

A Contract Harvester Perspective of CTF

Peter Bradley

Contract grain harvester, National President of the Australian Grain Harvesters Association Inc.

The paramount issue is standardization of all equipment at 3 m wheel centres, particularly headers/combines. The most pressing problem is in relation to irrigation crops on 2 m beds. Some growers have changed to 1.5 m irrigation beds, to work in with 3 m wheel centres. There is a cost to growers to change, as there has been for 12 m fronts etc. I firmly believe the end result will outweigh the expense of the change to a sustainable and low emission cropping system.

The technology required for efficient CTF harvesting includes GPS devices, auto-steer, 12 m fronts, 3 m wheel centres on headers, tractors and chaser bins. Contract harvesters cannot be solely responsible for these costs. A class 7 header fitted with all the technologies required for efficient CTF costs approximately \$62/ha for a 2.5 t/ha standing crop. Currently, farmers are paying contractors \$37 - \$48/ha harvested. Who is paying for CTF practices? Where does this leave the contract harvester? No business can be sustained under these conditions, and farmers could very easily lose an important service in professional 'Contract Harvesters'.

CTF practices give very clear monetary and farming practices benefits. We have shown 20% - 40% reductions in soil compaction, and a 25% reduction in fuel consumption. We average around 6% less actual time harvesting due to auto-steer.

However, greater productivity will be wasted if harvest scheduling does not allow for on the go unloading, there is insufficient storage in the field, not enough trucks, or if on-farm storage has not been planned for effective handling of grain quantities and quality. Farmers and harvesters need fully documented and understood breakdown contingency plans in place prior to harvest. Moisture control criteria need to be implemented and any other risk assessments and planning in place. Field planning must be in place for roads and unloading points etc.

Our business is considering commencing Farm Harvesting audits to give our clients a more accurate understanding of harvest costs and where more efficient CTF practices could be implemented to create better profit margins.

If a farmer wants a profitable and more sustainable harvest, my honest point of view is to go for it - create your CTF cropping system and you won't look back!!