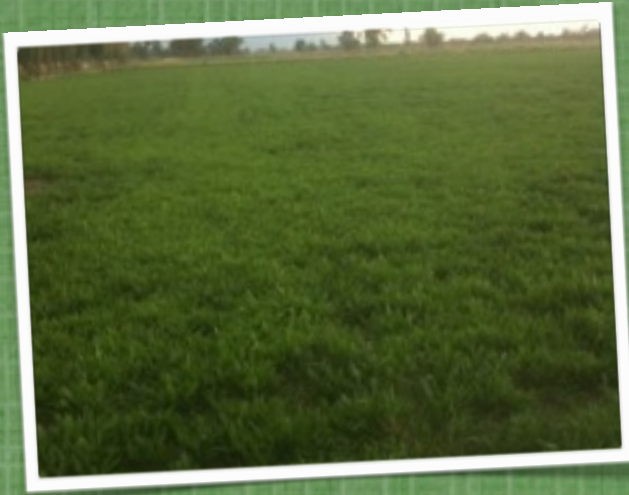


# CB Farming News

MAY 2012

PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES

ISSUE TWO



*Left; Straight plantain after first irrigation in late Feb.  
Right; White Sorghum near Yarrowalla.*

## CB Farming News 2012 - 2nd edition

Welcome to the 2nd edition of CB Farming News. It feels as though time has just been flying by, as winter is just around the corner. Since the last edition, we have seen wide spread early autumn rains which have seen good sub soil moisture deposited in most areas. Although it has been relatively dry for most people since the big opening rains, except for some localized storms, I know of at least one grower who lost the roof of a shed, conditions are promising for a prosperous season. With good moisture to take advantage off, some growers have already got crops in and out off the ground, while others are well and truly underway with their Canola and early season Wheats.

This season, with the return of reliable irrigation water, we have seen quite a few hectares of summer crop planted amongst our growers, in particularly Soy Beans, as well as smaller areas of White Sorghum and Maize. We have seen some very good yields from soys in the region, with the better crops

ranging any where from 2 to 4 t/ha, equating into quite tidy little profits.

### White Sorghum - An alternative to Maize?

As mentioned, we have also seen a few growers try their hand at white sorghum, which has proven quite successful. It has proven relatively easy to grow, especially when comparing to other summer crops such as Maize, which is quite labour intensive and requires precise management. Provided we can find an established market, we feel that white sorghum could prove to be a lost cost, low input crop, without the associated risks of growing Maize. For instance, its watering intervals are much more forgiving, it doesn't require much fertilizer, and if it's plant numbers aren't perfect when establishing, it has tended to tiller out quite well. We have also had it used for both grain production as well as silage pits for a dairy herd. Hopefully once we have some data on yield and feed

Early autumn rains have seen good sub soil moisture deposited in most areas.

quality it will prove to be just as good if not better than maize.

### Irrigation scheduling - Critical to optimizing performance.

The scheduling of irrigation intervals can be the difference between growing a profitable crop, or having feed available when you would traditionally have a feed gap. Irrigating to early or often, can be just as bad, often worse, then being late with an watering. This does of course, all



**Perennial rye grass which wasn't irrigated over summer. It has maintained plant numbers without being over run with weeds.**



**Wedge tail wheat that has been over irrigated. While it can be useful for early feed, over irrigation will stunt growth.**

depend on what crop your growing and how you irrigating. For instance, crops such as Lucerne and Wheat (grazing or not), do handle being irrigated to early or often, especially under flood irrigation. They are completely different to rye grass, you can't just keep watering them religiously and expect them to grow. These crops are better of to be slightly drought stressed before watering, as they can recover from being drought stressed very well, yet when they are watered to early, they really struggle, even die.

This obviously has serious consequences to the profitability of the crop, whether its for grazing or grain, getting water scheduling right can make all the difference. After all, when soil is at total saturation, there is no oxygen, so it cannot breath. So before you schedule your next irrigation, grab the shovel, and go have a dig and find where your moisture levels are at!

