

Cultivation option

Fleabane can be a weed in all farming systems, not just no-till, but is easier to control with cultivation than with chemicals and growers prepared to include some form of soil disturbance in their farming system can go a long way towards minimising the impact of this weed.

C. bonariensis requires light and an extended period of moisture to germinate; a combination that helps explain why it is rapidly becoming a major weed in no-till stubble retention systems in which surface cover keeps more moisture at the soil surface for longer and there is no


cultivation to cover the seed.

Cultivation can prevent seeds germinating because the requirement for light means a cover of soil will prevent germination. It can also kill flax-leaf fleabane seedlings.

Crop competition will also inhibit this increasingly problematic weed, with 90% shade reducing germination by 80%. A combination of crop competition and spraying young fleabane seedlings with a robust rate of post-emergence selective herbicide can give a good level of control, according to Queensland weed scientist Steve Walker.

The mid to low 20s is the optimal

temperature range for germination of flax-leaf fleabane, which in northern cropping systems means it germinates in autumn, early winter and spring. In southern systems it germinates mostly in spring and early summer.

This timing means fleabane often establishes in maturing winter crops and, once the crop is harvested and the weed has no competition for light or moisture, can grow rapidly, especially if there is summer rain. Consequently, fleabane plants are often quite mature, with a large root system and high tolerance to most herbicides, by the time there is an opportunity for post-harvest spraying. 

Conservation Agriculture in action

ALEX MILNER-SMYTH

It's quite amazing to think that SANTFA was set up to promote the idea of no-till farming in South Australia more than 10 years ago. Today more than 90% of SA's cropping farmers practise no-till farming methods, making SA one of the more successful States in Australian conservation agriculture.

Over the past decade SANTFA has broadened its focus from exclusively no-till to related topics and issues pertinent to growers. These issues range from pest and disease control to the impacts of the carbon tax on agriculture.

However, while the topic range has increased, SANTFA's underlying objective remains the same today as it was when the association as established: to help its members find better ways to apply more ecologically sound principles in their farming enterprises with the aim of increasing profitability and sustainability while reducing negative impacts on the environment.

This was the context for a meeting of SANTFA staff and board members in early October to develop a five-year strategic plan to guide the organisation in its efforts to continue delivering relevant and topical information to members.

Conversation flowed well throughout the day-long event and it was reassuring to see that participants were 'on the same page' in terms of what SANTFA members need and how those needs should be met and services delivered.

THREE PILLARS

The three pillars of conservation agriculture are:

- absence of tillage
- biodiversity (crop rotations)
- permanent cover

Aspects of these three pillars have been covered in the SANTFA journal in recent years and this will continue in the future, with each pillar approached from a variety of perspectives and viewpoints to address the diversity of SA farmers and the variety of climate, soil and regional characteristics they are working with.

Perhaps the most significant decision taken during the planning exercise was to position SANTFA as a conservation agriculture (CA) association and promote CA as a system of which no-till is part.

This decision to move away from being only a 'no-till' association is reflected in a new slogan - 'Conservation Agriculture in Action' - which captures perfectly what we're all about.

Flowing from this, SANTFA will use the three pillars of CA as reference points for decisions about the future direction of the association, the information needed by members and the delivery of services

including our journal, website and events.

We believe the decision to position SANTFA as a Conservation Agriculture organisation will improve our attractiveness to sponsors and partners and our ability to build and develop strong relationships with them. This has the potential to broaden our commercial base and improve our ability to successfully tender for a variety of research and development projects. Being able to attract more research funding will enable SANTFA to undertake trials that are relevant to members and ensure they have front-row access to findings from this research work.

SANTFA is currently involved in several projects to help farmers reduce the impact of the carbon tax on their businesses and determine the value of opportunities for them in the carbon farming initiative and the renewable energy sectors. More information on these initiatives will feature in the January issue of 'The Cutting Edge'.

The changes flowing from implementation of SANTFA's strategic plan are designed to ensure each member gains even greater benefit from being involved in our organisation into the future than has been the case to date.

If you have a query or comment about the changes that are occurring, or would like to receive a copy of the strategic plan, contact Alex at Alex@santfa.com.au or call 08 8842 4278. 