

Prospect

FOR FARMERS IN THE KNOW

Summer 2021



The Delta Agribusiness group of companies



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Welcome to the Summer edition of *Prospect*.

2021 has pleasingly delivered terrific seasonal conditions across most regions of the country, albeit not without some significant challenges. As articulated in that famous old poem by John O'Brien *Said Hanrahan* and his famous line, "we'll all be rooned before the year is out", I'm sure is currently resonating with some regions of our farming network.

After recent years of prolonged drought, severe bushfires, frost in WA, trade tariffs, and of course COVID-19, we are now witnessing a wet and challenging harvest and damaging floods across large parts of northern NSW and Queensland. We've seen it all over the past few seasons. Certainly, plenty of challenges and crop losses to take the edge off what has in general been a very positive agricultural environment, and strong industry returns. Our hearts go out to those badly affected by the recent wet harvest challenges and damaging flood waters.

In general though we have much to appreciate. Extremely high livestock prices, record canola prices and lucrative values around most other ag soft commodities (even weather damaged grain is still holding up well), on top of escalating land values and strong equity positions, ag in general is in a very good space. Irrigation dams and on-farm storages in Eastern Australia are now predominantly full, and with full soil moisture profiles across many regions we are set up nicely for a strong year ahead and several strong years for irrigation farms. Whilst we are also navigating some supply chain challenges and rising and volatile farm input prices, there is a lot of general positivity ahead for our industry in our opinion.

In this edition of *Prospect*, we are proud to showcase two of our leading producers in the Litchfield family and their rich history at Hazeldean on the Monaro, and the highly productive enterprise of the Murdoch family in Victoria's Mallee region. Whilst a significant contrast in farming dynamics, both families are operating outstanding businesses, challenging the status quo, and delivering outstanding and sustainable production outcomes.

Penny Crawford and her innovative creations at Crawford Boots, is a great example of initiative and determination to change the paradigm in terms of workplace safety, injury prevention and business diversification. Crawford Boots is a terrific story, created through the tough years of intense drought, and tangibly improving mine workers comfort and safety under some of the most challenging conditions in any workplace. We congratulate Penny on her achievements in this space and are sure you will enjoy reading her story.

In addition, we also feature one of our very best locations, Lachlan Fertilizers at Grenfell in Southern NSW. We are very proud of our Grenfell team, as they epitomise our overall company's purpose, vision, and values; integrity, commitment, common sense, innovation, getting better, and partnering with farmers to make the right decisions. This team leads the way in consistently delivering outstanding customer service, and total dedication to their clients to ensure they have market intel, strong and reliable supply, and leading agronomy and advisory services.

Our business success like all businesses is firmly anchored and underpinned around attracting and retaining the best people. In this edition we also articulate the importance and success of our graduate agronomy program and in particular Holly Pender's journey with us based at Narrabri. Holly is another shining example of the rewards of being committed to such a program that invests heavily in providing opportunities for young talented people to develop an ag career, and our future sustainability is very much dependent on programs we operate like this one, and its sister Graduate Agribusiness intake each year at Delta Ag.

In this edition we are also proud to showcase our newest family member, David Grays Aglink and its company owned retail sites (ARH) across Western Australia. The David Grays business has a rich history dating back to 1939, and the Agri services division, which was established 16 years ago incorporates David Grays Aglink (DGA), a leading wholesale business that services a large network of successful independent businesses, as well as its own retail branches. DGA has a purpose and culture that is very well aligned to our overall business. Warren Stirrat and his team are passionate about their customers, their people, their footy, and Western Australian regional communities that rely heavily on businesses such as ours. At Delta Ag Group, our ongoing strategy is to continue to grow by partnering with like minded people, to deliver increased diversity in terms of geography, and business activities, whilst always focussing on adding value to our customers.

As the festive season is upon us, we would like to sincerely thank you all very much again for your loyal business support and your friendship, we greatly appreciate it. On behalf of all of us across our businesses, we wish you and your families a very Merry Christmas, and a safe and prosperous New Year in 2022.



Gerard Hines
Managing Director
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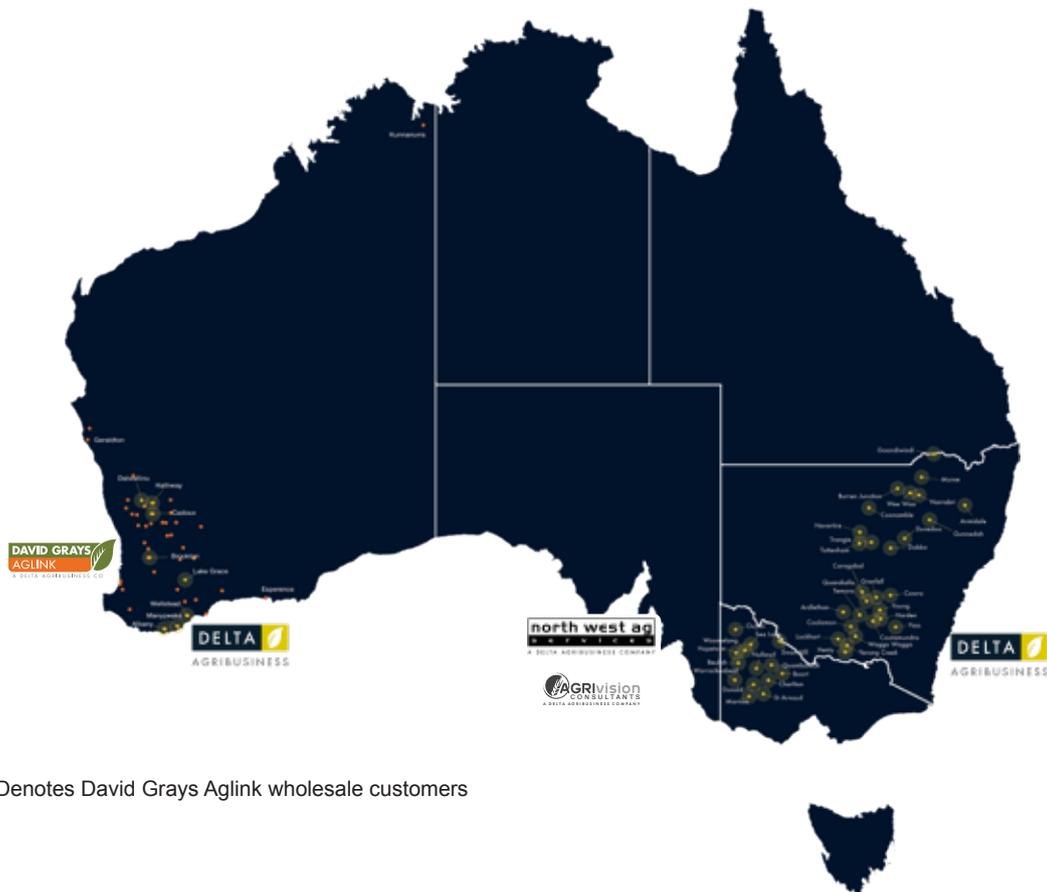
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THROUGH HER EYES

How Heidi Morris is capturing the heart of our rural communities



Her images have been captured via chopper in the most outback dusty desert regions of Australia's vast landscape, they've been captured via an open window of a dented working farm ute, they've been captured as she shares a laugh and a chat with locals as she travels across the country... however as **Lucy Moore** discovers, it's the rawness of a portrait and the resilience and strength of those working in agriculture that inspires Heidi Morris the most. ►



Glancing through photographer Heidi Morris's Instagram page @lens.of.rosie, there are hundreds of images telling a special story.

From the giggles of a naked child wearing an Akubra hat, to the excitement of a child riding a sheep, piggybacks, cuddles with dad in a cotton crop, harvest in action at sunset, to the action of a bull catching operation at Wollgorang Station, her images show the heart of the people living in rural Australia.

It was when she was working on Paraway Pastoral Company's Davenport Downs, west of Jundah in south west Queensland, throughout 2014 and 2015 that she first created the Instagram page to show station life.

"My Instagram page gained more traction than anticipated, so I continued to upload with the hope of educating city friends about life in the desert," she says.

"A lot of my city friends really had no idea about what went on in the west and loved seeing it all firsthand through my photos.

"My love for the beef industry and the channel country merged with my love of photography and if it weren't for my time at Davenport I doubt I'd be where I am today."

Heidi recalls playing with her parents' digital camera from the age of 8 years and developing a passion for photography then.

"When I was 14, I worked two jobs for six months to save for my first 'big' camera and it was after using these new tools I realised I really had the 'eye' for photography," she explains. She has a particular interest in capturing portraits as she says the images conjure so many emotions and feelings.

Heidi's photography work has since meant she has been selected to photograph campaigns for Akubra, the NBN network and the NSW Government, as well as several other businesses and organisations.

She has travelled to remote landscapes throughout the Northern Territory's Kimberley, and more local endeavours surrounding her hometown of Moree.

When I chat to Heidi, she's in the midst of working a demanding harvest – having operated headers throughout Australia and Canada for the past nine seasons.

And now, her passion for the agricultural industry and having been involved in harvest operations prompted Heidi to undertake a new

venture, as she saw firsthand how ongoing pressure from COVID-19 lockdowns and border closures then linked to staffing shortages has led to many sleepless nights for grain farmers as the season draws to a close in the Eastern states.

That's how her new venture and social media pages Seasonal Work Australia (Facebook) and Instagram handle @seasonalwork_oz was established and have taken centre stage to her other commitments.

"The nation-wide shortage of harvest staff and the complex processes in place to get new workers among the current COVID-19 climate made me realise we need to simplify the process to attract people as much as possible," Heidi explains.

"I knew so many people through my travels who were keen to follow the harvest like I did, they just didn't know where to start.

"I really wanted to scale the process back to a simple message and phone call scenario, and the response has been better than I ever imagined."

Australian farmers requiring seasonal work have long relied on overseas workers to get crops off, but with that option all but dried up, Heidi hoped to attract Australians to the job.

"Aussies are here to stay, so what's to say they can't come back every year for harvest? I know how rewarding working through harvest is, and I'm hoping others will be involved and experience firsthand how enjoyable it is"

Heidi says hundreds of people have been contacting her looking for opportunities, from university students to school leavers, and those who have been left unemployed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

While Heidi originally planned a 12-month commitment with Seasonal Work Australia, she says the response received hinted the project could easily become long-term.

"The dream would be to have hundreds of Aussies coming back to our rural areas each year for harvest – I'd find that very rewarding," she says.

"I just ask what potential workers are looking for and pair them up with farmers I have on my list," Heidi says.

