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MEDIA RELEASE

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FARMING WITH A BROWN MANURE CROP ROTATION CAN BE PROFITABLE

The switch from 'traditional' mixed farming into intensive cropping with no livestock, has seen the inclusion of 'brown manure' crops into cropping rotations become more relevant, but making it fit profitably has also sparked a new challenge for growers.

That is where New South Wales farm business consultant Robert Patterson steps in.

The Rural Management Strategies director from Cootamundra, has spent much of the last six years focussing on the agronomics and economics of incorporating brown manure crops into cropping systems.

Mr Patterson will be one of the key presenters at this year's Hart Field Day on Tuesday, September 17, presenting his experience and thoughts within the sessions titled "vetch varieties and brown manure".

Mr Patterson says, to date, the inclusion of a brown manure crop into a rotation has been largely 'ad hoc', and his consultancy has been boking at whether it can fit profitably into a cropping system, while maintaining sound agronomic principles.

Brown manure cropping involves growing a grain legume crop, usually with minimal inputs of fertiliser and chemical, with the aim of achieving maximum dry matter production, before the major target weed species such as annual ryegrass or wild oats have set viable seed.

The grain legume crop is sprayed with a knockdown herbicide such as glyphosate before seed set, to kill both the crop and weeds.

The objective of this practice is to control problem weeds, boost soil nitrogen for future crops, plus conserve soil moisture for the following crop in a low risk manner.

"I have some clients now with 25 per cent of their area in brown manure crops on an on-going basis," Mr Patterson said.

"I've been looking at fine-tuning that cropping system and making sure it stacks up economically for the grower.

"Brown manure crops in South Australia are not new, but I don't think it's been incorporated into a system, it's been a bit ad-hoc and partly used just to finish lambs off."

Mr Patterson said so far his research had shown that a crop sequence of brown manure field peas followed by canola and two wheat crops, can be as profitable at current commodity prices as continuous cropping, or mixed farming involving cropping and Merino sheep

“We’ve also seen that a crop production system involving brown manure field peas, has less production and financial risk compared to continuous cropping, due to lower input and operating costs,” he said.

“And a crop production system involving brown manure field peas, is likely to be more sustainable than continuous cropping and similar to mixed farming, due to less reliance on herbicides for weed control and artificial Nitrogen for crop nutrition, plus the maintenance of higher levels of ground cover.”

To hear more about including brown manure into a cropping system, hear Mr Patterson speak at the Hart Field Day on Tuesday, September 17, at the Hart Field Site, just off the Blyth to Brinkworth road.

For more information about the field day, take a look at the Hart Field Site Group website www.hartfieldsite.org.au or contact Sandy Kimber on 0427 423 154 or email admin@hartfieldsite.org.au.

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Photo caption:

A pulse forage trial at Hart, where New South Wales speaker Rob Patterson will lead some sessions at the Hart Field Day on September 17 on vetch varieties and the economics and agronomics of adding brown manure crops into a cropping system.