

A FRESH APPROACH

Latina™ Fresh, a General Mills brand, partnered with Landcare Australia in 2019 to develop a sustainable agriculture program in northwest New South Wales to help farmers improve the sustainability and resilience of farm production systems. Latina™ Fresh has been making fresh pasta using Australian durum wheat for over 20 years and their pasta relies on high quality Australian durum wheat. Some 50 to 70 per cent of durum wheat is grown in northwest New South Wales, which has been hit hard by the effects of drought in recent times. The partnership is working with farmers to develop methods for conserving more of any spring and summer rainfall in the soils and storing it when needed by crops.

In the most recent project supported by a General Mills Foundation charitable contribution, trials for a variety of cover crops in the Moree region aim to assess the effects on soil moisture and durum production. Overseeing the trial, Rimanu Farms agronomist Alice Clark outlines project plans and intended benefits

EXPLAIN THE TRIAL AND WHAT'S INVOLVED.

It's made up of different treatments – millet, sorghum and barley which are all terminated at different intervals to see how much water

is used to get to a certain stage of moisture and allow for cover.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS FOR THE SOIL WITH THIS TRIAL?

With these three different crops compared to a stubble fallow, having that soil moisture increases our AMF levels. The drought had seen some fallows that had gone for over 18 months and due to the dry conditions, some of the microbes in the soil had broken down and suffer from long fallow disorder and that just decreases your crop. We want to see which of these crops retain the most moisture in the upper profile.

CAN THE RESULTS OF THE TRIAL ULTIMATELY ASSIST AND SUPPORT DURUM GROWERS IN THIS AREA?

Definitely, if you can find a cover that can increase your fallow efficiency and not host crown rot which durum is usually very susceptible to, if you can increase that moisture, you would be more inclined to go with durum if you have the field set up and ready to go. With that warm moisture in the field, it should work to the benefit of durum.

Read the full interview at landcareaustralia.org.au/project/a-fresh-approach

Rimanui Farms agronomist Alice Clark is overseeing the trial.
Credit: Melanie Jensen

