



Building an Agricultural Airstrip

Aerial spraying and spreading can also be a very efficient way to apply pesticides and fertilizers on your farm. They can also be quite economical, but there are a number of things you need to do to make sure you get an economical job. An aircraft basically operates on a cost per hour. The more hectares you can get sprayed per hour the cheaper the cost per hectare. One of the large wastes of aircraft time is the time it takes to go back to the airstrip to get the next load. For an aircraft operating from an airstrip 20km away, up to \$4/ha of the cost may be due to wasted ferry time. Having an airstrip on the farm can soon pay for itself. For more information on aircraft operating costs please check out our web site.

Things to consider when putting in a strip

Access for vehicles.

Air Ag need to get into the strip with a truck carrying our mixing equipment, fuel and chemical. You need a good access road that is useable when you may need the strip the most, ie when it has just rained.

Available water.

We cannot bring water with us, we use too much of it. You need to be able to supply water to us. An aircraft going flat out may need up to 5000L per hour. There are several options

- Use a water trailer to cart water. We have a tank on our truck to hold one load so you have time to go back for another load (about 20 minutes). This is a good option if you have a big water trailer and you do not think you will be doing that much aerial spraying.
- Put a tank at the strip and fill it with your water trailer or a piped supply of water. A 5000 to 10000L tank would suit depending on how fast it refills. This is a good option for regular aircraft users.
- Build the strip close to a water supply such as a bore or dam. You would still need to put in a tank or have a pump and pipe to keep our truck full.

Type of Airstrip.

The ideal airstrip is a gravel all weather airstrip that we can use the day after rain, but this all costs money. The other end of the scale is a grass field that you run the slasher over when you want to use it. What you use is based on money and how often you want to use it, and how reliable you want it to be. Remember you may only need an aircraft when it is too wet to move. Consider these ideas

- If you want an all weather strip then you can offset the cost by using a straight piece of existing gravel road. Many growers these days are setting up their farms to allow all weather access for grain trucks, so all they need to do is make one of these straight for 800m. The road needs to be a little bit wider than normal and away from fences or powerlines. See the diagram below for measurement details
- Kick in with a group of neighbours for a good central airstrip. Air Ag are always willing to help out in these situations by helping with negotiating, organising and maybe funding some of the infrastructure.
- A dirt strip will dry out quicker if it is properly graded with a positive camber and table drains to help water drain off quickly. Usually what holds up a strip after rain are a few low spots or puddles. If the water can drain off quickly and get away it can be used quite soon after rain. This is a good option if gravel is expensive. Getting a grader in is pretty cheap. You can always add gravel later if it necessary.
- We will operate out of any flat area that meets our specifications. (see diagram below). Fertiliser spreading for example, needs to be done from 'next to the



paddock' due to the large number of loads, so if you are planning a large area of urea spreading it would be worth it just to run the drag bucket over a flat area of paddock and make a temporary airstrip. As long as it is hard and smooth enough to drive a ute on at 100kph it should be adequate.

Airstrip dimensions

These are strip dimensions recommended by the Civil Aviation Safety Authority. Pilots always have the final say as to whether a strip is safe to use, but we think these dimensions are about right. Air Ag staff are always available to come and look at an area and give some advice on what would suit us. Feel free to give us a call anytime. A standard strip will take up about 3 hectares if you allow for the fact that you could grow a crop in the clear areas on the side of the strips.