### **Amacide 700 - our new best friend for broadleaf knockdown.**

While we are an independent company, when we come across a good product, we will certainly let you know about it. Since the release of Amacide 700, we have found it to be very effective in controlling broadleaf weeds as a general knockdown. This new formulation of Amacide is advertised as being compatible with glyphosate, meaning better results when using the two as a general knockdown. It has been proving to be very effective, especially when combined with goal to further help pick up a wider range of broad leaves.

### **Deep ripping - can be an effective tool if done correctly.**

While many of our clients are often hesitant to work their soils, as we generally are, some times it is necessary evil, as the use cultivation is still our best method of fixing heavily compacted soils. This is especially true for those who have both irrigated land and livestock. We have seen some good results where land has been ripped prior to crops being planted, particularly soy beans, which have performed better than Soys on the same soils that where not deep ripped.

However, the key to deep ripping is to either inject Calcium into the soil while ripping, or to have it put on soon afterwards. This is because the Calcium is the key nutrient to soil structure, and will help prevent the soil from settling back down to how it was previously. If this is not done, you are essentially wasting your time and money, as it will not improve the structure of the soil and the soil will go back to how it was. When done correctly, the soil will be relieved of compaction, allowing oxygen into the soil more freely, resulting in better root growth and a healthier plant. Again though, this is all dependent on Calcium being applied to improve the structure of the soil, so that it becomes more friable.

### **Plantain - an alternative to annual rye which doesn't need to be re-sown.**

Re-sowing annual ryegrass is not only time consuming, its expensive, and every time there is a minimum of 6 weeks wait prior to first grazing. Because of this, over the last couple of years we have been looking at alternatives to this expensive exercise. What we have tried, and found to be very successful, is Plantain. We have had a few farmers put in straight stands of plantain last year and found it to be very comparative to rye grass in its first year.

However, the beauty of plantain is its following years. Because it is a herb, rather than a grass, once it reaches the end of its growing season in December, rather than dying, its just puts out a seed head and sits dormant. Then come opening autumn rains/irrigation, the paddock is not only ready to graze 2-3 weeks later, it will thicken it self up from self-sown seed. Those who have had it in to see its following year have been very impressed with both the amount of early feed its provided, as well as how quickly it came. It has been grazed 3 times before annual rye grass this year. It has proved an invaluable feed source for those who have had it, while it feed tests up just as well as ryegrass.

We are encouraging any one who traditionally faces an autumn feed gap to give it a go, as it is a very easy way to grow lots of high quality food well before

any ryegrass can, while it is very simple to manage. It treated very similar to annual rye grass, yet it doesn't need to be re-sown and can be sprayed with both grass and broadleaf selective.

## Brassica - A lower risk alternative to Canola.

Break crops are incredibly important in maintaining long term profitability in continuous cropping systems. However, in areas of lower/unreliable rainfall, Canola is considered a risky option, as it requires good growing season rainfall. That's where Grazing Brassica can be very useful for those with livestock. Brassica can grow on much lower rainfall than Canola, yet you get the benefits of growing a Canola. It enables you to use different group herbicides, as well as getting a disease break from cereals. It proves very effective in cleaning up bad grass paddocks, as animals will selectively graze the grasses, before getting stuck into the Brassica. It has also proved a good quality food source, with lambs able to put on their 300g/day while on it.

## Early season moisture - Planting grain and graze varieties.

For two years in a row, we have seen very good early season rains, with excellent moisture levels in early Autumn. If this is going to become a continued trend, as many climate experts suggest, those with mixed enterprises may wish to take better advantage of good soil moisture by planting grazing tolerant cereal and canola crops. While many farmers have already started growing **Wedge Tail** wheat, which has excellent grazing tolerance and can be quite high yielding, a grazing tolerant Canola is also available to use. **Taurus** was released back in 2009 and has been specifically bred to be grazing tolerant. It is a very late maturing winter Canola which has been bred for early season vigor as well as hybrid yield boost. It requires quite high rainfall, so will likely require irrigation, but may be a viable option as a very early season break crop which can double as an early feed source for your animals. It is essentially an alternative to forage brassica, but can still yield like a traditional Canola.

