



Our country, Our future.

Practice changes

The benefits to farming operations are clear



To Wandoan grain grower Russell Ezzy, converting his enterprise from conventional tillage to a zero-till controlled traffic farming system is a long-term commitment for a profitable and sustainable business.

Russell's 1,000 hectare property Hiddenvale is located approximately 15 kilometres from Wandoan.

"My family have owned Hiddenvale since the soldier settlers, around 1954. We were the first people to own it and I've run the place since 1985. I grow sorghum, wheat, fodder crops and opportunity pulse crops," said Russell.

Dawson Catchment Coordinating Association (DCCA) approached Russell about participating in Grains Best Management Practices (Grains BMP) when the program first started in 2010. Although initially sceptical, Russell was one of the first grain growers to participate in the voluntary, industry-led process aiming to assist broadacre growers identify practices that improve their long-term profitability.

Moving to zero-till farming

Russell could immediately see the benefits of zero-till farming, discussed at Grains BMP workshops, despite having reservations about being able to implement the practice change on his property.

By completing Grains BMP he was able to access assistance from DCCA, and support from Fitzroy Basin Association Inc. (FBA) through funding from the Australian Government's Reef Programme.

As a result, Russell has shifted from conventional tillage to zero-till, which does not cultivate the soil and leaves stubble from previous crops in place. This technique significantly improves water infiltration and retention, thus increasing productivity and profitability. It is particularly useful in making the best use of available yet variable rainfall.



Russell Ezzy has completely overhauled his grain growing operations to make the best use of his resources. He has converted his operations from conventional tillage to zero-till, installed farm-over contour banks and is working towards full controlled traffic farming.

Since that first workshop, Russell has developed a long-term plan for his operations, and is implementing it one step at a time. He has removed fences and brought in consultants to help him plan his property's layout to make the most of his resources, all while reducing erosion and increasing soil moisture.

He recommends that all grain growers consider getting involved in the program. "I highly recommend the workshops. The workshops have an ongoing influence on my business and have had a positive impact," Russell said.



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Moving to farm-over contours

"I did my first project about four to five years ago. I started improving the erosion problem with banks. I upgraded my machinery, which included going from conventional tillage to zero-till and building farm-over [contour] banks to enable the change to controlled traffic."

By installing farm-over contours, Russell still slows down and retains water travelling across his property; however, unlike conventional contours the broader and rounder farm-over contours allow machinery to pass over them, maximising the area suitable for cropping and thus increasing yield and profitability.

Benefits of controlled traffic

The farm-over contour banks in conjunction with controlled traffic methods allows Russell's machinery to consistently use the same wheel tracks, and maximises the available area for crops, increasing crop yields and decreasing soil compaction. It has the added benefit of reducing soil loss, which means less sediment is entering waterways that will eventually reach the Great Barrier Reef.

With support and funding assistance, Russell has converted his operations to partially controlled traffic, with all equipment and machinery except his header having been converted. He is hoping to upgrade his header in the near future, and achieve fully controlled traffic—a significant investment and achievement.

The benefits of controlled traffic operations have been immediately clear to Russell, which he sees as a clear validation of the Grains BMP program. Grains BMP is a joint initiative of FBA, Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries and AgForce.

"The savings on the project is a long-term process, with savings seen now on chemical costs and building up soil moisture to enable planting at the appropriate time, as opposed to waiting for a weather event," he said.

"I highly recommend the Grains BMP. Everyone should at least go to one day and see the benefits and what it is all about," Russell said.

"The initial results were building up moisture and less erosion with better water management and reduced erosion in gullies."

"The long-term impact is a more sustainable business."



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