And while she might be in the driver's seat of a header in the thick of harvest activity, don't be surprised if she's got the camera bag packed and Heidi's social media pages are filled with images of her experiences during these latest seasonal farm operations.



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On Location Grenfell Lachlan Fertilizers Rural

LACHLAN FERTILIZERS
A DELTA AGRIBUSINESS COMPANY *rural* 

Article & Photography | Jennifer Harden

The historic flour mill that sits in the middle of Grenfell is steeped in history and it heralds the beginning of an illustrious journey in farm supplies for the Central West rural township.

Now positioned on-site is Delta Ag's Lachlan Fertilizers Rural business and Branch Manager Anthony Dixon is proud of the legacy and strength of the services here that continues through the people working within the business.

"It's the varied personal experiences and depth that each team member brings to their role that is so helpful to us as a business and that strengthens our team and elevates what we can offer our clients," Anthony says.

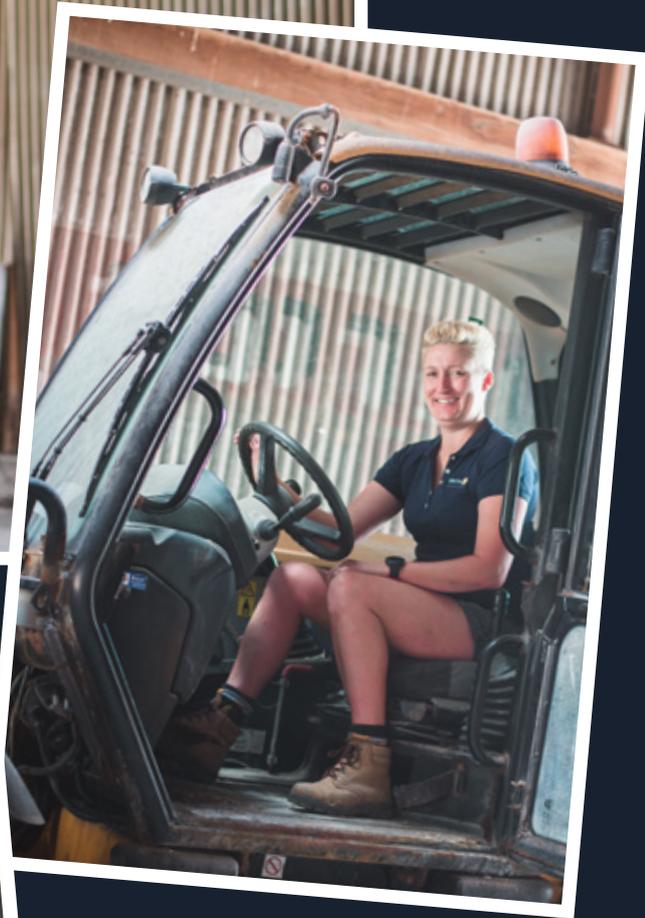
Fertilizer Manager Sarah Armstrong brings more than 17 years' of experience to her role, and she brings with her a tie to the history of the business as the fourth generation in her family to work here. It was in 1946 that her great grandfather Harold Oswald Ryder was managing the flour mill when he saw an opportunity to start his own farm supply business. This business would come to be known as H.O. Ryder and Son. The son was Frank Ryder, who was actively serving in the Army during WWII when his father's request for an early discharge to come home and start up their new business was obliged.

"I was the first daughter to join the business and started working here casually when I was 14 years of age," Sarah says. "Before me, the family was just a big run of boys too, I was the first girl to be born into my family in 60 years." Sarah took her father's advice and jumped right in learning everything there was to know, including operating the loader.

More than 75 years after first opening, with 15 full-time staff members and a premises just off the main street, Lachlan Fertilizers Rural is a big presence in their small town of Grenfell.

It's not just the work they do at Lachlan Fertilizers that makes the team recognisable, but also the additional activities and support businesses that contribute to the Grenfell community. Mick Neill in merchandising along with his wife Maria own the Grenfell shoe store, and Anthony and his partner Belinda have just opened The Collective Grenfell, a shared work and event space. Agronomist Jenna Brewis and Trials Manager and Agronomist Nellie Evans have recently started a landscaping and garden design business in their spare time.

Fellow agronomists James Ingrey and Henry Mitton both share their time between providing agronomic services and in-store support along with running their family's mixed farming operations, while Craig Bembrick who delivers fuel by day, moonlights as a local councillor.



Clockwise: Anthony Dixon, Sarah Armstrong & Moe Reynolds



When COVID-19 hit and the owner of the pub across the street closed up shop, Moe Reynolds, the on-site fuel manager saw an opportunity and purchased the Railway Hotel and he can now add publican to his impressive resume.

Before Moe Reynolds became the Fuel Manager at the Grenfell branch he had worked on a local farm, toured Australia as the drummer in a country band, done two tours of duty through the Middle East with the Australian Air Force and been a truck driver on the daily run from Bathurst to Sydney. A Grenfell local, Moe would always fuel up at Delta Ag before heading back out on the road. "I got a phone call from Anthony one day and I thought he was chasing up my bill!" laughs Moe. But, it was a job offer. Anthony thought Moe's time in the Air Force working in logistics and aircraft movement would see him bring to the fuel role processes and discipline. His time working on the farm would lend an understanding of crucial periods in the farmers' year and the importance of delivery timeliness and Anthony quips, "you just never know when you might need a drummer".

The fuel team is made up of Moe and Craig who take pride in offering a personalised on-farm fuel delivery service that assures customers get their fuel exactly when they need it.

"The wheels are always turning," says Moe, working their delivery route around urgency and proactively throwing in a few top-ups along the way for good measure.

It's this level of service along with competitive pricing that see's Delta Ag Grenfell's fuel service continue to grow year on year, drawing customers from as far as 120km away.

Many of the 15 team members come from families with active farming operations, including Anthony himself. "At the age of three or four, as soon as you can walk and chase your first sheep, before you can even recognise that you are learning, you are beginning to compile a farming knowledge base." ▶

He believes that early farming experiences stay with you as a foundation to build on into the future. The experienced agronomy team is headed up by senior agronomist James Ingrey who has over 20 years' experience. James, along with Henry Mitton, Jenna Brewis and Nellie Evans, each bring with them at least five years of experience in agronomy and the majority also have a rich personal history on the land.

Despite growing up on his family's farm in Grenfell, Ed McKellar still wasn't convinced that agriculture was the path for him. He decided instead to study accounting, however after a few courses he still felt he hadn't found his match. He took a chance on a fertilizer and seed handling role at Lachlan Fertilizers that was meant to last just four months, and four years later he has gone from loading fertilizer to understanding the ins and outs of the business.

His familiarity with Delta Ag from a customer perspective due to regular visits sourcing supplies for his family farm and his base of accounting knowledge made him a great fit on the admin team. Ed says that it wasn't until he found a practical application for what he had learned in his accounting courses that it all clicked for him.

For livestock production advisor Kate LeBrocque, providing good support makes all the difference to her clients and their livestock.

While she also grew up on a property, she admits the expanse of the property on the outskirts of Sydney is minuscule in comparison to those she visits in her current role. The year she turned 11, a few cows were added to her family peaking her interest in livestock and leading her to explore the agriculture classes that her high school offered, even joining the cattle show team.

These experiences paved the path for her to pursue a Bachelor of Agriculture at university and upon graduating she found herself quite literally out in the field working as a pasture agronomist and selling seed. As a by-product of her job and the fact that pasture is by nature feed for livestock she became more and more interested in animal nutrition and began to focus on this area of agriculture which brought her to Lachlan Fertilizers Rural 12 months ago.

Kate is thankful for the size of the team at the Grenfell branch which allows her to focus on her passion of helping farmers produce and maintain healthier livestock.

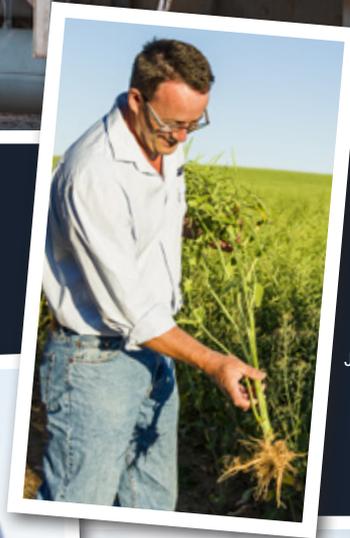
She feels proud to be able to take a few things off their plate by being knowledgeable about her clients' livestock and their calendar. This helps them to stay one step ahead of any seasonal challenges and works in with her goal of creating proactive operations instead of reactive ones.

Kate and the rest of the team feel privileged to be given so much personal information about their client's enterprises.

The productivity gains of the Grenfell clients provide immense satisfaction for the entire team and it's through these close partnerships and excellent communication that they are able to stay on the front foot and really kick goals.



Phil Eyles



James Ingrey



Jenna Brewis



Ed McKellar



Kate LeBrocque



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The Litchfield Family

A legacy in farming at Hazeldean

Farming since 1865 in the Monaro region, the Litchfield family has become renowned for producing strong genetic bloodlines, nationally recognised for its top performing Angus herds and Merino flocks. **Rosie O’Keeffe** discovers their history in farming in the Monaro region and how whilst they have a long history in agriculture, why they believe it’s important to innovate to maintain their success as one of the largest and most progressive enterprises in the industry.

Photography | **Camilla Duffy**



Whilst the Litchfield family have been involved in agriculture for more than 150 years, they are innovators, constantly evolving the management of their properties and livestock practices to remain at the forefront of emerging technologies and genetics.

The Hazeldean Litchfield business specialises in the production of superior seedstock for the beef and wool industries, and is recognised as one of the oldest and largest Merino and Angus cattle studs in Australia.

The historic family property "Hazeldean" was initially settled in the 1860s by James Litchfield who had travelled from England.

After spending some time as manager of "Myalla" (a property a part of the Litchfield's ownership today), he took up his first 130 hectare block on the Cooma Back Creek and four years later he established Hazeldean Merino Stud. Eventually he had acquired in excess of 18,000ha of land on the Monaro. The eldest son of James, Arthur, eventually assumed control of Hazeldean before his son James further developed their pastoral interests and introduced Angus cattle in 1926. He received an OBE in 1972 for services to the wool industry.

After further developing the Angus stud and expanding the influence of the Merino stud, fourth generation James Litchfield became recognised as a pioneer in the application of proven scientific research and for his contribution to Australian livestock production with a number of industry awards. These include the Beef Improvement Association's Howard Yelland Award for services to the beef industry in 1988, election as Fellow of the Association for the Advancement of Animal Breeding and Genetics in 1995 and the Helen Newton Turner Medal for Contribution to genetic improvement in the Merino Industry 1997.

