

Australia's weeds prove fertile ground for US ag science firm

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Australia's reputation for excellence in agricultural innovation, rigorous regulatory approval process, and standing as one of the largest food exporters in the world spurred global agricultural sciences company FMC to pick it as the launch market for a game-changing herbicide.

US-based agricultural sciences company FMC is leading the charge in the war against annual ryegrass – a major weed threatening crop production in Australia – with an innovative pre-emergent solution called Overwatch® Herbicide, powered by Isoflex™ active.

Australian grain growers will be the first in the world to access the herbicide, thanks to the approval of the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA). Overwatch®, which will be available for the 2021 winter cropping season, is the first blockbuster crop protection product to be released by FMC globally in over 15 years.

'FMC has been consistently impressed with the very high standards within the Australian regulatory review and approval process,' says Managing Director ANZ–FMC Australasia, Kristina Hermanson. 'It is rigorous, but so efficient relative to other regions around the world.'

The overall cost of weeds to Australian grain growers has been estimated at A\$3 billion annually, with annual ryegrass being one of the most significant pain points. On top of that, many weeds in Australia continue to develop resistance to commonly used herbicides.

'Overwatch® is a breakthrough in annual ryegrass control,' says Hermanson. 'It is the only isoxazolidinone pre-emergent herbicide that can be used for three key winter crops – wheat, barley and canola – providing farmers with more flexibility for crop rotations, while delivering up to 12 weeks' residual control. It has also proven to be effective



ANZ–FMC Managing Director, Kristina Hermanson.

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Kristina Hermanson, Managing Director, ANZ -FMC.

against weeds such as silvergrass, bifora, sowthistle, hogweed and lesser loosestrife, making it an excellent fit in many Australian paddocks.'

Appetite for agricultural innovation

Australia's commitment to agricultural innovation, rapid adoption of new crop management practices, and cohort of talented agricultural practitioners made it the ideal launchpad for Isoflex™ active and Overwatch®.

'Across the continent, Australian growers work with a diversity of soil types, moisture conditions and climatic zones; they have a real appetite for innovative solutions to increase their sustainability and productivity,' says Hermanson.

'We have been able to demonstrate 108 large-scale field trials this season and engaged with more than 1,200 growers and agronomists all over the country going through our dedicated trial sites,' she says.



Australian Government

Australian Trade and Investment Commission

‘Along the way, we’ve gathered a lot of industry experience and knowledge – from agronomists, consultants and growers. These trials have helped to improve our understanding of how Isoflex™ active can be rolled out globally.’

Australia’s counter-seasonality to the northern hemisphere means FMC can develop and trial solutions all year round, typically achieving two seasons’ trials in the one calendar year.

Another advantage is Australia’s diverse microclimates, which mimic environmental conditions in different regions and countries.

Hermanson contends that Australians are leaders in agronomic practices, an upshot of being one of the largest food exporters in the world.

‘Australian farmers have an exceptional can-do attitude, an intuitive problem-solving style and an interest in time and labour-saving agtech,’ she says. ‘That’s a good fit for us, with our focus on advanced farming solutions and sustainable crop protection.’

‘The Overwatch® launch will allow us to prove ourselves as a tier-one player in the agribusiness space. As part of our global strategy, we are developing precision ag solutions, such as the Arc™ farm intelligence platform that helps growers accurately predict insect pressure before it becomes a problem.’

FMC is building new technologies to facilitate yield improvements, reduce wastage and drive greater efficiency. Australia is an important market for the company as it moves to drive innovation beyond new product development to include the intangible demands of modern farming.

‘People, culture and community lie at the heart of Australian agriculture,’ says Hermanson. ‘That’s something we live and breathe at FMC through our safety culture, the active promotion of diversity and inclusion, and through our efforts to support and participate in the communities we work and live in.’

‘I am very proud to say that this approach has resonated strongly in the market, leading to annual revenue growth, globally, of 8% last year despite flat market conditions. Our business is at an exciting stage of growth in Australia.’

Hermanson anticipates FMC’s Australian team will expand rapidly over the next five years, particularly in research and development, regulatory and commercialisation capacity as the company becomes more connected with Australia’s rich Agriculture 4.0 innovation ecosystem.

‘There is a great talent pool in Australia that FMC can draw from to build a team with unique expertise

in plant science and agronomy, a passion for success and an innovative spirit at heart.’

FMC also sees significant value in Australia’s network of free trade agreements to support diverse export pathways for its high-quality horticulture and grain products.

Building relationships, supporting locals

FMC has collaborated with Grains Research and Development Corporation to evaluate pre-emergent herbicide and resistance monitoring in Australia. It advocates for grower groups and farming practice collaboratives, such as Birchip Cropping Group, Southern Farming Systems and the Liebe Group, and is keen to further support local manufacturing.

The company has completed a multimillion-dollar upgrade of its chemical plant in Wyong on the New South Wales Central Coast. The facility, picked up from the 2015 acquisition of Cheminova, already formulates and packages the majority of FMC’s locally registered products and is geared up for the production of Overwatch®.

FMC is eager to build deeper relationships in Australia and sees Austrade playing a key role.

‘We are keen to work with Austrade to extend our footprint in Australia, forge partnerships with world-renowned research organisations and ramp up manufacturing to meet the growing needs of the Australian agriculture sector,’ says Hermanson.

‘Austrade can help in identifying R&D activities, introducing us to – and arranging meaningful connections with – research bodies such as CSIRO. We plan to accelerate our contribution to universities to attract more talent into ag sciences and extend our engagement with the agtech network and other innovators seeking to commercialise new technology in collaboration with FMC.’

About Austrade

The Australian Trade and Investment Commission (Austrade) is the Australian Government’s international trade promotion and investment attraction agency.

We deliver quality trade and investment services to businesses to grow Australia’s prosperity. We do this by generating and providing market information and insights, promoting Australian capability, and facilitating connections through our extensive global network.

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