



**DATA FIELD:** At the Mid North High Rainfall Zone field day in October last year, eager participants jotted down information they could use back on their farms. They are seen inspecting new varieties of wheat.

## High-rainfall trials yield solutions in Mid North

**T**HE Mid North High Rainfall Zone group was established in 2005 to find solutions to problems of farmers in the area that had not been fully addressed.

Their initial trial site at Mintaro was set up the same year with three small experiments. The following year, the trials expanded and moved further south to Tony Clarke's property at Tarlee before shifting for the final time to Pat and Mary Connell's property at Navan between Tarlee and Riverton.

Since then, the trials have increased in size and scope to meet the growing demand of the farming community in the area.

In 2009, the group established a committee consisting of local farmers and industry representatives. The committee aims to reach out to a broad cross-section of the farming community in higher-rainfall areas and highlight issues that can be explored in depth at the trial site.

These are some of the issues under research:

- Waterlogging – how it affects nitrogen use patterns, and ways to manage the soil types.
- Finding out effective weed management techniques
- High productivity crops and pastures – how to best produce them and manage issues such as high stubble loads, excessive biomass production, water use and disease.
- Grazing management of new cereal varieties – finding out how different varieties react to



grazing and recover to produce grain.

- Managing climate variability – time of sowing, seeding density, varietal selection and nitrogen management.

SARDI completed harvesting an array of trials last year just before Christmas and since then, the committee has been tabulating results to determine outcomes.

Some of the highlights from last year's trials include:

- Wheat varieties sown on May 13 (Time of Sowing 2) had the highest yields, significantly higher than crops sown two weeks earlier or later. This result has been replicated in every year of the trials so far.
- The highest-yielding, triazine-tolerant canola lines were at least as good, or better, than the Clearfield and Conventional varieties. Yields were good at 2.5-3 tonnes a hectare because of the high level of plant-available water at sowing.
- Cereal species generally produced the highest dry matter yields in the growing biomass trials. Sugar Beet was the exception with 14t/ha.
- Barley yields were slightly higher when sown in late May than mid May. This could be a result of the moisture stress

early sown crops experience leading up to rains in September. Later-sown crops were able to utilise these rains to increase yield. Many broad-acre barley paddocks experienced the same last year.

- Timed applications of plant growth regulators produced up to 29 per cent more grain than plots without regular treatment.
- Lower seeding densities produced similar yields to higher densities when sown early. The longer vegetative growing period of the early sown crops enabled them to compensate for lower plant numbers. The plots with lower plant numbers clearly stood out during the dry spell, being fresher and less moisture-stressed.

Trials this year will continue to study similar areas, perennial pastures and pasture mixes for waterlogged soils, undertake more work on plant growth regulators and production of quality oaten hay.

A trial site wrap-up of last year will be held before seeding to enable farmers to put some of those research findings into practice.

The Mid North High Rainfall Zone field day will be held in October and more details will be provided closer to the event.

Farmers who wish to highlight production issues can contact an MNHRZ committee member to see if that can be explored at the trial site.

- **Details:** Andrew Parkinson, chairman, [andrew.parkinson@landmark.com.au](mailto:andrew.parkinson@landmark.com.au) or Mick Faulkner, deputy chairman, [jeffbraun@bigpond.com](mailto:jeffbraun@bigpond.com)

### Around the regions

#### Lucerne Australia

LUCERNE Australia will host a header set-up day in preparation for the 2012 lucerne seed harvest at Gumbowie, Willalooka, by invitation of Guy and Sarah Cunningham. This will be held on Friday, February 17, from 1.30pm. Robert Will, from Will Inspect at Bordertown and James DeBarro from Alpha Group Consulting at Keith will present seed testing and header set-ups. Basic header principles and concave, sieve and fan settings will be discussed along with crop evenness and weeds. Lucerne Australia will host its annual Trial Site Field Day on Thursday, March 1. This will include a trip from Keith to the drop-tube centre pivot variety trials at Kinyerrie by invitation of grower member Joe Sandford. There will be an extensive crop inspection, releasing of 2011 harvest and forage yields, and updates from seed marketers.

- **Details:** [www.lucerneaustralia.org.au](http://www.lucerneaustralia.org.au)

#### Northern Sustainable Soils

THE NSS farmer group held its annual general meeting on Monday, February 13 with keynote speaker Rick Llewellyn, CSIRO, giving a presentation on soil moisture and crop water-use efficiency. From a trial perspective, brome grass management had its harvest treatments in December and its first assessment will be done in autumn. Soil moisture probes have been inserted at Tickera in chaff-treated and untreated sites for a better understanding of the effect of chaff on salinity. The NSS trial booklets will be distributed early February.

