National training for grains advisers on integrated weed management

John Cameron¹, Andrew Storrie²,³ and Peter Martin³

¹ Independent Consultants Australia Network Pty Ltd, PO Box 718, Hornsby, New South Wales 2077, Australia
² New South Wales Department of Primary Industries, 4 Marsden Park Road, Tamworth, New South Wales 2340, Australia
³ CRC for Australian Weed Management, PMB 1 Waite Campus, Glen Osmond, South Australia 5064, Australia

Summary Weeds cost the Australian economy an estimated $4 billion per annum (Sinden et al. 2004). Efficacious low cost herbicides make weed management relatively easy. However, herbicide resistance is now common in many broad acre cropping systems. In Western Australia, some 90% of arable land has annual ryegrass (Lolium rigidum) with resistance to Group A (ACCase inhibitor) and/or Group B (ALS inhibitor) mode of action herbicides (Owen et al. 2005).

There is significant need to implement a more diverse range of integrated weed management (IWM) tactics than currently practised. Most grain growers seek advice on weed management from an agronomist – many of whom have expressed an interest in improving their skill base in IWM.

While appreciable scientific resources, information and knowledge in IWM were available, information dissemination to advisers was often focused more at awareness than skills development. To address this problem, a training program for advisers was developed by Independent Consultants Australia Network Pty Limited (ICAN) in collaboration with the Cooperative Research Centre for Australian Weed Management (Weeds CRC) and with support from the Grains Research Development Corporation (GRDC).

A key output is the development of a training course tailored to the needs of agronomists. To date, 211 advisers have been trained in the 14 workshops conducted between September 2005 and April 2006. The course is mapped to two national units of competency from the Rural Production Training Package. These are (RTC5801A) ‘Provide specialist advice to clients’ and (RTE5006A) ‘Plan and manage long-term weed, pest and/or disease control in crops’. Successful completion of assessments leads to a credit of two units at diploma standard from Tocal Agricultural College.

In 2006, commercial sponsorship was obtained that enabled course fees to be reduced for many participants. More workshops are planned for spring 2006 and into 2007 and 2008.

Another key project outcome has been the 350+ page IWM reference manual developed by the Weeds CRC. This manual represents a referenced literature review of over ten years of research on IWM tactics. While a draft version has been used in training to date, it has already been hailed as a world class document that will serve as a practical reference for grains advisers for years to come.

CRC weeds specialists have participated in training delivery at all workshops. This input combined with the significant experience held by participating advisers, has ensured that the course is at the cutting edge and tailored to regional needs. Involvement of the Weeds CRC helps maintain this edge whilst enabling efficient program coordination and delivery and containing course costs.

Participants have indicated that as a result of workshop participation, their contact with growers on IWM is more frequent and of longer duration than previously. Many intend running Ryegrass Integrated Management (RIM) workshops with clients. A survey is intended for late 2006 to measure the impact that workshop participation has had on the nature, frequency and duration of interaction with clients on IWM and related topics.

With most workshop participants already tertiary trained professionals working as weeds advisers, they were seen as a no-nonsense, pragmatic and potentially difficult to please audience. Workshop attendees were asked to rate the overall value of the workshop and 99% indicated that the workshop has met or exceeded their expectations, with most rating it as 5 out of 5 where 5 = excellent. The quality of course materials, presenters and interaction between participants were seen as key elements of success.

Keywords Training, IWM, integrated weed management, adviser, broad acre, herbicide resistance, crop.

REFERENCES