

* * MEDIA RELEASE * *

Friday 18th May

Cropping Areas Set to Increase this Year

The *first ever* ProFarmer Grower Planting Intentions survey has confirmed there will be a large increase in winter crop planting in Australia this year (weather permitting) compared to last year's drought restricted plantings.

ProFarmer Managing Director Richard Koch says "Some of the increases seem a little unreal. But most cropping programs were wound back last year and the drought has seen livestock numbers stripped back to the bone. Rather than looking to restock, growers are opting to expand cropping programs to generate cash flow."

Growers were asked what their planting intentions were compared to 2006, assuming an average May break. Producers who responded to the survey represent about 4% of the total acres planted in Australia in 2006/07.

"Most states indicated increased plantings of most crops. However, farmers were quick to qualify that rain of 50-75mm will be needed in the next month across northern and central WA, northern NSW and central and southern QLD for these larger plantings to be fully realised", said Mr. Koch.

Big swing to barley

According to ProFarmer, the biggest swing will be toward barley as growers choose low risk crops that are efficient water users.

"Survey respondents also said that they would be increasing barley plantings because of good domestic marketing opportunities – feed barley is trading at wheat values in many areas – and to replenish on-farm reserve stocks of grain for livestock feeding," added Mr Koch. The ProFarmer survey showed potential for sizeable increases in barley plantings across all states, with the potential swing in the vicinity of 20-30%.

Wheat plantings will rise

Wheat acres will also rise in the majority of states, with the exception of SA where growers will favour canola and field pea plantings. The early start and excellent conditions in southeast SA – traditionally considered a safe area – have encouraged growers to plant these riskier crops.

Canola up too

Canola plantings will rise nationally, but fall in Victoria. Victorian producers will favour wheat and barley at the expense of canola and pulses. One grower commented he was 'going for less riskier crops due to a run of dry years in Victoria'.

Mr Koch says the survey results are consistent with his reports from the field. "In the north of Victoria, programs will feature almost predominantly wheat and barley. Non-

cereal cropping will contract back to safer Victorian cropping areas in the western Districts and southern Wimmera.”

Pulses on the rise in NSW and QLD

Chick peas are set for the biggest rise in plantings proportionally, with growers in NSW and QLD predicting significant rises of 50-80% if a season break comes soon. Faba beans will be the casualty of the larger chick pea plant.

Survey responses in NSW were skewed somewhat by the divergence in seasonal conditions between the north and south. Many respondents in the north commented that they would need at least 50mm to feel confident to plant, otherwise they would look to summer crops. A northern NSW grower commented: ‘the soil moisture profile is not adequate at present. Without 75mm of rain before the end of June, we will only plant 50% and fallow the balance for sorghum.’

Conditions are similar in Queensland, with many respondents suggesting they would require +100mm, and soon, to plant a winter crop: ‘This is the lowest starting subsoil moisture we’ve had for at least the last five years. Significant rain is required (75-100mm) to plant the intended area let alone have a chance of achieving average yields.’

In areas of WA that have received rain, larger programs are currently going in. However, unless parts of the northern and central wheat-belt receive +50mm before mid-June, programs will be wound back. Apart from the south coast of WA, most of WA needs follow-up rain. Mr Koch noted ‘It has been hot and dry since the opening rain, and unless some follow-up is received soon, yield prospects will start to decline.’

ProFarmer will conduct a follow-up survey with growers every month during the growing season. The results will be published in the ProFarmer Crop Conditions and Crop Forecast Report, available online via subscription at www.profarmer.com.au.

Winter Crop Planting Intentions (Ha) (as per survey respondents)						
	Wheat		Barley		Canola	
	2007	2006	2007	2006	2007	2006
QLD	39,227	24,279	3,170	1,240		
% ch	62%		156%			
NSW	152,138	135,224	46,568	29,144	20,997	15,751
% ch	13%		60%		33%	
VIC	43,437	36,459	21,913	17,606	10,843	12,867
% ch	19%		24%		-16%	
SA	14,421	14,635	8,479	7,180	1,712	1,296
% ch	-1%		18%		32%	
WA	174,844	140,507	57,675	42,074	26,868	21,149
% ch	24%		37%		27%	
TAS	5,740	6,100	3,300	2,425	2,275	2,995
% ch	-6%		36%		-24%	
Aust	429,807	357,204	141,105	99,669	62,695	54,058
% ch	20%		42%		16%	

National Planting Intentions (Ha) (as per survey respondents)			
	2007	2006	% Ch
Oats	30,389	19,165	59%
Chick peas	29,569	15,861	86%
Faba beans	3,336	6,459	-48%
Field peas	11,991	11,731	2%
Lupins	32,502	28,935	12%
Lentils	4,632	5,208	-11%
Fodder crops	18,824	17,721	6%

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Background Information:

ProFarmer is Australia's leading independent supplier of agricultural commodity market information and strategic advice. ProFarmer offers national coverage of all broad-acre commodities through its network of analysts with over 50 years of combined experience. The flagship ProFarmer Newsletter and Market Update is read weekly by over 2,000 of Australia's top farmers. ProFarmer also offers advisory, consulting and training services.