

Farmer: Col and Sally McKenzie
Region: NSW Quirindi
Machine: 7650 Spra Coupe

WITH a recently-purchased Croplands 7650 Spra Coupe just getting into its stride, Willow Tree-based spray contractors Col and Sally McKenzie believe it ticks all the boxes in terms of meeting their demanding expectations.

Purchased in June of this year, it is only now getting into top gear as one of the wettest winters, followed by an equally damp spring, saw it frustratingly consigned to their shed after the early excitement of its delivery in early July. Operating from their base near the northern NSW town of Quirindi on the Liverpool Plains, the business travels up to a 100km radius, servicing a burgeoning customer base.

Previously, the McKenzie's principal workhorse was based on a smaller, more lightweight machine, a 4660 Croplands Spra Coupe equipped with a 27m boom, 1600L tank and a 93kW (125hp) Perkins engine, also an adjustable wheel spacing facility, which their experienced operator, Nick Page (Quipolly), now drives. Today, however, they are getting to grips with the newest addition to their Croplands 'family,' namely the 7650 which sports a similarly-sized boom but a much larger, 2,750L tank with power supplied in the form of a 131kW (175hp) Perkins engine.

In this instance, however, the wheel spacing is hydraulically-adjustable - between 2m and 3m - to suit individual tramline systems. Interestingly, the 7650 looks as though it will be earmarked for more dryland cotton-growing duties during the season ahead, as "some of the regular clients are going into cotton this summer" Col McKenzie mentions "We are expecting a lot of herbicide, pesticide and liquid fertiliser work, as well," he added.

The business has fine-tuned its turn-round times to ensure downtime is minimised - with the use of a water truck, an important aspect of spray operations. "We've been doing in-crop work where we have had up to six different mixes in the tank, so it can turn out to be a real 'cocktail' sometimes," Col McKenzie said.

The business is also aided by a truck-mounted Hayes and Baguley sprayer, thereby to ensuring the busy contract operation is well-placed to meet the district's ability to grow both summer and winter crops. "At the moment we are doing a lot of in-crop work in wheat, applying fungicide sprays, but we are also doing fallow work, getting ready for the summer season which involves working with sorghum, sunflowers and cotton," Col said.

"Our machinery has to be flexible, also be easy to operate but the main thing is reliability," he added. Col said the decision to purchase the big new 7650 was based on its variable row width capability, also the limitations of the truck-mounted sprayer to meet the district's increasing sorghum acreages - especially when paddocks become rain-soaked. "Our big new machine can cover anything from 300 to 500ha in a day, and while work rates can be similar to the smaller machine, you just don't have to sit on the 7650 for so long," he said. The bigger sprayer is said to be more comfortable and the 4WD aspect of the 7650 has been "wonderful" in the wet paddocks of the last few weeks.

As well, he drew attention to the ample under-belly clearance on offer with both his Croplands sprayers - especially useful attributes when spraying-out sorghum. "We need the clearance to get over the crops because they are generally very good," Col said. "Last year some growers achieved 12t/ha which is pretty handy, so you don't want to be hitting them (the crops) as you work your way down a paddock." When it comes to driving the new 7650, Col said it was "very well balanced," plus offered good all-round vision from the cab. "I am really happy with it," he said.

As a contractor the McKenzies keep a close eye on the hours each machine undertakes during the course of a busy 12-month spray programme. Their 4660 machine regularly racks up 1,200 hours work a year, a target that will easily be trumped by the larger 7650 self-propelled. "It's important to have good gear, when you are a contractor - to provide the best service possible to your clientele," Col said. He also stressed the "excellent" service backup provided by Cornish's, Gunnedah, which was only ever a phone call away.



Cornish Gunnedah's Ryan Milwarde hands over the keys of a new Sprague Coupe 7650 model to contract operator Col Mckenzie, Willow Tree, alongside Croplands Self-propelled Service Manager, Malcom Reck.