

THE LUCERNE LEADER

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Redlegged Earth Mite Insecticide Resistance Found

Scientists have for the first time discovered the extent of resistance in the southern and northern regions. Redlegged earth mite (RLEM) in the Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC) southern cropping region.

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Recent laboratory studies on several RLEM populations in South Australia have confirmed resistance to both synthetic pyrethroids, including bifenthrin and alpha-cypermethrin, and organophosphates, including omethoate and chlorpyrifos. This is the first time resistance has been detected in Australian RLEM populations outside of Western Australia, where resistance can be found throughout that State's grain belt.

Research, in which the GRDC invests, suggests that whilst it is too early to determine just how widespread the distribution of resistance is in the south, resistant samples have come from more than one paddock.

Entomologist Dr Paul Umina, from **cesar** and The University of Melbourne, says further sampling will be undertaken this year to enable more detailed mapping of



Photo : Andrew Weeks

Redlegged earth mite is a threat to a variety of Australian crops and pastures, with canola, lupins and legume seedlings the most susceptible to attack.

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GOOD PEOPLE TO KNOW

AgChem Access Priorities Forum Update

By Peter Dal Santo AgAware Consulting Pty Ltd

As part of the Australian Government's initiatives to improve access to safe and effective agricultural and veterinary chemicals, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources, the Hon. Barnaby Joyce MP initiated the 'Assistance Grants - Access to Industry Priority Uses of Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals' grants program (AgVet Collaborative Forum - AVCF) in 2014.

The aims of the AVCF are for agricultural industries and agchem companies to consider collaboration and co-investment opportunities to address industry priorities in a timely manner. Research and Development Corporations (eg. RIRDC) use the industry priorities to submit grant applications to the Australian Government's priority and \$8 million investment commitment, 'A Competitive Agriculture Sector', to improve access to agricultural and veterinary chemicals.

RIRDC industries did not participate in the 2015 AgVet Collaborative Forum.

In late 2016, RIRDC commissioned AgAware Consulting Pty Ltd to manage the RIRDC project, 'PRJ-010111 - Minor Chemical Consultant for small and non-levied industries'. This project works with RIRDC industries, which includes 'pasture seed - lucerne', to develop pest/pesticide priorities. The lucerne seed industry provided information on:

1. Key plant pests (diseases, insects, nematodes, weeds, etc.) currently not controlled effectively.
2. Any new or developing plant pests that will be a future threat to the production of lucerne seed.
3. Key pesticides (fungicides, insecticides, nematicides, herbicides, etc.) required to control these plant pests.

From the lucerne seed industry information provided, five key pest management 'gaps' were identified, but the information was incomplete on four projects and postponed until 2017.

One project was prioritised - the control of various aphid species [Bluegreen aphid (*Acyrtosiphon kondoi*), Cowpea aphid (*Aphis craccivora*), Pea aphid (*Acyrtosiphon pisum*), Spotted alfalfa aphid (*Therioaphis trifolii*) and Green mirids (*Creontiades dilutus*). The insecticide proposed was Transform[®] Insecticide (sulfoxaflor) by Dow Agrosiences Australia Ltd.

This project was supported by Dow for registration at the 2016 AVCF. Following the AVCF, AgAware on behalf of RIRDC and the lucerne seed industry submitted a grant application to generate crop safety/efficacy and residue data to support the registration of this use. The project was approved by the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources in late December 2016.

The protocols to conduct these trials are currently being reviewed by Dow and will be commissioned in the next few months. Trials are planned to start by October 2017 and be finalised by August 2018 with the registration package submitted to APVMA by December 2018. Registration is expected by November 2019.



The 2017 AVCF is scheduled for July 2017. The priorities provided by the lucerne seed industry for this round of discussions are:

1. Heliothis & green mirids / Avatar eVo (indoxacarb)
2. Heliothis & green mirids / Sero-X (Clintoria ternatea extract)
3. Heliothis, thrips, green mirids & two-spotted mite / Proclaim (emamectin benzoate)
4. Weed desiccation / Spray.Seed (diquat + paraquat)
Broadleaf weeds / carfentrazone-ethyl

We will know the level of support for these projects by August 2017.

For further information on this project and the AgVet Collaborative Forum, please contact Duncan Farquhar (0429 495 499) of RIRDC or Peter Dal Santo (0407 393 397) of AgAware Consulting.

