

The Professional Approach

A professional approach to growing sunflower has not only produced better yields, but also contributed significantly to the total farming system because of the crop's rotational benefits.

This is the opinion of the many experienced sunflower farmers and agronomists from all major sunflower growing areas who contributed to *The Big Black Sunflower Pack*

They agreed that the popular 1970's and 1980's practices of:-

- growing sunflower as a crop of last resort (due to its wide sowing window)
- double cropping on marginal moisture and agronomy
- compromising agronomy

all contributed to its reduced popularity in farming systems.

The professional approach adopted by most sunflower growers in the 1990's, which included some very dry seasons, has demonstrated the crop's benefits. These successes have seen many growers return to growing sunflowers on a regular basis.

This publication combines farmers' best practice for sunflowers in their farming system together with agronomists' recommendations and the latest technology.

Sunflowers in demand

There is an intrinsic demand for sunflower oil in Australia. That is, we require 100,000 - 200,000 t of seed annually to meet domestic requirements. What we don't produce, we must import. However it is the development and potential of the new mono sunflowers, both domestically and as an export opportunity that provides the greatest future potential. The challenge is for Australia to be a consistent supplier of product to supply these new expanding markets.

A better understanding of marketing, e.g. forward selling, has also provided the opportunity for better returns. It is the marketing of sunflowers that has

previously concerned many growers and this issue is comprehensively addressed.



Sunflowers in the farming system

The role and benefits of sunflower as a rotational crop in the farming system is only now being fully realised. Sunflower benefits include:

- Loosening and improving soil structure at depth
- Use as a disease break in cereal rotations
- Its quickness can shorten rotations allowing for more crops in the system
- An ideal change crop when moving from a summer to winter rotation or vice versa
- A better crop where grass weeds are a problem
- A wider spread of recommended sowing times
- Risk management.

Opportunity cropping

Today's farming systems work on planting a crop when soil moisture is adequate. Providing there is a metre of soil moisture, sunflower fits into these situations best due to its wide sowing period and quicker maturity.

Sunflowers are environmentally friendly

With fewer chemicals required for insect and disease management, sunflower has both a perceived and actual clean image.

Sunflowers fit all farming systems

Recent experiences have shown that sunflower is well suited to conservation farming systems (including no-till) and performs well in these situations. By planting sunflower into stubble of the previous cereal crop, farmers still have good soil protection combined with the many benefits of sunflower.

Irrigation farmers have recorded yields of up to 5 tonne/hectare with 4 tonne crops being relatively common. This is a great improvement from the top yielding crops of 3 tonne/hectare a decade ago.

There are also well documented benefits under irrigation of cotton following a sunflower crop.

Sunflower has quick cash flow benefits

Compared to some of the alternatives, sunflower not only provides *relatively low up front production costs, but also quick payments.*