



Irrigated Cropping Forum – Report to IREC AGM 2007

The Irrigated Cropping Forum has been very active over the past year and continues to be so through to the current time. There are a lot of opportunities to seek support for irrigation and related industries at present with the focus on water as it has been recently. Our challenge is to keep growers involved and engaged so that they continue to identify their needs and seek answers. The drought is impacting heavily on most cropping producers which means they need to focus on their immediate issues but research continues to go on and so we need to ensure that there is a voice considering the longer term viability of the irrigation industries and the research needs associated with this. The ICF has been that voice and is growing stronger in this role each year.

ICF projects:

ICF 00004 and 00005 – Lifting the value of Irrigated Cropping.

This project has moved substantially forward over the past year or so as we overcame some teething problems and moved into top gear. The Victorian component of this project is physically demonstrating double cropping and higher value rotations. The rotations are generally based on opportunity forage systems using oats and clovers which can be harvested early and allow the planting of a summer crop in the same area. In some ways the drought has provided a fillip to this project due to high prices for stock feed and the trials have been cut for hay / forage purposes and even with water restrictions this is showing a good return. The forage aspect has also been demonstrated as a method for overcoming chemical resistance in some weed species.

The NSW component has a number of facets to it:

1. the review of barriers to adoption of higher value systems
2. the review of previous research into higher value systems
3. the development of a decision support tool to assist growers to best utilise water on their properties

4. some case studies of what some growers are doing in each region.

Addressing these in order:

- the review of barriers to adoption of higher value systems
Scott Glyde and Tony Dunn from CSU have been undertaking this work holding focus group meetings across the region. The work was reported at the 07 GRDC Update in Griffith and the final report should be available before Christmas this year.
- the review of previous research into higher value systems
Andrew Schipp from DPI has been doing this work and has been able to identify a good selection of previous work – most of which has been reported in the *Farmers Newsletter* over the years. Interestingly though, he has found that since the mid 1990's there has been very little research into higher value systems and so there are aspects of the previous work that are out of date due to the release of newer, shorter season varieties and adoption of technology like minimum tillage that would increase the viability of double cropping opportunities under irrigation.
- the development of a decision support tool to assist growers to best utilise water on their properties
The International Centre for Water and Food Security has been commissioned to develop this tool as a grower focussed end product that should be available later this year. It is designed to assist with the question of *how can I best use my water?*

Coleambally Irrigation have also recently agreed to become a partner in this work.

- some case studies of what some growers are doing in each region.
Michele and Mark Groat were commissioned to travel across the region and interview selected growers about what they are doing to ensure that their business will be viable into the future. The interview part of this work has recently been completed and the articles are now being compiled into a publication that will be mailed out with the Autumn 08 edition of the *Farmers Newsletter*. These case studies will also be posted on the ICF website so they are accessible to a wider audience. They tell a very positive story of growers who are reacting to lower water allocations and looking for new opportunities to ensure they will continue to be in business despite the current conditions.

ICF 00006 – Oilseed Industry Development Officer

Felicity Pritchard continues to do a great job in this role from her office in Horsham. Drought has been a major factor in limiting canola production but she continues to make presentations to growers and advisers as well as participating on industry planning and R&D discussions.

Soybeans are another matter. Drought does not limit soybean production – grower attitude and marketing seem to be the issues here. Soybeans require about 8 ML / ha of water and the market as it stands only requires around 20,000 tonnes from the Riverina. So based on 4 tonnes / ha, 5000 ha of soybeans will fill the current market and will use about 40,000 ML of water. Felicity, the ICF and the Australian Oilseeds Federation are now working on convening an industry meeting to discuss the issues around soybean production to ensure the industry remains in the Riverina.

Felicity has done some market research and found that Australia uses over 300,000 tonnes of soybean equivalent product but much of this is imported as meal. We would be able to service this market domestically if the right market signs were provided to growers. We have also been made aware of potential market expansion in Japan for both soybeans and natto beans and we are working through some discussions in relation to these.

ICF 00007 Winter Cereal Genotypes for Irrigation

This project commenced this year with trials sown at Yanco, Mayrunga and Kerang. Andrew Milgate from NSW DPI is leading this project and it has generated a lot of interest already.

Unfortunately water restrictions in the Murray valley caused the Mayrunga site to be cut for silage in August, the other 2 sites continue with successful field days being held at both recently.

The aim is to test and select winter cereal genotypes under irrigation that have potential high yield (eg 10 tonnes / ha) that will perform under our Riverina conditions. We hold great hopes for this project.

Industry Stocktake for the non rice, irrigated grains sector.

In the last few weeks we have been informed of the success of our application for an industry stocktake for the non rice, irrigated grains sector. This application was based on the scoping study conducted by Dennis Toohey and Associates into the potential production that could come from irrigation. The stocktake will validate

some of the scoping study findings and provide us with resources to delve more deeply into what needs to be done to realise the potential of the irrigation sector. The partners to this stocktake proposal include:

ICF

Australian Oilseeds Federation

Australian Grain Accumulation

RGA

Maize Association of Australia

NSW DPI – Luke Gaynor

International Centre for Water and Food Security

GRDC

The process for this project is that it will be conducted over a few months in early 2008 with funding from DAFF. A report will be generated which should include detailed information about the sector and its requirements for moving forward to realise potential.

We look forward to the commencement of this project.

GRDC funding application – Striving for the top – matching water use efficiency to potential.

This new project was recently submitted as an expression of interest response to the GRDC tender process. It is a collaborative project involving the NSW DPI, Vic DPI, CSIRO, CSU, private industry and the ICF. It is a modular approach to understanding the yield potential of a wide range of crops in our region and then working out the limitation to production and overcoming it. Our proposal was a substantial body of work and sought over \$3 million from GRDC with co-investment from the partner organisations of over \$4.5 million.

GRDC called for projects and were heavily oversubscribed and so we are waiting for a response from GRDC and fully expect that we will need to negotiate with them for an eventual project.