Farmers' thoughts about controlled traffic farming in the northern grain growing region of Australia?

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Market research in the form of semi-structured face to face interviews was undertaken with 50 people (6 consultants and advisers, 44 farmers) within the northern grain growing region of Australia to identify the thoughts, perceptions and experiences with zero and strategic tillage. The market research results provided insight into the importance of controlled traffic and the role it plays in the success of zero tillage. Zero tillage and controlled traffic farming are perceived 'to fit together like a boot and a sock'. Controlled traffic and zero tillage are credited for reducing compaction within a paddock and overall helping to improve soil structure that would occur from compaction.

Respondents perceive the best controlled traffic system is on a 3 metre spacing with all machinery (planter, spray rig and harvester) using the same tracks. This system was supported not only by those who have adopted this system but others who haven't. The key factors limiting the adoption of a full controlled traffic system on 3 metres is the ability to upgrade machinery to suit the system and if contractors are being used, particularly for harvesting.

Results also identified some recent key issues facing these farmers include hard to control weeds and rough country, especially in tramlines after very wet seasons and harvests. There is now a need to renovate country and tramlines due to the limitation of controlled traffic farming to deal with extremely wet seasons as seen in recent years (2010-2012). Farmers are looking at the best way to renovate country back to a level where tramlines are no longer rough. There is interest into tramline renovators to minimise compaction and cultivation throughout the paddock. However, there is also concern about the concept of using valuable topsoil to fix tramlines. Ongoing work into controlled traffic and zero tillage systems' capacity to handle wet conditions would be helpful in addressing the challenge the industry faces with rough tramlines and potentially weed management.