## Field Walk Report

On wednesday the 18th of April we held a field walk in conjunction with Malijo Consulting, where we had a tour around 3 farms in the Tongala and Stanhope. The Day was very well attended with approximately 40 people attending the day. The main aim of the day was to demonstrate how you can grow high quality feed, by growing the right pasture species at the right time of the year. When done correctly, it ensures the maximum amount of food can be grown, which will minimize your production costs.

The day started out at Peter Costello's Dairy farm in Tongala, where we had a look at his Automated Dairy. It was very interesting to see his robots in action, while he spoke about all the different challenges that he has had to overcome in setting up his system. Although I don't know if the system would suit everyone, there is certainly potential for more robots to be set up in the region.

Our next stop on the walk was Barry Nexhip's, also in Tongala, where we first had a look at his Chicory red clover paddock. It was an example of a crop that can be grown with very minimal effort, minimal water, doesn't need to be re-sown every year, and provide very high quality food. Chicory is a perennial herb which is highly nutritious, which animals perform very well on. This particular paddock has only been watered 3 times in 2 years. It was an excellent example of what can be done with those hard to irrigate paddocks, which are often neglected. We then moved down to Barry's Lucerne out block where he grows Lucerne on Pipe and Risers, as well as on Drip Tape. The purpose of the visit was to demonstrate how productive land can be when crops are grown in their intended growing season, with minimal water, while maintaining very good feed quality. This is a very productive block for Barry, with high production or high quality food making it worthwhile for him to either put through his dairy herd, or simply sell any excess feed.

The final stop of the day was at Gorgon Emmett's Dairy Farm in Stanhope. After we enjoyed a beautiful BBQ lunch at the Ky West Hotel, we travel over to Stanhope to look at a couple of Gordon some different high water use efficiency pastures, which are

not re-sown or irrigated over summer. We first looked at a perennial rye, One50 with the endophyte AR37. It was irrigated up until Christmas 2011, then didn't receive another irrigation until late February. The stand has recovered very well, and is as thick as it was last year, while providing its first grazing only 2-3 weeks after irrigation. This is much quicker than annual variety's, yet because it wasn't irrigated over summer, it is very clean of undesired grasses such as paspalum or couch, see photo above, therefore it is of better quality than rye grass that is irrigated year round.

The other pasture we looked at was straight Plantain. Again it was irrigated until late december, then not irrigated again till late February. It came back extremely well, as well as thickening it self up from self sown seed. It was grazed 2-3 weeks after first irrigation and had 4 grazings prior to annual rye which was sown 1 week after the plantain was irrigated. It has provided lots of high quality early autumn feed, when traditionally he would have been waiting for annuals to establish.

Overall, the day was very successful, with an enjoyable day had by those who attended. Hopefully there was something to take away for everyone who attended, if nothing else, it was good chance to have a chat with some fellow farmers and see how other people are doing things.

Thanks to all those who attended, any feed back on the day, good or bad, would be greatly appreciated.

## Field Walk - Take home messages.

- Must have a variety of feed sources on farm if you want to avoid feed gaps.
- A feed gap isn't just running out of grass. It's running out of quality feed, there is no substitute for quality. Early Autumn feed is traditionally the biggest problem.
- Pastures such as Plantain, Chicory, Shaftal and Ryegrass with AR37 endophyte are our best options. They are first to produce feed after summer and don't require re-sowing (except shaftal).
- Growing the species in the natural live cycles. Rye grass isn't a summer grass, it is when it should be in its reproductive stage, so let it.

