

CROPPING

Durum gets more space

By PAULA THOMPSON

KANIVA, Victoria, farmer Alwyn Dyer has been growing durum for almost 20 years, but recently, crop coverage increased to 50 per cent of the wheat he grows, thanks to new varieties and a drive to get on top of agronomic issues.

The West Wimmera Durum Group chairman was a guest speaker at the recent Durum Growers Association of South Australia pre-seeding forum at Kaniva, attended by more than 50 farmers and industry representatives.

He grew 600 hectares of durum last year, and plans to sow a similar amount in the coming season.

"In the early days of growing durum I had some great successes, but also some pretty disappointing results," he said.

"But in the past few years, with the new varieties coming through, they seem to be better adapted to this area."

"I've also learnt to manage the crop a bit better."

Alwyn says older varieties tend to struggle in dry, spring finishes whereas newer varieties seem able to cope with tight times.

This was evident last season, when he achieved yields of between 4 tonnes and 5.5t/ha on only decile one-to-two growing-season rainfall for the Hyperno variety. But more than 300 millimetres of rain over the summer months started the crop off strongly.

"When I first started growing durum, I chose the Yallaroi variety, then I moved to Tamaroi, which was okay in normal years but in dry years it just died off," he said.

"While you can have a nice-looking Tamaroi crop during the season, if you got a spring drought it would go only two-thirds of what bread wheat would yield."

"Kalka was a bit of an improvement over Tamaroi, with a bit of boron tolerance."

Alwyn has been growing the Hyperno variety for three years and says it seems very well adapted to his district, in the west Wimmera, with very

5 Critical Factors

- 1 New varieties lead to more tonnage
- 2 Nitrogen management important tool
- 3 Paddock selection critical to crop success
- 4 Strong interest in area-based contracts
- 5 SAGIT-funded project looks at ryegrass problem

strong yields.

"I've been bulking-up varieties for the Durum Growers Association and looking at the new varieties WID 802 and 803," he said.

"While 803 yields really well, it has an inherent issue with higher screenings. 802 has performed very well in the past three seasons."

This season, Alwyn will plant half of his durum area to 802 and the other half to Hyperno.

He says paddock selection is crucial when growing durum. "Durum grows better on well-structured, alkaline soils," he said.

"With hostile subsoils, salinity or boron issues, bread wheats tend to do better."

Alwyn undertakes Predicta-B soil tests to check for crown rot issues before sowing durum. And, he sows it after a legume or canola crop.

Nitrogen management is important, with excess early application leading to bulky crops and problems if a dry season eventuated.

"When I first started growing durum back in the 1990s – before the run of dry years – I was predrilling urea," he said.

"That led to a lot of bulky vegetative growth. I've cut right back on my early nitrogen application and just put extra nitrogen out during the year, depending on rainfall."

Durum returns were a standout last season.

"Durum absolutely blew bread wheats out of the water last year," Alwyn said.

"My gross margins were in excess of \$1000/ha."

San Remo mill manager John



STRONG PRICES: With durum wheat yielding up to 5.5 tonnes a hectare and selling at strong prices, Kaniva, Victoria, grower Alwyn Dyer is sowing 600 hectares of the crop this year.

Stuart – another guest speaker at the forum – says there has been strong interest from the South East in area-based contracts offered through the AGG cooperative.

"We've been trying to build the area up for a number of years and, based on the contracts already signed, we'll see more than 20,000t come through this season, which is a fairly big take-up," he said.

He says that with the contract at \$320/t, more than \$100/t above APW wheat, it makes an attractive proposition.

Durum Growers Association

committee member John Green said a three-year project, funded by SAGIT would investigate best agronomic and management practices to combat ryegrass in durum wheat.

"A major issue with growing durum in the 2010 was that though we had the best crop in SA's history, we also saw an enormous regeneration of ryegrass," he said.

Alwyn said that with growing herbicide resistance, control options were running out.

It was a particular issue for durum, with the new herbicide Sakura not recommended for the crop.

MyTake

with DR JASON ABLE

University of Adelaide durum breeder

Overview:

The University of Adelaide durum breeding program, part of the Australian durum wheat improvement program, is funded through the GRDC, San Remo, NSW DPI and the University of Adelaide. The southern program is responsible for developing new durum varieties adapted for South Australia and Victoria. Our vision is to underpin the longevity of Australia's durum wheat industry through excellence in plant breeding, grain chemistry and molecular biology. Our mission is to significantly expand durum wheat demand for national and international markets through the development of superior-yielding, high-quality varieties.

The good:

Varieties recently released for the southern region – or due for release – have yields that compete with those in bread wheat, and are better adapted to moisture stress. This includes Tjilkuri, WID802 and WID803. The markets will always set the price, and this price is volatile. Durum premiums last year were \$100 a tonne more than those for bread wheat and looks set to continue. Durum gross margins are significant compared to bread wheat – particularly in medium and high-rainfall areas.

The bad:

Crown rot (caused by *Fusarium pseudograminearum*) may result in yield losses of more than 50 per cent. But with appropriate management, risks from this disease can largely be mitigated. Production (total tonnage) – not just in the southern region but nationally – has been generally inconsistent in the past decade. Stabilising and increasing the amount of production would see greater competition and new market opportunities develop in the mid to long-term.

The way forward:

When 2017 comes, what can you expect in new durum varieties? Increased yield, reduced susceptibility to crown rot, and superior quality attributes are our three top criteria for future releases in the southern region. A strategy we have adopted to achieve this is to access global genetic diversity – including Italy, Germany, Canada and US germplasm – that has not yet been integrated into the breeding program.

My top 5 tips:

1. Become a member of Southern Durum Growers Association, a young and dedicated group.
2. Get your management right (rotations, N application, etc) – the problems automatically reduce.
3. If you are growing varieties like Tamaroi, consider upgrading to a new variety such as Tjilkuri which has better yield and quality.
4. Consider planting most durum varieties by mid to late May. Sowing later is alright if you are in a region that typically has cooler/moist grain-fill conditions.
5. Participate in durum forums held every year through the SDGA to learn about latest developments.

Need to know more?
08 8303 7075



Australian Farmer of the Year Awards

12th SEPTEMBER 2012

Are you the next Australian Farmer of the Year?

Kondinin Group, ABC Rural and the Australian Rural Leadership Foundation are proud to host the 2012 Australian Farmer of the Year Awards

Award nominations close August 3, 2012

Visit www.kondiningroup.com.au for more information or contact Kondinin Group 1800 677 761



Australian
Rural
Leadership
Foundation



ABC
Rural
abc.net.au/rural