

Making the most of CTF

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Started zero-til in the early 90's, but could not set planters because of tracks all over the place. Went to controlled traffic on 60 inch centers. Sprayed with Toyota's, tractors & air seeders in to 60inch, harvesters on 120-180 inch duals & chaser bin on 120 inch.

This set-up worked very well and was a revolutionary step forward, however it meant that there were 6 tracks in a 30ft swath. We started noticing less growth and yield around the wheeled area compared to outside the wheel tracks.

We got the DPI to harvest single row sorghum trials to determine the difference between rows with a track on both sides, one side or no track and then by shifting row yields to different track configurations it demonstrated the economics to change to 120 inc or 3 m centers.

The decision was made to go to 3m, so tractors were spooled out, air seeders and boom sprays axles extended, the chaser bin was already built on 18 or 20 inch tyres.

In time bearing and kingpin failures made us give the spools away on the tractors and extend axle housings so kingpins and final drives were back to standard.

In 2000 economics and gene technology tempted us to grow dryland cotton.

To fit in with the 3m tracks, 15 and 30 inch rows it was decided to grow cotton on 60 inch solid rows.

The cotton picker and boll buggies were put on 3m. The first year the picker picked 4 rows out of the 6 planted (30ft), which meant it ran off the tramlines and put an extra track up the guess row. The damage that one pass on uncompacted ground did was frightening. This spurred me on to extending the picker out to 30 ft (9.14m) and picking the 6 rows that we plant.

Once we got into cotton we found that our guess rows were too wild for band spraying. The next step was to purchase a Beeline, which gave us accurate multiple width band spraying, shielded spraying, band spraying with the mulcher and general efficiencies.

CONCLUSIONS

We have moved our tracks three times, 60 inch, 3m and then 3m Beeline.

This has been part of the evolution of Controlled Traffic but has been a very expensive exercise as each time we went backwards to go forward, so I would strongly advise to go to 3m and precision guidance as soon as possible.

Suspension on tractors and spray rigs is important as it minimises the woops in the tramlines from ridged machines a speed in moist conditions.

Use swath widths of 9.12 or 18m depending on your operation – grain, cotton or lage scale farming.

Remember, farming and economic pressures are changing rapidly so you must stay progressive and flexible.