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cussed the economic impact of frost for growers, focusing heavily on maximising returns and minimising risk.

Growers face sudden crop death with frost, compared to drought, which they can see develop and put plans in place. The booklet details how to avoid or minimise frost and assess damage, explaining what growers can do with frosted crops to maximise returns that year or beyond.

It also explores options for frost management, highlighting crop choice, sowing time and variety selection as the most important management factors.

Although there's no 100 per cent protection against frost, the booklet provides WA growers with support, guidance and comfort to reduce frost's impact.

Spring tour

The impression the Western Panel gained during the 2007 Spring Tour was that graingrowers in the areas visited were optimistic and having a good season.

One tour group travelled to Esperance, Munglipup, Ravensthorpe, Lake King, Cascade and Wittenoom Hills, where the Panel visited a range of National Variety Trials sites, plus joined SEPWA, DAFWA and RAIN grower field days.

A second tour group went to Salmon Gums and Grass Patch, met with the Liebe Group and travelled to Cascade and onto Wittenoom for the SEPWA variety trial.

GRDC Western Panel members, executive management and GRDC Board Director Philip Young met with researchers and growers at trials and discussed the progress of current research and prospective outcomes.

Panel thanks

Sincere thanks to all Panel members who contributed their skills and knowledge in 2007: Ruth Young, Merrie Carlshausen, Ben Curtis, Ralph Burnett, Professor Robert Belford, Professor Richard Oliver, Dr Iftikhar Mostafa and Vince Logan, along with David Capper who resigned in January 2008.

Southern Panel

Grain growers in the Southern Region were understandably disappointed with a second consecutive year of low rainfall and reduced yields across most districts, especially after such a promising early start. Many crops were cut for hay.

Although grain tonnages rose significantly in Victoria and South Australia they were still well down from those achieved in 2005, while in southern New South Wales production fell even from the previous year's low figures.

Another development we noted in 2007 was that many growers in the Southern Region experienced difficulties with their marketing programs, particularly with regard to forward selling.

In a quick response to the poor season and marketing problems, the GRDC-funded Low Rainfall Collaboration Project gathered together a group of farmers, researchers, consultant, advisers, bankers and marketing experts for a workshop in November 2007 to develop tools and guidelines that could assist growers in reducing their level of risk. The result of the workshop was the publication of the *GRDC 2008 Planning Guide for Low-Risk Farming*.

The guide is designed to help growers work their way through a decision-making process that will lead to the best possible outcomes for the 2008 cropping season. It was launched during the GRDC Adviser Updates and we urge growers to obtain their copy.

GM canola

There has been considerable debate regarding the decisions taken in NSW and Victoria to lift those states' moratoria on commercial production of GM canola. The GRDC itself has supported informed debate on the issue that ultimately facilitates grower and consumer choice regarding GM technology.

An important challenge for the GRDC will be to assist growers and the industry with the introduction of GM canola into NSW and Victorian farming systems. This will include researching and providing data on how GM canola fits into crop rotations, ensuring growers are aware of their obligations regarding regulations and protocols, and providing information about matters such as glyphosate use to facilitate the preservation of GM technology.

Glyphosate resistance

Managing the looming threat of glyphosate-resistant weeds will be a high-level priority for the GRDC. More populations of glyphosate-resistant weeds are being discovered in the Southern Region. The GRDC's concern is that glyphosate resistance does not adversely impact on no-till systems and stubble retention systems so that growers can continue to realise the many benefits such as moisture conservation, improved soil biological activity and reduced topsoil erosion.



David Shannon,
Southern Panel Chair



Inspecting a cereal trial at Esperance during the 2007 GRDC Western Panel Spring Tour (L to R): Julia Polkinghorne, GRDC Canberra and Philip Young, GRDC Board Director, with Panel members Neil Young of Kojonup, Ben Curtis of Esperance, Merrie Carlshausen of Wubin and Ralph Burnett of Albany.

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The GRDC has supported informed debate on GM technology such as GM canola. (PHOTO: Richard Henderson)

Rising input costs

The cost of fertiliser inputs continues to rise as a result of increasing global demand, directly impacting on the profitability and sustainability of Australian grain producers. Addressing this issue is perhaps the most important priority for the GRDC. While the emphasis has previously been on improving water-use efficiency, the GRDC is now also strongly committed to nutrient-use efficiency. This will include projects looking at how we use phosphorous and nitrogen, agronomic and genetic solutions, and examining alternatives to phosphorous.

Climate variability

Maintaining the viability of Australian cropping systems in an increasingly variable climate remains an important priority. The GRDC continues to fund research into developing more robust rotations, water-use efficiency and better root systems. An important element will be developing varieties with greater tolerance for heat stress, particularly during flowering, and systems that cope better with extreme climate events such as drought, heatwaves and frost.

Rust

The battle against cereal rust goes on. We continue to see mutations in rust pathogens overcoming resistance in newer wheat varieties, requiring changes to resistance ratings. Resistance has also broken down in some triticale varieties. The GRDC continues to put a lot of resources into maintaining cereal crops' resistance to rust pathogens and providing agronomic information to growers so they can economically manage the problem. This includes funding the Australian Cereal Rust Control Program, which plays an important role in developing disease-resistant germplasm and offers cereal breeders the opportunity to screen breeding populations under artificially created rust epidemics at any stage of their development.

