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SUSTAINABLE FARMING PRINCIPLES FOR WESTERN CATCHMENT

The Western Catchment Management Authority (CMA) has developed a series of fact sheets outlining sustainable farming principles for the Western Catchment.

The Western CMA's General Manager, Daryl Green, says that cropping in the Western Catchment requires specific considerations and management techniques.

"The grey and red soils of the Western Catchment are naturally low in nitrogen and phosphorus and often have low levels of organic carbon. There are a number of management decisions and practices that can increase landholders' ability to farm sustainably and profitably," Mr Green said.

"This is the most recent study conducted into cropping practices in the Western Catchment and while many of the recommended practices are applicable elsewhere, this study provides information specifically tailored to far-western NSW," Mr Green said.

The Western CMA contracted the Department of Primary Industries to undertake research to better understand the effects of cropping on the chemical and physical properties of the soil with the aim of assisting landholders in making decisions about their future management strategies.

Soil samples were taken from 112 sites in the Western Catchment and each was analysed for its chemical and physical properties. Landholders also provided a cropping history for each of the paddocks that were sampled.

"The series of four fact sheets provide plain English recommendations resulting from the study," Mr Green said.

"The conservation farming fact sheet outlines the two major principles of this farming system, which is becoming increasingly more common throughout the Western Catchment: stubble retention and reduced tillage. It explains the benefits and mechanics of both practices, including ways landholders can modify existing farm machinery to begin conservation farming.

"The soil structure fact sheet defines good soil structure, which enables crops and pastures to explore the soil for moisture and nutrients and maximise yield potential. Factors that improve or destroy soil structure are identified and practises for improving poor soil structure are recommended.

"The soil fertility fact sheet explains ways to improve soil fertility. Nutrient levels and balances between nutrients must be maintained for profitable, long-term agricultural production. Our cropping soils are naturally low in nitrogen and phosphorus, which are often not replaced at the same rate as their removal. They also have low levels of organic carbon.



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"The cropping management fact sheet outlines crop rotation, livestock management and weed control strategies, including invasive native scrub (woody weeds) control. Landholders can use these strategies, together with conservation farming practices, to help increase yields, maintain or improve soil structure and fertility and reduce the risk of crop disease," Mr Green said.

Copies of the fact sheets are available from Western CMA offices, by visiting www.western.cma.nsw.gov.au or ringing freecall 1800 032 101.

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Caption:

Western CMA's Anthony Azevedo with the sustainable farming fact sheets.