Redlegged earth mite insecticide resistance discovery *continued*

By Dr James Maino, cesar Australia

RLEM is a threat to the profitability of a range of Australian crops and pastures, with canola, lupins and legume seedlings the most susceptible to attack. Mite feeding can lead to distortion or shrivelling of leaves and affected seedlings may die at emergence when mite populations are high. RLEM are most active from autumn to late spring. Infestations are commonly controlled using seed treatments, or foliar applications of synthetic pyrethroid and organophosphate insecticides.

Dr Umina says the discovery of resistance in samples collected from SA in 2016 means growers and advisers will need to reconsider their RLEM strategies, requiring a focus on ensuring insecticide applications are used judiciously against this pest as part of an integrated approach to control.

To guide growers and their advisers in their efforts to control RLEM and reduce the risk of resistance occurring, a Resistance Management Strategy (RMS) for South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria and southern New Wales has been developed (in addition to a separate strategy for WA).

The [RMS for the Redlegged Earth Mites in Australian Grains and Pastures](#), developed through the National Insecticide Resistance Management (NIRM) working group and endorsed by CropLife Australia, has been published by the GRDC and is available for viewing and downloading at <https://grdc.com.au/FS-RLEM-Resistance-strategy-South> or at <http://ipmguidelinesforgrains.com.au>.

The strategy's key recommendations include not using the same chemical groups across successive spray windows (on multiple generations of mites) and reserving co-formulations (or chemical mixtures) for situations where damaging levels of pests are present and a single active ingredient is unlikely to provide adequate control, according to Dr Umina.

"The most important message is this: only use chemicals when needed, and if they are required, rotate between different groups of chemicals," he says.

Other recommendations in the RMS, as part of an overall integrated pest management (IPM) approach include: Growers are again this year being encouraged to use a RLEM insecticide resistance testing service, available at no extra cost to growers through a national GRDC-funded project led by the University of Melbourne, in collaboration with **cesar**, the Department of Agriculture and Food Western Australia and CSIRO.

Dr James Maino, a **cesar** researcher, is urging growers to pay close attention to RLEM populations sprayed with insecticide so that any potential resistance can be detected early before developing into a more serious issue.

"If growers notice poor efficacy from spraying or experience chemical control failures over autumn and winter, we want to know about it," Dr Maino says.

Growers and advisers suspecting chemical resistance in RLEM should contact Dr Maino on 03 9349 4723. Samples will then be collected from the property and follow-up advice as to the status of resistance will be provided.

COMING EVENTS

- July**
- 3 - 5 Grain Growers Annual Innovation Generation Conference, Adelaide - Samantha Adams 02 9286 2000
 - 6 GRDC Regional Cropping Solutions Network Local Forum, Lucindale - Jen Lillicrapp 0427 647 461

- August**
- 1 - 3 Australian Grains Industry Conference, Melbourne - AGIC 02 9427 6999
 - 11 Growing SA 2017 Conference & AGM's, Hahndorf - Ag Communicators 08 8332 3277
 - 22 GRDC Research Update, Bordertown - ORM Communications 03 5441 6176

- October**
- 7 Keith and Tintinara District Show





Retail fertiliser prices turn higher – but the cycle is nearing a peak

By Michael Harvey, Rabobank senior analyst

Australia's import program for fertilisers is well underway, with supply chains embarking on inventory builds to cater for the winter cropping season. On average, Australia imports 50 per cent of its import requirements between March and June, emphasising the importance this trading cycle plays in setting farmgate prices for our peak application period.

Each year Australia consumes around six million tonnes of fertiliser, of which 80 per cent is imported product – meaning farmgate prices are closely aligned to global forces. Since 2010, local buyers have enjoyed a period of low farmgate fertiliser prices because of a prolonged period of weak global fertiliser markets. Lower retail pricing for fertiliser was a small piece in the puzzle in helping Australia achieve high yields and deliver a bumper wheat crop in the most recent harvest.

During this period of lower prices, global markets remain oversupplied given sluggish nutrient demand in key import markets and increasing manufacturing capacity additions – while falling raw material costs (coal and gas) have reduced the cost of production.

However, global fertiliser prices have been quite volatile in recent months and generally trading at higher levels compared to the same period last year. The minor rally has been caused by a spike in raw material costs combining with a withdrawal of Chinese exports and controlled production from manufacturers, bringing markets into better balance. The repercussions have meant local retail prices have increased to reflect higher global prices.

However, Rabobank believes weak fundamentals will persist for most of 2017 which will keep a lid on price rises in the current cycle and help ensure global prices remain below long-term averages. This is a silver lining for Australian crop farmers who are still confronting low commodity prices through much of 2017.