Today, Jim Litchfield is the Managing Director of the company and has expanded their pastoral interests even further in marketing bulls in Queensland, NSW and South Australia, the introduction of the Senegus program and progressing the Merino stud, whilst having served on many industry committees.

It was after completing a Bachelor of Agriculture at Orange Agricultural College and jackarooing in northern NSW that Jim, who is fifth generation in the Litchfield family to farm at Hazeldean, returned to Cooma and took the reins from his father.

"I have always had a love of the land and animals and breeding. I also did not want to rest on the efforts and successes of previous generations but rather carry on their work increasing and improving the business," Jim explains.

He says a highlight was expanding the business with property acquisitions in South Australia, Queensland, and Victoria, as well as the Riverina district of New South Wales. Jim and his wife Libby manage the Hazeldean operation alongside their eldest daughter Bea, son-in-law Ed Bradley, and their baby Stirling. "I am now enjoying being a grandfather and seeing Bea and Ed take over the day-to-day running of the business," Jim says.

The enterprise now includes the 5,000ha "Hazeldean" property, which is located in south east NSW in the foothills of the Snowy Mountains with expansive landscape including rolling plains. The enterprise also includes "Myalla" which is 9,000ha, and a third property at Adelong 1,000ha which was purchased as part of a drought risk management strategy.

The Litchfields have become world leaders in the use of measured performance and the quality and longevity of the animals that are bred.

"Our Angus cattle are known for their fertility, ease of calving, above average growth and carcass," Bea, who had studied a Bachelor of Ag Science and worked in a corporate role in agriculture, before returning to the farm, explains. "It's important that our animals are durable and able to withstand tough winters and short growing seasons, whilst upholding key performance traits in particular fertility." ▶



Ed, Bea Bradley & baby Stirling with Jim & Libby Litchfield



Hazeldean's Angus cattle auctions are still breaking records, with just under 500 bulls sold in their recent season.

"We have had a particularly strong year with our Angus program. Whilst of course the strength in the cattle market has played a major role, we also have been able to capitalise on demand by having a very consistent product in our bulls. We've stuck to key breeding principles which align with profit for commercial producers and have not been distracted by trends or fads. As a result we have a very strong line of females that produce consistent bulls," Bea says.

The Hazeldean Angus herd was established in 1927 with the purchase of purebred commercial Angus females. The registered herd was established in 1952 with the importation of in-calf heifers from six New Zealand studs.

In 1960 Hazeldean was one of the first beef herds in the world to embrace the concept of Performance Testing. By using measured weight gain for selection the stud made much faster progress. Selection on measured gain remains a cornerstone of the stud today. The National Beef Recording Schemes 'Breedplan' was launched officially at Hazeldean in 1985.

Today the stud uses all available means to maximise the rate of genetic gain. Each year a large Artificial Insemination (AI) and Embryo Transfer (ET) programme is undertaken using the breeds' most proven, progeny tested sires.

"The Angus are a super fertile easy doing cattle that we know perform under hard conditions. They are incredibly docile and are renowned for their carcase performance. High end processors such as Rangers Valley specifically source our genetics for their carcase quality," Bea says.

"We are continuously collecting data on our animals to improve our breeding program and be able to better identify those animals that will be the most profitable to our future herd and those of our clients. We know you can't just breed out of a computer, it's very much looking at the structure of the animals and temperament as well as the performance figures."

The Merino flock has grown from its establishment in 1865 to being one of the largest and most progressive in Australia. Hazeldean Merinos are built on Rambouillet bloodlines with occasional Riverina Peppin infusions. And have one of the largest individual gene pools in Australia.

Hazeldean still leads the way with performance recording, having measured indicators longer than any other Australian stud since 1954 when James Francis Litchfield began to weigh fleeces, how much wool they cut and the fineness of the fleece.

"The genetic space is very exciting. Through the generations we have always maintained the mantra to continuously innovate and adopt new technologies," Bea says.

"From being the first stud in Australia to weigh and measure fleece weights we are now utilising genomics to better analyse our animals. We take DNA samples at marking which verify both sire and dam pedigree and also provide us with more accurate breeding values. From this we can more accurately identify the animals best suited to driving our program forward.

“We collect data and measure anything that can be profit driver traits, but we also know you can't just breed things out of a computer...”

Bea Bradley - Hazeldean



Bea & Ed Bradley

“Over the past decade we have built on our heavy cutting, fine wool base to better suit the changing market and environment. The market pressure for non mulesed wool and the strength of the sheep market have increased their place in the mix and we have moved toward breeding plainer bodied sheep that have more early growth whilst retaining the fleece performance.”

Ed Bradley says this year’s ram sale was the strongest the Litchfields have ever seen.

“The promising season obviously plays a big role but it is very encouraging to see commercial clients invest in their genetics and know that our genetics are delivering for them,” he says.

Not only have the Litchfields been focusing on genetics and improvements they can make to the breeding programs, but they are also focusing on pasture improvements to what has been traditionally native country.

“To reach the genetic potential in the animals you have to have the best quality pastures and our agronomy,” Bea says. “This year in particular we have been fortunate to gain new advice on different products available and we have trialed new varieties of crop we hadn’t considered before which we believe has been advantageous.”



Senior Delta Ag Agronomist James Cheetham



Delta Ag Agronomist James Cheetham has been working with the Litchfields to diversify pasture varieties and further trial new species that have not been traditionally grown in the Monaro region.

“We have been focusing on diversification in the crop and pasture program, and through this they have grown dual purpose canola for the first time this year to complement the more traditional grazing cereal crops,” James says.

“This has proven useful for weed and disease control whilst achieving some excellent growth rates on the ram lambs. We have been using a program which capitalises on the rainfall patterns on the Monaro to reduce environmental risk in dry periods and capitalising on wet periods, so there is a wider window of available feed through the year.

“We put in a pasture variety trial this season and have used multi species fodder mixes and we are also seeing promising results from these inclusions.”

The Litchfield family have also had the opportunity to educate many jackaroos, overseers and managers in the art of sheep and cattle breeding, performance recording and objective measurement, coupled with visual assessment to select and identify top animals along with best practice in livestock breeding.

Jim and Libby Litchfield stand amongst the lush pastures and glance over at their daughter Bea, her husband Ed Bradley and their baby boy Stirling, as the sixth and seventh generation of the family to be involved in the Hazeldean enterprise, and they know the future of the family business is going to be a bright one.

Bea attributes the continued success to the family’s passion and the importance of continuing on what has been a family farming legacy spanning generations.

“I really believe that is one of our key strengths. We are hands on within the business, and there is nothing like having family members to drive such a strong purpose in keeping the strong family history and links to farming going,” Bea says.



COMMUNITY CULTURES ALIGN ACROSS NEW BORDERS

With the Delta Ag Group now extending into Western Australia as part of its acquisition of David Grays Aglink (DGA) and Acquire Rural Holdings (ARH), **Rosie O’Keeffe** gains an insight into the history of these businesses and what the merger means for both companies.



Locals Supporting Locals

David Grays Aglink Field Day - York

The David Grays Aglink mantra is aligned with its sense of community – “locals supporting locals”.

And, while the company now boasts servicing more than 40 branches as wholesale customer stores and its own 8 retail holdings across the state, the sense of community in each of the outlets is strong.

Each Thursday night in the small town of Cadoux in the north eastern wheat belt of Western Australia, a district with around 35 local growers, all come together socially. Usually for a barbeque and perhaps to pick up their local supplies at the same time, the gathering has also been known to have other important elements such as health checks offered to those in attendance.

“Perhaps in other larger regional centres, rural stores just sell farm inputs, but we also sell hardware, general store items, liquor, lottery, fuel, postal services – our retail holdings really are community hubs,” David Grays Aglink General Manager Warren Stirrat says.

“We will look at the opportunities to go to very small rural townships and we will then really make sure we immerse ourselves in those communities.”

There are two segments to the David Grays WA business. Firstly there is David Grays Aglink which is a rural inputs wholesale business servicing 40 independently owned rural retail branches throughout the regions of WA, from Kununurra in the north to Esperance in the south east.

The second part of the David Grays business are the 8 wholly owned rural retail branches located throughout the main cropping belt of WA.

Today in the DGA network there are 70 staff, including 35 employed in the retail stores, and 35 staff employed in the wholesale section of the business. Most of the team members have been working in the DGA business for several years, and some since the first day of operation back in 2005.

Whilst the David Grays Aglink story began 16 years ago, the David Grays name and its business establishment as a supplier of agricultural chemical products to the farming community dates back to 1939.

The company was originally formed as a supplier of stock feeds and is now a highly diversified business with involvement in waste management, pest control, aerial spraying, consumer products, commercial formulation (toll manufacturing) and commercial agriculture through its David Grays Aglink branding.

The waste management division originated in 1992 when David Grays secured the local distributorship for SULO wheelie bins and became WA’s largest supplier to government, mining and industry. The pest control division commenced operations in the mid 1940s when David Grays first diversified into the formulation and supply of DDT and Dieldrin, while the consumer products division really grew to prominence in the 1970s when the products Outdoor Fogger and Scram became popular in the effective control of flies and mosquitoes. Since its inception, the David Grays company has remained a family-run business, with David’s son David joining the enterprise in the early 1970s after studying a Bachelor of Commerce at the University of Western Australia and now his own sons Nicholas and Benjamin are a part of the business.

David took over the reins earlier than expected when his father passed away in the mid 1970s. Whilst the business continued to grow under his management, it was in the 1990s that the next major transition

occurred with the larger expansion into the broadacre market, joining with the company to later become known as the Aglink brand.

It was then that Warren Stirrat and John Cross, both still in management with the company today, led the operations of the Aglink side of the business, expanding the reach throughout the years.

“The move into Aglink was when we really focused more on broadacre and horticulture and then we expanded into the seeds and trial work with AgroAdvantage, working with a number of suppliers,” David Gray explains.

“We had known the potential for expansion across Western Australia was there and the development really hinged on the contacts Warren and John had and understanding the importance of servicing the independent retailers in smaller districts that were distinctive from where the corporates had a presence.”

David Gray and Warren both attribute the success and growth of the business to its sense of community and the relationships garnered between the team and the customer base.

“It’s really about the culture and the community. That’s the strength of the independent, we are all local within the region and contributors to the community. That makes it a very workable model. The farmers like to support a business which is supporting the community as well and we work well with each of the outlets in community and charity events to, and we’ll support those ventures in any way we can.”

