SA Drought Hub Impact Report

Tools and tactics for improving crop establishment – Managing risk in early sowing and variable rainfall

PROJECT LEAD: Ag Excellence Alliance Incorporated

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PROJECT SUMMARY

This project aimed to deliver a farmer forum to support informed farmer decision-making for seeding in 2026 by bringing together farmers, agronomists and researchers to discuss crop establishment challenges in the Mid North of South Australia. Recent seasons characterised by late seasonal breaks and limited summer rainfall have seen dry and early sowing become increasingly common. While this approach is widely adopted, it presents ongoing challenges, particularly in the medium to higher rainfall environments and heavier soil types typical of the region. Research and farmer surveys indicate that confidence in dry and early sowing varies considerably depending on the season. This forum will provide an opportunity to openly explore these challenges, build shared understanding, and strengthen confidence in establishment decisions for 2026 and beyond. Resources will be made available to enable participants to continue accessing information and building on the discussions beyond the event.

Target Audience

The forum is intended for growers in the Mid North who have experienced challenges achieving reliable crop establishment under dry and early sowing conditions. It will also be highly relevant to agronomists and advisers supporting grower decision-making in these environments.

How

The forum will be delivered in an interactive format designed to encourage discussion and shared learning between growers, agronomists and researchers. A facilitated approach will be used to support open dialogue, with subject matter experts contributing practical insights grounded in both research and on-farm experience. The emphasis will be on collaborative discussion and the

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exchange of perspectives, ensuring participants leave with practical tools they can apply directly in seeding 2026.

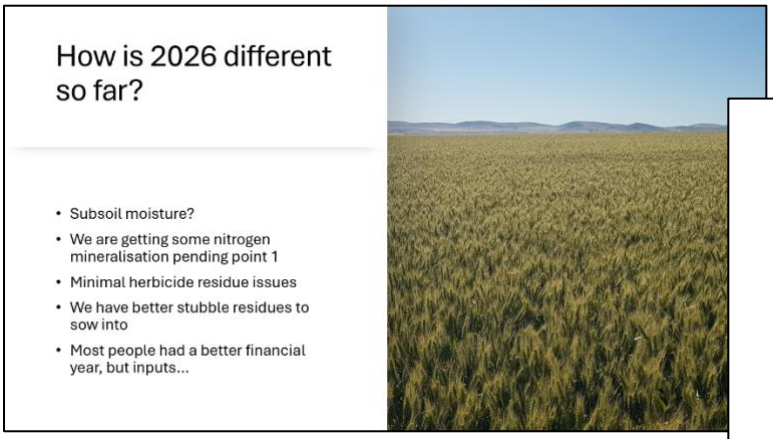
PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS

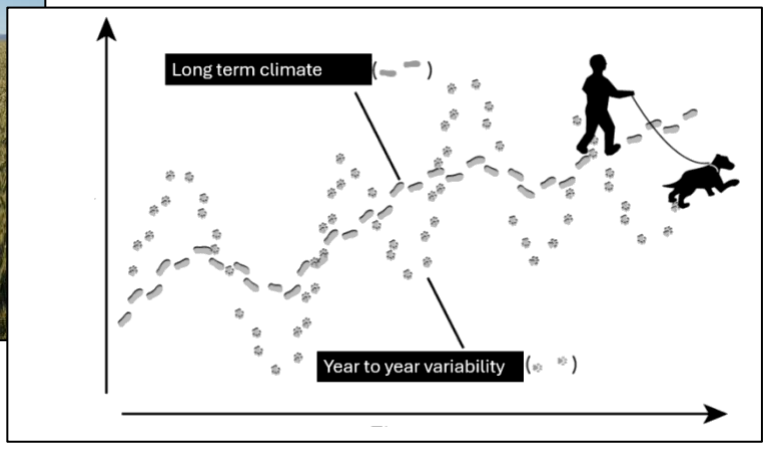
The forum was held in the Harvest Church at Clare on March 11, 2026, from 1.30 to 4.30pm. There were 60 registrants for the workshop with 41 attendees which the majority of these were farmers.

Belinda Cay from Ag Communicators was engaged as the facilitator for the day. The forum was delivered with the valuable support of the Hart Field Site Group. The forum was held in the afternoon following Hart's annual 'Getting the crop in seminar'. Hart organised the venue, catering and tech support on the day. Running the event alongside Hart, allowed for a much wider audience reach and gave some recognition to the forum.

