

Managing Rough and Deep Controlled Traffic Tracks in Southern Queensland and Northern NSW

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Summary: The adoption of controlled traffic farming for a majority of farmers has been an extremely positive experience, however as a result of the self mulching shrink, swell properties of the Vertosol soils in southern QLD and northern NSW, there are some farmers who have experienced problems with rough and deep controlled traffic tracks (CT tracks).

There is no ideal way to manage these, and there is much debate as to whether the rough and deep CT tracks are really an issue with the practice or a product of design and layout. Regardless, CFI has been conducting some case studies which highlight the costs and benefits of numerous different options that a variety of farmers have been implementing.

For some soil types there is an option of simply waiting for the soil to naturally repair themselves with the natural wetting and drying cycles. In the interim, learn to live with the tracks by slowing the tractor speed and/or plant the tracks with a guidance row in the centre. Another option is to alternating spray tracks so that all tracks are used equally. This significantly reduces the incidence of some tracks being deeper and rougher than others. A farmer in southern Queensland has found that by keeping his weight of machinery to a minimum, he has significantly reduced the need to renovate his CT tracks.

The third option is to renovate the tracks either as a separate operation or as part of the planting operation. It has been found that renovation is better achieved directly after planting when the soil water profile is low. However, many farmers have found that attachments to the planter can do a reasonable job at planting time when soil moisture is higher.

A less appealing but amicable option is to cultivate. A more appealing option than a full cultivation is to work the area around the CT tracks only. There are many machinery options available whereby most farmers would have access to or still own old pre-no tillage machines. One option being explored by a NSW farmer is the use of a leading tyne ripper used over the CT tracks. This reduces the incidence and size of clods being brought to the soil surface, which often pose a new problem after ripping or heavy cultivation.