Warren, who is third generation in his family involved in agriculture, with his grandfather originally settling on a farming property at Muntadgin in 1926, first started working in the industry 30 years ago and worked in various roles across the state before he accepted the David Grays opportunity.

“I recall we were despondent with the corporate environment and there was a real appetite from other agricultural agents that wanted involvement with a business with high level customer service, so we grew the business from 5 to 6 agents to 15 to 20 in just a few years,” Warren recalls.

With the Western Australian broadacre cropping area spanning some 8 million hectares and with 3,500 growers, and then horticulture operations close to the coastal areas, there continues to be opportunities for expansion. And that was a driving force in the David Grays Aglink business now merging into the Delta Ag network.

With other corporates merging, Warren saw that as an independent and Australian-owned company to continue to operate and potentially grow into the future, scale and size was needed.

“I really felt it was time to bring our retail outlets (ARH) and David Grays Aglink wholesale business together, and this opportunity with Delta meant we could achieve that,” Warren says.

“It really was a natural step for a growing independent business to come together with another business that share the same values. We can now really look at extending our network.

“Whilst it’s important for our suppliers and customers to know we are now a part of the Delta Ag group, it was also equally as important to us to retain our identity, so we will still be trading as David Grays Aglink and that is the brand our agents and growers have resonated with.”

David Gray agrees that in having Delta’s ownership of the Aglink part of the company will enhance further expansion opportunities. ▶



"When we started to talk to the Delta management team it was obvious that our cultures were very similar and that to me was one of the most important factors in getting together."

Delta Ag's Managing Director Gerard Hines is also excited about the opportunity the expansion will bring for the wider network and growers across the group's footprint.

"This exciting development has launched our company into the large Western Australian market in a substantial way and will give us initially around a 25 per cent share of the Western Australian crop protection market, the largest market in Australia. This merger also gives us a big uplift in geographic and seasonal diversity and provides our overall business with better balance in terms of diversity of earnings and a strong base to add additional services like Livestock Marketing, Finance and Real Estate activities."

Warren Stirrat believes that there are exciting new opportunities for Western Australian agriculture overall and with an increase in residents moving to the country for a rural lifestyle, he is excited to develop the team and the David Grays Aglink network further, along with increasing the David Grays Aglink offerings in its AgroAdvantage, retail and its procurement divisions.

"We have a very loyal workforce and team and very few people have left the company after joining the David Grays family," Warren explains.

"The merger with Delta Ag has also given these wonderful staff members the opportunity to invest in the business if they choose to."

Teresa Bartolone is the administration manager for the business and is responsible for consignments. She has seen the company from just a handful of staff and she is proud to have been involved in the family-owned company since 2005. She had been working with Warren prior in the agricultural industry and has enjoyed her role as it has evolved over the years.

Simon Hazelden started in the business temporarily having immigrated from Zimbabwe, and now, 15 years later, he is still working within the team, now as Business Operations Manager for the retail stores. He says that the business has been through growth curves and new systems for procurement have been instrumental in keeping ahead of inventory especially in challenging times such as the Global Financial Crisis.

"It was important for us at the time to develop a consignment stock model into our business with the aid of four key suppliers. These operating systems have become a key cornerstone of the business. It's all integrated so there is a visual window for the supplier to see where the stock is and all the sales data from the products as well," Simon explains.

Simon believes that COVID-19 has cemented the importance of local retailers such as the David Grays Aglink business, and whilst tracking operations at these outlets can be challenging with such a large 'general store' offering, he believes the services are so important to the communities.

"We have seen how much communities are relying on their local businesses. We are excited about the opportunity to expand into other rural communities across the state. Whilst some of the smaller retailers may not be large profit drivers, they are an important part of these townships and the districts and we need to keep them in operation. Aligning with Delta now certainly allows us the ability to increase our footprint for further retail outlets throughout Western Australia."

Doug Hanna, who manages procurement for the wholesale and

retail stores, has also been working with David Grays Aglink for several years and he says it has become critical to be ahead when it comes to forecasting requirements.

"Procurement has changed dramatically in the last 15 years that I have been involved in the business, and I believe it has also changed dramatically in the last two years and in the last six months. It has always been important to negotiate the right price and terms, but it has become crucial to have accurate numbers for individuals and the overall business to make sure that there is stock available, but there doesn't become an excess of stock," Doug explains.

"It is especially important now with season 2022 upon us, with expected shortages with suppliers from China and price increases not seen to this extent since around 2007, inventory management, pricing and terms is critical."

Doug adds that being able to make decisions for customers and supplying products in a short timeframe is also a point of difference.

"There is a number of loyalty tools the business has that really provides value over price. Working on the research trials through AgroAdvantage also ensures we provide information on new products so farmers can have the latest information at their fingertips.

"Being aligned with Delta now will also increase our scale for opportunities for customers with an increased ability to purchase products from suppliers. It's a real bonus."

David Grays Aglink AgroAdvantage is the agronomic and technical services division. The network has seven trial sites located across Western Australia giving the opportunity for agronomists, advisors and growers to view and understand the new chemistry and seed lines before they become commercially available. The trials and development program allows growers the chance to see firsthand how new molecules and seed varieties may fit and the role they can play in their own individual situations.

The main trial site is located at Dumbleyung with others from Geraldton to Albany and Esperance, and regular field days are renowned throughout the industry, attracting more than 250 growers in attendance. John McBride, AgroAdvantage Lead, joined the David Grays Aglink business 14 years ago, however has more than 25 years experience in the seeds industry, at the forefront of new products developed for growers.

"We have really seen a progression over the years from pollinated varieties to hybrids that are increasing yields and profits for growers," John says.

"As an independent business our AgroAdvantage offering is unique in that it evaluates a series of products with a side-by-side comparison of horticulture and broadacre varieties.

"In the horticulture seed lines we could have 6 to 10 trials happening across a range of products at any one time – tomatoes, onions, carrots, spinach... In broadacre this year we have eight trial sites across the state with a product range with five major contributing seed companies demonstrating 15 to 16 molecules and various seed lines ready to be introduced to the market."

David Gray believes that the future of agriculture in Western Australia is bright. "The agricultural industry in Western Australia has expanded and new crop varieties are bringing new opportunities for farmers too. I think Western Australia has become known as a mining state, but I keep reminding people how important agriculture is. It's a vast countryside and there is certainly plenty of opportunity here.

"I see nothing but a great and positive future for agriculture going forward."



Warren Stirrat, Doug Hanna & Simon Hazelden - David Grays Aglink



David Grays Aglink Field Day - Brookton

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SEASONAL SUCCESS

With significant yield variation across paddocks and inconsistent rainfall in Kooloonong in Victoria's Mallee region, Alistair Murdoch has constantly been adopting new technologies and innovations to drive profitability in his family's farming enterprise. **Rosie O'Keeffe** discovers how a wealth of knowledge and agronomy experience ensures maximum productivity is achieved year after year. ►

Photography | **Jane McLean**



The Murdoch family - Kooloonong

Alistair Murdoch has always identified big business opportunities in farming.

Whilst like many others who have grown up amongst the day-to-day operations, driving a header at harvest and working long hours in between other employment opportunities as an agronomist, he recalls that his motivation was always to develop a broad knowledge of farming operations through various experiences. He has taken further opportunities to add assets and innovate, adopting new technologies and exploring emerging farming practices.

The Murdoch family farms a total of 7,100 hectares of arable land which comprises a combination of owned and contracted properties. There is a cereal crop rotation of wheat and barley (65 per cent) and pulses of grain legume, lentils, chickpeas, lupins and faba beans (35 per cent).

"The current system is no till farming and stubble retention, allowing a lot more predictability in our yields. We use controlled traffic and we do a lot of precision agriculture practices with variable rate spreading," Alistair explains.

"We find this lends itself favourably to our soil types and average annual rainfall of 325mm. We have a dune swail land formation in the hills and flat areas, so the yield potential varies dramatically on those different soil types. This year within a paddock we could have up to 300 per cent yield variability from the lowest to the highest, so managing these inputs is critical so we aren't capping the yield in the good areas and overspending in the poor areas."

Alistair takes a short break from the day's operations at the family property at Kooloonong, located 80km north west of Swan Hill along the Murray River to explain his family's passion for the local region, not just in agriculture, but in being actively involved in the community. Alistair's grandfather first moved to the region in 1927 after having farmed at Mildura. His great grandfather had also been a farmer, and Alistair says there is a similar history of farming documented in his mother's ancestry too.

Whilst since 2004, Alistair has owned and managed his own properties, he returned to full-time farming and involvement in the family enterprise in 2010 after having studied at boarding school, completed a Bachelor of Applied Science at Melbourne University, Dookie campus, and being employed for a short time for chemical company Bayer, travelling overseas, and then working for a number of years as an agronomy consultant at North West Ag Services and then AGRIVision.

"I was lucky to have gained such a practical knowledge while working in agronomy, consulting was instrumental in learning more about the processes involved in decision making, gaining more analytical skills in business management, and creating a wider network of contacts," Alistair says.

With the joint family farming venture Carinya Ag Enterprises under management with his parents Gordon and Geraldine Murdoch and his wife Simone, and children Charles, 8, Bede, 5, and Eleanor, 3, also involved, Alistair now focuses not just on overseeing the day-to-day operations, but he says its integral to the success of the enterprise to focus on clear processes and roles within the business to and build on the current structure for the future.

"It's been important in our enterprise, and I think it's important in many farming businesses now with so many large assets under management, to have clear structures within the organisation. I think one of the challenges in our business and others will also be experiencing similar, is that we are all under resourced and the main responsibilities and accountabilities can fall on just one to two people.

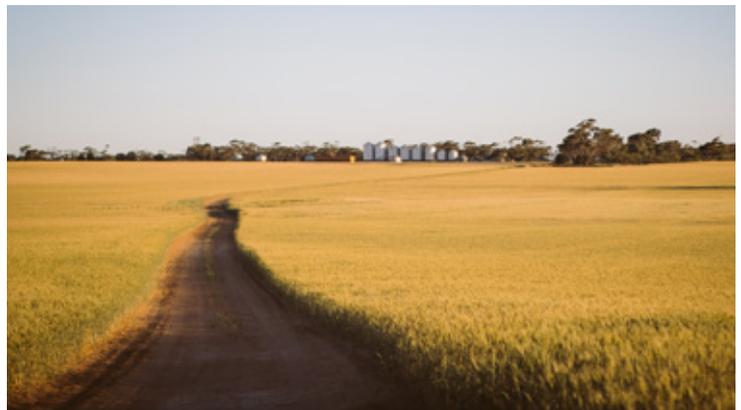
"As I've been involved in the management of the business I have certainly taken more of an interest in how we can evolve and grow the enterprise – that's where I get a lot of ongoing energy and motivation from too.