The forum featured a range of presentations from speakers to help set the scene as well as a series of discussion panel sessions which where audience members were encouraged to ask questions. The speakers were:

- Jeff Braun – The Agronomist
  - Setting the scene – A review of season 2025 and what to look forward to in 2026
- Dr Peter Hayman – SARDI Climate Applications and SA Drought Hub Deputy Director
  - Defining the seasonal break
- Dr Glenn McDonald – Adelaide University
  - Crop establishment 101
- Royce Pitchford – Pinion Advisory
  - Financial considerations for crop establishment
- Jordan Bruce – Trengove Consulting
  - Agronomic and crop nutrition considerations
- Jack Desbiolle – Adelaide University
  - How do different seeding systems affect crop establishment





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The forum presenters L to R: Jeff Braun *The Agronomist*, Royce Pitchford *Pinion Advisory*, Peter Hayman *SARDI and SADH*, Rachel May *SADH*, Glenn MacDonald *Adelaide University*, Jordan Bruce *Trengove Consulting*, Belinda Cay *Ag Communicators*, Jack Desbiole *Adelaide University*.



Jeff Braun setting the scene with a presentation on the past season and what to expect from season 2026.

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Glenn MacDonald explaining the importance of understanding soil texture on water holding capacity in relation to crop establishment



Audience members engaged in Glenn’s discussion

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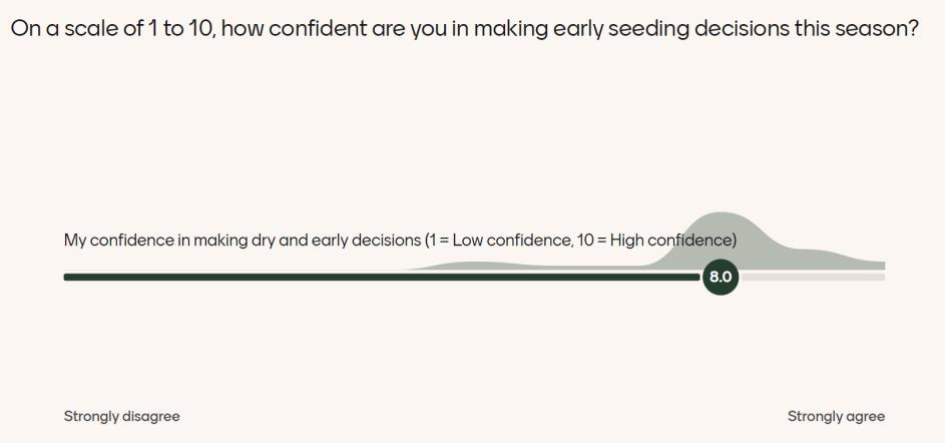
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OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

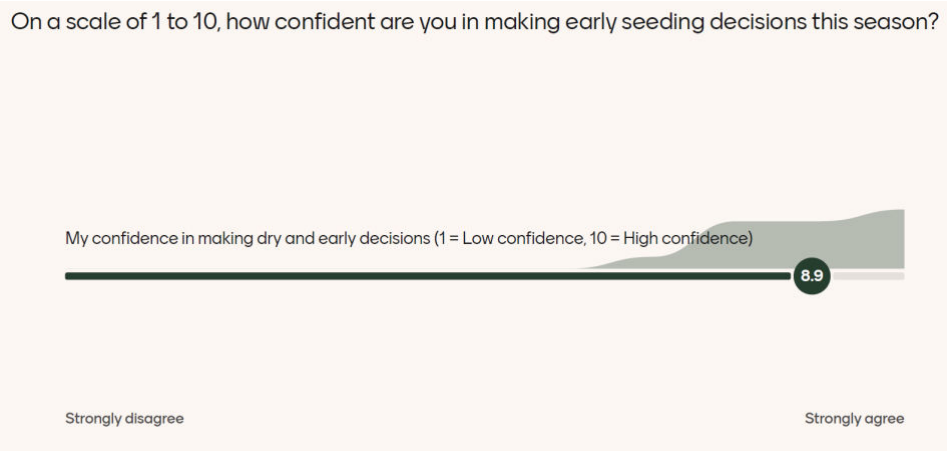
Throughout the forum, there were a series of Mentimeter questions asked to gauge the audiences confidence for decision making for 2026. These generated a lot of discussion with participants and presenters. There was lots of input from farmers sharing their experiences on previous years. This was of great value to all participants.

