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## OPPORTUNITIES DESPITE DIFFICULT SEASONS

DESPITE the failed promise of an above-average winter season, many farmers and the agribusiness people that support them remain optimistic.

For Crop Care Australasia southern NSW technical sales representative Robert Harborne, it's a matter of continuing to look forward rather than backwards, seeking new business opportunities and learning from experience.

From his own experience in regional Australia as Smorgon Steel NSW business development manager, years with the fertiliser companies Pivot and Incitec and Hoechst Agrivet, and as owner-operator of the Union Club Hotel at Wagga, Robert is familiar with the ups and downs of regional business.

Robert's southern NSW territory for Crop Care - including the Riverina irrigation area and southwest slopes - has been affected as deeply as any by lack of rain and irrigation water, but the work continues to keep agriculture moving forward and adapting.

His region includes much of the water-reliant NSW irrigation area around Griffith, the dryland cropping areas of the south west slopes and the horticulture regions around Young.

"It's been a disappointing season for the second year in a row for most farmers in the region. Most of the cereal crop will be baled rather than harvested. Despite the record high wheat prices, very little will go into the silos - and many growers have been caught without a crop, but with forward contracts to be honoured.

"The high-security irrigation farms with permanent horticulture crops such as grapes and oranges have 75% allocation, while those on general security such as cereals and pastures generally have little or no irrigation water.

"But we are always only a few inches away from a good season. At this time of year, a few inches of rain over two weeks can change everything. Growers with lucerne, for example could have a huge growth response at this time of year from just a small but significant amount of rain.

"My job under these circumstances is to promote products that can assist productivity and help farmers get ahead - for example the higher yielding canola, field pea and wheat varieties that Crop Care is now marketing.

"Constantly improving crop varieties like rust-resistant wheats such as Peake are part of the support that agribusiness like Crop Care can provide to rural industries.

"Another good example is the just-released herbicide for viticulture Spotlight Plus - that only kills what it hits. It's an ideal development for desuckering vines - allowing grape growers with large areas to quickly desucker vines and preserve precious moisture for vine growth.

"Farmers are becoming far more technically focussed - their more efficient use of water is a good example. They are looking for ways to produce the most they can from their inputs and labour.

"The type of activity that works well despite difficult circumstances is to look at what's ahead, to look at ways of achieving better results. "For example Crop Care created optimism and enthusiasm amongst growers and agronomists in the region this winter by running field demonstrations to openly benchmark their new crop varieties against existing commercial varieties - and to physically demonstrate the potential for future improved yields and profitability."

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