

Assessing the economic value of Controlled Traffic Farming practices

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Jim conducted his first assessment of controlled traffic in the early 1980's while based at the Biloela Research Station. He shared an office with Peter Walsh, an Agricultural Engineer who was familiar with Jeff Tullberg's work at Gatton and together they set up a hypothetical production system for a large scale Bauhinia grain farm applying the principles and benefits identified by Tullberg. The assessment suggested that replacing 500 hp tractors with 360 hp tractors and practicing CTF and reduced till farming practices would be a commercial proposition.

More recently, following his re-employment by the Department, he has conducted economic assessment of CTF elements in the small crop, ginger, banana, papaya and sugar industries. These assessments generally confirmed the commercial worth of farming systems that incorporate and build on CTF principles. These assessments have been used by both producers and scientists to assist in the planning and implementation of their activities.

ABSTRACT: In the Call for Papers for this conference it is stated that "The great productivity and environmental benefits of CTF are well known: the difficult issues are those of practical adoption". This introductory remark overlooks the importance of producers having confidence in the likely profitability of CTF given that producers can sort out most practical issues of implementation if they are confident they can make a good profit from the change. In addition, they are more likely to support CTF research if they can see a payoff.

Experience has shown that viewing CTF as a standalone management practice greatly understates its value. Instead it should be viewed as a cornerstone of a new system that incorporates a number of other management options that depend on CTF in order to achieve their potential benefits.

Other components of the system may include reduced tillage, fallow cropping, stubble retention and modified rotations aimed at increasing yield, and the area cropped. All of these practices can be introduced without CTF but their benefits are limited by soil compaction, excessive tillage and associated issues. All of these practices benefit when conducted in conjunction with CTF.

Similarly, the benefits from the practice of CTF are circumscribed without these additional changes.

It is suggested that CTF should not be assessed in isolation. Instead the new system that incorporates CTF and a range of complementary changes such as those listed should be assessed.

