

AUSTRALIA has had some very unwelcome visitors to her shores in recent months – and there's no turning them back. We are currently being overwhelmed with a crescendo of coronavirus information and predictions while the exotic fall armyworm pest has quietly slipped across the Torres Strait and into Queensland's Cape York Peninsula.



Depending on where you live and run your farming business, both unwelcome arrivals are having immediate and varying degrees of impact on how we go about our daily lives.

Australian farmers, by the very nature of their way of life, are well ahead of the coronavirus curve and have been effectively practicing self-isolation for more than 200 years – but without downplaying the impacts on personal health, the virus has the potential to disrupt the supply of some imported farm inputs such as fertiliser and agri-chemicals, much of it sourced out of China. Many re-sellers are saying that these supply disruptions need only be small and short-lived, particularly with Chinese factories gradually coming back on line – as long as there is no panic buying.

There are some positives

People around the world will continue to eat and wear clothes. This puts food and fibre producers in a much more positive environment than most in times of a global pandemic. We are also seeing the lowest crude oil prices in many years putting downward pressure on major farm inputs while a low Aussie dollar is boosting the value of our farm exports. And the beautiful widespread rain across much of our national grainbelt since the New Year, is the cherry on top. Even the federal and state governments are doing their bit by offering a range of taxation and investment incentives for the coming season.

We can also put a positive spin on the fall armyworm (FAW) outbreak. Given the world-class monitoring and control capabilities of Australian farmers when it comes to insect pests, we are well placed to manage FAW. Environmentally, we might also have an advantage in that the pest slows down considerably in temperatures below 10°C – and frosts stop it dead. It appears that in most seasons FAW may not be an issue any further south than Central Queensland.

We can also learn from our own as well as global experience – and mistakes – when it comes to the control of a new exotic pest. Australia is among the last food and fibre producing countries to have a FAW incursion, so we can learn from the control strategies put in place by countries such as the US. And we can learn from some of the past mistakes we have made (read here, the Ord River in the 1960s and 70s) in controlling unwelcome arrivals.

Let's hope the rains keeps coming and your families remain healthy, happy and optimistic.

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Pre-emergents for better weed control



Over the past 20–30 years, resistance to many post-emergent herbicides has developed to the stage where many growers are now again heavily reliant on pre-emergent herbicides as the foundation of weed control programs.

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Contemplations



The new decade is now upon us. We enter it with anticipation, indeed assumption, that as 2020 progresses it will impart a more tranquil and favourable era, as distinct from the anguish and suffering from the drought and bushfires, inflicted mercilessly upon so many rural communities.

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Wheat disease 'boom and bust' cycle



Latest research has uncovered a 'boom and bust' pathogen cycle that may be the key to developing new and improved management strategies and disease ratings for the damaging wheat disease septoria nodorum blotch.

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Sorghum production lowest in 50 years?



What a difference a month makes. Substantial rainfall across the majority of the nation's winter and summer cropping regions, on top of isolated storms in the preceding five weeks, has swung the mood across rural Australia from one of heightened pessimism to one of guarded optimism.

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Coronavirus and agriculture – how worried should we be?



The coronavirus outbreak is already having a severe impact on China's foodservice and on-trade channels and this could become "more serious and longer-lasting" if the virus is not contained in the next six to eight weeks, leading agribusiness banking specialist Rabobank has warned.

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