

New crop protection for durum

SOUTH Australian durum growers will benefit from a new multi-peril crop protection package, which combines popular area-based contracts with the removal of sharp protein cliff faces between durum grades.

The grower-driven Australian Grain Growers Co-operative has developed a zero-cost insurance option to suit durum growers' needs for a more flexible and risk-friendly approach to grain marketing, according to chief executive officer Steve Mellington.

"The grain industry has consistently struggled with the introduction of a multi-peril crop insurance," he said.

"As a consequence many growers have avoided managing price risk, as production risk was viewed as too great".

The zero cost multi-peril crop insurance option is available through AGG Co-op's durum area based program.

"Under this arrangement growers commit an area to the program. There is no commitment on tonnage," Mr Mellington said.

"The only obligation that a grower holds is to deliver the tonnage produced from the area under contract."

In response to grower demand, the 2013-14 program will now also protect against protein-grade cliff-face risk through a sliding-scale payment arrangement.

Mallala grower and 2012-13 Durum Grower of the Year recipient Richard Konzag said this

KeyPoints

- Protein cliff-face removed
- No commitment on tonnage
- Lower demand from North Africa

innovation turned back the clock in order to move the durum industry forward.

"Some years ago, the industry enjoyed a far fairer approach to the management of severe penalties of dropping from one grade to another," he said.

"I can accept dropping a dollar or two if my protein falls by 0.1 per cent, but a cliff-face of \$20-30 can shift the crop from profitable to unprofitable."

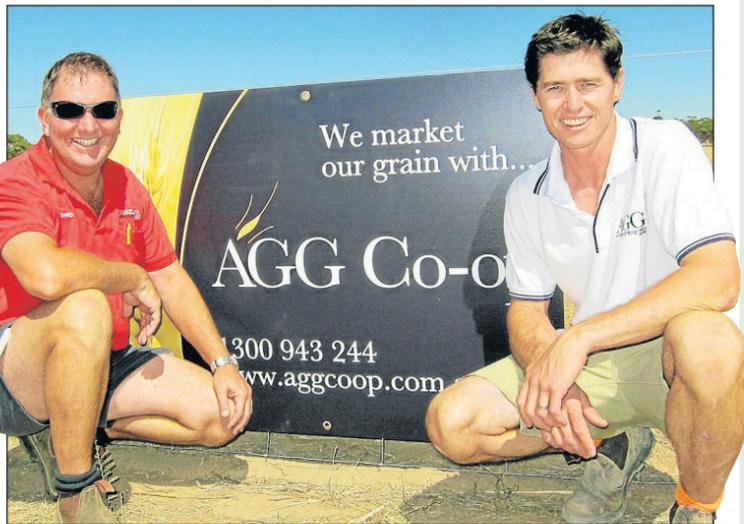
An indirect benefit could also be gained across other quality risks.

"We try and target a 13 per cent protein Durum 1 grade with our production," Mr Konzag said.

"The challenge with this target is balancing high protein with higher screenings-risk in years where the season turns off, such as last year.

"Under this structure I will not have to push the crop so hard to try and sneak over 13pc protein, which in 2012-13, also pushed my screenings over 5pc."

AGG Co-op operations manager Edward Cay said that the annual release of durum area-based contracts occurred well before seeding so that growers could finalise decisions on paddock plans.



DURUM CROP: Mallala grower and 2012/13 Durum Grower of the Year recipient Richard Konzag with AGG Co-op's operation manager Edward Cay. AGG has a change to its contract pricing structure this season.



In the first instance we will provide this offering exclusive to members of AGG Co-op

— EDWARD CAY

"Growers have made it clear to AGG Co-op that for niche crops such as durum, price signals are required early in the season," he said.

During 2012-13, the world durum crop was reasonably static at about 35 million tonnes.

A large crop in North America offset lower production in the European Union, Morocco and the Black Sea region.

Global trade is expected to fall slightly to about 7mt across 2013 because of lower demand from North Africa.

Mr Cay said that while growers are now invited to participate in the 2013-14 offering, growers needed to be clear that it was a limited offering.

"In the first instance we will provide this offering exclusively to members of AGG Co-op – any additional tonnage will be available on a first in first served basis," he said.

• Details: 1300 943 244.

Adjust crop programs for better 2013 season

SOUTHERN region grain growers are being urged to adjust their cropping programs and priorities for the 2013 season, following a generally dry summer that is expected to impact on sowing and growing conditions throughout south eastern Australia.

The latest advice from industry leaders on key issues facing the grains sector in 2013 and beyond has been relayed to agronomists and growers attending recent GRDC Grains Research Updates in the southern region.

GRDC Southern Region Panel chairman David Shannon said cropping experts speaking at updates in Ballarat, Victoria, Adelaide and Temora, New South Wales had asked growers and their advisers to shift their considerations when planning this year's crop.

"The focus at the moment is more about making good variety choices, making sure you've got the rotations right, being prepared for a season

where we could have minimal stored moisture, getting the seeding right, getting the timing of it right and making sure we've got the rotations right so that weeds don't come up to be a major issue for us," Mr Shannon said.

"This season is hard to predict because we've generally had a dry summer – very different from some of the summers we've had in past years where the focus has been on summer-weed control, stored moisture and making the best of those conditions.

