

## Trash cutter key to rotation success

MIKE ROBERTS

Medic pastures, low sheep numbers and an airseeder with tines can mean headaches at seeding time, according to Rudall farmer Daryl Norris, but a K-Line Trashcutter has opened the way for him to improve the performance of his medic-based cropping rotation.

Daryl, with wife Leanne and sons Brady and Hayden, farms 4,400ha on central Eyre Peninsula, where the average annual rainfall is 340mm (240mm in the growing season from April to October). Their country is mainly sandy loam over a limestone rubble base; a soil type that can be fragile and prone to wind erosion if over-grazed.

That fragility is one of the reasons Daryl has reduced sheep numbers from around 2,000 Merinos to 600 Dorper ewes. The reduction in stock numbers has also been driven by the fact that Daryl and the boys see themselves as 'drivers not drovers', preferring to drive tractors and machinery over moving sheep around.

### Medic

Direct drilling since 1990, the family have grown many different crops including wheat, barley, peas, vetch, canola, triticale and cereal rye but keep coming back to medic and hard wheat on a two-year rotation.

"There are so many positives for growing medic in our country," Daryl said. "It's our break crop, providing lots of free nitrogen and giving us a chance to control grass weeds. In the pasture phase you can throw the kitchen sink at them with things like double knock treatments to help keep chemical resistance under control."



THE K-LINE TRASHCUTTER, SHOWN HERE FOLDED FOR TRANSPORT, IS DOING A GOOD JOB ON MEDIC VINE FOR DARYL NORRIS, THANKS IN PART TO THE EXTENDED FINGERS THAT PRESS RESIDUE ONTO THE SOIL SURFACE AHEAD OF THE RIPPLED COULTERS.

"The biggest challenge for us is going to be herbicide resistance. Hopefully only cropping half the property each year will give us more time and opportunities to control herbicide-resistant weeds."

Daryl says that with previous rotations wheat was grown on the heavy flats, barley on the sides of the sand hills and cereal rye or triticale on the tops of the hills. "These days we use the medic as a guide to show us where we will crop up the sand rises and only sow wheat up the sand hill as far as the medic will grow. If the soil is good enough to grow medic we will crop it."

"The yield monitor on the header soon

tells you where the cropping edge should be. Wheat yields drop dramatically on the sand beyond where the medic will grow.

"We are aiming to grow just hard wheat and medic. In the past, as soon as we started double or triple cropping paddocks they couldn't grow hard wheat because our protein would drop. I've done the gross margins and believe we can do just as well by keeping things simple with a two year wheat/medic rotation."

They grow mainly Parabinga and Parragio medic, sowing up to 400ha of a mixture of the two varieties a year to ensure good medic populations in their paddocks.

**GrainVantage™**  
Grain quality, the Australian way.

GrainVantage is the next generation in NIR for measuring protein, moisture and oil content in whole grains and oilseeds. The fast, portable and accurate grain management tool is a must have for any grower.

To find out more call GrainGrowers on 1800 620 519



**Perten**  
INSTRUMENTS

**Grain Growers**  
Real benefits. Real results.

[www.graingrowers.com.au](http://www.graingrowers.com.au)

## Trashcutter

Having 2,200ha of medic pasture each year with only 600 sheep grazing them means that in most years the Norrises end up with a fair bulk of medic. This has resulted in difficulties getting their DBS airseeder through the bulky medic-vine residue the following year.

“In the past we tried harrowing the medic vine into rows then burning the rows. We also tried a Kelly disc chain but neither was successful. Grazing the medic out with sheep didn’t work either because our average paddock size is 160ha and we only ended up with the sandy rises being bared out, exactly what we didn’t want.

“I could see it was going to be an ongoing issue and was on the lookout for something that would solve the problem.”

The problem came to a head last August when Daryl was faced with a huge bulk of medic and his research led him to a K-Line machine he thought was worth investigating. “On paper, the K-Line Trashcutter was the best thing I could find that I thought would slice the medic stubble so we could get our airseeder tines through it.”

The family travelled to the K-Line factory in Cowra, NSW, to see the machine for themselves. No-one could tell them whether or not it would do what they needed it to but based on what they saw and could find out they decided to take a punt and bought an 18.3 metre K-Line Trashcutter in September last year. They used the machine, behind a 360hp 936 Fendt tractor, for the first time this year. Daryl says the Fendt pulls the machine easily on heavy soil types but is only just big enough for the lighter soils.

“The trashcutter weighs approximately 11 tonnes and appears very well built. It has hydraulically adjustable down pressure with an adjustable disc angle and a disc spacing of 130mm.”

Based on their experience so far the best results are achieved when the medic vine is brittle and the ground hard and dry, and in Daryl’s view the best time to use the Trashcutter on medic pasture is likely to be between January and March in conditions that are warm and dry but not so hot that sparks from a rock strike pose a fire risk.

With some experimentation, 15 to 16km/hr turned out to be the ideal speed. “We tried it faster and slower but it didn’t seem to cut as well. We used it over all of the cropping ground once in March and April. When we started seeding we found



DARYL NORRIS (LEFT), DISCUSSING THE PERFORMANCE OF THE TRASHCUTTER WITH SANTFA RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT MANAGER GREG BUTLER.

## OTHER MACHINERY

### Seeding:

Steiger 600hp tractor pulling a Gason 15,400L front-tow box and 14 metre DBS airseeder set up to sow on 254mm row spacing, with coulters ahead of the tines.

### Spraying:

JCB 8250 Fastrac tractor pulling a goose-necked Beverley Hydraboom with a 7,000L tank and 30.5 metre boom.

### Harvesting:

Case 8010 header with a 12.2 metre draper front.

25 tonne Wongan steel chaser bin pulled by a Fendt 936.

110 tonne Finch mother bin.

Volvo prime mover with road train.

the medic vine was not blocking the airseeder but was still coming out the back in heaps so we have been running the Trashcutter over each paddock a second time at 90 degrees to the first cut, which is producing much better results.

“After trash-cutting the paddocks twice we can sow without blocking the airseeder and the medic residue is left in a nice even mulch right across the paddock.

“Without the Trashcutter we would have been continually blocking the airseeder. One pass with the cutter stopped the blocking and two avoided having any lumps or bumps left out the back after

sowing. At this stage I don’t think there is anything out there that is going to be better at solving our problems, so I’m happy to run with it.

“As long as we grow medic pastures with low sheep numbers and have a tined seeder, the trashcutter will be an important machine for us.”

## Herbicide issues

Daryl uses high water rates of 100 to 150L/ha when applying his pre-emergence herbicides and thinks that using the Trashcutter twice on a paddock should increase the effectiveness of his sprays because the double pass exposes some soil. While it is not designed as a cultivator the machine does disturb the soil surface, providing an ‘early tickle’ that might encourage rapid germination of weeds that can be sprayed before seeding.

Despite using the machine later than planned this year it sliced the medic mat up, putting some gaps in it and exposing a little bit of soil, Daryl said. “We are definitely going to get better results with our pre-ems this year than we would have if we had not trash cut the residue. In future we will do the trash cutting earlier in the season and hopefully the tiny little bit of dirt the cutter throws up on top of the medic will help it break down quicker and assist the chemicals to work better.”

The Norrises successfully ran the Trashcutter through some wheat stubbles earlier this year to cut up some big melon vines, which helped get a better germination of medic at the break of the season.