



Press Release

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Nitrogen Management Tool for Grain Growers

Mallee Sustainable Farming knows all too well the importance of careful fertilizer use. With grain growers feeling the price pinch, a free on-line tool has been developed to assist with some of the problems of managing nitrogen use in different zones within paddocks.

The Mallee Sustainable Farming Zonal N Management Tool has been developed to help farmers and advisers understand the Zonal N management decision by addressing three key questions:

- Where do I put the first unit of nitrogen fertiliser?
- When do I stop and start putting fertiliser somewhere else?
- How are these decisions affected by my 'gut feel' about the season?

Tool developer, Dr. Ben Jones of Mallee Focus said, "It optimizes the spread of N fertilizer (at sowing) between any number of paddocks and zones subject to what you think the season will be like".

"The rule is to put each unit of N where it gets the highest return, but there's also a manual mode where you can see how your decisions might affect profit compared to what it thinks is optimum".

"The tool was developed based on APSIM (crop model) simulations of wheat crops in Mallee paddocks at Carwarp, Euston, Loxton and Pinnaroo. We know how crops have responded to nitrogen in these paddocks in 2006 and 2007 and think the model has done a reasonable job."

"The version we've released is a 'beta' (preliminary) version but it's worked well enough in testing so far that we think it'll be useful on-farm," Dr. Jones said. "The tool simplifies a lot of things which makes it easier to use and understand. In the end we expect that people will make the final decision with their agronomist, but the tool will help them understand how different seasons and zone management will impact on the final result."

Updated versions will be available as the tool is improved and, to this end, feedback from farmers and agronomists is welcomed.

The tool was launched at the recent Precision Agriculture workshops held across the Mallee and according to Dr. Nicole Dimos, Extension Coordinator with MSF, "This tool will no doubt help the back pocket of grain growers. It's simple to use, comes pre-loaded with a demo paddock so there's plenty of practice time for farmers".

"Importantly, it received rave reviews from farmers who are well equipped with variable rate technology on their farms."

The free download is available at www.malleefocus.com.au/tools

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