

Chickpeas on the menu

Flipper, Yorker bowling over NSW growers

By Amy Lawson
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CHICKPEA production rose by 195 per cent in NSW last year and with prices still at historical highs of \$600 to \$700 per tonne (delivered up-country), even more growers are this year tipped to turn to the winter legume this season.

And if Jimbour was the quality benchmark, then new varieties, Flipper and Yorker, are meeting the grade, according to a southern Queensland grain grower, processor, and marketer.

Past chickpea growers are regaining confidence in the crop after ascochyta outbreaks in 1998 and 2003 annihilated crops across the eastern growing region, particularly Victoria, where up to half of the State's crop was wiped out in 1998.

Growers in most chickpea growing areas report an intended increase in planting on last year's crop, provided the moisture is there.

New AWB Seeds varieties, Flipper and Yorker, were grown commercially for the first time last year with grower

confidence of their resistance to ascochyta and phytophthora root rot respectively contributing to the big crop.

In NSW, about 25,000 hectares of the 155,000ha State crop was sown to Flipper, which had been particularly successful east of the Newell Highway and the Central West, with 20,000ha sown to Yorker.

Mr Woods, a director of Woods Grain, Goondiwindi, said Jimbour had been seen as "a quantum leap" by end-users over the previous industry standard, Amethyst.

"Jimbour was better in terms of quality but didn't offer any disease resistance," he said.

"Flipper, quality wise, has been as good as Jimbour without any difference between

them. "We treat them all the same.

"We don't discount and won't discount and if growers are in disease-affected areas, we'd recommend they grow these new varieties because of how much they will save on chemical.

"Without a variety like Flipper, in a normal year and if prices were a bit lower, the gross margin wouldn't look so good."

AWB Seeds sales agronomist for northern NSW and Queensland, Jon Thelander, Toowoomba, Qld, said the uptake of Flipper last year had been "overwhelming", with seed selling out.

Yorker was intended for more western growing areas, where planting has been limited by fewer planting opportunities.

Yorker's improved phytophthora resistance – compared to Jimbour, Flipper and Howzat – had provided yield advantages up to 0.6 t/ha in NSW Department of Primary Industries trials. Nor was there the need to spray Flipper chickpeas until disease appeared.

About 95pc of Australian chickpeas go to India and Pakistan and with a reduced rain-affected Indian crop to be harvested from this month, market direction will be better gauged.

"There hasn't been trade shorts out there driving price, there's just been straight demand," Mr Woods said, adding that there was little carryover stock left after growers sold most their crop last harvest at record prices.



Jon Thelander (AWB Seeds) and Bruce Woods (Woods Grain) checking a sample of Flipper chickpeas.