

# Benefits in early seeding but beware of risks

Growers can gain significant benefits from early seeding but should carefully consider the risks according to the new Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC) 2008 Planning Guide for Low-Risk Farming.

GRDC Southern Panel chair David Shannon said the guide outlined the benefits and risks associated with early seeding, and provided tips on spreading the risk.

"The benefits from early seeding appear to be increasing – particularly with regard to better yields – partly because some of the risks are being better managed by growers," he said. "Timely seeding is the single most important influence on crop performance.

## Be aware of all the pros and cons

"When thinking about whether or not to seed early, growers need to be aware of the real impact of the pros and cons. Delayed seeding can carry penalties but there are some advantages, such as cheaper weed control and reduced leaf disease pressure.

"Early seeding carries risks which must be managed in order to retain the benefits. These include the possibility of losing the seed due to a lack of follow-up rainfall, more expensive weed control, higher leaf disease pressures and an increased likelihood of frost damage.

"Poor operator or machinery performance can also be an issue because early-seeded paddocks are the first paddocks sown. It's important to make every effort to avoid these problems – pad-

## AT A GLANCE...

- Effective risk management the key to meeting cropping challenges.
- Benefits to be gained from early seeding, but growers urged to weigh risks.

docks selected for early seeding should be the best paddocks on the farm, and any mistake can be costly.

"This can be partly avoided by making sure all seeding machinery and equipment is properly maintained and ready well before seeding time.

"Weed control costs, which are often higher for early-sown crops, can be minimised by selecting clean paddocks. Not all paddocks are suited to early seeding; weed burdens, soil type and surface cover must be considered when selecting paddocks.

"The risk of frost damage can be reduced by seeding hills first, and if frost damage does occur, losses can be limited by cutting frosted crops for hay.

## Mix up your seeding options

"Overall, it's important for growers to manage risk by not committing their entire cropping program to any particular seeding option."

David said effective management of risk and profitability was the key to success in farming.

"Effective risk management is vital to maintaining farm sustainability and profitability for growers in the face of climate risk and rising production costs," David said. "Growers have experienced poor seasons and marketing difficulties over the past two years and are looking for tools and information that will enable them to better manage these risks.

"In a timely response to this need, the GRDC gathered together a team of experts late last year to produce the 2008 Planning Guide for Low-Risk Farming."

Growers can obtain a copy of the guide for by contacting the GRDC on (02) 6166 4500, or downloading a copy from [www.grdc.com.au/lowriskfarming](http://www.grdc.com.au/lowriskfarming).

The guide will also be available through the Birchip, Eyre Peninsula, Central West, Mallee and Upper North farming systems groups involved in the GRDC Low Rainfall Collaboration Project. ■

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Early seeding carries risks that must be managed to obtain the benefits.