

Three year payback from permanent beds

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Snap Fresh Foods uses permanent beds to produce leaf vegetables and carrots. The aim is to save input costs and to improve sustainability in cropping operations. The change to permanent beds gave large savings in inputs, notably fuel, labour and machinery. Permanent beds also let them produce more from less land area.

“Indications are that GPS will pay for itself in three years on fuel savings alone. We also expect major savings in labour, land allocation, steel, fertiliser and machine repairs and maintenance,” says Chris Butler, farm operations manager at Snap Fresh Foods. Permanent beds are another form of controlled traffic farming. “Our soil is our big asset, so taking better care of it is a big reason for controlling our tractor traffic with GPS,” says Chris.



Trimble GPS and auto-steer guides tractors down the same wheel tracks, pass to pass, year to year.

Chris was already growing on beds, so most machinery was compatible with the new system. However he identified further savings by working three beds at a time.



Straight lines in the paddock made Chris Butler a very happy grower



Many plantings of many lines requires considerable tracking of operations for quality assurance

A 225hp tractor with RTK autosteer, six- metre discs, triple-bed hoe and triple-bed Lister bar were purchased. An existing tractor had GPS fitted for bed-forming.

Permanent beds remove the need for many heavy operations because the compaction in the beds is eliminated. This means less energy, less fuel and a shorter time between plantings.

A major advantage is the increased opportunity to get ground preparation done in windows of fine weather. Using permanent beds means fewer operations and less total waiting time after wet weather. Avoiding downtime allows more crops to be grown in a year.

Controlling where wheels go also reduces soil damage when harvesting in wet weather, because the permanent tramlines support traffic better. Spraying access is more reliable with better quality wheel tracks and better infiltration of rain into the beds. The seven-day demands of supermarket customers are easier to meet because harvest access also benefits from this system.

Gains in land use efficiency, wet weather access and turnaround have all proven GPS and a shift to permanent beds to be a wise investment for this operation



Straighter is better when growing salad



Permanent tracks give firm base for harvesting