

## Change in row spacing advocated

A case for wider row spacing to be used when sowing winter pulses, and other crops, has been put by WA agronomist, Wayne Smith.

Speaking at the recent annual conference of the SA No-Till Farmers Association, Mr Smith said “trials and experience” was showing not only yield benefits from this change but also improved weed control through the use of shielded sprayers.

“On wide rows we spray SpraySeed down between the rows without hurting the pulse crop,” Mr Smith said.

“This cannot be done on 7 in. rows. Canola is also looking OK on wider-row spacing – say 50 cm to 60 cm wide at least.”

Mr Smith said that as far as cereal row spacings were concerned the use of narrow rows to increase crop competition with weeds, was being advocated in some quarters.

However, he did not favour it.

“The increased soil disturbance from using narrow rows makes more weeds germinate which means the only way of controlling them in the crop is by herbicide or crop competition,” Mr Smith said.

“But if you use wider rows it makes fewer weeds germinate and trifluralin-type chemicals work better.

“Making weeds germinate is not good as it means you then have to use chemicals to kill them. If weeds don’t germinate that is what we want.

“Go too wide and yes, yield loss becomes too great. We are very comfortable growing wheat and barley at 250 mm to 300 mm row spacing in WA.

“Theoretically 100 mm spacings would be higher yielding in a perfect world but we have weeds, herbicide placement, stubble, tractor pulling power and so on to contend with.

“Going wide to make herbicides work better and weeds germinate less is a good thing. There is a point where yields won’t be lower than those achieved at 100 mm spacing and we think this is around the 250 mm to 300 mm mark.

“I would never go narrow just to smother weeds.”

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