

CTF Farmer, My Experiences, Grains

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My name is Peter Walsh. I farm 2000 ha in the wimmera area of Victoria. I have been using different forms of guidance and controlled traffic since 2001. This has taken several different forms and today I would like to talk about the pitfalls and successes I have had along the journey.

The initial driving force behind my quest for guidance was my father; at the time he was in his late 70s and was the main driver for the seeder. After 60 years of farming and operating machinery his back (as is the case with many farmers) had seen better years and he had difficulty in turning around to see if he was on line with the last pass. Consequently he would, on many occasions, just overlap a row or two. It was easier to make up marker arms rather than convince him of the necessity of driving accurately.

At the time the seeder was 9.4 mt and I bought a sprayer that was 28.5. After making a pair of full width marker arms that left a line in the centre of the next pass we were ready to put it into action. The first year it worked very well with Dad finding it very easy to follow the mark and when the crop came up I had nice straight lines to guide the sprayer. So here I was nice straight seeding lines and good guidance for in crop spraying, I thought I was controlled traffic farming. Little did I realize at the time how far I actually had to go.

Over the next couple of years we refined the system and to all intents and purposes it worked very well. The harvester did not match but that didn't seem to be a problem. We started to see some results of lining up our major passes and some reduction in wheel damage.

After taking on more land in 04, I increased the seeder to 14.6 mt and extended the sprayer to 29.5 and was spraying on every second pass. I also installed 2 cm RTK in the seeding tractor, a JD 8400. Whilst this gave me better efficiency and the ability to cover more area, it created more problems than it solved. I had dual wheels on the tractor, wheels everywhere on the bar and spraying every second pass was not as efficient as every third pass. Add to this that I now had a much larger (and heavier) harvester with a 10.7 mt front; we had some severe wheel tracking problems and the harvester wheels were completely random. I felt I had completely undone three years of good work.

At the start of 06 I could see I had to change my system otherwise I could never hope to achieve the results I knew were there to be had. Even though we had now taken on even more country I made the change to 10.7 mt. Everything now matched - tractor and seeder on 10.7 with the tractor on singles and at 3 mt centers, SP sprayer on 3 mt with a pass width of 32 mt, and at long last harvester at 10.7. We are now set at what I believe is the correct combination for our operation. The 10.7 flex front for our harvester works very well and now lines up with everything else. We have RTK guidance on all equipment and the system is finally delivering the benefits that I could see eight years ago.

We still have many things to do to refine our system - like narrow wheels on the harvester and a catcher for the chaser bin - but now we can finally concentrate on the small things to finish off the transformation.

What I want to really emphasise today is that this is a full system and to implement only part of it such as the seeder and sprayer will ultimately be disappointing. Only when you put ALL of your wheel traffic in the same place will the full benefits of reduced compaction become apparent. With the wealth of information and data that is now available it is much easier to implement a CTF system on your farm. I urge you to do it and to do it right from the start thereby achieving your goals much quicker.

Good luck!