"I've always been curious coming into agriculture from a science perspective, so being able to understand the production side of things too and looking at different farms I think has been really beneficial.

"I remember loving helping my father on the farm and I was fascinated with jumping in the ute with the agronomists when they would visit as part of their advisory."



Gordon & Alistair Murdoch



Geraldine & Gordon Murdoch



Three generations of the Murdoch family

“ We’ve had a large focus on water use efficiency and converting rainfall into grain...”

Alistair Murdoch

Today, Alistair is involved in the day-to-day operations and manages the spraying and seeding, while at harvest time, he drives the header and manages the logistics.

Gordon is still involved in the operation and there is one full-time farm worker employed and one full-time truck driver, with seasonal labour used throughout the year.

“One of the conversations we are having at the moment is surrounding labour and clear systems to train people quickly and having clear processes they can understand,” Alistair says.

He had believed that the model used from a labour perspective was a resilient one, until the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the availability of international workers.

“We had been calling upon international trainees, through agricultural agencies, usually workers mechanically trained or with farming experience... Our business was focused on training and development and having standard operating procedures... We wanted people who were wanting to learn and grow and who can process information quickly and embrace their role and create a niche within the business.

“Typically it would be Danish or Swiss workers... That was the model up until early 2020, and when Coronavirus hit, we have had to rely more on local university students or family members.

“I think we will look at more business administration and management going forward too, developing and overseeing operating procedures and more human resource practices and compliance to free me up to be more creative in the practical farming side of the business and growing the scope of the business and the agronomics.”

The Murdoch family has traditionally been actively involved in the community at a local and industry level whether it be on committees of sporting clubs to the current roles that Alistair has on the local Landcare group and regional GRDC advisory committee.

Alistair has used variable rate seeding in applications since 2007 and variable rate spreading systems and top dressing nitrogen was introduced into the cropping operations in 2011.

“We are doing a lot of deep ripping of the lighter soils in the variable rate seeding. Plant establishment can be challenging, so variable rate seeding definitely helped crop emergence in the lighter soils.

As previously mentioned, the yield capacity of some paddocks can vary by up to 300 per cent, so trying to supply the right amount of nutrients to the right zone rather than over allocate the zones with enough nitrogen that might be there already has been important.”

When I speak to Alistair, the property had experienced well below average rainfall for the season, so expectations are lower than usual for yields and frost events have also been challenging in recent years.

“There is a strong focus in the commodity game, we have to be a low cost producer per tonne of grain and one of the easiest ways is to have the efficiencies in the operation. Timing is critical in terms of potential. In utilising labour better, having good size machinery and by running a reasonable scale, we can invest in maintaining a lot of the latest technology and keep improving water use efficiency for productivity gains,” Alistair explains. He says an 80 foot seeder is used for sowing, an 160 foot sprayer, and Alistair is also currently planning on using a shielded spraying system to utilise over summer for weed control. It is also a shield system that can be used in-crop for cereals to remove weeds growing inter-row.

“Grain marketing is really important whether using pools as a benchmark... We store a lot of grain on-farm too...”

“We have a focus on cost and profit per tonne, our operational equipment, financial costs and structures, efficiencies and using agronomy and technology with the latest varieties and farming practices all combine for us to extract as many gains as possible.

“We’ve had a large focus on water use efficiency and converting rainfall into grain, but outside the production season from November to April we often utilise some of the crop residue and stubbles for grazing livestock too.

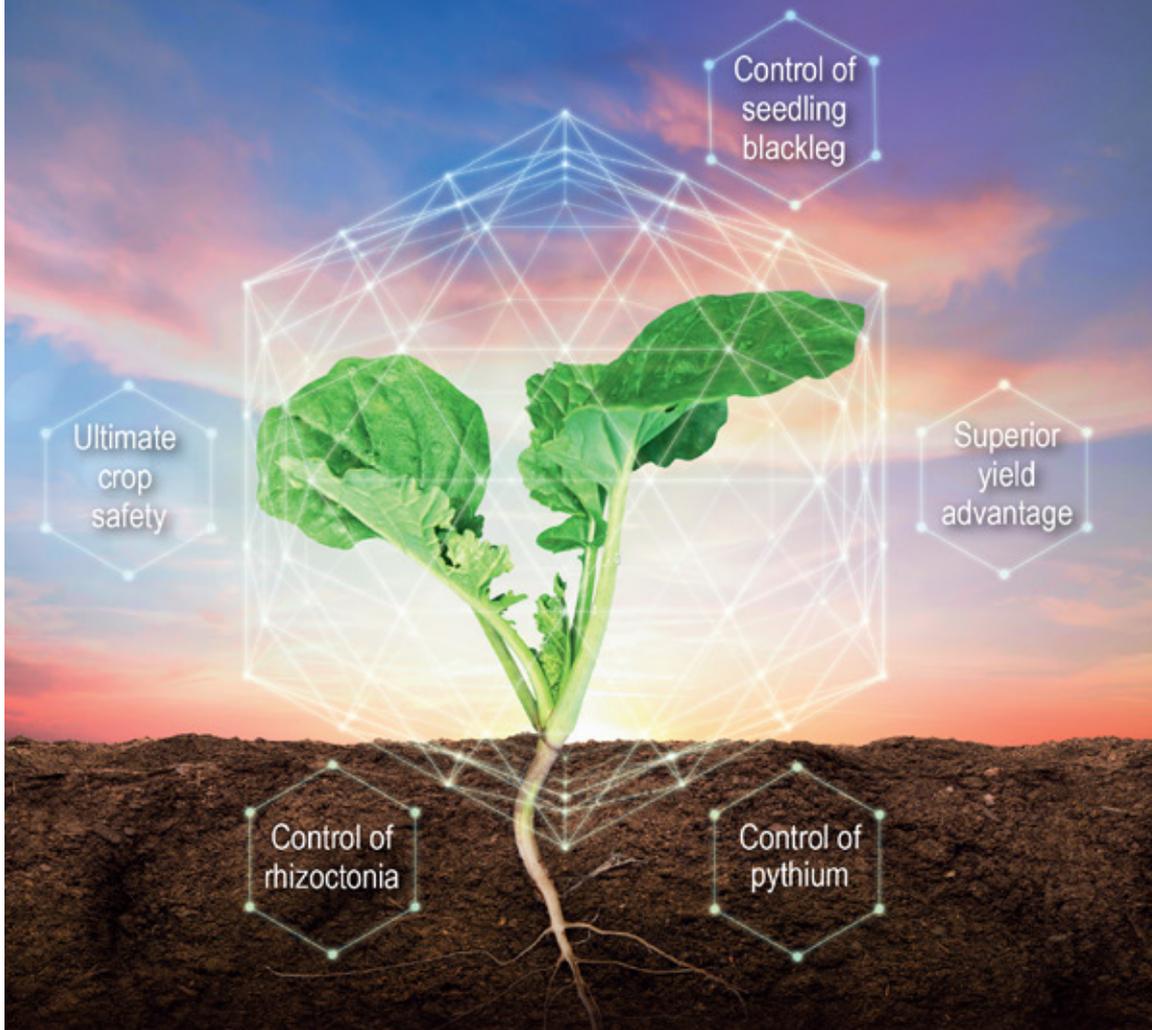
“We built our own feedlot 5 to 6 years ago so we often transition those sheep in the feedlot and utilise seconds grain to increase their live weight to when we sell them in the winter period.”

Alistair believes the future is a bright one, especially as he continues to grow the enterprise.

“I do feel that we need to be continuing to try new things, which is also why I have been involved in trials to gain an insight into different technologies, practices or varieties that we may not have had information that is relevant to our specific area or farm business.”

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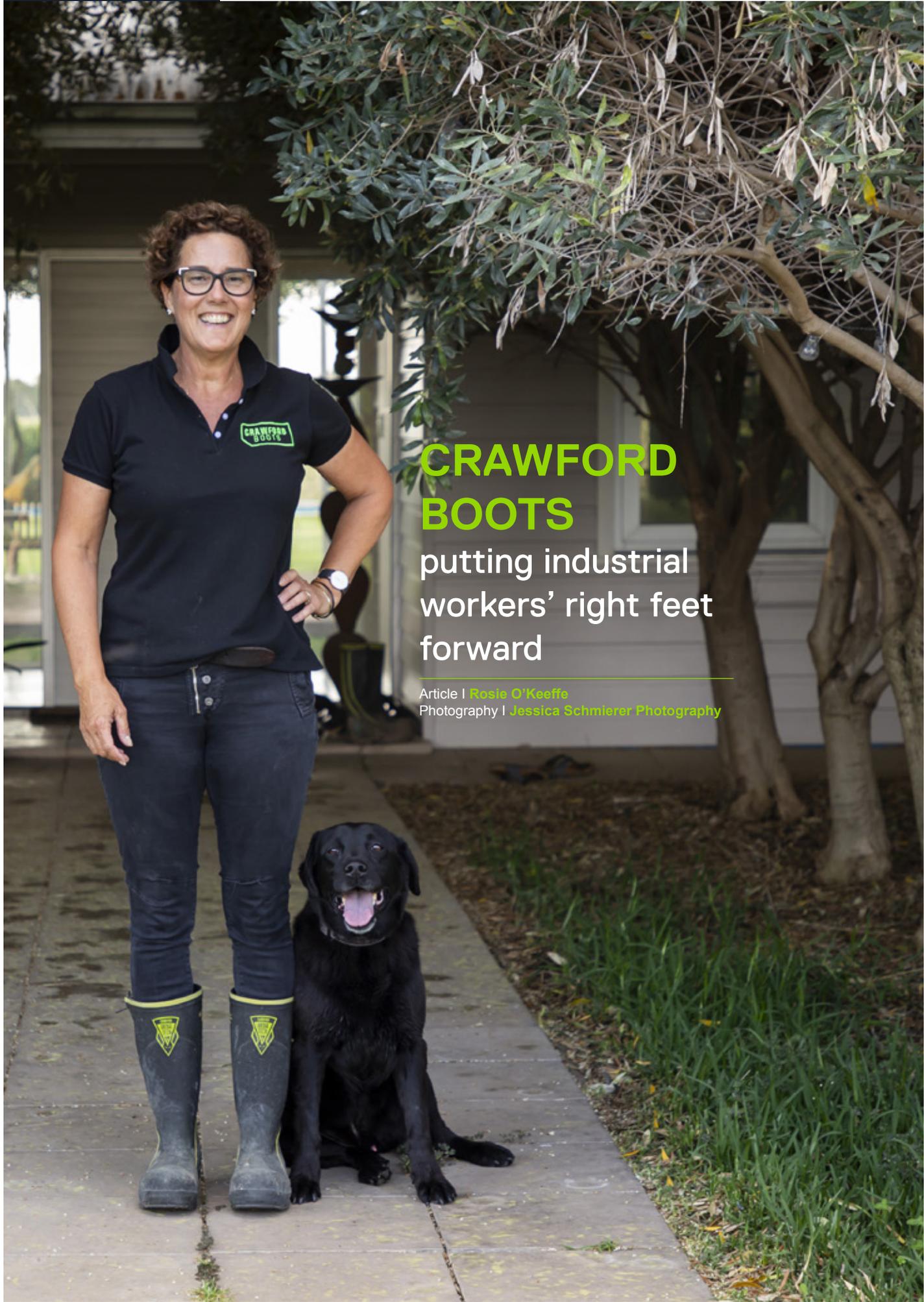
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CRAWFORD BOOTS

putting industrial
workers' right feet
forward

Article | **Rosie O'Keeffe**
Photography | **Jessica Schmierer Photography**

In her 30 years servicing the north west NSW areas of Gunnedah and Tamworth as a podiatrist, Penny Crawford never believed her background would take her deep into the most remote underground mines in Western Australia, but for the past six years she has experienced firsthand these extreme working conditions as she's travelled across Australia to develop her new venture.

