

Lettuce BMO trials

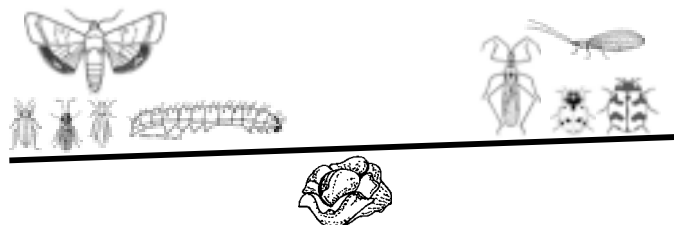
Reports on the lettuce Best Management Options (BMO) trials NSW Agriculture had at Hay and Cowra last spring are available on the internet at: www.agric.nsw.gov.au/reader/veg-lettuce

Printed copies are also available by request.

This series of trials aimed to identify and assess the most cost-effective control options available to growers for insect pests and diseases.

These trials showed:

- Monitoring regularly to a protocol can reduce insecticide applications.
- Monitoring regularly enabled better disease management through early detection.
- The best control option for heliothis in the 2003 spring grown lettuce at Hay and Cowra was the older broad-spectrum insecticides.
- Lettuce crops will tolerate very high levels of leafhopper feeding before economic damage is done.
- Using insecticides that preserved and encouraged beneficial activity cost more.
- In these trials the advantages of preserving beneficial insects was not evident.



The balancing act

Similar BMO trials done in the autumn lettuce

Regional update

New South Wales

Hay

The earlier lettuce crops at Hay were direct seeded in late January. These crops established well in fairly mild temperatures. Lettuces have struggled with the heat wave earlier this month, resulting in some staggered germination and patchy stands. Heliothis grub pressure is high. Sap sucking insects like thrips and jassids are also active in the district.

Central West

'Target' seedlings have been planted since mid January, whilst some growers have started later than previous years. The lettuces have been growing well in the mild January temperatures with little disease pressure. There has been moderate heliothis pressure, with growers using some newer chemistry to avoid resistance.

Queensland

John Duff, QDPI

The recent rains in Stanthorpe have filled up many of the surface storages on grower properties and as such there has been an increase in plantings in this region. Insect pressure has been fairly low. Heliothis is the only insect of note. Growers in the Lockyer Valley haven't started planting yet and unless we get large quantities of rain that help to fill the underground water sources many growers will be cutting back on what they normally grow. Some growers will also be moving over to trickle irrigation to help prolong what water they currently have below ground.

Victoria

Slobodan Vujovic, DPI Knoxfield

In the Melbourne metropolitan growing regions (Cranbourne and Werribee South) insect

Water situation in Werribee

The Werribee Irrigation District (WID) is finishing the season earlier than last year, and with less than a third of its usual land down to lettuce. Although the market is strong for Brassicas this is not the reason behind the drop off in production.

It is no secret that the Werribee Irrigation System has suffered due to the drought. The previous summer saw the system capped at 100% water allocation, a severe blow to producers, many usually using over 160% in normal years. Southern Rural Water (SRW) having uncertainty of supply opened this season with 5%, and increased the allocation when inflows allowed. Water allocation is currently at 40%.

In November/December many growers were already facing a critical shortage of water, and with the total ban on groundwater imposed in mid November, growers sought urgent meetings with Government to look at alternative water supply options.

The resulting aid package that was negotiated with the CCC and the State Government did not suit all irrigators in the district, and left them with a difficult choice. The package that went out to customers provided three options with access to emergency potable water from Thomson Dam;

- Remain relying on the current supply agreements, but have access to the potable water at the commercial price of \$1305/ML.
- Sign up for an equivalent volume of reclaimed water to existing river water right, but relinquish river sales water after five years. The value of the river sales was offset against the commercial price of the potable water enabling growers to access potable water at \$126.50/ML.
- Option 2, plus the option to sign up for an additional reclaimed water volume.

According to the EPA and DHS the reclaimed water will be of a quality that makes it "fit for use". This means that current vegetable crops grown in WID will be able to continue to be grown by irrigators using reclaimed water.

Currently about 75% of the growers in WID have signed up for the reclaimed water options. However, the late timing of the final agreements, and the "trickle" increases in the water allocation early in the season have caused uncertainty. Therefore many cautious growers have reduced the land commitment to lettuce, many opting for the more hardy Brassicas, or fallow.

In spite of concerns about winter and spring inflows to the reservoir system, those growers that have agreed to use reclaimed water next season can enjoy a little more security.



Lettuce conference

Accommodation Scarce

3rd Australian Lettuce Industry Conference

The 3rd Australian Lettuce Industry Conference will take place at Werribee, Victoria from the 3rd-5th May 2005, overlapping with the biennial Werribee Expo (5th & 6th May). Registration and a welcome reception will be held on the 3rd, a full day of activities are planned for the 4th and 5th. There will be some time on the 5th to attend the Expo and combined conference/Expo dinner is planned for the night of the 5th.

Potential guest speakers include Rudolf Behr, the largest Lettuce producer in Europe, and Murray McPhail from Leaderbrand New Zealand. Both of these growers are internationally recognised for the quality and diversity of their products, and for their business and marketing success.

Given a major event at the National Equestrian Centre in Werribee will be competing for local motels on the same dates as our conference. Our advice is to **book early!** See local options below:

LOCAL ACCOMMODATION OPTIONS

Note. Accommodation prices may vary:

Best Western Werribee Motor Lodge	
ph 03 9741 9944 fax 9742 4709	25 rooms \$105/night
Monte Villa Motor Inn	
ph 03 9748 7700 fax 9748 7451	37 rooms \$105/night
Werribee Park Motor Inn	
ph 03 9741 7222 fax 9741 8553	20 rooms \$85/night
Mansion Hotel	
ph 03 9731 4000 fax 9731 4001	to be confirmed
Quest Inn Apartments	
ph 03 9393 5300	40 rooms \$200/night
Wattle Grove B & B, Werribee	
Ph & fax 03 9741 299	23 rooms \$120/night
Carter Cottage B & B, Werribee	
ph 03 9742 3426 fax 9741 97156	rooms \$110/night

For further information contact: Andrew Creek, NSW Agriculture, Ph (02) 6951 2653, Fax (02) 6951 2692
or - Slobodan Vujovic, DPI Knoxfield, Ph (03) 9210 9222, Fax (03) 9800 3521
www.agric.nsw.gov.au/reader/veg-lettuce or www.nre.vic.gov.au/agvic/ihd/projects/lettuce.htm