

Need for support tailored to farmers using the best technology to conserve soil, moisture, organic carbon and soil micro-organisms ie conservation tillage.

We face huge increases in up-front costs (fertilizer, but mainly chemicals) that may or may not produce a crop, depending on rain. We spray to conserve moisture and reduce the seed bank for no return if there is no follow-up.

Glyphosate has risen in price 350% in 6 months. MAP was \$450 3 years ago and is \$1500 today. Fuel has doubled in price in the last year. In "Agricultural Science" Vol 21 No1 February 2008, Dr Tony Fischer said in the annual Farrer Oration (p10) "Integrated weed management is now the name of the game, but without herbicides I believe the Australian wheat industry would be uncompetitive globally and/or unsustainable".

Need to continue support after the rain for at least 2 crops to rebuild and repair. Often the drought-breaking rain is a deluge that causes immense damage to paddocks where the stubble has long since rotted away. The EC flood relief was well targeted and an invaluable financial and psychological rescue.

Supplements tend to keep cattle going but destroy pasture. Good agistment is hard to find so stock are sold to prevent flogging the land. Drought loans to re-stock are not much help - we can get loans from our bank and experience shows that concessional interest rates only last till we have a crop and are hit with a tax bill (sometimes the first crop rolls out the losses and the second crop is the whammy), then the interest rate goes up to commercial rates and it is a double whammy that knocks the recovery process for six.

Cattle prices do not rise after droughts today, so selling cattle before they lose too much condition and buying back after the drought is an appropriate strategy. Preserving breeding lines requires agistment or locking up and hand-feeding to preserve pastures.

Spelling paddocks is good management and is common practice but the kangaroos come in and destroy paddocks of good feed if the surrounding area is getting eaten out. **NEED TO CULL MORE NATIVE AND FERAL ANIMALS especially in public reserves and national parks IF THE STOCK NUMBERS ARE REDUCED.** Promotion of kangaroo meat in local markets would help use the huge numbers of kangaroos that breed up on well-managed properties.

Interest subsidy is useful and practical. It is helpful the way it is because much debt is because of farm-build-up to remain viable, but if it has to be reduced, should at least cover debt incurred during drought.

Support for preparation makes sense. Silage lasts for many years but is expensive to put down. Perhaps assistance could be given to put it down, but how do you distinguish graziers who use it as a regular and normal feeding strategy? Perhaps assistance at the time of feeding it out when in a rainfall deficit or flood-induced deficit would be a better strategy.

Off farm investments are a part of good management to top up the lean times and for retirement. If savings are in a super policy, they are not available for the lean times, and they don't grow for retirement near as well as a well-run and diverse portfolio.

Yet they have to be in super for the farmer to attract EC assistance with the same value of assets. This is wrong. The off-farm asset buffer needs to be bigger for a bigger operation - if each spray to kill weeds after a shower costs \$1m it will eat a portfolio faster than an operation where each spray costs \$15000. We have never used FMDs.

One farmer mortgaged his in-laws' house to plant this wheat crop because he had run out of assets to sell after a run of failed crops.

Models and satellite imagery are the fashion and devour much research money, but none of the prediction models can tell us whether it will rain on our farm. The SOI is said to predict rainfall patterns when in fact it follows the rainfall patterns in our area. There is a danger that government and large organisations will make decisions for farmers on the strength of models with no regard for what is actually happening in the paddock. We get enough rain to plant the part of a paddock where the soil is a bit lighter but not the rest. A satellite cannot tell this, and nor can a computer model. If some of the resources applied to models springing from every "research" organisation were put into local research centres it would be better spent. And now we have a new bureaucracy of climate change to do more models and waste more money.

Research funding for CRCs is useful, but agronomists are needed on the ground to help the information get to the paddocks, and to disseminate good ideas from one farmer to the other. The QDPI resources now go into paper shufflers and local research stations are not there to ground-truth CRC research. CSIRO is also closing research centres in production areas that are unique and cannot have research from other areas easily translated to local conditions. They are putting the responsibility for ground-truthing back to farmers so it is done with demonstrations rather than scientifically valid trials. While QDPI and CSIRO show such little regard for the science to back farmers, any scientists who work for them are demoralized. Part of the problem is that employees in both the department and the catchment bodies, landcare etc are mostly on contract and there is no continuity and more importantly, no mentoring.

Part of the problem is political interference in valid scientific research eg Dr Bill Burrows was gagged in Rockhampton when the Grasslan issue broke and he was the most qualified to comment but his comments did not support the prevailing political line in Qld.

Part of the problem is "science" that is tailored to suit a political or commercial point of view. **Science is replicable, peer-reviewed research, not statements by somebody employed as a scientist.**

The subject of downgrading the Roma Research Facility to a regional office was discussed by the Western Downs RAC and is a matter of ongoing concern. Refer to Aust Inst of Agric Science Journal "Agricultural Science" vol 20 No 1 - May 2007, pp8-12. Dr John Radcliffe, SA Division, "Tomorrows Agricultural Scientists". The AIAST has a special interest group exploring the issues arising from a Conference and workshop on future Agricultural Scientists.

There is a belief that GM will deliver the productivity improvements we need without on-ground agronomic research. In "Agricultural Science" Vol 21 No1 February 2008,

Dr Tony Fischer said in the annual Farrer Oration (p10) "The breeding and agronomic advances of the last century should not be considered separately, because there have been many positive interactions between new varieties and new agronomy such that taken together yield response has been more than their individual effects."

Despite food riots in countries with challenging political and production situations, the world is awash with cheap food and food production - if it weren't, the price would rise and food production would become a rewarded and respectable industry again. Agriculture (cf land use, conservation and the other trendy subjects) has fallen from favour as a subject to study and an industry to become involved in. As a nation we have used up the fat on food and fibre production after many years of competing with subsidized competitors and competitors with low labour costs, and producers are less able to withstand the downturns. We produce the cleanest, greenest food in the world and our reward is loss (with US encouragement) of support for a wheat marketing system that provided a degree of security, increased biosecurity risks, reduced ability to control feral and native pests, and any other impediments people in our cities and outside Australia want to encourage our governments to foist on us.

Drought relief should be re-named to be more positive but because we are the great free trade nation leading the world, assistance cannot be given for preparedness strategies or anything positive. It must be seen as Aussies helping their mates who are down, for the government to justify it.

Thankyou Agforce for putting so much effort into improving the system.
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