

February 11, 2008

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Cost of Controlling weeds!

The substantial increase in glyphosate prices and pressure to keep input costs low has seen many farmers redo the sums comparing cultivation versus chemical fallow for controlling summer weeds. Birchip Cropping Group (BCG) has calculated that a single spray operation is \$14.12/ha more expensive than a single cultivation when comparing variable costs associated with each practice.

The herbicide prices used were based on average retail prices as of 12/02/2008, the mix being Roundup CT 1.2 L/ha (\$10.75/L), Garlon 80 ml/ha (\$34.40/L), Ally 5 g/ha (\$0.14/g), Ammonium Sulphate 0.8 kg/100L(\$1/kg), and Hasten 0.5% (\$4.95/L) (prices are exclusive of GST).

Diesel was calculated at \$1.17 per litre which has taken into account the fuel rebate. Travelling speed and fuel usage was based on local district practice. Labour costs were calculated at \$20/hr. Table 1 outlines some of the assumptions and costs used for the analysis.

Table 1: Assumptions and variable costs associated with each method of weed control:

	Cultivation (mechanical)	Spraying (chemical)
Travelling speed / hr	10 km/hr	18 km/hr
Area covered	13 ha/hr (45 foot bar)	56 ha/hr (120 foot boom)
Labour cost/ha	\$1.53/ha	0.36c
Fuel Usage / hr	50 L/hr	31L/hr
Fuel Usage /ha	3.66L/ha	0.55 L/ha
Fuel Cost/ha	4.28	0.64/ha
Chemical /ha	-	\$17.73
Expenditure \$/ha	5.81	\$19.93

There is a significant difference in variable costs between each practice, however before immediately switching systems to a less costly practice, the advantages/disadvantages of each system need to be considered. Cultivation is known to have a negative impact on soil structure, can increase vulnerability to soil erosion, has greater wear and tear on machinery, mixes weed seeds in the top 10 centimetres putting pressure on in-crop herbicides and takes significantly increased labour time to undertake the operation compared to spraying. However these negatives are being weighed up against the fact that the variable cost of cultivation is much cheaper and cultivation can occur around the clock and is not restricted by particular weather conditions.

The increasing price of glyphosate and various herbicide brews and limited hours for spraying due to weather conditions are being weighed up against the benefits of controlling weeds chemically, such as keeping stubble on the surface, protecting soil from wind erosion, maintaining soil structure, increased capacity to sow on time as well as the ability to cover a lot of country relatively quickly.

The benefits of each system need to be weighed up by individuals and it comes down to personal preference and understanding the consequences associated with each practice. Regardless,

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whichever system you are currently using, BCG recommends giving weed control priority to those paddocks that are to be cropped this year and those with the best yield potential. Due to the volatile market, there is also strong likelihood that glyphosate prices will continue to increase.

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