

AS I write, there are still a handful of grain paddocks around the country yet to have their winter crop harvested. A later than usual planting and persistent showers have pushed harvest for some areas well into January. But there are enough bulging silos, bunkers and grain bags already out there to know that this has been a big – a very big – harvest.



In December last year, our official forecaster ABARES, was estimating a national winter crop for 2022/23 of 62 million tonnes (Mt). This is only a few bags short of the record 62.5 Mt delivered in the previous year (2021). And the record before that was – you guessed it – the 2020 season with around 57.1 Mt harvested. Having highest ever production records tumble in three consecutive seasons would be remarkable – particularly given the vagaries of the climate facing Australian grain farmers. But this three-peat has every chance of happening.

Thanks to generally favourable conditions since December, a number of grain market analysts are estimating the 2022 national wheat crop to eventually come in 4 or 5 Mt tonnes higher than ABARES late 2022 forecast. Even if only half of this extra tonnage is realised, it should put total winter grain deliveries to well north of 64 Mt and our highest ever.

These consecutive bumper crops have put “annual averages” onto a new and much higher level. Working on the pretty reasonable assumption that the 2022 winter crop will come in somewhere higher than 64 Mt, the average annual production for the past 10 years is just under 46 Mt. If we look at the average winter crop production for the 10 years prior to 2013, we come up with 35.7 Mt – or about 30 per cent lower than the most recent 10-year average. In absolute tonnage terms, that’s an average of about 10 Mt a year more grain. And I reckon the particularly outstanding number is that the average area planted to winter crops across those two 10 year periods has seen very little change at around 22 million hectares.

In other words, we are now producing, on average, pretty close to half a tonne more winter grain per hectare per year than we did in the first decade of this century.

Alternative energy options for rural Australia

In the next (March-April) issue we will be introducing a series of articles in collaboration with AgriFutures Australia on alternative renewable energy options facing farmers. The estimated annual cost of energy is about \$5.85 billion for our agricultural sector, but this is set to soar as electricity prices go through the roof.

On-farm renewable energy systems are being touted as a significant solution for farmers. The series will investigate ready-for-market renewable energy solutions including solar, wind, bioenergy, hydro, hydrogen and battery storage.



In this issue...

Caution required when retaining rain affected seed

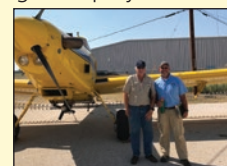
When harvesting cereal seed for planting in 2023, it pays to consider the potential risks of retaining low protein, rain-damaged grain, says Dr Greg Rebetzke.



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Seeding the skies, harvesting rain

For millennia, humans have tried everything from prayer to dancing to summon rain from the skies. Today, as water grows ever more scarce, researchers at ARS are developing a revolutionary technique of seeding clouds to produce more rain, in cleaner, less costly ways.



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Daniel Albone

Agriculturists know all about outstanding high profile tractor designers such as John Deere, Jerome Increase Case, Harry Ferguson, David Brown, A.H. Macdonald, etc. But few would pass the pub test if asked about one of the greatest tractor innovators, Daniel Albone.



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Virus undercuts fungus's attacks on wheat

A naturally occurring virus co-discovered by Agricultural Research Service and university scientists may offer a way to undermine a costly fungal threat to wheat, barley and other small-grain crops.



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Herbicide discovery through innovation and diversity

Around 75 years ago, dichlorophenoxyacetic acid (2,4-D) was the first synthetic, crop-selective herbicide introduced for use in global agriculture. Many herbicide discoveries soon followed. But fast-forward to today and only a handful of the ag majors have active discovery programs.



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