What this means is that as Australian farmers prepare for next season, budgets for nutrients will need to be revisited to incorporate a lift in input costs. However, attentive nutrient management and application should still deliver a return on the investment.

Looking further afield, global fertiliser prices will come under downward pressure in the second half of 2017. The timing will be critical, as this may 'arrive' after Australia's main import program. Also movements in our currency will impact local retail prices. While the Australian dollar continues to hover around US75c, Rabobank is forecasting it to drift lower to US72c through 2017, which would put some heat in local prices.

The main driver of a likely drop in fertiliser prices will be a slowdown in global demand once the northern hemisphere application season ends. Also, new capacity additions coming online will keep markets well supplied. Nevertheless, there is potential for retail prices to soften for delayed applications later in 2017.

Longer-term, fertiliser prices are expected to remain below historical averages with structural shifts across the global market forecast to keep markets well balanced. This is a good thing for Australian crop farmers going forward.



Source: CRU, Rabobank 2017

To find out about more about research from RaboResearch Food & Agribusiness, contact Sarah Martin, Rabobank senior manager Mount Gambier on 0429 101 840.

What looked like being a reasonable lucerne harvest a couple of months ago has turned out to be quite the opposite. Yields on average are down 40-50% on expectation across the industry following a summer of above average rainfall and the cooler conditions associated.

Recent demand has certainly increased as news of the poor harvest has filtered through to buyers of Australian seeds. Saudi Arabia is ordering more seed than expected and whilst the indications remain that this country will reduce its availability of water for lucerne projects going forward, the reduction may be a little slower than forecast.

International markets that Heritage Seeds support with its Proprietary portfolio continue to increase as demand for superior varieties with the ability to produce high fodder yields and greater persistence grows. Our sales and business development staff have recently completed a lengthy trip to the MENA region which uncovered some new and exciting opportunities for our company and in-turn our seed grower base.

Very soon we will sow our new Lucerne Trial located in the heartland of seed production between Keith and Bordertown. This trial will focus on management practices targeted at maximizing seed yield potential whilst also showcasing the performance of our portfolio of varieties, including new releases from our breeding program.

We are always on the lookout for new planting opportunities, whilst if you wish to discuss your public varieties options for sales, please contact your Heritage Seeds representatives on the numbers listed below.

Nathan Smith, Lucerne Production Manager - 0408 655 220

Daryl Turner, National Production Manager - 0418 191 060

Tom Botterill, Procurement "Publics" M/ger - 0439 384 375

Craig Myall, International Business Manager - 0407 620 580



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Winter Hay Market Report and Outlook

By The Australian Fodder Industry Association

Throughout the summer period we saw a particularly slow hay market around the country. Last year's bumper crops throughout Victoria, South Australia, Southern NSW and Western Australia had created an oversupply of feed and clogged the market. Everyone from occasional hay growers or dairy farmers to large scale hay producers experienced the boost in production. Fast forward to autumn and good supplies remain in sheds across the southern regions. A strong autumn break added to the lack of urgency to buy with most of the south enjoying a return to plentiful pasture.

In the north, supplies are much thinner and fodder is subsequently more expensive. Large volumes of feed are being transported from the seemingly endless supply in southern states with cost the only deterrent for farmers. Hay quality continues to be an issue around the nation. Sporadic but significant rainfall was an issue during harvest and with the greater amount of hay in paddocks; a lot has been damaged by weather in the past few months. Hay traders don't expect any significant change to hay prices for some time now until growers try to offload poorer quality feed to break even financially or make room in sheds for later this year.

- Good volumes of fodder are available in Central West NSW, the Goulburn Valley, and Southeast and Central South Australia.

- Tight cash flow from dairy farmers continues to have an impact on the amount of hay purchased around the country. Many dairy farmers have succeeded in covering the majority of their feed requirements on farm this year to cut costs.
- Any hay in southern region which has not been stored adequately will be badly weather damaged. Reports indicate both the top and bottom bales will most likely be useless.
- For the most part, hay prices remain well back from previous years. This is both a result of the boost in hay available and the decline in quality.
- Southern Tasmania has experienced a poor autumn break and demand for fodder is slowly building. Comments suggest the northwest should be able to compensate for this however, showing a strong start to the season.
- Western Australia is having a mixed start to the season. Some parts of the state have consistently missed out on rainfall while others have been hit by floods. Generally speaking the quality of last year's fodder in sheds rivals that of eastern states for quality. There is also a lot of frosted and rain damaged feed available.
- The best insurance in buying fodder in the current market is to get a feed test.