After having many local underground miners visit her practice for advice and remedies for injuries caused by ill fitting footwear worn during their long 12-hour shifts, and identifying a lack of waterproof alternative to the basic gumboot that has been worn for generations, Penny got to work on developing and manufacturing a design with more comfort, stability and safety features.

And now, Crawford Boots, the industrial safety boots that can withstand the toughest conditions in underground mines and other wet area worksites, are distributed to workers in more than 40 underground mines across Australia. Handmade from 23 individual pieces of rubber, the boots have a reinforced heel area and steel capped toe for increased support. The lining of the boot is impregnated with antimicrobial and antifungal agents to assist in inhibiting mould, fungus and eradicating odours, and each boot undergoes waterproof testing by pumping 50kpa air into the boot whilst immersed in water.

"I knew that I wanted to develop a boot that would fit the characteristics of leather safety boots, but still have the waterproof capability of rubber gumboots. It was concerning that gumboots slip, or workers were using extra socks or innersoles to try and stop the movement. Leather boots eventually wear down and the material deteriorates causing cracking from the wetting and drying cycles," Penny explains.

Penny, who lives on a 408ha cattle property at Carroll east of Gunnedah with her husband Mike, recalls selling her podiatry business to concentrate on developing the manufacture of the boots.

She explains that it was certainly a gamble, financing the first container of boots in the midst of the drought from funds generated from selling their stock.

"It was certainly a difficult time emotionally and financially, taking the risk to focus on establishing Crawford Boots when we had no income due to the drought, but it's interesting to look back to what we have now developed from a concept to a tangible product," Penny says.

She now manages supply chains in three different countries, and credits the success of the business to the industrial designer she had teamed with, and receiving a Commercialisation Australia grant which allowed Penny to develop her business skills and increase her network of experts to also give advice.

"The manufacturing component was always particularly important as we need to adhere to Australian and international standards and I knew I wanted to use a natural product.

"The Malaysian factory I use has exceptional quality control measures and it was so important to work with them in the research and development stage to ensure that we were developing a quality product.

"The boots have an insert to personalise the fit, it pushes the heel to the back of the shoe to stop the foot sliding, the lining fabric is microbial and antifungal, and there is reinforcement around the heel, a pocket that fits the insert, and a zipper.

"The longevity of the boot varies, but they will outlast every other boot by still being durable and safe to wear up to three times as long as alternative options."

After developing the prototype, Penny arranged for 150 pairs of boots to be manufactured in a short production run, and worked with the local mine, Whitehaven, for workers to trial the safety and comfort of the product.

"I remember I was there at the 4am shift change, fitting the miners with their boots and we developed surveys for them to complete after a number of weeks. I knew that they weren't going to change to a product unless it proved its value. ▶



“Your feet are your foundations. I had seen short-term injuries such as fractures, sprains and trips and falls, as a result of instable boots...”

Penny Crawford



Penny & Mike Crawford

Penny says she finally ordered the first container of 2,000 pairs of boots in June 2018 and has since worked around the clock, undertaking more planning, logistics, organising freight, warehousing and despatching.

In 2019, Crawford Boots won the NSW Minerals Council NSW Mining HSEC Health Innovation Award in conjunction with Whitehaven Coal.

Interestingly, she says there have been offers for joint ventures and interest from other companies to purchase her design concept, however whilst it has been a foray not without its challenges, she's not looking back.

"I really think you've got to back yourself. I really wouldn't have realised the potential the business has and really identifying the need for the product.

"There have certainly been memorable experiences. I remember we drove to one mine site at Forrestania in Western Australia which took several hours because we couldn't fly in or out, and another time we travelled to Olympic Dam in South Australia. It was the middle of January and 50 degrees, and I just remember wearing the full orange PPE (personal protective equipment)... Going underground is an amazing experience.

"The miners work hard – the average underground miner's shift involves walking more than 10km through knee high water and on uneven ground. It's certainly a different world."

Penny believes it is important to be mindful of footwear choices, especially in labour-intensive environments.

"Creating these boots has been about recognising the need to be proactive rather than reactive and preventing injuries before they happen.

"Your feet are your foundations. I had seen short-term injuries such as fractures, sprains and trips and falls, as a result of instable boots, but there are also long-term effects in ill fitting footwear pulling on calf muscles, hamstrings and even causing back injuries and friction wounds."

Just like other businesses, Penny has experienced challenges due to COVID-19, particularly in delivery timeframes, however she is continuing to research ways to expand Crawford Boots into designs specific to other industries and has already had interest from other industrial workplaces.

"We are entering into trial periods with water companies, we are working with Worksafe Victoria, and staff at some waste and recycling centres are also wearing the boots where they are handling chemicals, broken glass and other hazardous materials as well.

"We have also been working with the the University of NSW Smart Centre and Molycop Steel in using my boots with other rubber products in green steel production."

Penny is also now investigating developing footwear for workers in other industries such as construction and agriculture.

"A lot of people involved in agriculture are already wearing my boots, but I do believe that there is an opportunity to design a boot that is more specific to their needs."

And with patents now in Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, Europe and Canada, and design patents in the United States, Crawford Boots could soon be going global.

"I just love what I do. I love meeting new people and it is really satisfying when the miners do give me the feedback that the boots are making a difference. Mike and I have done so much travelling that we wouldn't have had the opportunity to do. There is certainly an exciting future ahead."



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WIRE SIZE	ROLL LENGTH (M)
16/180/15	250
12/115/15*	250
15/150/15*	250

*Available with or without apron



A NEW GENERATION

How Delta Ag's graduate agronomy program is proving a prime training ground

Article | **Lucy Moore**

Photography | **Jessica Schmierer**



“My decision to pursue a career with Delta was based on the experience I knew I would receive through their graduate program.”

Holly Pender

Delta Agribusiness is leading the way with its agronomy training program, having developed the course to enhance the skills of graduate agronomists/consultants who join the network.

Whilst the graduate agronomy program was first established when Delta Ag opened its doors in 2006, the content has evolved to give participants more contact with senior advisors and includes exercises that involves investigating case studies, covers enhancing presentation skills, communication skills, extension methodology theories, and technical training.

Delta Ag Executive Director and Group Advisory Manager Chris Duff says the program has been a particularly important component of training agronomists with less industry-led opportunities available.

"We believe our training program is important for the future of the advisory business in ensuring we keep people interested and integrated within our wider team," Chris says.

"Whilst they are provided with agricultural skills and knowledge after completing their university course, we also focus on specific agronomy training in soils, a broader knowledge of pre-emergent herbicides and farm management practices.

"We encourage the graduates to develop relationships within the industry and broaden their contacts, while also focusing on their organisational skills and giving them insight into understanding client responsibility."

Chris says the graduates are supported by a senior advisor who works within their region and these mentors check to ensure that milestones are being completed and assist the graduates with gaining particular skills throughout the process.

"Investing in the right training and with cross-industry experiences to develop their skills early will ensure graduates can be the best they can be."

Holly Pender who recently completed the Grad program and who is based at Delta's northern NSW region says growing up on a cattle station in outback Queensland ensconced a passion and energy to be involved in the agricultural industry even during her childhood.

Holly believes her childhood experiences have contributed to a development of resilience and an appreciation for hard work – both attributes that have carried her through university into her current role.

The transition from beef to cropping occurred quite organically for Holly, studying agronomy at the University of Queensland and accepting cotton checking work throughout the course of her studies.

Holly spent a period of time abroad in Canada before returning to Australia and entering the Delta Ag graduate program, which she explains has already shaped her future in the industry.

"My decision to pursue a career with Delta was based on the experience I knew I would receive through the graduate program," Holly says, starting the program in July 2020 after time away from the industry. It's set up in such a way that the team gives you as much exposure as they can from the paddock to the in-house branch work.

"I was able to familiarise myself with the ag chemistry side of things and also become involved in the back end of the business, where understanding pricing structures tied in with the advice I am able to offer clients."

Holly says the graduate position provided the opportunity to work with three other agronomists between the Wee Waa, Narrabri and Gunnedah branches.

"I spent a couple of days each week at each branch, which worked well as the crops in each region were usually at different stages or of different varieties, mainly due to variations in seasonal conditions," she explains.

During the summer season Holly's work was primarily at Wee Waa with cotton crops, and at Gunnedah she gained experience in working with both sorghum and cotton. The winter months were dominated by the growth of cereal crops around Narrabri and into areas further west.

