



Graeme Martin

From the desk

It is very interesting to look back over the past 12 months and think about the two years prior to that - the contrast is quite staggering. During that difficult period we all had to look at our business and think about ways to push through the economic crisis that hung over the world.

It is fair to say that at Super Air we made some hard decisions - we reviewed our capacity for topdressing, reduced costs of operations and hung on by the seat of our pants!

The past twelve months has been good for the industry. The demand for application was very strong; volumes of fertiliser were up and we saw a significant increase in lime volumes - up 20% on previous years, including the good ones.

This edition of the newsletter contains information on the timing of fertiliser application, developments in the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) rules that govern us, and news about some of our team members.

I'd like to take this opportunity to personally acknowledge the contribution of our Masterton-based pilot, Hamilton Ruback, who retired recently.

Although the marketplace for farm gate returns continues to fluctuate, I do hope you all have a good year on the farm.

of surveillance. This means if we do not have any incidents we will not be under strict surveillance, but if we do, then we can expect regular visits from the regulator. Industry has also identified training and supervision of young pilots as an issue and will be developing more educational tools to reduce this risk.

Importantly, the agricultural aviation industry will be working with the CAA to develop the risk-based profiles, so they will be relevant to the industry.

In essence, this approach is the same as that to be taken by the Department of Labour when addressing the issue of accidents involving four-wheel motorbikes (ATVs) on farm.

Beefing up Taranaki

From spring 2012 Super Air will have a permanent full-time pilot covering the Taranaki region. The new pilot is Steve Johnson, who will be moving down from the Waikato with his family.

Steve will be flying one of our turbine planes, which will enable him to cover good ground and handle the volumes of lime and fertiliser that are typically applied in the Taranaki district.

The new plane will be based in Stratford, so Steve will be able to service customers over a wide area, right up through to Taumarunui. Although Steve hasn't been with Super Air for long, he's already shown that he works well with his customers, so he will be a real asset to the Taranaki farming community.

CAA and rules

Last year we were anticipating a safety-related change in the rules governing the agricultural aviation industry. However, we have since been informed by the CAA that the Ministry of Transport (MoT) has decided no changes are required. The MoT concluded that the reduced accident rate over the past five years indicated the current rules were adequate.

However, you may have noticed that we have implemented the AIRCARE programme (www.aircare.co.nz) as a safety management system that covers the requirements of CAA rules and the HSE Act, as well as environmental compliance requirements.

The CAA has identified areas of concern and is looking to 'promote' and have an increased emphasis on the requirements of the HSE Act. In addition, they will be developing a risk-based regime



The AIRCARE logos





Hamilton Ruback

Departures and arrivals

Hamilton Ruback

Earlier this year Hamilton Ruback decided to retire after he was struck down by a medical condition that means that he can no longer hold a pilots license under the CAA pilot licensing rule.

Hamilton joined Super Air in November 2006, following the acquisition of Air Services Ltd in Masterton. He had a long career in aviation, and not only in agricultural work. Hamilton is a qualified instructor and flew overseas before settling into ag work in the Wairarapa region.

Hamilton had a total of 23,500 flight hours, which included some helicopter time. He always had a great relationship with his clients and this was obvious when he became ill, as so many of his clients contacted him to make sure he was OK.

We would like to thank Hamilton for all his service over the years and to wish him all the best in retirement.

Jason Moore

One of two trainees on the team, Jason Moore has been working for Super Air for 3 years, starting as a loader driver in Taupo.

Jason was inspired to go flying from an early age, after watching planes in action on the airstrip on his family's dairy farm at Stratford. He trained as a pilot at Bay Flight Aviation in Tauranga.

He is gaining a lot of satisfaction out of working for Super Air. 'We get to see a lot of the countryside, and go to places lots of New Zealanders don't get to see.' His long-term ambition is to move on from loader driving to flying for Super Air. His persistence is bound to take him far!

Sam Kershaw

Super Air's second trainee, Sam Kershaw, was determined to become a pilot from a young age, growing up on a sheep and beef farm at Onewhero, where the fertiliser was flown on with planes using the farm's air strip. After leaving school he worked for four years to gather up the money he needed to train to be a pilot and then continued working hard for the two years required to complete his pilot training at Ardmore Flying School.

Sam has been with Super Air for a year now and is happy with where he is. 'I have always wanted to do ag flying, and now that is what I am achieving at Super Air.'

Summer is fine

Warwick Catto, Research and Development Manager at Ballance Agri-Nutrients, explains why it is good to consider applying phosphate fertiliser to your land before the arrival of autumn.

Applications of lime and superphosphate-style fertilisers have been the mainstay of hill country farmers trying to improve the land and get better productivity out of what can be quite a challenging farming environment.

Often it's a bit of a juggling act, trying to balance the funds on hand to pay for fertiliser and its application, versus not leaving topdressing so late that you miss out for the season. Sometimes, though, we hear that applications have been delayed because the farmer thought the fert needed to go on in autumn. I suspect this idea persists because on easier land, there's a strong history of fertiliser being applied in spring and/or autumn – we don't often talk about people making summer applications of fert!

However, it's important to know that there is no agronomic reason why phosphate fertiliser – or lime – can't be applied in summer. And from a logistics point of view, there are a number of advantages.

First, the agronomic story. When phosphate fertiliser is spread on the land, it will remain on the soil surface until sufficient rain falls to wash it into the soil – 25 mm is usually enough. Once in the soil, a proportion of the phosphate will be immediately available for plant uptake – and it will stay that way, even if the plants don't use it straight away. The phosphate reserves will still be in the soil when pasture starts to grow later in the season.

And the practical advantages? Well, one benefit of getting fertiliser on in summer is that the weather conditions are generally much better for aerial top-dressing. The airstrips are more likely to be in a good state, so fert can be delivered without any trouble and the planes can get in the air safely. The longer daylight hours mean more flying time is available, too, so you are likely to have less of a wait for a suitable slot in the pilot's schedule.

The other issue to consider is the impact on your farm if the fert doesn't go on this year. We know that withholding fert causes a relatively rapid drop in the levels of plant-available phosphate, which in turn suppresses pasture production. Less pasture means less grazing time, which means less dung and urine returned to the soil, which further contributes to the lowering of phosphate levels. In time, soil Olsen P falls and pasture quality declines. It takes some time – and a significant investment in capital fertiliser – to recover from this damage.

It really does make good sense to get your fertiliser on while you can. Summer is fine.