Anthony Quilter - Production and Procurement Coordinator

This season has certainly provided us with some challenging circumstances. The wet spring hindered the timing of our hay cuts, and a full moisture profile and indifferent summertime weather conditions made for challenging times to set crops up for pollination. An extended flowering period and chasing the 'last few pods' allowed time for some weeds such as Fat Hen, Setaria and Panic to take hold. The outcome for many growers was yields close to half last year's results, and an increase in tests showing weed lists.

Much of temperate eastern Australia has enjoyed the best autumn in years, and PGW Seeds saw strong domestic demand for all proprietaries, and common lucernes of low to mid dormancy. This drew our stocks down prior to new crop becoming available. Hunterfield, Hallmark, Aurora, Sequel and similar types fill an important position in this pastoral, wheat-sheep zone and demand currently is good. If you have any of these types, please contact PGW Seeds in Keith for a price.

PGW Seeds has an excellent portfolio of proprietary lucernes that supply the Australian, New Zealand and South American markets. We have seen consistent increase in demand year on year, and this has led to another busy contracting period. We have contracted approximately 2000ha of proprietary lucernes and almost 1400ha annual clovers this autumn. If you have area available for certified lucerne production, please contact PGW Seeds in Keith for an option.

We are currently awaiting the final results from our seed yield trial that was harvested in April. The early results are indicating some of the varieties that are still under code will be highly suited for seed production.

Greg Excell – Keith Site Manager

Even though yields were down from previous years, the Keith site has continued to increase its intake of lucerne. With new equipment and experienced staff, our seed cleaning season has run smoothly and we have been able to process all lucerne varieties in a good time frame.

Wild Turnip was prominent due to the summer rainfall; however, our spiral separators were able to remove these weed seeds successfully. As in previous years, other weeds featured but were easily managed due to the quality of our equipment.

Our site has attracted many new clients, including other companies who have recently used our services to process and package lucerne.

Please don't hesitate to contact me for more information on our seed cleaning services.

Daniel Steadman - International Trading Manager

I recently attended the ISF World Seed Congress in Budapest, Hungary, along with PGW Trading Managers from South America and New Zealand. We met with industry leaders which has resulted in a good amount of enquiries for Australian products and a positive outlook on future sales.

There are mixed requirements for high dormancy lucerne in Argentina with some carryover stocks of last year and a lot of area still underwater from heavy rains.

We also spoke about new markets opening in Iran where recent trade sanctions have been lifted allowing more trade from Australia.

Our team met with our European listing agents to register future proprietary varieties that will come into production in the coming years.

While travelling, I also met with many loyal clients in Europe which has resulted in some immediate and forward sales for PGG Wrightson Seeds.

I had a number of meetings in the Middle East to visit our existing customers who buy and market our varieties in that region. With the continued uncertainty about Saudi production, the surrounding countries are positioning themselves to produce this hay with our varieties.

Seed Services Australia is turning 100

by Dan Casement, Executive Director Rural Solutions SA - PIRSA

Seed Services Australia is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year - and it has a lot to celebrate.

Since the Government of South Australia officially started providing a seed testing service in 1917, it has witnessed, led and supported the development of the state's seed industry, which is now the largest in volume and most diverse in the nation in terms of the number and range of species grown.

As part of Primary Industries and Regions SA, Seed Services Australia now plays a critical role in the department's chief aim to assist primary industries and regions to grow, innovate and maximise their economic growth potential.

It does this by delivering a wide range of analytical and seed identity quality assurance programs to the Australian seed industry and by meeting its core charter of enabling its customers to meet international and domestic standards for the sale of sowing seed of new and existing seed varieties.



Seed Services analysts Aaron Keane and Marc Wilmshurst.

Today, more than 10,000 seed samples every year, from across Australia, are sent to Seed Services Australia for testing, mainly for purity and germination analysis.

Its team of experienced seed analysts and field inspectors inspect more than 35,000 ha of planted seed crops annually across southern and eastern Australia, including Tasmania, as part of its national seed certification and SureSeed programs.

In particular, Seed Services Australia inspects, certifies and tests around 85% of Australia's most valuable seed crop –



A Lucerne Australia visit to Seed Services, a few years ago

Lucerne.

This year, the team will be celebrating its 100th anniversary at a number of industry events. On July 7, invited clients and industry supporters with former and current staff and PIRSA executive will come together at its Waite Campus laboratory in Adelaide, for an anniversary lunch and celebration.

Then in the week commencing 21 August, Seed Services Australia will acknowledge its 100 year anniversary, as the Gold Sponsor of the four day Australian Seed Federation conference being held in Adelaide.