National Variety Trials

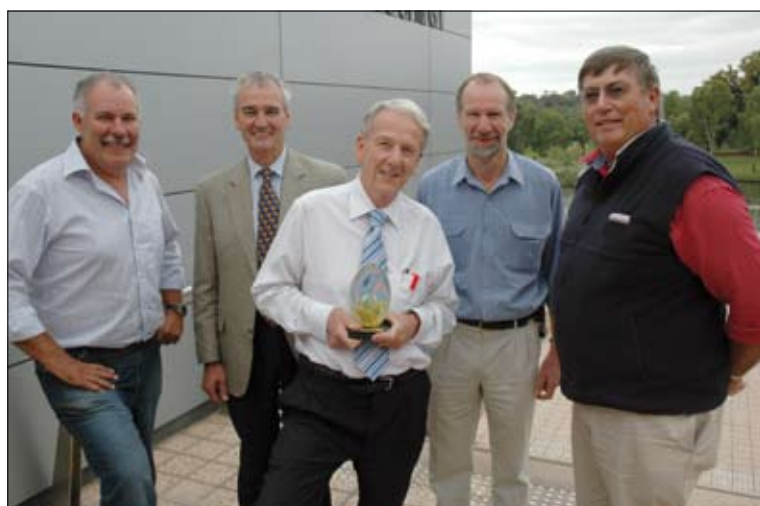
The National Variety Trials (NVT) have been in full operation for two years. NVT is a GRDC initiative in

response to growers' requests for a system that provides independent assessment of new varieties under a range of conditions and in a range of cropping environments. NVT continues to grow and develop. The website (www.nvt-online.com.au) has become more user friendly, with growers able to quickly access trial information relevant to their local conditions. Changes have been made to cereal rust trials and in addition to yield data, add-on packages are being trialled in Western Australia to provide economic analysis incorporating grain quality and payment grades.

GRDC Updates

GRDC Adviser and Grower Updates are a very important mechanism by which the Corporation extends research and development outcomes. We're pleased to note that

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Jon Lamb, centre, was presented with the GRDC Seed of Light Award in February this year for his contribution to grains research communication as coordinator of Southern Region GRDC Updates. With him are GRDC Southern Panel members, from left, Andy Barr, David Shannon, Allan Mayfield and Jeff Arney.

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attendance figures rise every year, and that record numbers attended the Adviser Updates in Adelaide and Ballarat in February this year.

The updates will continue to be an effective conduit of information to Australian growers while the GRDC looks to new and additional ways of interacting with growers, researchers and the industry. This year will see the first series of technical workshops held in the Southern Region. The workshops will have a more specific focus on particular topics to compliment the more broad agendas at updates.

The Southern Panel

As we are in the final year of the current panel's three-year term, growers can expect to see a few new faces on the GRDC Southern Regional Panel when we embark on our 2008 Spring Tour. I've been privileged to work with the growers, scientists and industry representatives on this panel. They have undertaken a considerable effort to liaise with growers and the research sector, and have achieved important outcomes benefitting growers. To date there have been many high quality applications for positions on the panel, and I look forward to working with the successful applicants.

The panel has also been delighted with the appointment last year of NSW grower Keith Perrett as the GRDC's Chairman. Keith has had extensive experience representing growers' interests with the NSW Farmers Association and the Grains Council of Australia, and he has brought a unique perspective and range of important skills to the GRDC Board.

**David Shannon, Chairman
GRDC Southern Panel**



GRDC Southern Panel members Mark Peoples and David Shannon examine a plot of Federation wheat on a visit to the Victorian DPI Research Station at Walpeup during the 2007 Spring Tour.

Northern Panel

It has been a year of contrasts across the Northern Region with drought and floods driving home the enormously variable conditions under which our grain growers operate.

The challenges of crown rot and stripe rust continue to present the greatest disease challenges and the Research Advisory Committees (RACs) have specifically requested a continued focus on Rutherglen bug management as part of QDPI&F's GRDC-supported integrated pest management project.

Looking ahead, a new panel will be in place by July 2008 and after a decade on the GRDC Northern Panel I finished my term in April.

Northern Grower Alliance

The successful GRDC initiative, Northern Grower Alliance (NGA), was launched in May 2006 in response to grower needs in north western NSW and southern Queensland for additional on-farm validation of new agronomic tools.

NGA, led by chief executive officer Richard Daniel and drawing together some of the region's leading agronomists, aims to:

- Take promising research to commercial validation earlier, resulting in more rapid uptake and improved levels of commercial adoption;
- Provide additional grower/industry-driven feedback on needs to researchers; and,
- Address both short term responsive and longer term strategic production constraints.

NGA hit the ground running with trials to validate the benefits from inter-row sowing for crown rot management; 'at planting' stripe rust management; and the impact of timing and product choice for foliar stripe rust management.

Other trials included assessing the economic benefits from fungicide application to control spot form of net blotch (SFNB) in barley – a greater northern region risk than other areas due to dry winters with low rates of stubble breakdown, combined with an increase in stubble retention for moisture benefits.

The western NSW projects are now being complemented with collaborative canopy management trials between NGA, NSW DPI and several Liverpool Plains-based grower groups.

Crown rot research gains

NGA trials on inter-row planting to combat crown rot aimed to determine the yield and economic benefits of inter-row planting, provide additional disease information and to ensure that inter-row sowing is used in the most appropriate situations.

Further research showed a potential management benefit by keeping new cereal rows as far away from infected stubble as possible through inter-row planting.



**Ian Buss, Northern Panel
Chair (term completed April
2008).**