

BEATING THE DRY AND PREPARING FOR THE WET



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PHOTO: Mud to the axles may not seem likely anytime soon. But in the meantime, it is important to set tasks, make plans and take a break to ensure you don’t get bogged.

QUICK TAKE

- It will rain one day—we just don’t know when. Use the dry time to get the farm, your office and yourself in good nick for when things turn good.
- Use the time to get develop a soil health program, clean and renovate channel banks or prepare seedbeds for when water is available again. It will be, one day.
- Review financial arrangements and investigate what assistance may be available. Start working on a plan for cash flow.
- People are the essential component of your business, community and industry—look after yourself and keep an eye out for your family and friends.

With low starting allocations, little carryover and high prices for temporary water, surface water irrigators are facing the stark reality of a low to non-existent summer crop program. It is important to remain positive and use this time to your advantage and to be ready for when the season turns around.

A **WISE** person once said, “learn to appreciate the quiet times”. Use this period of low water and low production to get ready for things to change, upskill and spend time with family and friends. No doubt you will be busy when irrigation allocations improve. In the meantime, keep an eye out for each other.

Following are some actions to consider to beat the dry times and to be ready for the big wet.

Get the farm in order

- Make a list of what needs to be done on-farm. Prioritise those things that do not cost a lot of money. Apply for grants for some of the works, check out the [farm innovation fund](#) while you have some time on your hands
- Assess the soil health of individual paddocks and have a plan for them—rotations, cover crops, fallow fields, level fields, soil amendments.
- Concentrate on weed control on channels and banks
- Get seedbeds in a condition where the cropping program can be ramped up quickly but minimise costs now. Control fallow weeds and conserve moisture where possible.
- Be ready to plant an opportunity crop either this summer or in the coming autumn. Brown manure crops are a great way of maintaining and enhancing organic matter and controlling weeds.

Keep on top of business

- Contact the local [Rural Financial Counselling service](#)
- Negotiate with suppliers about extended terms of trade and check for low interest loan options. See what may be available through the [Regional Investment Corporation](#).
- You will have time to upskill—do a course that interests you or a group of neighbours, for example see what [AgSkilled](#) has on offer.
- The Rural Assistance Authority has a grant available called the [Farm Business Skills Professional Development Program](#) which will cover half the cost of a range of upskilling options.
- Difficult decisions may need to be made about retaining staff. Consider the cost of wages during extended low production periods versus the challenge of replacing staff when water allocations improve.
- Consider the cash flow implications of this extended low production period. Look 24–48 months out with your cash flow budget.
- Many businesses will return a profit in 2019–20 based on carryover income from production in 2018–19 and minimal crop production costs in 2019–20. However, cash flow will take a big hit when getting back into production and there will not be the benefit of previous crop income. Start planning out these scenarios now and discussing with your financier.

Need help? Does a mate need help?

Some good information is available:

[Beat the breakdown video](#) (video)

[Man Up - Mate Helping Mate Meeting](#) (video)

[Are you bogged mate?](#) (website)

If you or someone you know needs immediate help, contact:

- [Lifeline Australia](#) 13 11 14
- [beyondblue](#) 1300 22 46 36
- [Mensline Australia](#) 1300 78 99 78
- [Kids Help Line](#) 1800 55 18 00
- [Suicide Callback Service](#) 1300 659 467

Keep in the loop

- Attend field days/catch ups/workshops even just for the social benefits—your industry organisations will be active through this period. Check in with [IREC](#), [CottonInfo](#), [Rice Extension](#), [Maize Association](#).
- Organise an exchange—get a group together and go visit some innovative growers in another region (IREC can help facilitate this).
- An essential component of any business is the people—you and the people around you. Have a break with family and/or friends—recharge.
- Maintain connections with your peers and local community.

Look after yourself and others

- Stay active, eat well and keep fit—this will help decision-making.
- Don't throw stones—remain united as a rural community. All industries, irrigated and dryland are suffering from the dry.
- Look after one another and help others to be positive. Be open and talk about mental health as we all become “accidental counsellors”.
- Seek out professional support if you are unable to resolve problems yourself or with support of your family and friends.

Eat the frog

Use the dry time to get in and do those tasks you keep putting off, be it in the office, in the field or around the house. They may be tasks that just take longer to complete. Go ahead and “eat the frog” you will feel better once it's done—guaranteed!

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