As well as attending the conference, Seed Services Australia will host a lunch and tour of its world-class laboratories at the Waite Campus on the Monday of the conference and conduct a seed lot sampling training course for interested delegates on the Tuesday.

Seed Services Australia's involvement in these activities is a great way to demonstrate the team and PIRSA's commitment to the local and wider Australian seed industry.

A range of media features and stories are also being arranged, to help share some of the unique and long lasting relationships with clients and industry.

It's a big year for Seed Services Australia and we wish to thank you for your support over this time and we look forward to working with Lucerne Australia and its membership for many more years to come.

I am writing this in an hotel room in France while exploring new marketing opportunities in the EU region. I've also just attended the International Seed Federation (ISF) Convention in Budapest, Hungary, where there were more than 1,600 seed industry delegates from all over the world. As I may have mentioned previously, next year ISF will be hosted in Brisbane by the Australian seed industry. It's expected that over 1,200 delegates will attend ISF 2018, which will be during first week of June. This presents an opportunity for us to invite our international partners and customers to showcase our S&W group of companies' R&D and production activities in both South Australia and Queensland.



ISF traditional flag handover from the Hungarians to the Australian delegation

As most of us know, this year's cooler and wetter climatic conditions resulted in an overall poor seed set with suppressed pollinator activity. The delayed window for seed harvesting, specifically on irrigated crops likewise hindered good solid seed yields as experienced over the last few years. These factors have all contributed to what I would describe as an unfortunate result for irrigated crops. Some year on year comparisons on certain fields have seen a reduction in delivered weight, ranging between 40-60%.

On the other hand, some dryland paddocks have likely given rise to some of the best yields this year, after many years of very dry conditions during the spring and summer months.

There are few lucerne seed deliveries left and cleaning is in full swing. Approximately 50% of our delivered crop has been cleaned. We anticipate the overall average cleanouts for this year's crop to be 7-8% larger than the long-term average of 20%. Consequently, this year overall lucerne seed harvest is expected to be reduced by a minimum of 40-45%.

To date we have seen some demand for seed orders from our trusted partners and customers in the MENA region however others are showing reluctance to commit to purchases at this time. The uncertainty created around the reported pasture phase-out policy in Saudi Arabia has unquestionably impacted on the overall strong demand we have witnessed during the past few years. Correspondingly amidst a year of very tight supplies, the decrease in demand has seen international prices for certified seed sourced from Australia retreat from last year's highs. For our other main markets the picture is still evolving. However, I expect the demand to be slightly higher when compared to the last few years. This should hopefully become more evident over the next three to four months.

I thank you for your continued support.

Should you wish to discuss any of this further, please feel free to contact me on my mobile: 0419 983 984



One of 6 lucerne hay processing facilities in France, drawing from 27,000ha of hay production to supply a growing demand in high quality protein feed for livestock and poultry

Tatiara Seeds Report

By Graham Ramsdale, Proprietor, Ph: 08 8752 0054

What a difference seasonal conditions make to lucerne seed production. Each year suits a different crop and this year it wasn't the turn of irrigated lucerne seed. Most growers who had dryland lucerne for seed were very happy with their yields; some of the best for many years or maybe the best ever. Most growers with irrigated lucerne were extremely disappointed and had between a 30% and 50% yield compared with the last couple of years. Some growers could see their yields were going to be so terrible that they put sheep on the crop.

From a seed processing perspective, there were many more small lots delivered, reflecting the areas of dryland harvested, but also many lots of irrigated were small (under 5 tonnes) because the season didn't suit. When deliveries were made using the grower's sheep feeder, the yields really weren't good.



Dock is very difficult to clean out, as the size is similar to lucerne. After normal cleaning, velvet rollers are used to remove the dock.

Fat hen, wireweed, dock, oxtongue, lovegrass, pigweed and lesser loosestrife were prevalent. I guess the cool wet spring really suited their growing conditions.

One harvest sample we analysed had 333,200 fat hen, 121,400 lovegrass and 64,200 wireweed per kg. Another had 10,000 dock and 76,500 wireweed per kg. The rest of the world doesn't really care about the type of season we get as long as the seed they purchase is almost perfect in all respects. Each seed company has slightly different criteria for their crops, but in general we must aim for 99.9% purity and 85% germination, including hard seeds. There must be a maximum of 60 seeds per kg of fat hen and wireweed; and nil dock, sorrel, lovegrass, panic grass, wild turnip, melilotus or spear thistle.

