post-plant application of another 180kg/ha of urea.

A post emergent spray of Dual went on at 2L/ha for grass control and Starane and Atrazine were applied in-crop at 750mL/ha and 2L/ha respectively.

The sorghum had two in-crop waters, helping it reach heavy grain fill, but it soon overdoled on water when it came to harvest in April.

Unexpected showers contributed to grain shell-out, hurting yield.

Despite this, the MR-Taurus yielded 10.1t/ha and the Enforcer 9.5t/ha.

Mr Charters said it was the first time he had grown MR-Taurus and had grown Enforcer for a while.

"This season was the season that would test a grain a sorghum variety for weathering and the Taurus certainly came through the wet harvest with good colour, seed size and grain weight."

This season he will dedicate two-thirds of available land to cotton and one-third to sorghum.

Their sorghum plant will be a fifty-fifty split of MR-Taurus and MR-Scorpio.



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AW1454882



Green light for mungbean season

THE Australian Mungbean Association heads into the next five years with well-founded optimism.

There is room to expand production in the traditional summer growing areas of Queensland and northern NSW and the whole supply chain is ready to respond.

In the last five years the volume of mungbean produced in Australia has increased three-fold and Rob Anderson, president of the Australian Mungbean Association (AMA), believes there is room for further expansion over the coming five years.

"We have put strategies in place to support the expansion of the mungbean industry and growers can be very confident to include mungbean in their rotation, taking less than 100 days to produce a

high quality protein food," said Mr Anderson.

The industry has set a goal to increase Australian production to average 170 thousand tonnes by 2019.

Mr Anderson says the development of new varieties, dedicated industry development, accredited agronomists and some blue-sky research will support growers as they incorporate mungbeans into their crop rotations."

The National Mungbean Improvement Program (NMIP), a partnership between Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) plant breeders, the Grain Research and Development Corporation (GRDC) and the AMA, released three new varieties that have underpinned the expansion of the

industry in recent years.

Pulse Australia industry development manager for NSW, Tim Weaver, says the industry's dedication to the Certified Seed Program and Accredited Agronomist training is commendable, providing growers with access to the best possible resources to confidently grow this very fast maturing crop.

"Culinary grade Australian mungbeans are well-received in the marketplace, especially in Asia, because of the priority we place on our quality product, which is verified safe to eat and clean," said Mr Weaver.

"We can't let our guard down and as the industry expands it is essential that we maintain this reputation

through product traceability on grower declarations regarding input use."

The new high yielding varieties also require a renewed commitment to mungbean agronomy research and the AMA

is encouraging research and extension projects that will further refine the best management practices for irrigation, crop nutrition and integrated pest and disease management in mungbeans.



Professor Sagadevan Mundree (left) and PhD researcher Michael Dodt (front, right) explain their drought-tolerant mungbean research to Australian Mungbean Association president, Rob Anderson (front) and other industry stakeholders, including Pulse Australia's national manager, Gordon Cumming. Photo: Erika Fish

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Kahl family invest in the future

JAMES Kahl's family has been farming cotton in the Namoi Valley in North West NSW since 1961.

When his parents Paul and Jean Kahl emigrated from California, they were some of the earliest pioneers of Australia's cotton industry.

Australia is now the second largest exporter of cotton in the world, after the US, but our cotton growers are under increasing pressure to grow more with less water, less labour and fewer resources.

This drive for efficiency has seen James recently invest in three new Case IH tractors for Merced Farming, his 4000 hectare property near Wee Waa.

He has two Puma 210s and one Puma 195.

"Cotton prices are not keeping up with the cost of inputs, so we've had to change a lot on the property to be more efficient," James said.

"You think you've done everything possible, but there's always more to be

done."

Merced Farming produces around 10,000 bales of cotton each year, as well as wheat or corn on rotation, and also grazes cattle and sheep.

"Over the last 15 to 20 years, we've cut the tillage amount by half - from cultivating the land 14 or 15 times to just seven," explains James.

"We've also decreased the amount of insect and spray control by about 80 per cent, and our water use is more efficiency thanks to land levelling and irrigation cycling. We also used to have 20 employees - now we're down to 12."

So when it came to choosing new tractors, efficiency was a big factor.

And higher horsepower was not necessarily the solution, as they can cost more to run.

"I was looking for a good balance between horsepower and the weight of the tractor - I need a lighter weight vehicle to avoid compaction."

James says the Puma range

from Case IH represented good value for the horsepower.

"It will do everything we need to do except the really heavy jobs, where we will use our Case IH Magnums.

"The Puma 210s (213hp) will be good mid-range tractors for the property, and can take on some of the 'lighter heavy work', while the Puma 195 (197hp) is a good value smaller tractor," he explains.

The other key benefit for James and his team is the ease of use.

"They're not overcomplicated with electronics - so if anything happens to go wrong we can just fix it in the field without needing to call in a computer expert!"

He says he'll be putting his new Pumas to work on all types of crops.

"They can handle some of the tilling and seed bed preparation, as well as fertiliser application, cultivation, mulching, and any type of crop planting."

James' sons are returning to the family business, and the Kahl family legacy is likely to live on.

"We've had more good years than bad, and we'll be here cotton farming for as long as it continues to rain," says James.

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James Kahl (centre), with his sons Daniel and James with their Case IH Puma.

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