

New Technology Helping the Harvesting Bottom Line

The summer of 2005/2006 saw the use of GPS auto steer on combine harvesters deliver savings to farmers of up to 12% on fuel and labour costs. For a number of years now grain growers in Australia have commonly used GPS auto steer products for soil preparation, planting and spraying operations, particularly by those producers looking to adopt controlled traffic farming and minimum/zero till farming practices. With many of the early adopters of this kind of technology taking the next step and choosing to auto steer their harvesting equipment some interesting results and tips on how to best maximise the potential outcomes have been produced.

The Dunstan family farming operation outside of Horsham in North Western Victoria run by Tom Dunstan and sons James and Tom junior, fitted their Lexion 580 Rotary with a 9 metre front with a steer kit to accommodate their BEELINE Arro 10 cm Auto Steer system, which they had previously used for sowing and spraying on their Cat 55 tractor.

Tom Dunstan junior explains

“We bought the Lexion in the first place from our local William Adams dealer as it appeared to be the easiest to convert to 3 metre centres without having to perform major work on the machine. We were keen to incorporate the harvester into our farm’s control traffic system as once full of grain it comes in at around 28 tonnes, therefore the heaviest piece of equipment to move across the paddock and we needed to be able to auto steer it to minimise soil compaction.”

“Initially, as we were mainly using it on our legumes, we saw that not having to worry about watching where the end of the comb was meant we could concentrate on the platform height to get as close a consistent shave to the ground as possible. Given the dry conditions we had this past year this was really important as most of our lentils and chick peas were shorter.”

“Also we work with a 9 metre front and normally when harvesting before we used the auto steer you would tend to have around at least a foot of the comb hanging out of the crop. Now we have the front completely full the whole time, even when it is really dusty and visibility is bad. Over the 6,000 acres we worked that does start to add up in savings on time and fuel.”

In retrospect Tom does think they will do some things differently this coming year,

“We had the header on large radial tyres and we did have some rough tracks to follow, as the Lexion filled we would see the tyres start to balloon sideways and the auto steer was having to work extremely hard to keep the machine on track. We will go to duals on the front of the machine this year, with the inside tyre over the 3 metre mark and just decrease the pressure on the outside tyre so it can act as a stabiliser.”

“With our field peas as we can now plant them with the auto steer we will be able to come back in with a set of crop lifters between the rows and that will give us an even better feed next time round.”

“We would not be without the BEELINE Arro auto steer gear, our next step will be to fit our John Deere 8000 series tractor with it so we can then simultaneously spray and/or spread fertiliser with the Cat 55 operating at the same time.”

The BEELINE Arro range has been successfully fitted to over 130 different makes and models of agricultural equipment, and can be mounted onto the existing interface on most auto steer ready tractors. The patented swap dock and VIU design enables a single controller and screen to be moved between equipment in under 5 minutes without tools or recalibration of the unit. This equates to a saving of around 75% on the cost of auto steering an additional tractor, spray rig or header.

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