

Grain industry leaders unite on good farming practice

GROWING AUSTRALIAN GRAIN: Safely managing risks with crop inputs and grain on farm was launched on Monday 27 July at the Australian Grains Industry Conference by Grain Producers Australia.

GPA Chairman Andrew Weidemann said the grains guide, which was developed with and endorsed by Australia's grain representative organisations, was a voluntary, self-help program built on best management practice that took a positive approach to managing on-farm risks in all forms.

The guide steps through the processes and protocols required to meet local and global obligations and commitments, tracing all farm inputs including chemicals, fertilisers, machinery, equipment and grain storage. It also covers weeds, pests, diseases, biosecurity issues and farm health and hygiene.

"What we do on-farm today has very wide implications, with consumers wanting to know more about how their food is grown and what happens during the production process," Mr Weidemann said.

"Everyone is aware of steps such as testing for chemical residues, but there is a much bigger picture and the grains guide will help demonstrate that Australian grain growers, working within a combination of regulatory standards and good practices, are active managers of potential risks to grain quality and integrity, as well as risks to staff and others involved with fertilisers, farm chemicals and farm equipment.

"In developing this guide we examined each step in the on-farm cropping cycle, identified the risks and responsibilities involved, then produced a checklist that individual grain growers can use or adapt to suit their farm – helping themselves and helping the industry as a whole in its approach to markets," Mr Weidemann said.

The guide integrates and incorporates more than 30 current industry and government codes of practice, regulations and legislation and risk management criteria into a single, easy-to-use framework. It captures the steps in all farming operations via a pro-forma list of annual activities and actions from pre-planting through production, harvesting, storage and transport, with safety an important element.

While all grain enterprises are different and diverse, the practices and requirements in the guide help merge these differences into a common set of principles, goals and objectives that can be adapted to suit individual farms.

It is intended that individual growers, and the grains sector as a whole, can use the guide to review, adapt and improve their practices to ensure the integrity of the grain they produce, while giving buyers confidence in the reliability of Australian grain production.

NSW Farmers Grains Committee Chair Dan Cooper said "Grain growers understand how important food safety and good farming practices are to our markets. The guide recognises the practices we already use on farm to be sure that Australian grain is safe for Australian families."

Chairman of Grain Producers SA Garry Hansen said the practical nature of the guide was a key feature.

"It has been really valuable for us to come together as an industry to work through each aspect of our farming system, to identify the possible hazards and obligations for us as individual growers and as an industry," Mr Hansen said.

President of WAFarmers Grains Council Duncan Young said safety was an important issue for farming businesses.

"This guide gives growers the key steps for managing farm safety, and provides links to further information," Mr Young said.

Victorian Farmers Federation Grains President Brett Hosking said “The guide recognises the professionalism of Australian grain growers.”

“It’s a really useful checklist for growers to work through the issues they manage with agricultural chemicals, fertilisers, biosecurity, grain handling and safety,” Mr Hosking said.

Chairman of Grain Growers Limited, Andrew Carberry, said his organisation was looking at how it would incorporate information from the guide into its own programs.

“Good systems and solid records are important for growers to protect and improve their business productivity and profitability. It’s valuable for our industry to have a common understanding of what we need to do as growers and what else we can do to manage risks,” Mr Carberry said.

The Tasmanian Farmers & Graziers Association’s Greg Gibson said the grains guide was easy to use and informative.

“The grains industry is expanding in Tasmania, so this guide will be particularly useful for both new and existing growers,” Mr Hagley said.

AgForce Grains President Wayne Newton said AgForce had been working with best practice in their “Grains BMP” program for some years, with the grains guide giving consistent information.

“We will use the guide in conjunction with our Grains BMP program.” said Mr Newton.

“For all Australian growers it’s about managing risks to protect Australia's reputation for quality and reliability, and for sustainable grain production and supplies,” Mr Newton said.

The industry is aware that some buyers are developing their own global assurance programs to set standards of farming practices and reporting.

WA Grain Group Chairman Doug Clarke said the guide would illustrate to these buyers that they can rely on Australian grain as the issues of concern are already managed by the industry and existing Australian regulations.

"With this guide the grain industry now has a national plan that fits with the tightening phytosanitary requirements of nations that import our products, so that Governments do not overreact should there be a one-off or minor incursion," Mr Clarke said.

Growers already participating in formal quality assurance (QA) systems can be reassured that both Graincare and CBH Group On-Farm Quality Assurance programs have been involved and are incorporating the information from the guide into their programs.

GROWING AUSTRALIAN GRAIN: Safely managing risks with crop inputs and grain on farm is available as a booklet from grain grower associations around Australia or direct from GPA. It is available, together with links to other resources, at grainsguide.grainproducers.com.au

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About Grain Producers Australia

Grain Producers Australia (GPA) represents Australia's broadacre, grain, pulse and oilseed producers at the national level. Broadly stated, GPA exists to foster a strong, innovative, profitable, globally competitive and environmentally sustainable grains industry in Australia.