

RISKWI\$E - Making the Tough Calls in 2025: A farmer's perspective

NATHAN CROUCH on thinking and decisions for 2025 season – written 5 June 2025

If we were to get a rain event, we're not going to wait for weeks for the grasses to get big enough to kill, so there's no point waiting for a rain event to dry sow.

If the season does come in wet, we can't get across the land, and we're sowing into July, that would be very frustrating. We generally get a better germination, and probably a better job sowing dry, then we would if we were in a panic trying to sow it if it came in very wet.

For seeding this year, we asked ourselves the questions to help make decisions. We started early May and just cruised along finishing 5 June.

In October, November and December 2024, we had quite a bit of rain through the lower areas of Wandearah, 60-100 mm, so we are fortunate in 2025 to have some subsoil moisture.

Being an early finishing area, we didn't want to be sowing too far into June. However, we still wanted to be finished early June, so if we did get rain the crops would be up as early as possible.

We can't sow the cropping program in only a few days. We asked ourselves: would we be happy to have nothing sown if we were to have an isolated thunderstorm go through on a 1-5 mm forecast? A prime example this year being through the area of Bute and Wokurna, where they received 25-30 mm in a skinny thunderstorm.

Most years in the lighter soil types, especially our sands, we can get a crop germinated on 8-10 mm. However, we can't get a crop germinated if we sow *after* an 8-10 mm rainfall. Nine out of ten years early dry sown crops have yielded the highest out of any crops. The one year that the early sown crops aren't sown dry, they are usually never far behind the later sown crops.

We were always going to sow the crops. So why not sow them dry? There's been a lot of dry sowing done in previous years, which gave us confidence to dry sow the cropping program, knowing the seed can sit in dry soil for a very long time.

We don't tend to look too hard at the long-range forecast to make seeding decisions. I like to say we budget for a drought, but we don't plan for a drought. For drought budgeting, we hold back on things like for example machinery purchases, new cars and holidays. But for the planning we don't cut back on our chemical and fertiliser as those things can have a huge impact on our potential at the end of the year. Fertiliser rates in 2025 may have decreased slightly, but in general not much has changed compared to any other year. Keeping in mind, recent seasons on the western side of the Upper North region have not been as severely drought impacted as other areas of the Upper North.

ANDREW KITTO on the thought process for season 2025 - written 1 June 2025

We plan to start seeding this week, and have revised our original planting strategy, planned fertiliser rates and blends, and crop types. As of 1 June, we haven't planted a single grain. We looked at the long-range Bureau of Metrology (BOM) forecast of rainfall and weather which showed lower rainfall and increased temperatures.

We watched the BOM 4-day chart and rainfall forecast, which was showing blocking highs. We used 70 years of our farm data, for rainfall and wheat yield. A gross margin break-even-yield value for this year was used.

Our average break for the season is based on 18 mm over a 2-day period after 1 April. Our growing season rainfall (GSR) used is:

- **Growing season rainfall (GSR) = Total rainfall (1 April to 31 October) – 110 mm** (for evaporation)

The average break of the season is 6 May (day 37).

10 of the last 70 years

In 10 of the last 70 years, the average break of the season has been after 6 June. Of those 10 years, 2 still achieved above average GSR (the highest GSR was 14 mm above the yearly average).

The two highest GSRs were 1993 and 2005. Both years came after a wetter than average year before, and both had wet kind springs. The 1993 year, with a 9 June break, had 3 rains adding up to a total of 25 mm in May.

Of those in the last 70 years previously mentioned, 2021 was the highest yielding year with 24.4 kg/mm GSR. This higher value was the result of a wet (62 mm) period prior to summer, with stored subsoil moisture. All crops were dry sown prior to the break on 8 June of 21mm. GSR ended up being below average though.

Our highest yielding year of the 70 was 2016 with an 8 May break. Yield was 16.9 kg/mm GSR (had 100mm over summer prior).

Our lowest yielding year of the 70 was 2024 where the break wasn't until 15 October. Yield was 111kg/mm GSR (had 90 mm over summer prior).

2025

Our 2025 rainfall to date is 18.5 mm with the highest day being 7 mm. Our potential highest yield, with sowing after 1 June 2025 is 3.5 t.

Based on average GSR to come from now 1 June 2025 is:
(253 mm – 110 mm) = (143 mm x 24.4 kg/mm) (highest yielding late year).

Our average yield sowing after 1 June 2025 is 2 t based on the last 70 years.