- **Details:** NSS chairperson Chris Davey 0428 466 675 or project manager Leighton Wilksch 0408 428 714

#### Lower Eyre Agricultural Development Association

LEADA committee members met in January to go through trial plans for this year which seems to be another comprehensive period of on-ground works. The association invites members with ideas for trials to contact them. Planning is underway for the Ag Expo to be held on Thursday, March 15 at the Cummins Rambler Clubrooms. Topics to be covered include pulse issues for the region, soil and water agronomy, carbon farming, precision ag with soil amelioration and a 2011 trial wrap-up. The expo is the time to renew memberships and prepare for the upcoming season, so be there.

- **Details:** Kieran Wauchope 08 8688 3409

#### Mallee Sustainable Farming

MSF is offering young farmers the opportunity to get their hands dirty and pick up some tips on conserving soil moisture, preparing for seeding and nutritional planning. The free workshop is funded by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry's 'Next Gen' Grants and promises to be fun. It will be held at Karoonda on

Tuesday, February 28. MSF hereby gives notice of the extraordinary general meeting to be held at Madec, 133-137 Madden Avenue, Mildura, Victoria on Thursday, March 22 starting at 10.30 am. Are you curious about farming in the Western Australian Mallee? MSF, with funding from a GRDC Industry Development Award, invites you to jump on board a study tour to the south east of WA in the second week of September to find out.

- **Details:** Contact Gemma Walker 03 5021 9106 or [gemma@msfp.org.au](mailto:gemma@msfp.org.au) for WA Mallee study tour and event organiser Tiffany Bennett 0488 524 609 or [tiffany.bennett@sa.gov.au](mailto:tiffany.bennett@sa.gov.au) for workshop details.

#### YP Alkaline Soils Group

THE YP grower update is scheduled for Tuesday, March 13. To be hosted by Minlaton Ag Bureau, the day promises to cover some interesting topics on key farm issues including snail nematode trials, State ag plans, stock theft control through Operation Poach and microwave weed seed trials. An evening BBQ will round-off proceedings. Trial results from last year are currently being processed and will be delivered in a new-look newsletter next year. Planning for the 2012 trial season has started with establishment of a new YPASG trials committee that will benefit from the contribution of Pete Treloar, Ashley Wakefield, Andrew Slater, Sam Holmes, Jake Rademacher and Adam Cook.

- **Details:** Project and funding coordinator Louise McIntosh 0402 261 693 or [www.alkalinesoils.com.au](http://www.alkalinesoils.com.au)

#### Agricultural Bureau of SA

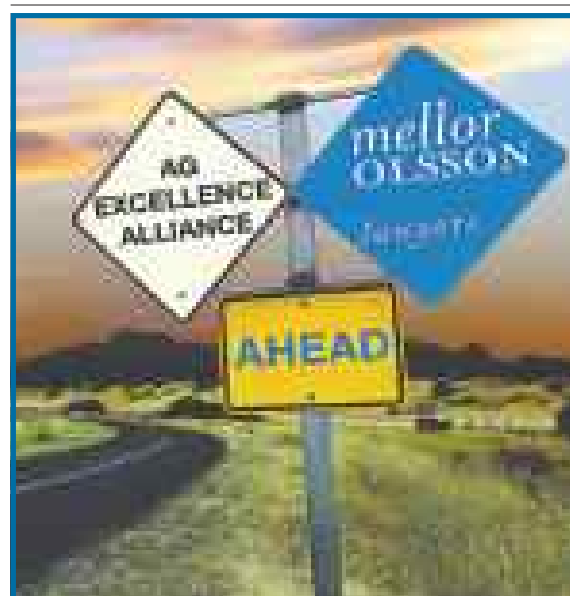
SOIL sampling is about to start in the South East and Eyre Peninsula for a new Agricultural Bureau of SA project *20:20 Challenge: Increasing Soil Organic Carbon of Sandy Soils*. Jointly funded by Caring for our Country and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, the project will investigate the effect that adding clay to sandy soils has on soil organic carbon levels. The project will sample 100 sites that have been previously modified by clay spreading or delving. Increasing clay content has the potential to raise soil organic carbon and offset carbon-dioxide emissions. Farmers and Ag Bureau members are encouraged to participate.

- **Details:** Brett Masters 08 8688 3460 or 0428 105 184

#### Ag Excellence

THE Ag Excellence annual awards dinner and forum will be held on Thursday and Friday, March 29-30. Nominations will be soon open for the 2012 Department of Environment and Natural Resources Ag Excellence Grower Group Award.

- **Details:** Mandy Pearce 0418 805 670 or [mandypearce.agex@gmail.com](mailto:mandypearce.agex@gmail.com)



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