Those growers using the kit to test for header damage are mostly coming up with very low abnormalities. Not everyone is using that kit. We are coming across some lots with quite high abnormalities (15-22%) in our precleaning germination test. Usually these have lots of inert matter and decoated and broken seed in excess of 0.1%.

Processing losses so far have varied between a low of 7% and a high of 90%. Compared to the 2016 season the demand for seed to be treated and into shipping containers before the end of the financial year is way down, suggesting there is ample lucerne seed in the world at the moment.

Keep this date free – July 26th – Keith

This presentation afternoon will cover two topics:

- 1. The final results of the five year fertilizer trial will be presented by Dr Belinda Rawnsley, AgXtra.**
- 2. A demonstration of a new and easy to use farm safety program from Safe Ag Systems.**

Developed to support compliance with Australian model WHS laws, Safe Ag Systems can be customised to suit any agribusiness, and negates the need to spend thousands on engaging a consultant to develop a static, paper-based WHS Manual... more likely to collect office dust than to add any value to your business. Active use of the Safe Ag Systems program is guaranteed to reduce your exposure to the likelihood of incurring a hefty fine... or worse, a work-related fatality. Is your farm or business compliant? Come and find out from people who have a farming business themselves. More information will be circulated closer to the date - but diarise the date now.

LUCERNE EXPORT STATISTICS from AUSTRALIA -January 2012 to March 2017

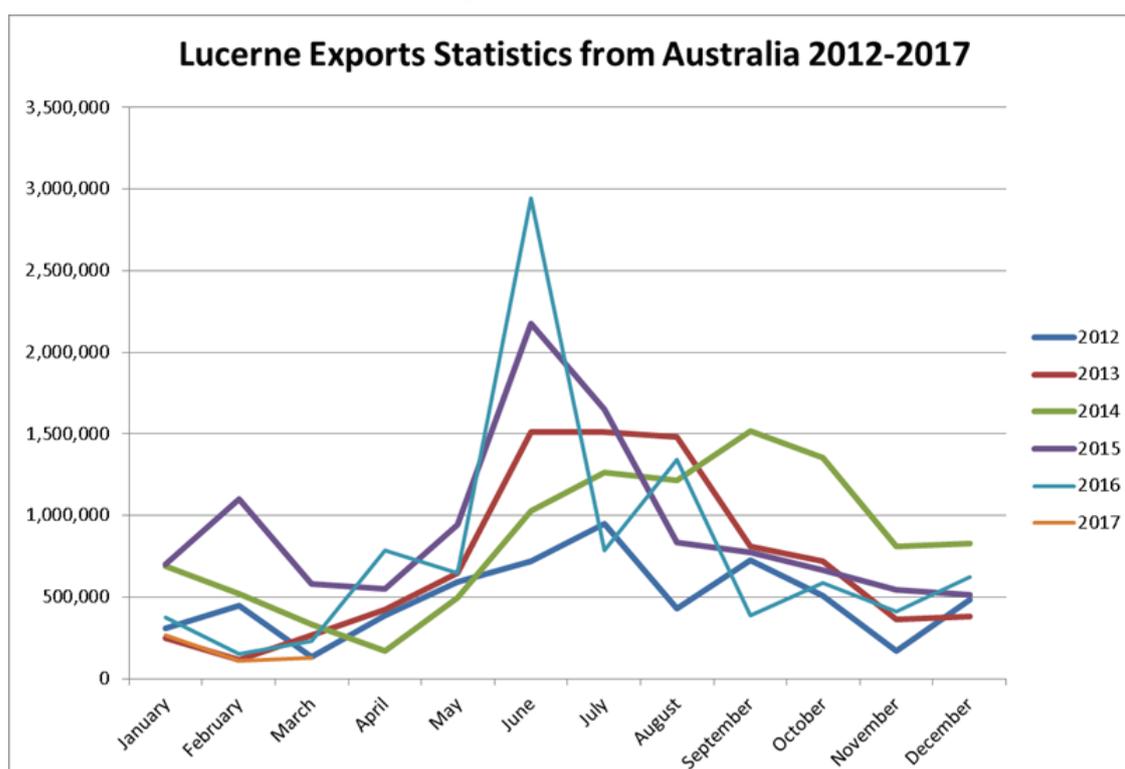
Courtesy of Teague Australia



Quantities below are in kg

Month	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Year to date Difference 2016 & 2017
January	310,144	245,741	687,172	698,895	374,150	266,596	-107,554
February	445,793	118,025	518,553	1,099,252	148,919	108,988	-39,931
March	130,625	269,091	334,033	582,929	227,050	127,000	-100,050
April	385,262	424,057	171,816	549,340	784,031		
May	594,069	647,509	495,472	940,000	644,704		
June	721,122	1,509,605	1,029,000	2,176,805	2,942,685		
July	951,685	1,510,278	1,260,782	1,649,080	786,450		
August	430,924	1,482,357	1,217,121	834,178	1,339,684		
September	726,310	811,667	1,516,965	770,857	388,207		
October	509,447	719,882	1,356,922	667,503	588,199		
November	169,450	363,877	810,704	543,246	409,700		
December	483,832	379,122	829,293	511,127	623,560		
Total	5,858,663	8,481,211	10,227,833	11,023,212	9,257,339		

This summary was produced using data supplied by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.



We thank Teague Australia, an associate member of Lucerne Australia, for supplying these figures.

While other regions in the state are struggling, the SE region of South Australia has seen one of the best starts to a season in short term memory with most areas well ahead of average rainfall figures for the first 5 months of the year.

Unfortunately, some of this rain occurred prior to the completion of the lucerne seed harvest particularly in irrigated crops, where there was close to 30-40% of harvest left to complete.

This weather damage increased clean outs and caused pod splitting which further exacerbated already below average yields due to cool conditions over summer. The subsequent delays in harvest and poorer yields combined with early rain through the Southeast and eastern states has created some delays in getting seed to market in a timely manner and subsequently saw a rally in price for certified public varieties. The uncertified market has remained relatively flat due to large areas of dryland with probably the largest price differential I have seen for a number of years.

