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**MEDIA RELEASE**

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## **CROP GROWTH AND TILLERING KEY TO SOIL MOISTURE UTILISATION**

Managing early crop growth and tillering is key to utilising stored water in paddocks, according to University of New England School of Environmental and Rural Science grains production lecturer Neil Fettell.

Dr Fettell will be one of the key presenters at this year's Hart Field Day on Thursday, September 22, where he will share his research findings on this topic.

He said summer weed control and stubble management were important in storing pre-sowing rainfall, however managing growth and tillering so as to not encourage excessive early crop growth would help maintain soil moisture for use later in the growing season.

“There are some factors to consider in managing growth and tillering,” Mr Fettell said.

“The timing of nitrogen application – delaying application until later in the season – can restrict early crop growth and is probably the factor which growers can manipulate.

“Farmers might also consider lower seeding rates, they may pick a variety that doesn't tiller as much, such as Gladius, and not sow as early.”

Hart Field-Site Group trials manager Peter Hooper said soil moisture retention becomes particularly useful at the end of the growing season and current conditions are a reminder of its importance.

“Stored water is really important for yield, but it becomes more important in lower rainfall years,” he said.

“Three weeks ago we had 60 millimetres of moisture in the soil at the Hart site and things were looking really good, but the season has been tracking along below average in terms of rainfall and so if we hadn't had that stored soil moisture the crops wouldn't be looking as good as they are now.

“That stored moisture has been really important this year.”

Neil Fettell will share some of his extensive agronomy knowledge at this year's Hart Field Day, where he hopes to provide an interactive discussion on some of the key factors in managing soil moisture use through the growing season.

As well as almost 40 years experience as a senior research agronomist, Dr Fettell has a farm near Condobolin, New South Wales, where he grows wheat, millet and lucerne under irrigation when water is available. In recent, drier times he has relied on a prime lamb enterprise and grown oats.

Highly regarded in his field, Dr Fettell is also a member of the Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC) southern panel. He has a wealth of experience and the Hart Field-Site Group is excited to have him as one of its presenters at this year's field day.

For more information about the Hart Field Day, take a look at the website [www.hartfieldsite.org.au](http://www.hartfieldsite.org.au) or contact Sandy Kimber on 0427 423 154 or email [admin@hartfieldsite.org.au](mailto:admin@hartfieldsite.org.au).

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