

GROWING APPEAL FOR NEAR-ROW SOWING

A recent survey of DBS owners has shown increasing appeal for near-row sowing. This photo, taken during long-term field trials researching the subject, shows the performance of a barley crop sown near-row (right) and inter-row (left) in a paddock located at 'Tasland' owned by Steve and Jaymie Waters, near Calingiri, WA. Photo credit CSIRO: September, 2011.

Establishing crops employing near-row sowing is becoming more appealing throughout the Australian grainbelt.

And according to Ausplow Managing Director John Ryan AM, it is providing a glimpse into the future.

"We recently held a survey among our DBS owners and the majority of responses we received agreed that near-row sowing was a valid option for crop establishment and to improve soil quality," John said.

"Many of our owners already are using near-row sowing, some are trialing it and others are saying it is on their radar for the future.

"And this comes on the back of a scientific paper published by a respected group of scientists heralding positive results of near-row sowing in field trials in Western Australia and South Australia."

Ausplow consultant Dr Margaret Roper, a former CSIRO scientist and microbiologist, was part of the research team that published the paper, which concluded that seeding next to the previous year's crop row can increase grain yields on water-repellent soils.

"These trial results and the anecdotal evidence Ausplow has

gathered from owners and our research and development program, are compelling,” John said.

“Quite simply, near-row sowing is providing us with a glimpse of how Mother Nature works in the soil.

“And I am convinced by the breadth of scientific research and ground-proofing done by farmers throughout the world, that when we talk about Mother Nature, we are actually referring to the microbiological processes that occur in the soil.

“Margaret has been at the forefront in world-leading research on microbiology and last year co-authored a publication on how soil microbes can suppress root diseases, including crown rot in wheat.

“This latest paper, which for Margaret is the result of more than 10 years assessing near-row sowing on water-repellent soils, is another building block in our understanding of how we should be farming our land.

“Whether you are a ‘mixed farmer’ or a ‘continuous cropper’, the principle of near-row sowing holds true, i.e., creating an environment which holds moisture and air so that soil microbial populations proliferate.

“Once this has been achieved, the process of soil-building starts with physical evidence such as improved soil structure, improved water-holding capacity, improved disease suppression, improved crop and plant health, improved crop quality and improved animal health.

“These are proven facts documented in scientific papers and by farmers throughout the world.

“I might add here that some farmers are gaining these benefits without near-row sowing because of the location of their enterprises on highly fertile soils.

“Some of the world’s most fertile soils are called mollisols, which are found in Ukraine, parts of Russia and the USA, while

other soils, called vertisols, are found in India, Australia, sub-Saharan Africa, and South America.

“Interestingly, particularly in the USA, many farmers blessed with fertile soils, are encountering ‘soil problems’ associated with the over-use of synthetic fertilisers and chemicals applied over the past 50 years, something that has also been observed on the ‘rich’ vertisols of the wheatbelts of northern NSW and southern Queensland.

In Australia, our reliance on such fertilisers and chemicals, applied to our poorer-structured soils, has done little to advance those soils in terms of organic carbon levels, etc.

There are positive ways forward and the starting point maybe near-row sowing.