

## Conservation Farming/Controlled Traffic and Catchment Scale Implications

Geoff Minchin

*Catchment Officer – Conservation Farming Training Coordinator and Climate Change/Variability Adaptation  
Lachlan Catchment Management Authority, PO Box 49, Boorowa NSW 2586*

The Lachlan Catchment Management Authority (LCMA) has a Land Management Target to improve soil health on 500,000 hectares of cropping land by 2016 by maintaining groundcover and minimising soil disturbance. To attain this target the LCMA provided incentive funding from 2004 to 2006 for the purchase or conversion of sowing machinery to adopt conservation farming practices. One major adoption impediment identified was the generally low level of knowledge of conservation farming and any formalised education available to learn conservation farming techniques. To address this and other issues identified in the program, the LCMA formed a conservation farming reference group consisting of farmers, agribusiness, cropping groups and government staff. One main action of the group was propose the production of a conservation farming training manual covering all aspects needed to adopt conservation farming. The manual was to be in the form of modules to address aspects such as: why adopt no tillage; soil health; handling crop residues; machinery selection; Controlled traffic farming, Precision Agriculture, agronomic and economic issues and monitoring change.

Within 12 months, the manual has been produced and 9 workshops have commenced in the Lachlan catchment with over 140 landholders registered. These workshops have been subsidised by the LCMA. Some of the main aspects to date are:

- 1 Despite a training requirement attached to incentives, catchment wide interest has come from farmers:
  - Who have currently or previously received incentive funding
  - Those who have adopted conservation farming from advice by other groups or to address individual farm environmental issues such as erosion or soil compaction
  - Those interested in adopting conservation farming for economic or environmental issues
  - Those that have developed an interest from completing such things as property planning.
- 2 Selecting a range of expert presenters with local credibility to deliver relevant modules has been well accepted. This has been enhanced by visiting local farmers advanced in conservation farming.
- 3 Being conscious of the mix of theory with practical aspects using local farmer experiences to maintain interest has been important.
- 4 Monitoring of individual change and catchment impact will be challenging due to the varied audience. This is despite having a number of monitoring tools built into the training package.
- 5 The workshops have been an invaluable tool for internal staff training and meeting local farmers
- 6 Conservation Farming is seen as a major farm management practice that will help farmers improve water use efficiency, adapt to climate change, improve soil health and reduce Greenhouse Gas emissions.

In conclusion a major aim of the workshops will be assisting farmers implement conservation farming as normal farming practice on a sustained basis.