IN THE NEWS
Broadacre

Bio boost for Barraba's sorghum

ABOVE: The Cordingley's planter, with liquid injection set up for Petrik application — in this instance it is set up for winter planting.
LEFT: Edward Cordingley, "Mandula", Barraba, in the family's first sorghum crop earlier this year, which was introduced to take advantage of the property's summer dominant rain pattern, particularly since the past couple of years have produced wet spring/summers, making wheat harvest extremely difficult.

WITH an aim of cutting input costs, but maintaining out-put, Barraba mixed farmers, John and Jules Cordingley have introduced compost treated with Petrik biological products to address fertility needs.

The couple run "Mandula", along with country they own in the New England, with the help of their son Edward, and the operation includes about 700 hectares of cropping throughout the year as well as some double cropping. This year they have also introduced sorghum.

John Cordingley said they had 220ha of sorghum, with the varieties MR Buster and Pioneer 84G22, which were sown into a full moisture profile.

In fact the sorghum was introduced to take advantage of their summer dominant rain pattern, particularly since the past couple years had produced wet spring/summers, making wheat harvest extremely difficult.

The paddock preparation, however, had been similar to the wheat, with one tonne a hectare of OGM compost applied, into which they mixed a Parkiss Rural-designed combination of cobalt, molybdenum and boron.

"All of our New England country is significantly deficient in boron," he said.

Mr Cordingley said he received agronomic advice from Petrik agronomist, John Hoskin, and had switched from feedlot and chicken manures to the OGM compost, which was supplied from Sydney's green waste.

The compost does contain impurities, however, many of these were an asset, such as molybdenum, boron, zinc, cobalt, copper and phosphorus.

Many of these impurities are also in the manure and don't have to be listed under legislation. Therefore, by using compost can calculate how much of each nutrient is being applied.

"You can look at an analysis of the compost and know exactly what's in it," Mr Cordingley said.

The compost also contained less sodium than feedlot manure and had less risk of causing botulism to live-stock than either feedlot or chicken manure, he said.

With the compost receiving assistance from government subsidies, it could also be delivered for a similar cost to manure, at about $40 a tonne.

Mr Cordingley said he applied the Petrik products, Evergreen and Green Manure, to the compost to help digest the organic material with the aim of developing a humus layer in his soils.

He said in the process it released nitrogen and phosphorous.

Mr Cordingley believed it appeared to be making a difference, with paddocks he originally thought he'd have to deep rip now showing the same results from the compost treatment.

"In the New England we used to put on 30kg/ha of phosphorous, 30kg/ha of sulphur and 150kg/ha of nitrogen and we turn off the same kilograms of livestock now with a tonne of compost to the hectare, plus trace elements and Petrik," he said.

When applied to pasture the Petrik treatments are sprayed into the compost, but in the cropping country it is injected into the soil.

Their sorghum at Barraba had a spread out sowing due to the rain, starting in late November and not completed until the end of December.

The crop is now close to harvest, but with 14.5 per cent moisture it is expected they might have to harvest it, then dry it.

Mr Cordingley said the predicted yield was six to eight tonnes a hectare.

"They're good, big heads and there's between nine and 12 of them per square metre," he said.

He said he's been pleased with his composting program, as it was not only producing good crop results, but also noticeably improving soil properties, including moisture retention.