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Crop rotation as important as what you grow each year

When it comes to making cropping decisions, rotation should be up there with crop choices according to Canadian plant pathology researcher Dr Kelly Turkington who will present at the Hart Field Day on September 19.

“My take home message will be for farmers to recognise the inherent riskiness of short rotations, and understand the issues they face so that they can implement the most effective strategies for crop and pest management,” Dr Turkington said.

“I will emphasise the role of rotations, but then outline some implications and options related to disease management when rotational intervals are short.”

In his presentation at Hart, Dr Turkington will give an insight into the Canadian research experience and says that being proactive rather than reactive is critical for sustainable crop and disease management.

“We have a lot of common plant disease issues and in some respects these are likely related to the short rotations Canadian and Australian farmers are using,” he says.

“Farmers grow multiple crops and deal with a wide range of issues related to crop and soil management as well as reducing the impact of pest issues such as weeds, insects and disease.

“As a consequence, I try to work with a range of colleagues including agronomists, weed scientists, plant breeders as well as other disciplines to provide farmers with: a) sustainable cropping systems; b) better tools to deal with multiple crop and pest issues; c) the potential to reduce input costs; and d) strategies to prolong the usefulness of pesticides and disease resistant crop varieties.”

Dr Turkington’s session is titled Canadian Cropping Adventures, a play on Australian television comedy show, Russell Coight’s All Aussie Adventures, and gives a little away about Dr Turkington’s lighter approach to ultimately some big farming decisions.

“It would be easy for me to simply tell farmers that they need to rotate their crops and that the current rotations they are using are not sufficient,” he said.

“However, when I was a young graduate student at the University of Saskatchewan in the mid 1980’s I was working on my project related to sclerotinia stem rot of canola at our lab at Melfort, Saskatchewan, when I had a visit from my dad and two of his best friends.

“They had been up from their farms south of St Brieux to pick up combine (header) parts in Melfort and decided to stop by the lab. During their visit one of my Dad’s friends told me to never forget where I came from as I pursued a career in agricultural research.

“The wording was a bit more colourful as in addition to picking up parts they had visited the local Chances R bar (pub) in Melfort.

“To this day I try to keep those words in mind. Many factors influence a farmer’s cropping choices and they are not just related to plant disease concerns.

“Economics and market opportunities are big drivers, while other factors such as on-farm feed/forage requirements may mean the rotational interval is tighter than a pathologist would recommend.

“So at the field day I will emphasise the role of rotations, but then outline some implications and options related to disease management when rotational intervals are short.”

Online registrations are now open for the 2017 Hart Field Day.

For more information and to register for this event, see the Hart Field-Site Group website www.hartfieldsite.org.au

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