

20 years of CTF experiences and 12 things not to do

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BACKGROUND

I was first involved in Controlled Traffic farming since early start of adoption in 1993-94 first as a machinery extension officer to the central Queensland CTF project.

In some of the major grain growing areas CTF has now become a standard growing method covering where CTF in some sort cover 80% of the cropped area. True CTF adoption where harvest is as well included however still covers only about 18% of broadacre cropping in Australia. With my partners in CTF Solutions we are involved in CTF adoption projects throughout Australia.

In 2000, my family returned to our home farm "Wanaringa" (1,741ha) where we have been practising CTF since.

Drawing on 20 years of CTF experience in Australia and overseas I hope to help you avoid many of the pitfalls that exist. Learn from our mistakes, you won't have time to make them all yourselves.

12 THINGS NOT TO DO

The 12 most common things farmers should not do are:

1. Don't measure.

Failing to measure a machine's width is one of the commonest sources of frustration. Regardless of what the dealer or the brochure says, double check. This also saves a lot of embarrassment when adopting RTK GPS steering and realising gaps between runs.

2. Go ahead with no plan

Assuming you can manage the transition to CTF without a written plan is like trying to drive blindfolded in a snow storm. Our business helps growers achieve complex management and operational changes based on a simple written plan detailing machinery, field layout and agronomic changes required.

3. Don't worry about agronomy, weed control etc.

CTF is not a magic bullet, it requires discipline and drive to succeed but the rewards are great. We don't know the agronomy of an uncompacted soil but we are getting better. Attention to normal agronomy is necessary. CTF will make your agronomy easier, as there are more options, better timeliness and a perfect job every time.

4. Leave the harvester out...for too long time

Everyone is allowed time to implement a plan but it should include the harvester from the start. The modern grain harvester is one of the heaviest machines over the field. Most of the increases in crop frequency on our own farm have come from controlling

harvest traffic. Matched tracks, widths and use narrow wheels.

All growers report harvesting is so much easier with CTF, the front is always full, even without guidance and much of the variation in pre CTF yield maps has disappeared.

5. Don't keep any records.

If you do not record what you do you have no idea whether you are improving. By record keeping, I mean the type which makes you money, not compliance or regulatory impositions. Production and input measurements prior to adopting CTF will allow you to make economic assessments of reward versus risk. Continual improvement is a cornerstone of CTF adoption. With the global reduction in government involvement in agronomic research, farmer trials are a necessary path to survival and prosperity.

6. Choose the longest run

Layout issues often trip up new CTF farmers. In northern Australia with its heavy storms, layouts must ensure drainage to a safe disposal point. Other areas suffer waterlogging, all this can be avoided with planning and the use of RTK generated topographic data.

Logistics of inputs to the field and outputs from the field are also often overlooked.

7. Avoid any hint of standardisation with any other CTF within your industry

When major adoption of CTF started in Australia, all the machinery manufacturers selling into our market wanted to know what wheel track spacing people were going to use and what operating width. After extensive consultation with industry, the team made an executive decision that we would standardise on 3m and either 9m or 12m for grain production. This was a voluntary standard and has been widely supported by manufacturers. Many growers have set up custom widths to suit their operation but suffer if they require emergency help during harvest or the tractor breaks down. In Australia we now have examples of cotton, sugar cane, fodder and vegetables on 3m wheel tracks. This means a much wider range of crops can be efficiently grown on one farm.

8. Always drive the sprayer/spreader on the same tramline

This is the commonest operational error in my experience. Intensive driving causes rutting and widening of that tramline, while the planting and harvest tracks get softer. In Australia where many wheel tracks are not planted, weeds can proliferate in the absence of traffic. If we do plant them, the crop is poorly developed, has high screenings and often green grain at harvest. My suggestion is to use every set of wheel tracks in a season. If running a 9m planter with a 27m sprayer or spreader, then i.e. start on run 1, then next spray starts on run 2 then run 3 and then back to run 1

9. Assume you can drive straight and don't need machine guidance

RTK guidance is the cheapest workman you will ever buy. Also systems improve and

they will link with controller software for automatic record keeping.

10. Don't match machinery exactly

A grower set up a CTF system but made it a bit narrower than the harvester so he had "wriggle room". The outcome: within 5 passes the header was no longer on the traffic lanes. The results were visible in subsequent crops for two years.

11. Buy the biggest tractor and plough you can afford because your neighbour has one

Testosterone has no place in setting up a CTF system. Smaller, lighter equipment will look after the soil and cost less.

12. Never seek advice. Insist on making your own mistakes

Many mistakes could be avoided by tapping into the network of CTF researchers and growers from around the world.

CONCLUSION

CTF has been a rewarding and interesting journey, one which is not over. The concept of continual improvement ensures no complacency and our seasons are always challenging. There are many facets of a successful CTF system which I have not covered here. The most important thing to remember is that CTF is a whole farm system. While matched machinery is an integral part, it is by no means the only part. Matched machinery still gets bogged if there is a wet spot in the field. Yields are still low if there is a trace element missing or planting was delayed. A CTF system is no substitute for not getting the basics right. With planning and attention to detail, CTF makes all farmers better farmers. With a global network of support in place, there are people who can help no matter what scale or crop you farm.

Do it, but do it right.

www.ctfsolutions.com.au / www.actfa.net.au



NH CR940 combine. Left with a 520 mm CTF tyre. Right a 900 mm tyre for other fields.



Besides a selfpropelled sprayer this 200 hp tractor is the only tractor used on the Wanaringa farm. For all transport trucks are used.