- If you intend on growing summer feed, grow a summer crop. That is Lucerne, Sorghum or Millet.

- Incorporate a rotation into your grazing system like broad acre farmers do. It will help in keeping pastures cleaner from weeds and disease, while growing more tonnage at better quality.

- This can actually increase water utilization while reduce re-sowing costs.

- Soil structure is the key to making these things work. It allow plants to grow better, so the recover quicker and are more tolerant to physical stresses.

- Water is more expensive than just the cost to buy it. Its heavy (compaction) and carries unwanted elements such as dispersed clay and sodium. It also leeches nutrients such as calcium from the soil.

- The correct fertilizer program is critical to achieving high production. Getting Calcium into the system to fix/maintain soil structure is essential.

- Deep ripping to reduce compaction will increase production. May only need to be once every 10 years, but getting oxygen into the soil in important.

- Lucerne is the base of the animals diets because it is our highest producing feed source.

- Remember, sometimes the best thing for a crop is to treat it mean. Allow them to go through the full reproductive cycle. It maintains quality and increases overall production.

## Mark's Mumble - Peak production.

With the autumn calving well and truly under way, it's now time to focus on peak production of the fresh cows. Remember that peak milk sets peak intake, and in doing so our total milk yield potential per cow for the season.

The age old rule of thumb is 1:200. This means for every litre at peak you can expect 200 for the rest of lactation (eg peak at 30 litres = 6000 litres per cow for the season). However experience shows that if you manage decline from peak this rule can be stretched to 1:235 litres/litre at peak.

The key to peak milk yield is maximizing pasture intake (minimizing NDF concentration) through the right grazing management/rotation, and marrying this with the correct supplement choice (both type and level of concentrates) to drive

milk/intake to where it needs to be to achieve your overall production goals.

With the likelihood of a significant decrease in milk price next season pasture management/utilization needs to become even more of our focus, minimizing our feed costs, and maximizing production, and in doing so diluting down our overall cost of production.

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

**Grain** - Wheat prices are forecast to remain weak for the following 12 months according to a rabobank report, while they are predicting similar outcome for Barley. Large carry over stocks from the 2010-11 season followed by another potential bumper crop are weighing heavily on local markets. The shining light is Canola however, with prices likely to remain firm due to tighter stocks.

**Dairy** - Murray-Goulburn released their likely season ending price of \$5.35 per kilogram of milk solids on the 24th of April, with Fonterra also forecasting a similar season ending price. At this stage, with softening markets from increased international supply and a strong australian dollar, it is likely that next seasons opening price will be down slightly on this years.

**Lamb** - MLA's February forecast for lamb prices to remain strong due to strong demand, particularly from export markets, although prices are unlikely to return to 2011's record levels.

**Beef** - MLA's February forecast for beef was for continued strong demand with beef and veal production and export expected to increase. Global beef prices are tracking at historical high levels, although factors such as the high australian dollar are dampening prices which australian producers receive.

## Cropping Gross Margins - Intergrading Livestock.

Over the past couple of months, we have done a lot of work on crunching numbers and coming up with different Gross Margins (GM) for cropping. Yet one thing keeps coming to the fore, intergrading livestock into the system creates a better GM. They can be very valuable in a number of ways; Improving herbicide effectiveness through spray grazing, turning a failed crop into a profitable one through grazing and adding diversity to the business, e.g while grain prices are low and meat prices are high, it drastically reduces risk.

While livestock doesn't fit into everyone's cropping systems, those who have, have found them to be a very valuable asset. The key is to manage animals in the way which doesn't jeopardize your cropping system. The two most important things to avoid are; over grazing stubbles and leaving animals on wet paddocks (compaction). This means having designated areas for animals to go when it is looking like coming in wet, or when substitute feeding.

Get the simple things right, and you can find the livestock will not only compliment your cropping very well, it can make your business a more profitable one.

*Regards,*

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