

CASE STUDY

Con Murphy

Con Murphy manages the Warrakirri cropping program at Condingup, 100km east of Esperance, with 12800 arable hectares.

Having worked on farms in Western Australia for 10 years, Con was exposed to a number of different Harvest Weed Seed Control methods, and has first-hand experience with herbicide resistant weeds.



When he started as the manager at Warrakirri, he said that much of the land had only seen about 7 crops, having been pasture prior to that. Because of the low cropping intensity, there was very little herbicide resistance. "Being given a blank sheet to start with, you need to keep it clean. A stitch in time saves nine, and I wanted to get in before we had any issues." Running a 100% cropping program, his rotation consists of canola, then wheat, then barley into canola. Con also has a spading program to ameliorate non wetting soils, and said that the barley was very useful to sow after country has been spaded to rapidly gain groundcover. For selective control of ryegrass in crop, he was very happy with clethodim and propyzamide in canola, and Sakura® in wheat. The Boxer Gold® was not as highly praised for ryegrass control in barley. Being virgin country he said that much of the chemistry worked really well for weed control. "I don't think Hoegrass® works, but clethodim in canola works really well."

As Con was also trying to set up a controlled traffic program on Warrakirri, he decided that a chaff deck was the logical choice.

This worked well, as the contractor Con uses for his harvesting developed the EMAR chaff deck. This meant that all of the hardware was already in place to begin chaff tramlining and his controlled traffic program.

With one more season left in their contract, he said he would like to move to 40ft seeding rigs, to complete the transition to controlled traffic farming. This would also give him the opportunity to change the design of the bar, as he was finding that trash flow under the bar was an issue with his heavy stubble loads. Despite all of the straw residue, he said that the chaff tramlines would likely not pose an issue. But, in having fully matched wheel tracks and machinery widths he said that it would give him an opportunity to make the wheel tracks as firm and 'hostile' and possible, to prevent the germination of weeds. He said that if this eventuates, he would consider getting a shielded sprayer set up, so that he could target just the wheel tracks if they warranted a spray.



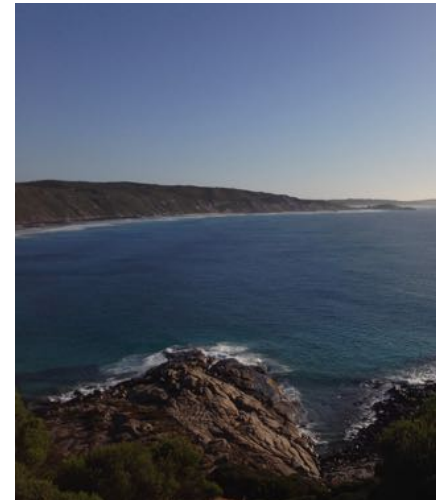
At the time of the interview, he said he had 40ft harvester fronts, on both owned and contractor operated machines, and an 80ft seeding rig, operated by a contractor also.

IMAGE: *The EMAR chaff deck in action.*

Aside from the ease of implementing the strategy across his program, Con had also eliminated other tactics based on their drawbacks. "Chaff carts have piles that need burning, and it's a risky, dangerous job, at the wrong time of year when you are trying to get ready for seeding." Further, due to the climate and being so close to the coast, he said that windrow burning can realistically only be used for a fraction of the program. Burning is impeded by how damp the windrows can actually get.

As for a seed impact mill, such as the iHSD, the price would be prohibitive, given he is using contractors for a large part of his harvesting program. "It's too much of a hassle trying to convince (contractors) to buy a mill, and then up the price. Also, it's another thing hanging off the back of the machine, and the fewer things you have hanging off the machine, the better." But, he admitted that it could be something he would investigate, if he doesn't find success with the chaff decks.

"If we were doing it ourselves, we might dabble with it and install it on one header and then use that machine to target the weediest paddocks. But to have 6 of them running around- you wouldn't even think about it."



As Con was interviewed during the first harvest since the chaff decks were adopted, he couldn't comment on how much they move the weed seeds from one area to another. But, he was confident that it would yield positive results, based on what he had seen on other farms.

For now, with little herbicide resistance, and a very proactive attitude, Con is confident the Warrakirri program will find success, either using chaff decks or otherwise.

“I've come from doing windrow burning, and finding that to be really successful, but we are limited down here, because it doesn't really fit the environment. I think the decks do fit the environment, so I hope we are on the right track.”

