

07



mail

SPREADING THE NEWS

SPRING
2008



Graeme Martin

From the desk

After reflecting on the past months and trying to decide what the highlights (or low lights) are, I believe that the industry impacts of drought and increases in fertiliser prices take centre stage.

It has been difficult to plan or schedule work with such significant influences on the farming sector. No single area within the North Island has escaped the influence of difficult weather patterns, particularly the diversity of perpetual wet in Northland and the long period of drought elsewhere in the North Island for the months of January through to June.

The demand for our services has been challenging. With the requirements going from famine to feast, our resources and capabilities have been stretched. During the dry period, no one was motivated to apply fertiliser, but when the news of significant increases in fertiliser prices became known, our services were in demand.

For many dry stock farmers, it has obviously been a difficult year. Low farm gate returns, poor feed conditions, and increasing cost of inputs have all been major problems. And this is on the back of the preceding year, which was challenging in itself. This year's drought also had an impact on the dairy herds with lower production and also lighter cows going into calving.

The agricultural aviation industry is also facing challenges. One of the more significant costs to our business is fuel. Our fuel costs have nearly doubled over the past 12 months, and unfortunately this cost must be handed on to our clients. Other challenges to the industry are the environmental issues raised by the various regional councils in their regional plans, and as with most industries currently, we have skills shortages. We have been facing skills shortages in both engineering and piloting.

In this newsletter, we want to revisit the need for safe operating environments, particularly with airstrips, and also discuss the use of GPS technology.

With the increase in fertiliser costs, we are predicting lower rates or volumes being applied and some of these being strategic applications. For you the farmer, you will want to know where your fertiliser

applications have actually been applied. We are able to provide 'proof of placement'.

I hope you find this newsletter helpful. We are available to assist you with the requirements around your airstrip – just ask your local pilot, or call us here on 0800 SUPERAIR (737372).

Robert Thurston celebrates over 30,000 hours of flying



Robert over Castlepoint on the day he reached 30,000 hours.

Super Air pilot and Wairarapa area manager Robert Thurston has been airborne for more than 30,000 hours as a commercial pilot, an achievement attained by very few aviators in any calling.

Robert came to Super Air under the wing of Air Services (1979) Ltd when Ballance acquired that company in November 2006, and even as area manager he still gets to strap himself in for yet another topdressing job.

'What with the demand in May this year, I flew 57 hours for Super Air,' says Robert.

'I enjoy flying, and even now I usually manage about 200 hours a year.' Robert got his Private Licence with the Wairarapa and Ruahine Aero Club at Masterton and his Commercial Licence at Wanganui Aero Club, followed by his Ag Rating with Beryck Dalcom at Wanganui. Since January 1969 he has been employed at Air Services, now Super Air.

We tried to estimate how much fertiliser and lime he had spread in his career. Suffice to say; in his

| *continued over*



Did you know?

The Civil Aviation Authority and the Department of Labour have developed guidelines for safety in aerial topdressing

28,500 hours as an ag pilot, he could have spread about 17 tonnes of fertiliser an hour.

'A lot of the early work was lime, so it will be too hard to work out. During the downturn in the mid 1980s, I flew a daily passenger service from Masterton to Auckland, then back, then on to Christchurch and return to Masterton.' Also a qualified instructor, Robert has just trained three pilots from Indonesia in the skills needed for topdressing.

Robert's expertise and experience is of real value to the company, as he is able to train and provide guidance to our young pilots. To keep his qualifications, he has to fly six hours a year, and pass an annual medical.

Robert has just turned 62, and he has other callings on his time now, having started flying at 19 and spending nearly all his life flying, often seven days a week.

'I enjoy flying, but I also like fishing. I semi retired so I could go fishing at the weekends. I also have seven grandchildren, and I like to spend time with them.'

Robert says he is happy to jump into any of the aeroplanes if it's a busy time at Super Air. 'I'm still happy to do it. I have been lucky.'

Last year Derek Williams, our Tauranga-based pilot, also flew past the 30,000 hours milestone.

Airstrip safety and the guidelines

As many of you will be aware, the Civil Aviation Authority and the Department of Labour have developed guidelines for safety in aerial topdressing. The guidelines are aimed at those persons who own, maintain, access or use topdressing airstrips and fertiliser storage facilities. These guidelines are for good practice rather than being mandatory in nature, but ultimately aid in maximising safety for all those involved in topdressing.

Over the past years, we have focussed on airstrip safety, as have all industry participants. The guidelines have become the benchmark standard of the industry for the environment that we work in.

It is very pleasing to see the effort of farmers to ensure that the airstrips are safe and operable. This has made a significant positive impact allowing us to operate more confidently.

In summary the guidelines state:

Delivery Control

- 1) The manufacturer will supply the product clean and dry.
- 2) The transport operator will deliver the product clean and dry.
- 3) Once delivered, the product will be protected

from moisture and contamination.

Airstrip Control

- 1) Airstrip owners and farmers will ensure the airstrip meets the guided criteria.
- 2) Pilots will inspect the airstrip prior to the job.

Application Control

- 1) The farmer should perform a product check, ensuring that it is free flowing prior to engaging the aerial operator.
- 2) The aerial operator will ensure the product is checked for free-flow immediately prior to commencing the job.
- 3) The pilot will inform the farmer of an affirmative or negative decision.
- 4) The pilot has the right to fly away.

Working together on this important area of your operation is the only way we will have a safer working environment and, therefore, reduce or eliminate incidents and serious harm.

We look forward to the continued partnership we enjoy with our farmer clients.

Does your product go where it should?

With the increased prices for fertiliser, you need to be sure that your product goes on the intended areas of your farm. A 'proof of placement' print out is possible for all planes that have GPS capability.

The best way you can ensure this happens is to give your pilot a very thorough briefing prior to the commencement of the job, or better still, provide your pilot with a GPS map of the area where you want your fertiliser applied.

Most farmers have a map of their farm and if it is on your computer, you should be able to extract a "SHAPE" (shp) file of the map and send it to the pilot. This also saves valuable time, as a briefing flight may not be required.



An example of a "SHAPE" (shp) file from a farm, useful for topdressing operations.