

## The journey of FMC's Overwatch Herbicide

**As one of the top-tier agchem companies in the world, FMC has a strong focus on innovation, customer success and a solid commitment to local manufacturing – all supported by its distinction as one of few major suppliers whose business revolves entirely around crop protection.**

With global backing, FMC Australia is leading the charge in the war against annual ryegrass with its newly released, innovative pre-emergent herbicide, Overwatch.



**Kristina Hermanson**

FMC ANZ managing director, **Kristina Hermanson** said the journey to bring this blockbuster product to market has taken many years and has been made possible by the dedication and determination of many individuals within FMC, and through the collaboration and shared knowledge of innovators, growers, agronomists, and retailers.

### A long history of development

During the clomazone discovery period in 1979, two additional analogues, F9600 and F9602 were discovered by FMC. However, due to FMC's focus at the time on finding a soybean herbicide for LATAM, the two analogues were shelved and were not commercialised globally over the following few decades until 2011.

In February 2011 a proof-of-concept project was approved to re-evaluate both molecules, and by 2013 FMC made the decision to advance F9600 into development based on its formulation characteristics and spectrum of weeds controlled.

"In the early days of development in Australia, the business case was a quarter of what we expect it to be today," Ms Hermanson said. "Research and development manager **Dugald North**, along with head of sales **George Saville** and global head of marketing **Craig Dunn** pioneered the vision of how significant the molecule could be for the Australian market."

Trials continued in Australia and in other parts of the world until in April 2020 when FMC Australia received the first global registration for Overwatch Herbicide. "From here, the extensive demonstration trial program commenced, which would not have been possible without the continued support from FMC globally," Ms Hermanson said.



**The tell-tale magenta colour of ryegrass sprayed with Overwatch Herbicide.**

### Australia Global First

"Overwatch Herbicide is the first blockbuster crop protection product to be released by FMC globally in over 15 years and Australian grain growers will be the first in the world to experience this innovative new product.

"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 the Isoflex active and Overwatch Herbicide," she said.

"Adding to that, the overall cost of weeds to Australian grain growers estimated at \$3 billion annually – with annual ryegrass being one of the most significant pain points, Overwatch has an excellent fit in many Australian paddocks.

"Overwatch is a breakthrough in annual ryegrass control. 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 against weeds such as silvergrass, bifora, sowthistle, hogweed and lesser loosestrife.

"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.

"Along the way, we've gathered a lot of industry experience and knowledge from agronomists, consultants and growers through our extensive trial program," Ms Hermanson said.

Prior to commercial production of Overwatch Herbicide, FMC equipped a number of innovative retailers and growers with product to conduct over one hundred large-scale 8ha field demonstration trials through which FMC was able to engage with more than 1200 growers and agronomists all over the country during the 2020 season.

The commercial demonstration and R&D programs have also enabled FMC to collect a comprehensive and comparative data set for Overwatch Herbicide vs a range of grower standards through the use of precision ag tools such as NDVI imaging.

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

She says FMC continues to do things differently with a unique selling model which takes the waste out of inventory management and allows every drop of Overwatch Herbicide to be applied to a paddock rather than sitting in a warehouse.

## Supply Chain

As Isoflex active starts to launch in markets around the world, FMC’s supply chain has also expanded in various global locations. For the Australian launch of Overwatch Herbicide, capacity has increased at the world-class Panoli, India manufacturing facility which has been instrumental for the production of Isoflex active ingredient.

In recent years, the US-based company has focused much attention on the Australian market, showcasing FMC’s dedication to providing customers with the highest quality product and operational flexibility by investing in the FMC-owned 5ha plant at Wyong on the NSW Central Coast.

Ms Hermanson said many significant changes had been made at the Wyong facility – most recently with an extensive multimillion-dollar upgrade including the addition of a suspension concentrate herbicide formulation line, built to formulate FMC’s blockbuster Overwatch Herbicide, Rustler herbicide and other industry-leading products.

“Based on what was anticipated for our first global launch, orders have already exceeded expectations and we are continuing to increase production at the Wyong facility accordingly,” she said. “The site is now operating 24/7 with an increased workforce, ensuring the best possible service for our customers.”

