

## Week 9 – fallowing out crops

13 September

During a dry year like this, farmers are faced with an economic and environmental trade-off. There is an option to fallow out crops at this stage in the season to conserve moisture and control weeds, but as you'll see below, farmers are well aware of the environmental concerns of reduced ground cover. This week, BCG asked three Wimmera Mallee farmers the following question:

**At what point would you consider fallowing out crops that have little or no potential yield?**



### **Roderick Schulz – Areegra**

Roderick Shulz farms with his brother and parents between Jeparit and Areegra. Their soils vary from heavy to light and their land is predominantly cropped, although they do run some sheep.

**Fallowing out crops:** “As far as I am concerned, making a crop into fallow is not an option. I believe you have to be in the game.

Not only that, I believe it is way too early in the year to spit the dummy (rain is still a possibility).

We have dry sown most years in the last 25 years up to as much as 80 percent of the crop just to be in the ground.

Don't forget ground cover in a dry year is more important than weed kill. Not all is lost if you have a few grass weeds, as my understanding is that you need some grass weed residue to maintain soil structure anyway. Happy farming.”



### **David Smith – Birchip**

David Smith has a 2900ha mixed property 20km west of Birchip that he farms with his brother, Ian, and father, Ross. This year they have eliminated pulses and canola and are growing cereals only.

**Fallowing out crops:** “We will be looking at each paddock on a case by case basis; as a general rule, we won't be spraying out emerged crops. The exception may be where brome grass is thick in a paddock of Clearfield Janz wheat that is very poor.

I don't think we will be gaining much by spraying out crop, if it doesn't rain the crop won't use any moisture and if it does, then there is a chance of achieving some yield off the paddock.

Our crops are extremely stressed but relatively clean, so are not going to do much damage now by just sitting there, hopefully waiting to burst into production when rain arrives.

Another benefit of leaving crops is we will still have ground cover if it continues to stay dry. We can clearly remember the demoralising task of ripping paddocks to prevent erosion in previous droughts.

We received 17.55mm of wonderful rain on 6 September.”



### **Daryl Bardell – Galaquil East**

Daryl and Gaye Bardell have a farm at Galaquil East near Beulah. They intensively crop their 1200ha of fine sandy to medium clay soils and have some cattle and prime lambs. Cereals make up 50 percent of their cropping program, legumes 40 percent and pasture 10 percent.

**Fallowing out crops:** “I would consider chemical fallow as the only option. As long as there is a reasonable amount of vegetable matter evident, this would reduce the likelihood of wind erosion over the summer months. This option would need to be undertaken as late as possible, but prior to seed set of both crop plants and weeds.

Conventional fallow wouldn't be an option on a dry year.

As this year has progressed, we have been unable to complete all of our weed control programs in crops because of the stress due to the dry and frosts. Some of those paddocks would be considered first (especially legumes that haven't had grass control programs implemented).

Also to be considered is the need for seed recovery for next season's cropping program.

A decision to fallow out crops would have to be made as late as possible considering the above points.

With 18mm of rain on 6 September, hopefully we won't have to walk down this path. Where have the good seasons gone! ”