

# Second National Conference on Controlled Traffic

## Introduction

In the past five years, controlled traffic farming (CTF) has changed from a research topic to a practical farming system, now in place on almost 0.5Mha cropland. Controlled Traffic research and extension projects are in place in Queensland, N.S.W., Victoria and Western Australia. Systems vary considerably from one place to another, but all share the same central ideas; that heavy wheel traffic is damaging on moist soil, that crops perform better when not subject to wheeling, and that permanent wheel tracks provide drainage, control runoff, improve trafficability and simplify guidance.

The relative importance of any specific feature of controlled traffic varies from one region to another, and is reflected in local names, such as 'raised beds'. The common benefits are those of improved economics and sustainability, enhanced by the practical and philosophical congruence of controlled traffic and conservation tillage. Rapid adoption here perhaps reflects the greater awareness of these issues by Australian farmers, compared with those of the USA and Europe.

This Second National Conference on Controlled Traffic has been planned to provide a snapshot of current activity, via conference papers, discussion and a field trip to CTF properties on the Darling Downs and South Burnett. It will also provide the starting point for a GRDC-funded national workshop, to provide a broad overview strategy to progress the adoption of controlled traffic, considering R&D needs, constraints and extension. The workshop will follow immediately after the field trip, and include representatives from most states.

The First National Conference on Controlled Traffic was held in Rockhampton in 1995, so it is interesting to compare the proceeding of these two conferences. Both comprise 39 papers, with a heavy emphasis on soil compaction effects, runoff and drainage. The major difference is probably the increased number of papers by farmers in this second conference. Mechanisation aspects also appear to be more significant now, as they are increasingly seen as the major constraint to adoption.

In a rapidly developing area of technology the best this conference can hope to achieve is a greater insight to the underlying principals of CTF, and quantification of its advantages and problems. There are not many definitive conclusions, but farmer contributions provide a valuable snapshot of current developments, and a basis for discussion and development. It is interesting to note that all current assessments of CTF impact on sustainability are positive. It is startling to find that each of the economic assessments of CTF have demonstrated advantages in the range of \$100 - \$150 ha/year.

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