



press clip

## *Windy Station: Sunnies every year for as far as the eye can see*

Sunflowers maintain their honoured place in this summer's crop rotation on Windy Station, west of Quirindi, with around 700 hectares scheduled for a spring planting during September.

The station's cropping manager Peter Winton says "sunnies" are valued on Windy Station because of their:

- flexible sowing and harvesting windows that spread both workload and cash flow,
- ability to reduce compaction on the Liverpool Plains soils, particularly on paddocks that have carried cattle,
- effectiveness as a general disease break in the rotation, and
- gross margins that are competitive with or slightly better than sorghum.

Mr Winton says yield potential – an average 2.6 t/ha in 2007-2008 and 2.8 t/ha last year – is obviously the major reason for planting the variety Ausigold 62 from Nuseed (formerly Lefroy Seeds) for the fifth successive year, but there's also its robust standability, guaranteeing a payable crop even in bad seasons.

"Ausigold's standability is outstanding in all seasons, and you can rely on it to be there for you in bad ones. We had one terribly dry year here and Ausigold 62 still produced a good crop," he says.

"At the same time we won't plant sunflowers without adequate soil moisture – at least 80 cms of it – and we have that here on Windy Station this year, allowing us to start planting in the first week of September."

Owned by the Romani Pastoral Company and under

the overall management of Keith Harris, Windy Station usually crops 10,000 hectares a year, 6000 ha of summer crop – sorghum and sunflowers – and 4000 of wheat, barley, triticale, canola and forage crops in winter.

Depending on rotations, soil moisture, weed populations and planting windows, sunflowers have claimed up to 25 per cent of the summer crop area ever since Mr Winton took over as cropping manager in 2003, and are likely to keep doing so while their performance stacks up.

"You need to be sure sunnies go into clean paddocks that have a good history of weed control, because you will end up with a serious broadleaf weed problem if you don't," Mr Winton says.

"On Windy Station we like to plant our main crop of sunflowers in early spring, which is what we are doing this year, because of the reasonable soil moisture, but there is always the option of a late plant in December, which we might do if we cut back the sorghum area for some reason.

"We had an area of late plant last season and, although all the rain we had then – downpours some of them – practically wrecked our plant population, the yield of Ausigold 62 was not that much less than we got in the early plant.

"We aim for a sunflower plant population of 32,000/ha but a couple of seasons back, because of the weather, we ended up with around 28,000 plants/ha.

"Ausigold 62 compensated for that lower population with bigger plants, with bigger stems."



*Farming Manager Peter Winton on Windy Station*