

Soil Salinity EM mapping underway in CH

Bill Wilkinson & James Moss will be in the field this week with a trailer mounted EM meter collecting data across the whole EIA as part of a FBA funded project. Soil sampling will be done in the New Year. James and Bill are more than happy to explain the rig & the data it will collect. For more info contact Bill 0428 879345

Irrigated summer cropping options

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General gross mains are always difficult to prepare, because there is so much variation in input costs and crop performance from one farm to the next, as well as price fluctuation. Gross margins for the main 2007/08 summer and 2008 winter and spring cropping options, are shown below.

Crop	Yield t/ha	Price ¹	ML/ha	GM	
				\$/ha	\$/ML
Sorghum	8.8	240 d	5.5	1183	215
Corn (feed)	9.5	290 d	8.0	1580	198
Corn (gritting)	9.0	325 f	8.0	1620	203
Corn (hi- moisture)	11.0	225 f	8.0	1384	173
Corn (hi-amylase)	6.5	400 f	8.0	1764	221
Corn (waxy)	8.5	285 f	8.0	1343	168
Mungbean	1.8	700 dr	3.0	496	165
Wheat '08	6.2	300 d	5.0	1058	212
C'peas '08	2.5	475 d	2.5	641	214
Cotton '08 (BGRR)	8.7	450 g	9.0	1800	200

1. d = depot, f = farm, dr = dressed, g = gin.

These gross margins assume achievable yields with good management, and 'usual' expected inputs. Water is costed in this analysis at \$30/ML, which is roughly the Emerald channel rate. Water costs obviously vary from one farm to another, so if the water costs for your farm are significantly different to this figure you need to make an appropriate adjustment. For instance, for flood-harvested water the cost for a particular crop could be significantly lower, depending on costs to pump water onto the crop and tailwater into storage.

Similarly, water-use is assumed to be for flood-irrigation in a year where rainfall doesn't contribute much. Water-use for overhead irrigation can be expected to be less than for flood, but pumping costs can be higher (of the order of \$40-50/ML, depending on your system).

Prices may differ significantly from those shown. They are current projected prices, which may change in the coming months. All the gross margins assume a full fertiliser, herbicide, and insecticide program, and

contract harvesting. They exclude farm overhead costs.

What makes the most money?

On a per hectare basis, dry corn options show the highest gross margins. However, demand for high-amylase and gritting corn now appears to have dropped off. High moisture corn will be less profitable unless there is demand and a higher price can be obtained, but it can be harvested several weeks earlier. Waxy corn is lower yielding and produces a lower gross margin. Demand for feed corn is also uncertain. In general, it would be wise to secure a contract before growing any type of corn. Sorghum is likely to net \$500/ha less than corn, with mungbean a long way behind.

It's a different story on a per ML basis. There is little difference between sorghum and the dry corns, with high-moisture corn and mungbean substantially lower. This suggests that if water is not limiting, dry corn is likely to be more profitable (subject to a contract) than sorghum or other options. However, if water is your most limited resource, there is likely to be little difference in return per ML between the different major options, in which case sorghum would be a good choice.

There will be no opportunity to double-crop into a winter crop after corn, while there certainly could be after sorghum or mungbean. High profitability could be achieved by rotating from sorghum to wheat or chickpea, but you are likely to lock yourself out of cotton.

Cotton prices in 2009 look promising. If you aim to plant cotton in September 2008, a winter crop is best left out of the rotation in order to allow timely preparation and cotton planting. If going into cotton, corn may be a good option as anecdotal evidence suggests that cotton performs well following corn. That said, time can be limited if corn isn't harvested until early August, which would occur if planting is delayed until late January or February by wet weather, or if we get another wet and cool autumn/winter that delays maturity and harvest. There will certainly be more time to get ready for cotton following sorghum than after corn.

On the other hand, if water availability by mid year in 2008 is low, it may be better to use it on winter crop than hold it over for corn. The analysis suggests that the return on water (\$/ML) may be just as good with winter crop as cotton. March/April price indications for these crops will help provide a clearer picture to help with that decision then.

Soybean and sunflower are risky from a whitefly and TSV perspective. Soybean is also a heavy water user. Despite being a lower water user, irrigated sunflower is susceptible to various other diseases.