

AgForce Grains Ltd.

A commodity council of AgForce Queensland ABN: 212 416 791 71



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EMS/BMP systems for the grain growers of Queensland.

Introduction:

In recent times there has been a push for rural industries to develop and implement Environmental Management Systems (EMS) to ensure the farmers of Queensland are not having an adverse impact on the environment. There have been many attempts across the country to provide an EMS for the grains industry with little success, especially on a broad scale.

Currently there are no market forces to make grain growers more open to adoption of these systems. This is probably the biggest barrier to adoption of EMS. Much work has been done on these systems, but due to a lack of incentive there has been no broad scale up-take.

Further, some systems that have been developed have been too complex and been too process driven. What is needed is a package that offers real value to grain growers that can be closely linked with on ground improvement.

In the past 30 years the uptake of technology and sustainable practices has possibly been higher in the grains industry than in any other agricultural industry. With the implementation of minimum till, controlled traffic farming and opportunity cropping among other things, the grains industry has reduced its effects on the environment significantly. The driver for this has primarily been increased profitability and is a good example of how practice changes needs to offer real value to grain growers.

Information and figures showing the uptake of sustainable practices however, are not readily available and as such, much of this good work is going unnoticed.

It is the position of AgForce that an EMS system should be available to those producers who want to implement it on their farms. However this is not going to reach the majority of growers. This is where a system of Best Practices (current recommended practice or current recommended agricultural practice) is needed that is simple to use and provides for good reporting of the implementation of sustainable practices already in place and those that are being more widely accepted.

The Current Environment:

Recently a project was developed to provide cross industry linkages for the development of EMS's in primary production. This project is being administered by the Regional Groups Collective of Queensland and is a Natural Heritage Trust funded project. AgForce Grains was included in the application for funding and was successful in being one of the biggest receivers of funding.

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This has spurred the grains industry on in its efforts and AgForce Grains is now leading the push to ensure that the final product is user friendly and does not produce duplication of previous work undertaken in this area.

The 3 Tiered Approach:

There are a number of projects being undertaken to develop a, for want of a better acronym, BMP in the grains industry and this allows us to be flexible in approach and delivery.

As mentioned earlier it is the position of AgForce Grains that a full EMS be available to grain producers of Queensland and there are a number of these already available and tailored to the needs of the Northern Grains Region. This will be the top tier and will provide for those who wish to undertake the best reporting system available.

Secondly the Grains Council of Australia is undertaking a project using third party information, mostly from the agricultural census data to provide information on trends in improvement and broad environmental impact reduction in the grains industry over the past 20 odd years. This project will provide a benchmark for producers in their area to see how their production practices measure up against the rest, but also provide some of the data needed to silence the environmental movement.

The third tier is the project being undertaken by the QDPI&F and Fitzroy Basin Association in Central Queensland. This project aims to be a pilot project that develops a manual of current best practices. Using staff from the Sustainable Farming Systems group, Fitzroy Basin Association staff, local consultants, members of groups such as Conservation Farmers Inc. and CTF Solutions, and local grain producers a widely accepted account of what current best practices are can be developed. It is expected that a great deal of input will come from members of the RAC's in the development of this project.

This project will then be slightly adjusted for the rest of the Northern Grains Region having modifications for, Southern Queensland, Northern NSW, Western areas to allow for slight changes in practice and intensity in these various parts.

In all of this the AgForce Grains EMS taskforce will oversee developments to ensure the final product is user friendly and widely accepted.

Time Frame:

The project from the Regional Groups Collective will have a deadline of June 2007 at the moment, but this may be extended slightly. This means the manual in particular will have to be developed in this time, or at least be ready for extension into other areas other than CQ.

The RGC project also has provisions for alignment with other industries efforts and for the grains industry this means discussions with Cotton Australia and GrowCom in particular.

This is a brief summary of the activities that will be required to produce a user friendly and sound Best Practices Guide for the Northern Grains Region.

For more information please contact Lindsay Krieg at AgForce Grains on 07 32386036 or any of the details on the bottom of the previous page.