The early rainfall and mild conditions through the SE has demonstrated why lucerne is the “king of fodders” with green paddocks throughout the region and many producers having green feed through the whole summer. The benefits of lucerne as a pasture forage species can’t be underestimated with strong livestock prices and wool making a comeback. This early rainfall will be particularly beneficial for allowing growers to establish lucerne early to create strong stands by spring as seasonal forecasts do not seem to reflect the current conditions.

As far as pests go earth mite numbers have exploded in the

last few weeks and should be treated to allow young pasture species to establish. Be aware that resistance to synthetic pyrethroids and organophosphate insecticides has been detected in the state. If a failure occurs I encourage growers to consult their agronomist and send a sample away for testing.

Snails are also a major issue this year due to wet conditions. Autumn baiting is most effective, but be very vigilant with seedling stands and apply bait immediately after seeding if required and monitor pastures. Snails (particularly conicals) can often do considerable damage to established plants if left unchecked or unnoticed in irrigated stands and dryland pastures.

Mice are also a major problem this year so take note when establishing lucerne, particularly if following a cereal crop from last year and apply bait immediately after seeding. As well as the above issues wet years with high stubble loads seem to bring out a wide range of pests - so be vigilant. These pests include millipedes, earwigs, slugs and slaters which are not easily seen so it pays to look under trash or inspect crops at night with a torch as I find this is the best way to find the pests if issues are occurring.

Remember that lucerne is often a 5 -10 year + crop and any gaps or holes are commented on by neighbours for the lifetime of the crop not to mention the effect of poor establishment on the productivity and life of the stand. Good establishment practices and vigilance are vital for productivity.



It has been a reasonably quiet lucerne seed marketing season this year. The lucerne seed statistics for 2017 back that up with the lowest amount of certified lucerne seed being exported from January to end of March for the past 6 years with only 502,584kg being exported, some 130,273kg below our previous low in 2013. To add to this, Saudi Arabia, our biggest importer of lucerne seed, has only taken 18,000kg from November 2016 to end of March 2017. These numbers aren't great and there are various reasons which could be attributed to them, but put simply it backs up what I have been saying all season. It has been a tough year to move lucerne seed.

In regard to Saudi Arabia and the numbers above, they have still bought lucerne seed this year and when the final export numbers for this season come out later in the year I would expect that their purchases will be down 30-40% on the previous few seasons. The Saudi market is still up in the air, but I still expect them to purchase seed, just nowhere near previous year's levels. One important point to remember, as they reduce their importation of lucerne seed it will affect all lucerne varieties and seed companies, whether they are public or proprietary.

Within the lucerne seed industry there are many variables, but the one thing that has stayed the same this season is that from a marketing point of view, general enquiry for public lucerne seed has been slow. If we compare that to the supply of lucerne seed it is the complete opposite. Earlier in the growing season crops were well set up and yield potential was positive. Fast forward 3-4 months saw the yield potential decreased due to variable weather events and poor pollination. The eventual reality of seed harvested has shown this year's crop to be one of the smaller ones. This isn't great news for lucerne seed growers, but one thing it has done is keep our lucerne seed prices firm for most of the season.

