

CTF, a grains industry consultant's perspective. Why and how should consultants advise our clients about planning for and adopting CTF?

Andrew Newall

NEWag Consulting, Horsham, Victoria

Farming in Australia provides many challenges, it being one of the driest continents in the world. One of the common deficiencies we experience in grain production is plant available water (PAW). So why wouldn't you then look at techniques or ways to ensure that you can be as efficient as you can in turning mm of PAW into grain.

Yield is limited by so many variables during the season, it is not just a direct correlation with the amount of PAW, although it helps. Many variables are out of our control especially when it comes to mother nature but one variable we can have an influence on is PAW. Reduced moisture availability due to compaction is still underestimated, it has a big impact on yields on all soil types not just clays. Conservatively 30% yield gains have been seen in our region and a minimum of 10% in sandier soil types, by introducing CTF and reducing the amount of compaction in the soil and increasing the amount of PAW.

If there was a new wheat variety that offered at least 10% yield gains over any other variety then every advisor would be advising their clients to grow it. However CTF has shown yield gains of at least 10% and yet there still seems to be a reluctance to implement a CTF system.

One of the key reasons for this reluctance as an advisor is the concern of having to give advice on machinery when your core job is to give agronomic advice on crop protection. However as an advisor you should be advising your client on all aspects of crop production so you need to be able and willing to advise and discuss aspects of CTF with your client.

One of the keys to successfully implementing a CTF system is planning, setting out a timeline and discussing with your client on where they are going with their business. The farming landscape is changing in terms of size of operations, so you need to know this, because once you put CTF lines down you don't want to have to change them down the track. Trust me we have had to and its disappointing when you have to start again.

So some key questions I would ask as advisor if my client was thinking about CTF:

- Is the size of your current operation going to change?
- What's your 5-10 year plan?
- What type of seeder do you want to use now and into the future?
- Can you or are you able to manage residue?
- Can you or do you want to rely on contractors?
- How do you go with labour?

From here you can then start to plan out the most efficient CTF working width for your client. This is the important stage, it is easy to try and implement a CTF system with current machinery in mind, however keep in mind potential machinery purchases in the future.