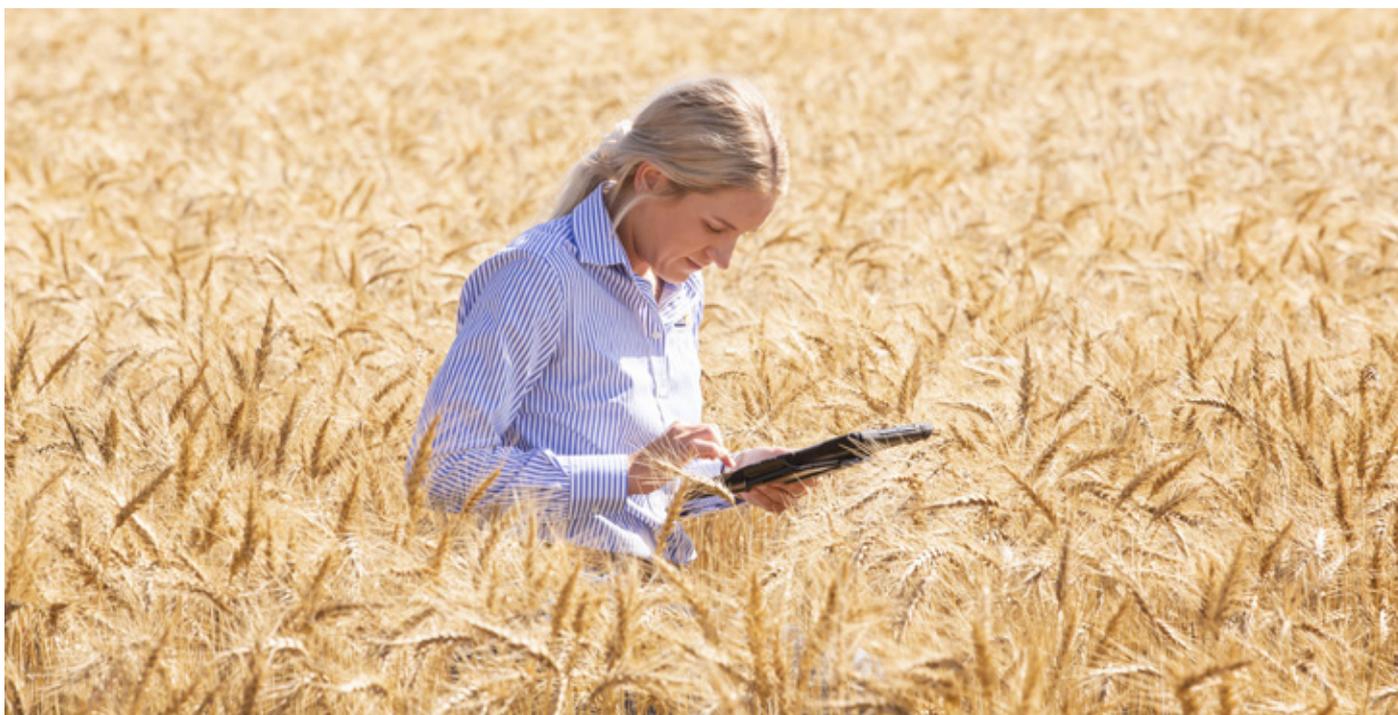
Holly gained her own clients within 12 months of starting in her graduate position and her dedication has now led to a full-time position as a fully qualified agronomist.

"My career has transitioned from cotton checking at St George and Mungindi, and then on to Griffith after university, which was a long way from home and all things familiar to me. The solo move into NSW opened me up to being flexible and seeking out as much exposure as possible," she says.

"For example, you might think you're going to specialise in one particular crop - for me, cotton - but I've had experience in multiple cropping industries now and that is invaluable as an agronomist moving forward. Delta does a great job of reinforcing the importance of connection and the value of sharing ideas in order to build successful careers."

Chris explains there are nine graduates completing the program with three new advisors having joined the team in spring.

"We really are committed to ensuring that we are providing our advisory team with the best knowledge and skills that encompasses the most up-to-date technical information they can then present to growers in the paddock," Chris says.



On Trial

Unearthing new crop varieties and products

Article | **Lucy Moore**
Photography | **Dean Kinlyside**



“Our growers really enjoy the process and look forward to the information at the other end, and they have confidence in the advice our agronomists are giving them.”

Delta Ag Senior Farm Consultant, Tim Condon



Canola varieties trial, located near Young NSW

With so many emerging crop management strategies and new products constantly becoming available, appropriate and timely research is critical for farm advisors to ensure growers are equipped with the best advice for their operations.

Since its establishment, Delta Agribusiness has developed an in-crop trials program which is identifying priority issues and solutions for the agronomy team to pass on to farming clients.

Delta Ag Senior Farm Consultant, Tim Condon, who heads the R&D program for Delta Ag NSW based at Harden, said the program was used to fill knowledge gaps and technical aspects of agronomy, management, as well as, information on new crop varieties and crop protection products.

“Dynamic things are always happening in agriculture. A lot of work goes into getting protocols and products organised, finding a site, doing all the assessments throughout the season and reporting back to the group, hosting field days and site visits.

“Our growers really enjoy the process and look forward to the information at the other end, and they have confidence in the advice our agronomists are giving them.”

The in-crop trials are currently located in paddocks throughout Delta Ag’s geographical footprint in regional NSW and Victoria. Delta Ag Executive Director and Group Manager Advisory, Chris Duff said there is input from all sectors of the advisory team into the focus of the trials.

“The importance of the trials has certainly increased over the years and the program is a large investment to make. These research sites and results are then used for our internal training programs, in our crop management publication each year, and advisors use the data for their pre-season meetings as well,” Chris said.

Tim Condon said the trial programs are aimed at a broad spectrum of farming angles dependent on current farming issues or farmers needs arising at the time.

“This year there has been a bit of a blow out on leaf diseases in cereals given the wet weather, so we’ve focused more on fungicides,” Tim said.

“Generally we work with suppliers who have set trials to work out what we can do from our end to complement the work they do.”

AGRIVision (a Delta Ag company) Swan Hill’s Research and Development Manager for Victoria, Jarrod Brown, brings 20 years of experience to the field of trial work and believes if it weren’t for in-house trial work, many production company trials would not receive testing under such a variety of conditions.

“Unless we produce our own data in our own patch, on our own weed spectrum, the relevance loses its lustre in terms of what we believe and what we don’t believe.

“If we’ve done the leg work beforehand on our own, we can hit the market running with a product and get the best value for our growers.”

Jarrod said there were a number of crossovers between Victorian trial work and work done further north.

Chris Duff also made particular mention of a three-year trial Delta conducted seven years ago which was an industry first, focusing on the plethora of alternative fertilizers. He said the specific data from alternative fertiliser trials was instrumental in providing growers with clarity on their value and likely response patterns. Such an extensive trial had not been conducted within the industry before.

“Ryegrass is the number one weed in cropping, and we conduct a series of trials every year comparing all the common products and likely pre-emergent mixes. It’s an everchanging space and we have to keep abreast of the best options for our clients.



Jarrod Brown



Tim Condon



Nell Evans

“If we’ve done the leg work beforehand on our own, we can hit the market running with a product and get the best value for our growers.”

AGRIVision Swan Hill’s Research and Development Manager, Jarrod Brown

“As the industry transitioned from open-pollinated varieties to hybrid, we have conducted three years of trial work on establishing the benefits of hybrids, and then conducted seeding rate trials to establish the right sowing rates. That was established due to the high cost of the seed, coupled with the significantly bigger seed size of hybrid seed. In addition to that we did trials to establish the cost benefit ratio of retained hybrid seed versus hybrid seed. This was proven to be clearly in favour of first generation hybrid seed. We have also had a high focus on canola agronomy and have implemented a lot of the fungicide management strategies identified in our own canola trials.”

As part of a growth in Delta’s in-crop trials, agronomist Nell Evans, based at Grenfell, has now joined the Delta network to assist Tim Condon in the management of the program.

Nell was previously employed by national agronomy contract research company, Kalyx.

“It’s been nice coming into the commercial sphere with Delta where I’m now seeing some of the molecules I had been working on for three years being run in practical trials in the Delta program,” Nell said.

“I enjoy looking at herbicides and seeing them in a use pattern and working out where they would fit in the Australian market in terms of broadacre cropping, potentially becoming available as early as next year.

“The Delta trials are really about deciding how we can best fit the chemistry into paddock programs for our agronomists.”

Nell said levels of ryegrass resistance to glyphosate and clethodim continue to be particularly prominent issues across the landscape this season. “Our Delta team are at the forefront of looking at how new chemistries fit with existing chemistries to be used in our agronomic

patterns in our growing regions,” she said.

“The trials are not limited to cropping and we’ve been quite interested in doing thistle trials in grazing country this year looking at best management practices in pasture systems.

“The key for trial work in all regions is being able to pick up a product and place it where we think it will benefit growers most in terms of deliverables for the incoming season.”

Tim said looking beyond trials currently under investigation in small plot replicated situations, there were goals to expand into paddock scale strip trials as ideas gained momentum.

Tim added that in recent times with Delta Ag having its dedicated precision ag team, some of the in-crop trials were conducted in conjunction with that group’s large scale paddock trials. Some of the research has been validated by the precision ag team and their technology.

Nell is excited to see how far the program could grow. “The ability to invest in knowledge in order to pick signals in the market and not get convoluted by marketing material is pretty impressive.”

Nell also said her involvement with the Grenfell growers’ community group brought home the real meaning behind her work. “We take the group through a canola and cereal variety trial field day out here so they get value out of that straight away,” she said.

“They get to see, touch and feel the results for themselves. They can see what’s looking good and see what’s being hit by rust this year – more than just a graph on a page.

“It’s really giving back to our farming community.”

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Nufarm's Terrad'or offers effective knockdown that ticks all the boxes



Delta Ag Lockhart & Coolamon agronomist Harry Wakefield

With Glyphosate resistance an increasing issue over the past few years in the southern NSW region, especially with annual ryegrass, farmer James Maslin with support from Lockhart and Coolamon agronomist Harry Wakefield, put Nufarm's new product Terrad'or to the test.

"With the concern that we are having weeds escape the glyphosate application prior to sowing to then go on and be very competitive to the crop and set a large amount of seed, which is glyphosate resistant leading to a loss in productivity and ultimately profitability, we've been doing a lot of double-knocking, in that autumn break when we get the opportunity.

"Normally, we'd look at using oxyfluorfen or carfentrazone with glyphosate to assist with the broadleaves, but we've been getting inconsistent results, finding weeds harder to control. As resistance has developed, we've been pushing our existing systems to compensate. Rotating and improving chemistry, harvest weed seed control, crop rotation and double knocking have been some options that have been providing good results. However, within the Group G herbicide space we've really been looking for something new.

"Terrad'or looked very promising. Given the trial work and the data we had for Terrad'or, we were confident to have a play with it and try a few different rates. We ended up using a 20 g rate for milk thistle, volunteer canola and other broadleaves, and then went for the 40 g rate on ryegrass.

"The results were outstanding – when we saw how good Terrad'or was, we knew we could go broadacre.

"It did a great job on the milk thistle compared to the other chemicals we'd been using, even at the lighter rate. But the thing we were most impressed with was the improved control on ryegrass. We used a combination of Terrad'or and paraquat, and it provided much improved control. It was great to see Terrad'or provide broader control above that of previous alternatives.

