

RURAL | GRAINS

Management with difference

GRAIN

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SUMMER fallow management in south West Victoria is experiencing a surprising change of late, with the green paddocks becoming increasingly prevalent over the hot months.

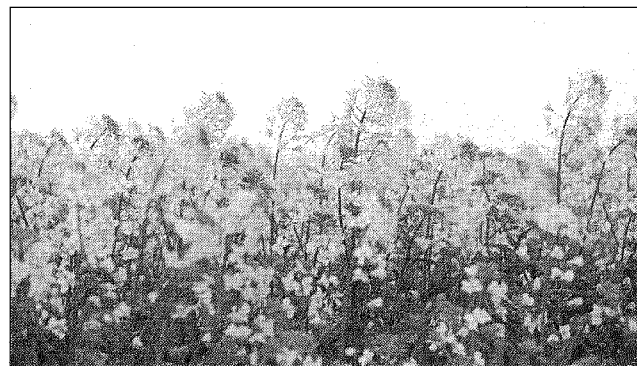
The new movement towards "cover cropping", or sowing winter type canola for feed and soil biological activity, has opened the door for less conventional practices that utilise summer water and nutrients in a completely different way.

Westmere in the western district of Victoria received between 2-5mm on three different occasions in December, as well as close to an inch on Boxing Day.

With this precipitation comes weed and volunteer germinations. Rather than going straight for keys to the boom sprayer, is there the potential to exploit this scenario and grow something that is productive?

The cover cropping revolution is quickly acquiring a devoted following of farmers looking to benefit from any sowing opportunity that has the potential of quality stock feed or value adding to the soil.

With the philosophy of growing a diverse cocktail of plant species in one paddock, it is easy to get complacent about the fact that the weeds are also profiting from the herbicide free summer. The hidden threat is summer active weed species that



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are considered to be winter problems as well.

Weed species that have the ability to germinate at any time of the year are especially dangerous in summer, as their reproductive photoperiod requirement induces rapid seed set. A wild radish

plant that emerges in a summer storm can easily set viable seed within a month.

This makes control difficult in a conventional chemical summer fallow if you are relying on a boom arm getting the kill in time. There could be multiple ger-

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Aaron Vague

minations over a two-month period, which can induce herbicide resistance from the excessive chemical use required for optimal management. In a cover crop scenario we can use the walking weed controller in the form of livestock. High stocking

rates of sheep or cattle are able to provide exceptional suppression of weeds until the cover crop is terminated and prepared for the next winter crop. Unless you are in an area where everybody has a universal approach to fallow management, then the green bridge is always going to exist. With the growing movement towards drying out the soil profile in summer in anticipation for a water logged winter, the mindset of transportation over evaporation is growing in popularity.

Yes, there are associated negatives with growing over the summer but unless there is a collective approach to fallow management the green bridge is going to exist whether we like it or not.