

Why go down the CTF journey? A grain grower's perspective

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With the introduction of autosteer on our boom spray in early 2000 and the seeder a little later we had unwittingly started down the path of controlled traffic farming. The 90ft boom spray was travelling on the same tracks and each year the 50ft airseeder was traversing its own set of tracks. The combine with 35ft front was traversing a different path again, and sometimes at a completely different angle to the other equipment.

About seven years ago we started to notice some serious problems in some of our paddocks, particularly from the airseeder setup as the wheel track width was close to four metres of the fifteen metre sowing width because of the placement of all the wheels in the setup. The area was approximately 27% of the seeded area. The combine track was 15% and the boomspray 3.4%. The total driven on area was 46% plus maybe a pass with the prickle chain of another 10%.

Because of the large losses in yield in some paddocks because of wheeltracks we decided to match up the track and width of our equipment. We settled on 120" wheel spacing, 40ft wide seeder on 15" row spacing, 40ft combine and 120" seeder. The result has been that the wheel track area has been reduced to less than 10%.

A number of benefits have occurred:

- Crop growth is even across the row width
- Much improved water infiltration
- Better root development
- The hard setting soils do not set hard anymore
- Allows for inter row seeding
- Reduced weed germination

This all looks fantastic but CTF does create its own challenges:

- Pest management has changed
- Because tramlines are more trafficable when conditions are wet it can be tempting to be doing field operations under conditions that will damage the tramline causing ruts and "pot holes". These can be difficult to renovate and remove. Consequently some tramlines have become quite rough which can limit ground speed.
- Renovating wheel tracks has its own challenges. It is best done in minimal trash conditions and definitely not long trash.

Some rules I have set myself to manage the tramlines:

- Don't damage or make them rough in the first place
- Keep off when wet if possible
- Travel at moderate speeds
- Tracks on equipment are best to minimise damage