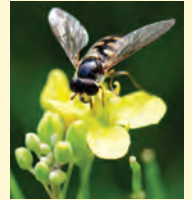




## In this issue...

### Enhancing – and not hindering – beneficial insects

Australian grain growers now have access to the latest information on the chemical toxicity of insecticides to beneficial insects in grain crops with the release of an updated version of the Beneficials Chemical Toxicity Table.



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### Weighing up the automated spot-spraying tech options

In response to increasing complexity, automated spot-spraying (using either sensors or cameras) gives growers multiple levers to pull using different chemistry, timings and rates.



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### Classic Tractor Tales Some intriguing tractor trivia

In the midst of the abundant knowledge of tractors, there are some intriguing trivia facts that are not always widely recognised. A few are considered here.



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### Corn production stunted in Argentina...

Argentina's corn production forecasts are being adjusted drastically lower as the crop – which only a month ago was widely expected to be a record – battles a rare leafhopper plague.



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### Saddling up for South America

A memorable journey or adventure is often because everything doesn't always go to plan – especially in remote regions of the world. But the travel and learning rewards are great. This is particularly the case when you saddle up for a tour of South America.



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**W**E have arrived at that time of year when the grain marketing horses are easily spooked. On the domestic front, all eyes (and hopes) are on a genuine autumn break to get our winter crop kicking along while in the northern hemisphere – where 90 per cent of the world's wheat and 80 per cent of its corn is produced – crop yield prospects will be largely determined by weather events over the next few months.



Just to underline this point, the horses bolted around ANZAC day on reports of prolonged dry weather in the US and Russia. Wheat futures jumped about 10 per cent in a week on the news. And as ep3's Andrew Whitelaw points out (see article page 28), we can expect this volatility to continue for the next few months while the northern hemisphere "weather window" is wide open and banging in the breeze. But with volatility comes opportunity and on average, the highest priced month of the year for global wheat futures is June.

#### Trends in global grain production

If you make your living from farming – or any other endeavour where global trends totally out of your control have a big impact on your future prosperity – it's always a useful exercise to try and get a handle on where things are heading. So to get a fresh perspective, let's consider what has happened with global grain production over the past 30 years and put that into the context of what might happen in the next two or three decades.

In the early 1990s, the world was producing around 1.7 billion tonnes a year of the four major grains: Wheat, rice, corn and soybean. At the time, the total harvested area of these crops was about 560 million hectares.

Today the world production of the four majors is about 3 billion tonnes each year, or a 75 per cent increase in total production, while the harvested area has edged up less than 30 per cent to around 725 million hectares. The point is, the world's farmers are managing to grow more from a given area of land. For example, in the early 90s, the global average wheat yield hovered around 2.5 tonnes per hectare. Today this has increased to 3.5 tonnes or an incredible 40 per cent productivity improvement in 30 years. Better varieties, including GMOs, and improved farming techniques and strategies are at the core of these technology-led productivity gains.

And farmers are producing all of this grain because the world's 8 billion people are demanding and consuming it. The consumption of wheat, rice, corn and soybean has also risen by around 80 per cent since the early 90s. And pretty much across the board, commodity forecasters are predicting this trend will continue with an increase in grain demand of a further 50 to 60 per cent over the next few decades when more than 9 billion people will need to be fed along with burgeoning global stockfeed and bio-fuel demand.

The future is bright for grain producers. The challenge will be to maintain the impressive rate of productivity gains enjoyed over the past 30 years.

Here's hoping that autumn break has arrived at your place. ■