Certified lucerne seed has been the easier to move this season and we have even seen prices rise over the past 3 months. This has been positive news, but in reality, it has been brought about by our poor harvest, meaning there hasn't been the seed to sell this year. As the season went along, yields were in decline which meant supply was tightening. When this news filtered through to our overseas buyers, especially Saudi Arabia, many needed to sure up their position or risk missing out on seed altogether and this is what drove the market. The pleasing thing for our certified lucerne seed is I would again expect we will be in a sold out position going into the new season.

When we look at uncertified lucerne seed it has been a tougher market, but again due to our poor harvest, prices have at least held this season. After the USA trip last year, I anticipated the uncertified market was going to be a tough one and it has proven that way.

We have been able to move a reasonable amount of dormancy 6/7 domestically which has helped, but there has been little enquiry on the export side. Dormancy 8/9 seed isn't one we sell a lot of domestically, but the export markets have been slightly better here, but still below where we would like them.

With the amount of dryland lucerne seed harvested this season and the majority of it uncertified, there is a chance, even after the poor harvest that we could go into next season with some carryover. This is one market I would advise growers to be cautious with, as we are getting closer to the USA harvest and traditionally once they get close to a harvest our export enquiry can drop away. The saying 'A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush' could ring true this season?

As always Naracoorte Seeds are active purchasers of public lucerne seed, so please feel free to give me a call to discuss on 0427 790 655.



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DO YOU KNOW THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Got a question for Lucerne Australia? Contact the Executive Officer or any our Executive Committee Members who will be happy to help.



Bruce Connor, Chairman

Bruce was born on the family dairy farm at Mt Compass. He relocated to a property at Tintinara in the late 1970's to grow out replacement heifers. He and his family now farms beef cattle, cropping, dryland and pivot irrigated lucerne for hay and seed. Contact: 0428 835 310.

Josh Rasheed, Deputy Chairman

Josh was appointed as the Contract Cropping Manager and Pasture Advisor at Naracoorte Seeds in 2011. In his role, lucerne is one of the major crops he is involved with. He was previously a Real Estate Agent at the family Real Estate business in Meningie. Contact: 0427 790 655.



Guy Cunningham, Grower Member

Guy farms with his wife Sarah and family near Willalooka. The business comprises a 300 cow stud beef cattle herd, dryland winter cropping and lucerne production, mainly aimed at seed with some hay sold off farm. Contact: 0429 875 422.

Charlie Hilton, Grower Member

Charlie's family moved to Keith in 1970. Their focus is on hay and seed production, as well as sheep and cattle enterprises. In 2003 he was awarded a Nuffield scholarship to study lucerne seed production. He is a strong believer in the future of lucerne and its benefits. Contact: 0412 668 558.



Scott Campbell, Grower Member

Scott and his wife Sophie Campbell own and manage 4100 hectares at Keith. They are highly focused on dryland and irrigated lucerne production and also run 3500 ewes for prime lamb production and a winter cropping program His family have been involved in the lucerne seed industry for more than 40 years. Contact: 0417 887 562.

Sarah Martin, Associate Member

Sarah is a Senior Rural Manager at Rabobank, responsible for a portfolio of rural clients. She holds a Bachelor of Science (Agriculture) from the University of Adelaide. She resides on a mixed farming operation (lucerne, sheep, cattle and horses) with her family west of Keith. Contact: 0429 101 840.



Simon Allen, Grower Member

Simon is involved for 10 years in a family farming operation based at Keith, which produces irrigated lucerne seed and hay, cereal grain and hay, pulses, oilseeds and a commercial merino flock. Simon attended college, studying rural business management and has previously sat on the executive committee of Lucerne Australia and its variety trials committee. Contact: 0408 893 786

Scott Hutchings, Associate Member

Scott is a senior agronomist with Cox Rural Keith and has worked in the upper south east for 21 years covering pulses, oilseeds and cereals and lucerne for seed, hay and pasture. Scott holds a bachelor of Agricultural Science from Roseworthy Agricultural College. Scott and his wife Cath also run a small prime lamb production and opportunity dryland seed production enterprise. Contact: 0428 551 188.



Jenny Aitken, Executive Officer

Jenny was raised on a grain and contract harvesting enterprise and has a good understanding of rural issues. After spending most of her working life in radio, she also worked for a Senator in Queensland and has a passion for promoting agriculture to the wider community. Contact: 0439 538 332.



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