"Value is a big part of the decisions we make, and Terrad'or is an affordable product that delivers a premium result. Even with the additional cost of the oil, it's very good value for money given the job it does.

"Terrad'or gave us that step up in control when compared to other products in the Group G 'spike' market. We've been relying on paraquat in the second or third knock on resistant ryegrass, because glyphosate has been less effective in recent seasons. In bad cases of glyphosate resistance growers would lean to a double application of paraquat - completing removing glyphosate - but this is weed spectrum dependent and there are many factors to consider.

"The addition of Terrad'or in either glyphosate or paraquat applications has significantly improved our control of resistant or hard-to-kill weeds. Terrad'or is an excellent choice for growers who suspect glyphosate resistance, and complemented with a double-knock approach can provide a really robust knockdown on weeds and improve the longevity of other herbicides."

They conclude that in the 2022 season they will use Terrad'or in a large number of circumstances due to its short plant-back period, price and efficacy on ryegrass and broadleaf weeds.



Livestock Health

Matt Hardy
Delta Ag Branch Manager, Wagga



Flies, Flies and Flies!

Fly pressure is mounting. As we saw in the wet spring/summer of 2020/2021, this will be no different again this summer. The continual widespread wet conditions are creating the perfect storm for Fly strike, especially as we roll into harvest. And, the last thing we need to be doing during harvest is chasing fly blown sheep!

The conditions have seen a large hatching of larvae and a massive increase in fly activity. Those that have not yet treated with a preventative product will and are running into trouble now. There have also been several cases of treated sheep getting struck, this is prominently due to sheep being struck in areas where no product has been applied e.g. hocks, Brisket and high on the neckline.

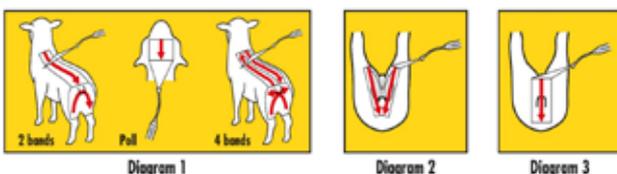
There is a misconception that when using back line products like Clik®, Clik Extra®, ClickZin® etc is that it moves around the body to give complete protection. This is not correct and basically it protects where it is applied. We have also seen a reduced length of activity with the large volume of rain we have been receiving. Where some products might claim 12 weeks protection, this can reduce to 6 to 8 weeks after a large amount of rainfall.

This is called stripping out, and producers will need to keep an eye on this as retreatment may need to be applied. If retreatment is needed, producers will need to use a different chemistry group, for example, if you have treated with Dicyclanil (Clik®) and need to retreat due to fly strike, you will need to use either Ivermectin (BlowFly & Lice®) or Imidacloprid (Avenge + Fly®) as a rotational treatment.

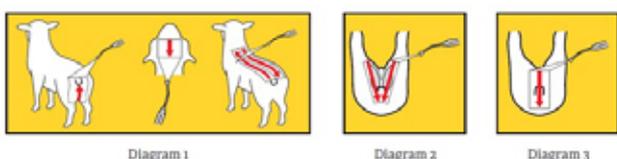
However, using products like Coopers Blowfly and Lice®, the right application equipment is vital to apply the product effectively. Jetting sheep needs to be applied using hand-jetting or by modified Harrington jetting race with at least 100psi, the idea is to get the active right down to the skin of the sheep.

When applying Dicyclanil based products it is important to apply according to label instructions. Always treat with the correct fan nozzle and apply at the breach in an upward direction. This is important, especially in wrinkly skin animals where the downward motion does not get under the wrinkle or what is known as the "Umbrella Effect".

Clik Extra® & Clikzin® Application:



Clik® Application:



Taking Stock

Alex Willson
Delta Livestock & Property, Yass



Buoyancy in livestock markets continues

The stars have continued to align in the second half of 2021 with extraordinary rainfall events and exceptional commodity prices.

With restocking activities continuing, graziers, backgrounders and finishers have actively sought livestock to integrate into their business. The annual draft of suckers, surplus stock and cast for age breeders has resulted in growers reaping the rewards of back-to-back boom years.

The late winter lamb market finished with a bang! Prices for domestic and export lambs alike exceeded \$10/kg which lasted into September. As of mid-November, domestic prices are sitting around the mid \$8/kg with heavy lambs slightly behind. Mutton quality has generally been very good as the season would suggest, mutton in the marketplace reached as high as \$7/kg with plenty of growers taking advantage of significant CFA sales.



Given these prices and great seasons, young breeding stock have maintained their record prices. 1st cross breeders have exceeded \$500, with well-bred Merino breeding ewes reaching over \$400, records continue to fall for maternal producers who have benefited from demand for surplus females.

The cattle market has continued to gather momentum, off the back of strong weaner markets in early 2021. Backgrounders and breeders alike have benefited from strong feeder demand. Prices of up to \$5.90/kg on-farm have been the icing on the cake for breeders who retained stock through the dry, and backgrounders who had a program in place and dedication to their trade. Processor cattle have continued to impress with strong competition from both domestic and export processors. PTIC cows/ heifers have exceeded \$3000/ unit and PTIC Cow and Calf units have sailed past \$4500/ unit.

Looking forward to summer 2021 and beyond, we expect to see increased numbers of store lambs marketed as a result of great spring lambing in the major breeding districts of NSW and VIC. Growers who have weight and finish on their lambs will enjoy competition on their produce as feed length increases and the difficulty of keeping lambs fresh in long dry feed takes effect.

Although there has been an increase of breeding females on property, the female to male slaughter ratio remained stubbornly high well into the middle parts of 2021 due to strong demand by feeders and processors challenged by high steer prices and grass feeders. Hopefully this will help to maintain the current strength in the cattle market into 2022.

Landscape

Leigh Norton

Delta Agribusiness, Agronomy Consultant



Forecasts to impact conditions in months ahead

The winter cropping season is coming to a close with harvesters trying to claim everything, while there have been a lot of areas experiencing delays from the wet and cool conditions.

The summer cropping programs are in full swing with sorghum forecasted areas increasing by 24 per cent, and cotton by 67 per cent from 2020. Sorghum and maize are benefiting from the cool nights and mild days with excellent germinations and developing heads are looking above average with more tillers than in previous years.

Some low-lying areas have wiped out seedling sorghum and cotton crops due to high rainfall and it's important to be mindful in these areas as further flooding is predicted with the La Niña forecast.

If the conditions continue to grow with above average potential yields, leaf testing of 4 to 6 leaf sorghum is showing that nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium may become limiting factors.

With full storages and great plant stands, irrigated cotton growers are very optimistic about the season ahead.

La Niña was officially called by the Bureau of Meteorology in late November. The current forecast for the period between November 2021 and January 2022 is a 60 to 70 per cent chance above average rainfall and average daytime temperatures for northern NSW dryland summer crop.

However, with 50 per cent accuracy, we do need to be careful not to think it will stop raining as the Indian Ocean dipole has been trending to positive and is now in the neutral phase, and when this decays, historically summers in the Gwydir and Namoi can be average or trending drier, similar to conditions in 2016.



There has been some talk of double cropping in the northern regions, which would be mainly sorghum or mungbean varieties. It would be wise to take into consideration flooding risk and also potential of less rainfall and higher temperature in February and March when these crops will be flowering so ensure enough moisture at planting is present to produce a profitable crop.

Also when deciding on double cropping, it is important to take into account the stresses that this can apply to your farm business and how it will effect crop rotations already in place.

Grain Watch

Mick Parry

General Manager, Delta Grain Marketing



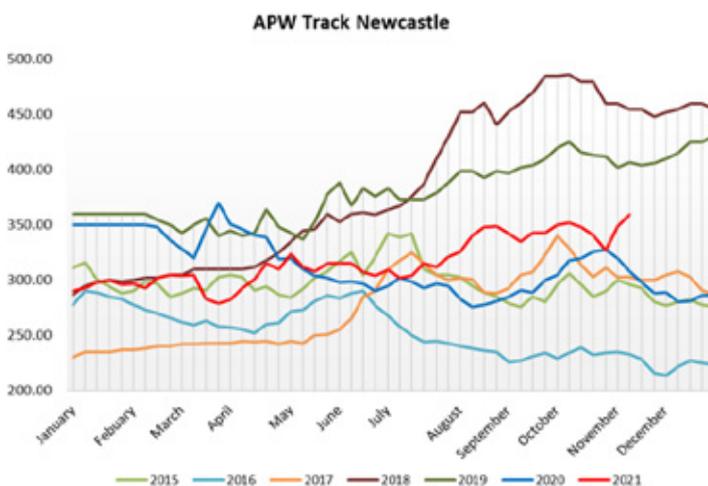
World markets keen as Australia achieves back-to-back record crops

The 2021 world wheat crop was smaller than average with the US High Plains and the western half of the Canadian Prairies the worst affected through drought. Europe managed a better crop but after three consecutively poor seasons they are trying to build their stocks and have less to export.

The Ukraine and Russia both had near record crops but the governments are keen to build domestic stocks and the Russian Government has placed an aggressive export tariff to slow the export pace. It is achieving their aim but it is also adding an additional cost for importing nations. Meanwhile, demand is very strong for milling wheat and feed grains as the world comes out of COVID-19 lockdowns and demand is surging. This also impacts freight availability and in turn has further increased the cost of freight and therefore grain prices.

Australia has been very fortunate to string together back-to-back record crops so it is extremely helpful that the world is so keen to buy what we are producing. The same conditions which are bolstering wheat prices are also working in favour of oilseed prices and particularly canola. The shortfall in Canadian and European production at the same time that China has sought to build its oilseed stocks has driven international and local values to record highs.

See the wheat graph below which highlight values and please note how far we are above previous non-drought years like 2016. Note wheat at \$350 Port Equivalent and Canola has also hit an incredible \$990 Port before retreating to a still solid \$900 Port as the first canola was harvested.



The rain which has so disrupted the 2021 harvest is also building valuable soil moisture for the 2022 season and importantly, the new crop values are already indicating values far above historical norms. We expect APW wheat values in the high \$300 range for 2022, and at this stage we are seeing interest for new crop canola around \$700 Port. The world will likely need high prices from grains and oilseeds to encourage a large planting if we are to build stocks closer to normal levels, and also to help growers compensate for the higher production costs this coming year with energy and fertilizer prices at historically high levels.

For more information on current pricing of all cereals oilseeds and pulses, please speak to one of our experienced grain brokers who are always ready to help.

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