

“Where is Controlled Traffic Farming in Southern Queensland Going?”

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Introduction:

After its inception in many areas of Australia in the late 80's and early 90's, Controlled Traffic Farming practices have witnessed exponential growth and development, especially in Queensland. In Southern Queensland we have seen the use of varied levels of niche practices in crops ranging from irrigated and rainfed cotton, pulses, summer and winter cereals and vegetables.

As opposed to the Central Queensland story, much of the CTF development in Southern Queensland has occurred without the immediate involvement of Government Agencies. In the south we have however, held 15 farmer discussion meetings, a departmental DPI / DNR workshop, trips to Central Queensland and Northern New South Wales and numerous field day activities in the past 2 years to provide awareness of Controlled Traffic principles. Additional on-farm discussion and development is being supported by local extension and development staff enhancing the adoption of Controlled Traffic Farming practices throughout the region.

To continue the positive development we have seen here in the past few years, a team of extension people has been formed to tackle “where CTF is going in southern Queensland”, where some major land type differences on the floodplains of the Darling Downs and the broadscale sloping areas of the Western Downs, Maranoa and Balonne, are requiring different management practices.

This paper describes briefly what activities have been conducted so far, and where CTF delivery and development is heading.

Activities so far:

CTF Info Days - Providing general information on the broad range of subjects under the CTF banner. These were presented as an opportunity to help farmers understand the philosophy behind controlled traffic practice.

CTF Issue Days - Providing a forum for interested farmers to indicate areas of concern regarding CTF. These may include erosion, chemical application or machinery matching issues.

CTF Focus Groups - This involved coordinating farmer groups to examine certain aspects of CTF. A typical activity was organised trips to view successful CTF farms.

Publicity - Numerous articles have been produced and distributed through the rural press as well as the Kondinin Groups 'Farming Ahead' and the DPI's CropLink information service.

Common Interest Groups - Members of the DPI and DNR involved with CTF have participated as guest speakers at a number of meetings. Through this, the group has a strong association with farmer organisations like 'Conservation Farmers Inc.', not only locally but into northern NSW.

DPI & DNR Staff Day - Controlled traffic Farming requires a multi-discipline effort, thus requiring support from specialists in different areas. This is seen as an ideal vehicle to bring departmental staff together. A workshop was run to identify the best way to work towards a common goal without duplication of activities.

One on One Activities - Farmers wanting specific answers, have contacted the departments directly. Some of these approaches have been initiated through extension activities and the farmers involvement in other departmental initiatives such as PMP and Landcare. Personal assistance has been given in areas covering farm layout and contour banks as well as machinery modification and agronomy.

The next 2 to 3 years:

CTF can't promise to be the solution to every farmers' problems. We believe that CTF should be promoted as a solution to farmers' concerns regarding costs of production, soil degradation and sustainability. To achieve this, a workgroup has been formed to illustrate how CTF can be used as an "Option for Improving Farm Efficiency", initially planned for the Dalby/Chinchilla areas. This exercise has been planned to cover the following areas:

1. **Resources:** Soil, water, farm layout, and vegetation
2. **Agronomy:** Nutrition, disease and spray efficacy
3. **Machinery:** Planting, spray equipment, and harvesting
4. **Costs:** Economic evaluation and management issues

These workshops will be presented using adult and action learning principles to ensure that the topics are delivered in the most appropriate manner. It is envisaged that these workshops will be facilitated by a "local bloke". This person will have had direct contact with a number of local farmers through previously established groups such as "Landcare", and be able to identify the target audience and their level of understanding of CTF. With this input, the structure and content of individual workshops will be tailored to producer's needs. Conducting a workshop where the content is particularly relevant to the audience's interest, will ensure positive delivery and the best potential for adoption of the principles.

In conjunction with the extension component of CTF in South Queensland, some team members are participating in the Eastern Farming System project, which will help provide some answers to commonly asked questions such as "Is there more erosion using CTF?", "How is my machinery going to fit?" The EFS sites, whilst still being developed, will look at a range of facets of on-farm layout, efficiencies and soil loss in CTF systems. These sites will also link into the GRDC funded project "Speeding the adoption of CTF through on-farm research and development", in which a Development Extension Officer has been appointed.