

# Week 1 – status of crops

19 July

To know what's happening “over the fence” can restore confidence and help relieve anxiety. For that reason, as the dry season continues, the Victorian State Government has announced funding to continue BCG's Over the Fence series. BCG will be asking farmers across the Wimmera and Mallee to share thoughts and ideas on various issues over the next four months.

To give an indication of where farmers are currently situated, BCG started by asking Wimmera and Mallee farmers the following question:

**1. What is the current status of your crops? What will be your strategy over the next few weeks if we get a good general rain?**



## **John Barbetti – Wilkur South**

John and Rhonda Barbetti produce cereals, first-cross ewes, export lambs and hay on 818ha of typical southern Mallee grey clay and red sandy rises west of Watchem. They fallow land each year and grow barley on half of their cropped area, wheat on a third, and vetch on the remainder.

**Current status and strategy:** “Oats and medic were dry sown in April for sheep feed. Germination was good but there is very little feed value and no growth. Following an autumn break of 42.5mm, wheat and barley were

sown into adequate moisture by mid-May.

We have only received 9mm since. Germination has been very mixed with crop from five-leaves to still under the ground. There has been a lot of wheel tracking.

The weeds are under the same stress as the crops. Spraying will be delayed until we get a good rain.

We are still hand-feeding ewes and lambs. With the prospect of not receiving a channel run this year, some hard decisions will have to be made soon. I don't see carting water for sheep being economic for me.

Like all farmers, we are optimists and we know how a season can turn around and a good rain must be getting closer.”



## **John Renney – Berriwillock**

John and Kim Renney farm 8km southeast of Berriwillock. Their soil varies from sandy loam to grey clay. While the Renneys normally sow lentils, peas and canola, this year they have chosen to sow 2000ha of crop, with 70 percent wheat and 30 percent barley.

**Current status and strategy:** “Crops are probably 90 percent germinated. Those sown early are tillering, some have not shot, and some have roots showing. We have had good weed control this year so crops are clean.

If we get a good general rain, we hope to see a good germination of broadleaf weeks before commencing spraying. Spray fallow would be the first job to get onto. We would not resow – there has been enough crop germinated and still living.”



### **David Petering – Minyip**

David and Sonia Petering and their employees, Jo and Markus, have grain properties at Minyip, Quambatook and Rokewood. Soils vary from self-mulching to black volcanic to sandy loams. Legumes make up 40 percent of their cropping program, wheat and barley 25 percent each, and canola ten percent.

**Current status and strategy:** “Our crops range from 2-3-leaf barley, to germinated but not emerged.

Twenty percent of our crop is still not sown. Everything is very thirsty, but an average year is still our potential.

If we get good general rains in the next few weeks, after having a few beverages with Jo and Markus and having a roll in the mud, we will complete sowing, then begin to look at our post-emergent spraying.



### **Peter Thompson – Manangatang**

Peter, Jack and Laura Thompson operate a mixed 3100ha property 28km northeast of Manangatang. They grow wheat, barley and triticale and produce wool and prime lambs on soil that Peter says ranges from “light sandy hills to medium flats to hungry soils”. This year they have cropped 1200ha, 60 percent in wheat, 25 percent in triticale and 15 percent in barley.

**Current status and strategy:** “With the season off to a tough start, no subsoil moisture and only 80 percent of my crop sown, my crops vary from tillering to three-leaf to nothing. Of what I have sown, about 5 percent has

not germinated and I don’t think it will. On the little moisture there seems to be, the first 500ha has performed extremely well.

Over the next few weeks if we get a good general rain, I will resow the 5 percent that has not germinated and also 10 percent of the remaining land, and don’t consider the last 10 percent, which is grey limestone country, to be a proposition this year.”