

Making hay while sun shines

By Geoff Adams

Clear skies and a warm spring have given northern Victoria good hay making conditions this year.

Despite the demand from drought-affected farmers in NSW and Queensland prices have been reasonably stable, with pasture hay running at about \$160/tonne and lucerne hay about \$300/tonne.

Katandra West hay contractor Stephen Black was baling oaten hay at Bunbartha when COUNTRY NEWS caught up to him last week.

He was seeing good yields on dry and irrigated paddocks following a run of clear weather.

"Just about every paddock is exceeding expectations," he said.

"It's been a bit slow to cure in some places because it hasn't been stinking hot like some years.

"I see some people baling green and there's no excuse for that because we haven't had any rain and you just need to be patient and let it cure."

He's been baling for about two months and expects hay cutting on dry paddocks to cease within about a week.

"I think I've got about 10 days of baling ahead, if we don't get any rain."

Outlook

Dairy Australia reports good to better hay-making conditions this season, with some carry-over of 2013 cereal hay in Victoria.

This hay may be a cheaper alternative to higher grade new season cereal hay.

Dairy Australia recom-



On the job . . . Luke Felmingham was baling lucerne and cereal hay for a dairy farm at Katandra last week.

mends buyers have a feed analysis done before purchasing any hay to ensure they know exactly what they are buying.

Invergordon contractor Luke Felmingham has had a busy few months and counts this year as a solid season.

"The weather's been spot-on.

"It's nothing like last year; we had a lot of frosted crops converted to hay."

Although the conditions have been good, Luke believes there is still some strong demand from the north for hay.

"We were cleaned out last year because of the demand for fodder up north. There's little or no carry-over from last year."

A solid season for hay production is expected in the Northern Victoria/Riverina region, according to Ian Wickham from hay certifying and marketing company Feed Central.

"There'll be a good finish compared to areas like western Vic and northern NSW and southern Queensland."

He said lucerne quality was up with good feed tests.

"Cereal hay quality is average to good with feed tests from out of the drier areas looking better."

The company was seeing strong demand from hay exporters across Victoria, however domestic demand for protein hays was also solid.



Busy time . . . Stephen and Brady Black on the job at Bunbartha last week. Stephen has been working some late nights to keep up with the season.



Finished product . . . Luke Felmingham punching out a 700 kg bale.

Latest technology lightens the harvest load

By Cathy Walker

Alex Graham is listening to Gough Whitlam's funeral on the radio in the cab of his MacDon M150 windrower as the "35 foot front" chomps its way through 240 ha of canola just below Mt Major near Dookie.

Such is modern technology that a computer screen to his right plots his every move and can report at the touch of a button how long it will take to complete the paddock, each green line on the screen disappearing when the windrow has been formed.

"These look pretty good I reckon," Mr Graham said, using the more conventional method of looking out the window to check the crop health as row by row he traversed the paddock.

Today he is working on 240 ha of Gem canola, a partnership with

property owners Ian and Lyn MacDonald.

The MacDon was switched on at Mt Major at 10 pm the night before and will go for 24 hours with three operators in eight-hour shifts — the windrower is not in a union and in his defence, Mr Graham said it had Saturday off.

In his day job, Mr Graham is a mixed farmer at nearby Cosgrove, producing wool, fat lambs and pasture crops.

He is anticipating a yield of 2.5 tonnes/ha of oilseeds when harvest comes around in a month or so.

The season, he said, had been "bloody fantastic" and unless unscheduled heavy rain arrives to spoil the party, shaped up as at least as good as last year.



Forward planning . . . A Goldacres sprayer is hooked on behind to spray rye-grass in preparation for next year's crop; the swather front also sprays the chemical on either side of the windrower.



All good . . . A quick break to check the machinery and Alex Graham heads back to the cab.



What's going on . . . The computer screen to the right of Alex Graham in the cab of the MacDon tells him where he's been, where he's going and how long it will take.



Chop, chop . . . View from the cab.