

MEDIA RELEASE

Late Plant Options a Great Opportunity for Extra Early Farm Cash Flow

Farmers planting summer crops in December and the new year, will take advantage of a second great cash flow opportunity this year believes Kevin Collingridge, Marketing Manager for HSR Seeds. “We don’t often get this scenario’ said Kevin, “where an earlier spring planted crop has been successfully sown, then excellent rains have filled in the moisture profile on the just harvested winter crop to allow another summer crop plant”. The main things needed for a successful summer crop are plenty of sunlight, enough heat units, plenty of moisture and sufficient soil nutrients. Right now there is excellent soil moisture in many paddocks, and fertiliser programmes can satisfy the crop’s needs for the coming growing season. Most varieties will also shorten up in maturity on the later plant, so there can be even greater water use efficiency from the full soil moisture profiles out there.

This will mean a cash flow coming off the summer crop roughly six months earlier than if growers wait for a winter crop to be planted in the autumn of 2009. No-one has any idea what conditions will be like next autumn, so hanging onto country with the belief that grain prices will get higher, or that there will be sufficient planting moisture available is at best a good rough guess. Right now it is all there waiting to be utilized for a summer planting. Some of the best summer crops grown on the Darling Downs have come from a December plant, even in late December, said Kevin. There have been numerous 10 tonne/hectare dryland sorghum crops harvested from a late December plant, and much of the Southern Downs has been traditionally a December maize planting.

Some areas do need to be addressed though according to Kevin. With Maize and sunflowers there is no real need to switch varieties as the growing conditions on the later plant do not present any new major challenges. There may be a higher risk of some diseases in sunflowers as the planting date moves into January from rust and sclerotinia, but with the current erratic climatic conditions no-one can predict the cool showery weather periods that may trigger sclerotinia outbreaks in crops flowering in mid-autumn, or when the hottest three week period will occur that can effect flowering and seed set in maize and sorghum. Grain sorghum does have some issues though-there is an increased chance of a sorghum midge challenge from the build up of midge numbers on the earlier sown sorghum crops, and there is also an increased chance of sorghum ergot on the later plant. This can be addressed to a degree by moving to varieties that have a significant midge resistance, such as those that have a Midge Tested rating of MT5 or more, and looking for varieties that can provide three main features to help combat ergot:

1. A strong flow of pollen
2. Highly viable pollen
3. A short duration of flowering

Ergot will only be an issue where there is poor pollination, so we need to plant varieties that have a greater chance of pollinating well to ensure a good seed set, and keep the ergot spores at bay. If we get 100% pollination then there will be no ergot.

Breeding programmes have now brought to the market new varieties that can offer up these three features. At HSR Seeds these are called “Pollen Power” hybrids, and we would be recommending Dominator, Enforcer, Liberty and Venture Pollen Power hybrids to help against any ergot challenge. For the sorghum midge challenge,



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Dominator and Venture are MT5 hybrids while Enforcer is an MT 6 to provide even greater protection from midge

Cattle producers also have an excellent opportunity this year, with some great options available. For the first time in many years, there will be a chance to let native pastures regenerate by allowing them to run to seed. This can be achieved by planting forage sorghum to handle high stocking rates, thus allowing the native pasture to have a break from grazing. It is also an opportunity to plant forage with the specific intent to make hay or silage and get some significant fodder stores put away for the harder times that will come in autumn and winter. The other opportunity is to plant highly productive forages such as Brown Mid Rib Revolution to lift animal productivity throughout the summer, with the ability to then take these cattle forward in better condition on to the early planted oats and ryegrass pastures coming through in autumn. It is easy to look around and see there is a lot of feed about right now, but that feed will be wasted unless a summer forage planting programme can take advantage of the abundance of this current feed bank, according to Kevin. At the moment we are getting a significant lift in demand on sunflowers, maize and some of our higher Midge Tested sorghums with growers taking this once in a decade opportunity while they can. The main forages that are being sought out are our BMR lines, and our Ultra Late Flowering varieties. In particular Hunnigreen is being preferred as a late sweet variety due to its ultra late flowering characteristics which means is at less risk of ergot challenges than some of the older style traditional sweet sorghums. The good news is there is plenty of seed available at the moment, although we have run out of some varieties such as Armour grain sorghum which offered the highest midge resistance available.