## R&D People + Pipeline

FMC is investing significantly in new chemistry and has one of the most robust discovery and development pipelines in the industry. Overwatch represents the first in a pipeline of 35 new active ingredients which FMC plans to release around the world by 2030, including more than 20 new modes of action.

“As FMC continues to develop new chemistry via the global FMC R&D organisation, the need to build a strong local R&D and tech extension team is paramount,” Ms Hermanson said.

To support development of the pipeline and global R&D effort, FMC ANZ head of development, **Geoff Robertson** has a five-year vision to build the local research and development team, backed by the confidence and significant investments of FMC globally.

“Geoff has made considerable steps towards his five-year vision with the recent appointments of **Marco Montagna** and **Sarah Anderson** to the roles of product development manager.

“With both Marco and Sarah’s extensive experience managing the development of new and existing products in the ag industry, along with advanced knowledge of conducting field trials for the development of new products, they bring a wealth of experience in areas we were previously lacking,” Mr Robertson said.

The FMC Overwatch field day at Roseworthy SA attracted plenty of interest.



“Marco and Sarah are welcome additions to the growing R&D team, with more appointments to follow in the near future.”

With a progressive pipeline of new products and the creation of innovative solutions for the needs of the Australian market, Ms Hermanson said FMC is heavily focused on product stewardship and sustainable chemistry. As such, **Judy Patterman** has been appointed to the role of head of regulatory and sustainability.

“Judy brings extensive knowledge in the regulatory space as well as a learning agility and desire to step-up our sustainability activities targeted to grower needs here in ANZ.”

## The People

Emphasising its ranking as a leading agchem supplier in Australia and New Zealand, and to continue to deliver on the promise of its strong technology pipeline, FMC is continuing to enhance the capabilities of its technical and commercial teams.

“We have been investing heavily in people to service the current business and new portfolio when it arrives, and we are ready,” Ms Hermanson said. “The commercialisation of Overwatch Herbicide has put FMC Australia in the spotlight for hiring the talent needed to work closely with agronomists and growers to develop what customers really need and to boost the productivity of our pipeline.”

Recent appointments include additional positions to enhance product development and registration capability, and to expand the current sales, marketing and technical extension teams – all instrumental in guiding Overwatch and other new products into the market.

“The individuals featured on the *Rural Business* cover have been instrumental to the successful launch of Overwatch, however this is just a sample of those involved across the business,” Ms Hermanson said.

Critical to FMC’s ability to deliver on the promise of its technology pipeline, and to complement the existing R&D and commercial teams, FMC commenced building a local team of technical extension specialists in late 2018.



FMC staff evaluating the level of ryegrass control in one of more than a hundred Overwatch Herbicide trials around the country.



Growers and agronomists inspecting the performance of Overwatch Herbicide at FMC’s dedicated trial site at Temora.

“With the addition of **Stephen Fischer** to the technical extension team, throughout 2020, the four technical extension specialists have been an integral part of the extensive technical extension program, supporting the area sales managers with a comprehensive field trial and demonstration program for Overwatch Herbicide, as well as the transfer of technical information from FMC’s research and development, regulatory and marketing teams across to distributors, growers, and agronomists.

“Alongside the technical specialists, FMC has invested heavily in expanding our national sales team to service the current business and the introduction of Overwatch Herbicide. Three regional sales managers; **Simonne Read** (southern), **Angus Wilson** (northern) and **Derek Burgess** (WA) oversee a team of 12 area business managers including the most recent appointment of **Yan Wu** to the southern region.

“Yan joins FMC with over a decade of experience in the ag industry and brings to the business a strong customer focus with the unique ability and desire to understand the customer’s needs, a talent I am ecstatic to have on the FMC commercial team to support the future growth of FMC’s portfolio,” Ms Hermanson said.

“Overwatch has set the stage for FMC’s future success, with the promise of more good things vested in the robust discovery and development pipeline. Add to this the collective knowledge of the current team along with the recruitment of additional resources in marketing, R&D and sales, FMC will continue on the trajectory towards becoming the market leading R&D-based agchem supplier in Australia and New Zealand.”