More than 90 people attended the Ravensthorpe Agricultural Initiative Network (RAIN) group’s field day at Owen and Terri Brownley’s Mt Madden farm last week, where trials are measuring the impact on soil health of stubble retention and better defining the role of precision agriculture (PA) in a continuous cropping system.

The Brownleys have used innovative PA and crop biomass engineering techniques for two years.

Their property was chosen for the RAIN group’s field trial sites due to its central location to other farming districts, 10 year continuous cropping history, 340 mm average annual rainfall and its acidic and alkaline soil types.

The Mt Madden site has attracted significant Grain Research and Development Corporation (GRDC) investment, with National Variety Trials for wheat and barley, field pea evaluation trials and a nitrogen management trial for grain quality.

According to RAIN’s Natural Resource Management Officer, Jenny Chambers, stubble residue at the sites hasn’t been removed during the 10 years of continual cropping.

“The trial site has more than 30 plots, with different input applications and stubble management techniques used by trial manager, Agritech Services.

“The site is an excellent example of resource management issues being investigated, locally, in tandem with grain productivity issues,” Ms Chambers said.

This year’s results will be presented to the regional Crop Updates in early 2006 and released on the Local RAIN group website www.ravensthorpehopetoun.com/rain/index.htm

The stubble management trials, begun in 2004, are sponsored by the National Landcare Program.

RAIN Chairman, Colin Guest, hoped the project would be funded for five to seven years.

“We want this to be a long term trial to gain valuable results for the group,” he said.

Presenters included Dr Margaret Roper, CSIRO, speaking about the impact of tillage practices on organic matter and soil microbiology and Dr Dan Murphy and Frances Hoyle, both of The University of Western Australia (UWA), discussing stubble management and soil health.
Other speakers were from the Department of Agriculture, South East Premium Wheat Growers Association and Summit Fertilizers.

Ms Chambers and site co-ordinator, Janine Watson, organized the field day, which was supported by AWB Landmark’s Lake King branch, Summit Fertilizers and Agritech Services.

The RAIN group is a member of the GRDC-funded, UWA-based Local Farmer Group Network (LFGN).

For further information on the RAIN group, visit the LFGN website www.lfgn.org.au

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