

DESPITE a global pandemic threatening the wellbeing and lives of the entire human population, closed borders and unpredictable lockdowns, policy-making on the run, economic and political turmoil and the constantly foreboding thought of – what the hell is next – it's generally been a great year... for Australian agriculture at least. Strong prices for most farm commodities, and a welcome break in weather patterns, have propelled incomes for many thousands of Australian farms and agribusinesses to record levels.



And the 'good' times might just keep rolling. International demand for farm goods is at a very high level as individual countries, in the face of uncertainty, look to bolster their domestic food stockpiles.

In addition, the La Niña system currently at play in the Pacific, is doing its part in helping the lot of many Australian farmers. La Niña typically means wetter conditions in Australia but drier times in South America. Other competitors on the world agricultural trading stage in North America and Eastern Europe are also facing drier seasonal conditions and lower production forecasts. This in turn is leading to a reduction in grain (particularly wheat) stocks held by the major exporting nations. This is also helping to support international grain prices.

Over the past 12 months China has been grabbing the headlines and for mainly the wrong reasons. Our current trading spat with The Middle Kingdom has impacted our farm exports to that country at a time when their food import demand has rarely been stronger. In its *Agribusiness Outlook for 2021* Rabobank reports that even though the value of our farm exports to China has reduced in recent months, farm goods to the value of \$800 million a month continue to get through. In particular, China's import demand for wheat is the strongest for many years.

It will come as no great surprise that a major beneficiary of this increased demand has been the US. The Trump administration had negotiated a farm trade deal (the Phase 1 Agreement) with China which is now bearing fruit. With the new agreement and rules in place, the US Wheat Associates – America's largest wheat farmer lobby group – estimates that China will import 9 million tonnes of wheat this marketing year. This is a 25-year high and the Wheat Associates expects China to turn to American wheat growers for a significant portion of that higher import volume.

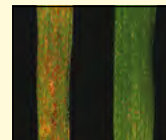
Given a bit of warming of the Australia–China trading relationship, you would expect Australian wheat growers might also join the party. But many Australian growers are questioning if they even want to continue to dance with China. We need to be very mindful that more than a third of our total farm exports each year find a home in China. We have not been this dependent on a single importer of our farm goods since the UK in the 1950s. ■

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In this issue...

'Gene sandwich' to enhance wheat rust resistance

Every year Australian farmers face potential wheat rust outbreaks. But CSIRO researchers have led an international effort to develop wheats with a stronger and potentially more durable level of resistance against rust diseases by "stacking" five resistance genes together.



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Landini

Our little 1.6 litre Opel rental car seemed embarrassingly inadequate as we pulled up outside a coffee bar in the centre of St. Moritz. We were en route to the Landini tractor factory, located in the small Italian provincial town of Fabbrico.



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Quinoa: From boutique to broadacre

A new open access quinoa variety developed in Australia is set to boost opportunities for farmers to grow the popular superfood, with increased production potential for both local and international markets.



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When soil is everything, it pays to invest

For Nick Ennis, any investment in PA is an investment in soils. Nick manages Lawson Grains' Borambil aggregation in southern NSW.



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Dual purpose crops

In southern NSW, outputs from experimental research and grower experience over two decades has firmly established dual-purpose (DP) crops (both cereals and canola) into mixed farming systems. Experienced growers have undoubtedly increased profit, flexibility and reduced risks in their businesses with appropriate integration of dual-purpose crops.



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