"Despite dry conditions across the Southern Region for much of the summer, rains last week delivered a welcome boost to stored soil moisture some areas. However, growers who benefitted from that rain still need to allow for cropping conditions that can follow a dry summer."

Mr Shannon said that after severe crop damage during late cold snaps in 2012, frost remained a priority issue for the GRDC, which would con-

tinue to work to deliver resources to southern region growers to help them prepare for and address frost damage.

Changing challenges with weeds and cereal rust, and the implications of larger, faster sprayers now available to growers would be key topics on GRDC's research, development and extension agenda this year.

"On a more tactical level we're certainly looking at emerging weeds, particularly herbicide-resistant weeds and how to tackle them," Mr Shannon said.

"We're looking at rusts, and in particular rusts in wheat and what are good strategies around dealing with that problem.

"GRDC is very supportive of only growing those varieties which have some good rust resistance, so we are relying on the genetic ability of the plants to deal with rust – rather than using fungicide sprays to always deal with it – and trying to reduce input costs for growers."



DRY CONDITIONS: GRDC Southern Region Panel chair David Shannon says grain growers need to shift their priorities for the 2013 cropping season after a dry summer.

Yield app wins grain contest for innovation

AN innovative smart phone app that forecasts harvest yields has won the GRDC and Australian Year of the Farmer Grain Inventors search for the next big breakthrough in farm technology.

The app will be designed to give growers a reliable forecast of yield and will take less than an hour for each user to set up, with no need for field inspections or tests. The GRDC, in partnership with the Australian Year of the Farmer, started searching for Australia's most innovative home-grown invention for the grain sector in 2012 through the competition.

The inventor of the iPaddock Yield app, Michael Fels, Esperance, Western Australia, will receive support worth \$15,000 from the GRDC to develop his concept.

"Having a reliable forecast of yield early in the season is the Holy Grail for grain farmers. We're really excited that we will be able to take the next step to achieving this by further developing iPaddock Yield," Mr Fels said.

"So far I've built the system on a PC, but we now intend to make it into an app for iPhones and iPads to make it easily accessible for growers.

"My primary motivation for developing the app is not to generate profits, but to make available to the wider industry a tool that can improve the viability of Australian farm businesses and make a profound difference to the way our major input decisions are made."

Mr Fels and his wife Marnie have used their data-modelling technique within their own business and have found one of the biggest advantages was the savings they could achieve by making more informed decisions about their input costs. "We have saved literally hundreds of thousands of dollars over a number of below average seasons, purely through informed rational decisions that were made at a time when the crops were looking a million dollars," he said.

Breakthrough in weed herbicide resistance

AGRICULTURE is on the path to finding solutions for one of the biggest threats to global cereals production and food security, according to Bayer CropScience.

Herbicide resistance in weed species is one of the roadblocks to increased cereal yields and farming productivity, but a team of researchers from The University of Western Australia's Australian Herbicide Resistance Initiative and Bayer CropScience has made a major breakthrough.

Until now, it had been a mystery how resistant weeds could break down several different herbicides.

Using new technology, the team has identified – for the first time – six different genes that are expressed at a high level in ryegrass populations resistant to Group A and some Group B herbicides. Weeds resistant to these two herbicide groups account for the majority of the in-crop weed-control challenge.

"By knowing more about it, we can look at coming up with solutions," Post-Doctoral Research Associate with Bayer Crop Science Todd Gaines told delegates at the Global HerbicideResistance Challenge international conference in Fremantle, WA.

"The long-term goal is if we understand how weeds are breaking down herbicides, we can develop new options or maybe add ingredients to old chemicals to protect them," he said.

Dr Gaines, who is part of Bayer CropScience's weed resistance research team led by Dr Roland Beffa, said identifying the specific genes had been too difficult until recently.

"This research breakthrough has been made possible by using next generation sequencing technology to get a foothold and then to analyse and identify the genes involved," he said. "The technology takes all the DNA and sequences it all at once."

"Compared to the old sequencing method, this costs a lot less and is significantly quicker."

InShort

Barley accreditation: The Barley Australia board has accredited four new malting barley varieties: Grange, Henley, Scope and Westminster. These varieties were accredited following the evaluation trials conducted in association with the Malting and Brewing Industry Barley Technical Committee assessment under the two-stage malting barley evaluation process. Executive chairman Andrew Gee said the Barley Australia website

included a list of both preferred varieties as well as approved or accredited varieties. "This preferred list is the message to Australian growers of the varieties that are sought by the market," he said. "If a grower is growing something not on our list, it's unlikely it is going to end up getting used by the malting and brewing industry, unless it is for a specific small market segment somewhere."

• Details: www.barleyaustralia.com.au

Biochar research: Biochar can significantly increase mycorrhizal fungi colonisation of wheat plant roots, Western Australian studies have shown. The GRDC-supported research showed that with the addition of biochar 50 to 60 per cent of plant roots were colonised by the potentially beneficial fungi, up from 10 to 20pc in soils without biochar. In some soil types, biochar has the potential to enhance soil fertility, increase soil carbon

storage and decrease greenhouse gas emissions. But before it can be widely adopted in agriculture, better understanding is needed of its properties and how it interacts with soil. A GRDC Understanding Biochar fact sheet has been released outlining information about the solid, carbon-rich material.

• Details: www.grdc.com.au/GRDC-FS-Biochar