

Week 11 – preventing stripe rust

27 September

With several reports of stripe rust in the Mallee in the last couple of weeks, the economics of fungicide application will need to be considered. This week, BCG asked three Wimmera Mallee farmers the following question:

Will you spray a preventative stripe rust spray on wheat with a yield potential greater than 1t/ha?



Neville Miller – Pyramid Hill

Neville and Michelle Miller and their four children farm at Mt Hope east of Pyramid Hill. They have dry land and irrigation, growing crops, lucerne, prime lambs and onion seed. The soils on their 1150ha (and 260ha leased) range from granitic outcrops to sandy clay loam, with 50 percent of the area cropped.

Preventative spray: “We grow the variety Yitpi on our dryland paddocks and I certainly wouldn’t use a preventative fungicide spray on anything with a yield potential under 1t/ha. In fact, growing season rainfall would have to be well above average before I’d even consider a preventative spray. Yitpi has not shown to have big yield responses to fungicides in our area, especially after the mid-booting stage. It all comes down to economical response. I would be interested in looking at any new varieties with better stripe rust resistance as long as they were suited to my rainfall and soil type.

We grow Chara under irrigation, and because it has a lower stripe rust resistance rating with a high yield potential, we use Impact treated fertiliser at sowing and plan a fungicide application at flag leaf emergence. This strategy has resulted in yield and grain quality responses in the past season.

I would like to highlight the importance of our FM500 farm group providing information and social interaction and support in these dry, trying times.”



Rodney Mitchell – Woomelang

Rodney and Ruth Mitchell run a property at Woomelang with their son, Travis, and daughter-in-law, Natalie. Cereals are grown on two-thirds of their sandy loam soil, with the remaining third consisting of legumes, canola and chemical fallow.

Preventative spray: “Early sown Yitpi wheat on light ground and chemical fallow from last year still has great potential. I haven't found any rust yet, I suspect Yitpi still has some resistance so will monitor closely and treat accordingly.

Late sown Yitpi wheat still has a long way to go and the chances of yields above 1t/ha are fairly remote unless we get a kind finish like last year, I wouldn't be using a preventative fungicide at this stage, monitor religiously and keep an eye on the weather. Remember you have to get a reasonable yield response just to cover the cost of the product and the operation, that's hard to do coming from a low base.”



Cameron Evans – Marnoo

“My name is Cameron Evans and I farm with my old man on our property located 5km northeast of Callawadda. Our farm is purely a cropping enterprise at this stage of its life, on soils that are predominantly grey clays but venture into red had setting clays. We also farm some self-mulching black soils. Our crop breakdown is as follows; barley 33 percent, wheat 27 percent, faba beans 16 percent, canola 13 percent, vetch hay seven percent, and chick peas four percent.”

Preventative spray: “At this stage, no, probably to the disgust of some agronomists (not ours, quite). As would be the case with a lot of farms across our region, funds are tight and any money saved is as good as money earned.

Last year we had one wheat crop, in particular, that slipped under our guard and ended up with a fairly severe outbreak of stripe rust within it, and after mild panic and the application of a fungicide, we were still very nervous of the final outcome. When the header ripped through, the yield (which was exceptional for last year) was still greater than any other wheat crop we had, and we believe achieved its full potential (or very near to it).

So this year, with the lack of wet weather forecast over the next couple of months, we have decided to hold off with the boomspray for now. We will monitor our wheat crops closely over the next six to eight weeks and be ready to go, should the need be.”