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Editorial...

David Dowling, Editor

WE signed off in the previous issue hoping for a continuation of the 'pleasant' weather which most areas had experienced up to mid-December – generally mild temperatures and the promise of a wetter than normal summer. Well it didn't quite work out that way and the best that can be said about the first month of 2018 was that it wasn't as bad as the previous year.

It was still very hot and very dry and to make matters worse, a very high percentage of crops were affected by herbicide drift damage. Agriculture is different to other industries, but it is not that different. And there is no other industry which would tolerate big losses – massive losses for some individuals – which stem from the actions of neighbouring industries. It would be just unacceptable. That's not to say that the solutions are easy – if they were, they would have been put into practice already. But every year that we witness this level of damage puts us closer to the point at which government regulators will step in and solve the problem for us – or try to, at least. And that is a situation that no one wants to see.

As Coonamble grain/dryland cotton farmer John Single points out in this issue (page 16), cotton is not the only crop that is affected – just the most noticeable. He also points out that the problem can be largely avoided by good management. And there is plenty of anecdotal evidence that good farmers can spray phenoxy products close to their cotton crops without incident. It's a matter of the right product with the right equipment in the right conditions. All that means is that there must be a lot of bad spray managers out there to produce so much widespread damage.

Mary O'Brien has become one of the main 'go-to' people in the industry regarding spray drift, and you will find some excellent comments from Mary on that subject in this issue. Mary also takes on another incredibly important issue in Australian agriculture – rural male suicide (page 28). Reading "Are you bogged mate?" brought a tear to my eye and I suspect it will have the same effect on lots of people. Hopefully it will have an impact on someone who is depressed, or who suspects that someone else is.

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