Some of the questions and results:

At the Start of the forum:



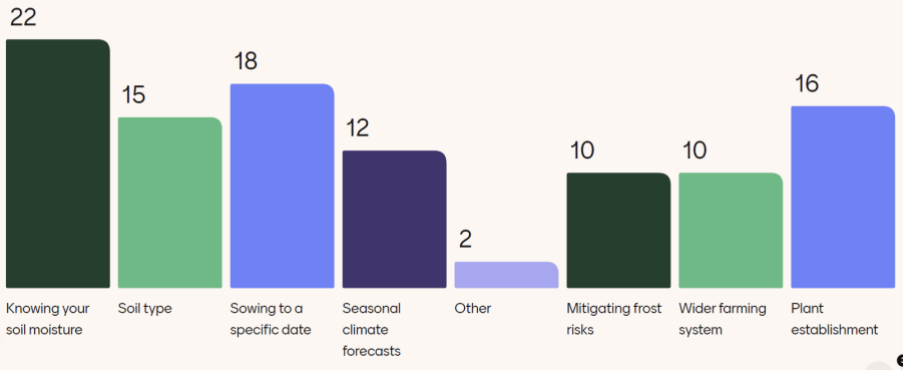
End of the forum:



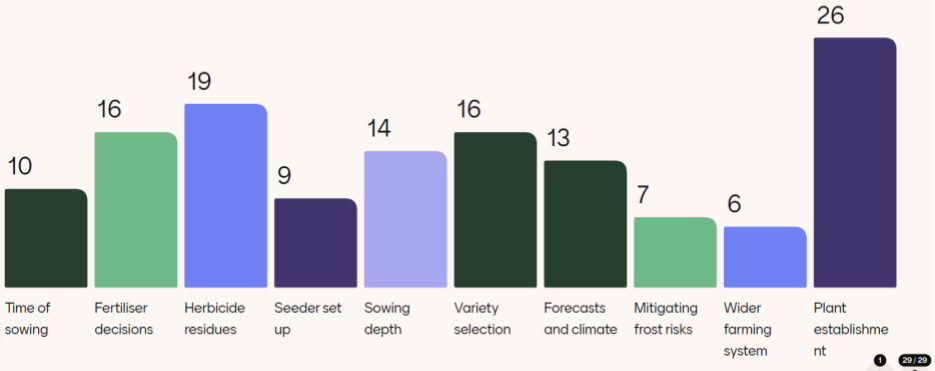
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What are the triggers for early seeding?



When making seeding decisions, what areas are you keen to learn about?

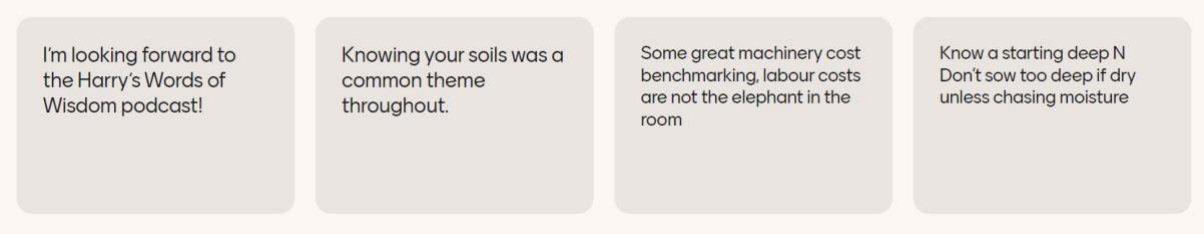


After participating in the session today, what changes are you going to consider implementing OR What's one new thing you learned?

Sow shallow	Need to have an operational efficiency gain to justify a new seeder	Learned about how to consider evaporation and rainfall at different times of year	Be ready for seeding
Keep up inoculation rates	Work back from finishing sowing date.	Potential to lower sowing rate with earlier crop establishment	Lease the farm

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Following the workshop a series of resources were available on the SA Drought Hub website resources page: [Crop and pasture management - SA Drought Hub]

The forum successfully brought together learnings from several previous FDF-funded projects, including initiatives delivered through both the SA Drought Hub and the FDF Extension and Adoption grant, *De-risking the Seeding Project*.

The workshop also strongly aligned with the objectives of the GRDC RiskWi$e project delivered in partnership with the Hart ARG. A key focus of the RiskWi$e program is improving agronomic decision-making, with crop establishment identified as an important area of discussion throughout the forum.

The forum format also provides a strong legacy opportunity for future delivery. Its flexible structure allows content and presenters to be adapted to seasonal conditions and regional priorities, supporting informed and practical decision-making around crop establishment. This approach could be replicated in other regions in future years if the need arises.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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