

Pea Season Debrief

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National Vegetable
Extension Network

T A S M A N I A

A number of growers and agronomists got together in February to talk about the pea season and how things went for pea growers. Garry McNab from Simplot shared some details. The North West Coast averaged a respectable 6,940 kg/ha yield for peas in the 2018/19 season, returning an average gross income of \$3247/ha for growers. The highest yield was 10,268 kg/ha, returning \$4,900/ha. No-till peas were generally at both ends of the spectrum, producing amongst the lowest and highest yields in the region. What is the driver of this variability? The following is a summary of the conversation and does not represent agronomic advice. **Remember to ask your agronomist or field officer for advice on growing peas.**

There were a number of challenges for no-till pea growers:

Slugs played an important role, one grower reportedly found 100 slugs per square metre (which may have outnumbered his peas) in his crop following canola, and the group discussed:

- the need to lay down adequate bait, metaldehyde is the most common.
- Ferrous baits can be an effective low-toxic alternative with no withholding period.
- If baiting can be started early in March and April, the numbers won't build up after summer.
- Planning should start now to disrupt the slug lifecycle for the next pea crop.
- Paddocks that had been grazed reportedly had reduced slug numbers.

Some growers also experienced Redheaded Cockchafer damage, and there were some poorly timed frosts.

Effective **weed control** using herbicides is crucial in no-till crops and there were some concerns about herbicides or weed management programs not being effective.

One grower reported that he had very **wet ground** at sowing time, affecting drill operation. This was likely due to a high biomass autumn cover crop that prevented evaporation over winter, and did not draw up moisture in the cold weather.

Another grower, famous for high pea yields, also used cover crops, and had livestock to graze it down to a more manageable level, which greatly reduced slug risk. In the absence of livestock, cover crops could potentially be mulched earlier, perhaps in June, for a better result. It is also advised that the paddock is rolled after sowing the cover crop, to produce a firmer surface when the peas are being drilled. There was consensus in the group that the roots of oats are not strong or particularly effective in drawing up soil moisture, and

barley may be a better choice, particularly the variety Dictator. Start planning now!

And so, why consider no-till peas? We heard that the highest yielding pea paddock for one northern Tasmanian Simplot field officer was ex potatoes, mouldboard ploughed, power harrowed then sown with peas and gave a 9t/ha yield with a tenderometer reading of 109, an excellent result. And yet many growers are pursuing reduced or zero till. I asked the group why growers are interested in using a no-till system. The first response was soil health and there were other reasons shared:

- Paddock preparation is faster, meaning you can fit the crop into a narrower window and reduce the cultivation occurring in winter.
- Erosion is reduced by keeping the soil covered for the late winter/early spring rainfall events.
- Compaction by harvesters is reduced, and the harvesters have a firmer surface to drive on.

Points to consider if you are considering no till peas:

- Is there a no-till drill available?
- Control slugs well before the crop is sown, and monitor for signs of damage.
- Increase pea seeding rate
- Firm paddock (current drills prefer this)
- Avoid excess above ground biomass in the cover crop

There were a few other general points of interest:

- 'Reliance' is widely recognised as the most suitable pea variety.
- Yield monitoring is not yet widespread but there is a great need for it.
- Regardless of tillage system - If your paddock is too wet don't drill it.
- If you have surplus nitrogen (N) at the end of the crop, that can really burn up your soil carbon, make sure you follow up the peas with something that will utilise the N. Strip till brassicas are one example that is in practice in Tasmania. (See VegNET's strip till video!)

This season highlighted that growing peas using a no till system provides many benefits and also brings some challenges. This group and other Tasmanian pea growers and contractors are working collaboratively to grow peas while protecting soil.

- Theresa Chapman, VegNET Industry Development Officer