

# Prospect

FOR FARMERS IN THE KNOW

Winter 2023



The Delta Agribusiness group of companies



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**W**elcome to this winter/spring edition of *Prospect*.

As we move into spring, we have a very different business landscape across most regions of Australia compared to this time last year. In 2022, Eastern Australia was inundated with excessive rainfall events that caused widespread waterlogging and flooding, and as a result we saw some material production losses and a very late and difficult harvest period. Cotton picking was also a nightmare with the season dragging on for months longer than normal, although overall the industry generally had another strong year with continued strong livestock and soft commodity prices. Pleasingly, our networks across South Australia and Western Australia had mostly favourable results and excellent overall returns. Fast forward to September 2023 and we have a very different outlook. Potentially a developing El Nino, dramatic falls in livestock and some other key commodity prices and some key production regions like northern NSW and the northern and eastern wheat belt of Western Australia under very dry winter crop conditions, there are certainly some significant challenges out there.

From a supply chain perspective, we also have a very different dynamic across our business. The escalating prices in fertilizer and chemicals that we saw in 2022 because of dislocated and delayed supply chains on the back of COVID-19, the Ukraine war, China withdrawing from the fertilizer export market, high energy and shipping costs, depreciating Aussie dollar and a raft of key raw material shortages, has pleasingly for our clients, largely reversed in 2023. Dramatic reductions in key farm input costs and a recovered global supply chain has been very welcome under the current economic and seasonal environment, further impacted by rising interest rates and inflationary pressures on production margins and cost of living. Our total focus through these cycles, as challenging as they are, is to ensure we are always a strong, reliable, and competitive supplier to you, whilst retaining a sharp focus on ways to add additional value to your farm operations and overall productivity. These volatile supply chains and high input prices also present enormous challenges for us in distribution. Working capital escalates, not just due to the higher prices of farm inputs, but the long lead times and forward inventory supply commitments we now must navigate to ensure we do have what you want when you need it. Overall though, Ag is still in a good space, with rising farm values, and strong balance sheets, we are as an industry I think well placed to face into the cycle of challenges that are inevitable.

In this edition of *Prospect*, we have a suite of great features and articles from across the business including a feature on our Harden branch, a foundation Delta Ag store and one of our highest performing business cultures, as well as, showcasing our Young Farmers Network, a terrific and innovative development that recognises and supports the next generation of farmers coming through, initially established by our agronomist Glenn Dyason at Coolamon, and now with several other groups in play across the business.

We are also very pleased to showcase two new businesses that have joined the Delta family. Troy and Kelly Maitland from EP AG n FERT at Kimba on the Eyre Peninsula, and Bruno Di Manno and his partner Charmaine Librandi and Charmaine's son Shane, joined us via merger transactions in April and May respectively this year. Both dynamic businesses have very strong brand and industry respect and credibility, are culturally aligned and are important strategic additions as we continue to grow our business diversity. Both Troy and Kelly, and Bruno, Charmaine and Shane have taken up a good level of equity in the overall Delta business through these transactions, so importantly, they retain significant "skin in the game" and their clients remain dealing with locals, who are a part of a larger private independent and Australian owned business, focused on attracting and retaining the best people and adding tangible and trusted services to its clients.

This edition also showcases several client enterprises. Rob and Bob Taylor and family from Hazeldene Pastoral Co near Young/Grenfell in southern NSW have been dealing with Chris and I for over 35 years now, foundation clients in our first business together and it's a pleasure to be able to feature this lovely family and high performing mixed farm enterprise. Likewise, editor Rosie O'Keeffe brings to our readers interesting features on the Roberson family from the Wagga Wagga region, along with Mike and Angie Armstrong's generational enterprise in the Tottenham/Nyngan region in Northwest NSW and their passion to create a unique country escape on historic Callubri Station.

Finally, it gives me great pleasure that in this edition, we feature Brian O'Malley OAM. Brian has shown great leadership and very significant contributions to both the National Agri Services industry, as well as, his hometown of Cootamundra, where he has been a generous benefactor to the local community in many ways. As you will read, Brian gave me my first start in the Ag industry when I was a young and inexperienced 24-year-old, and his influence, generosity, wisdom, and principles applies to the very foundations on which we have collectively developed the Delta Ag business over the past 17 years.

We wish you all the best for positive seasonal conditions ahead and thank you all sincerely for your continued support.



**Gerard Hines**  
Managing Director  
Delta Agribusiness



## Prospect

FOR FARMERS IN THE KNOW

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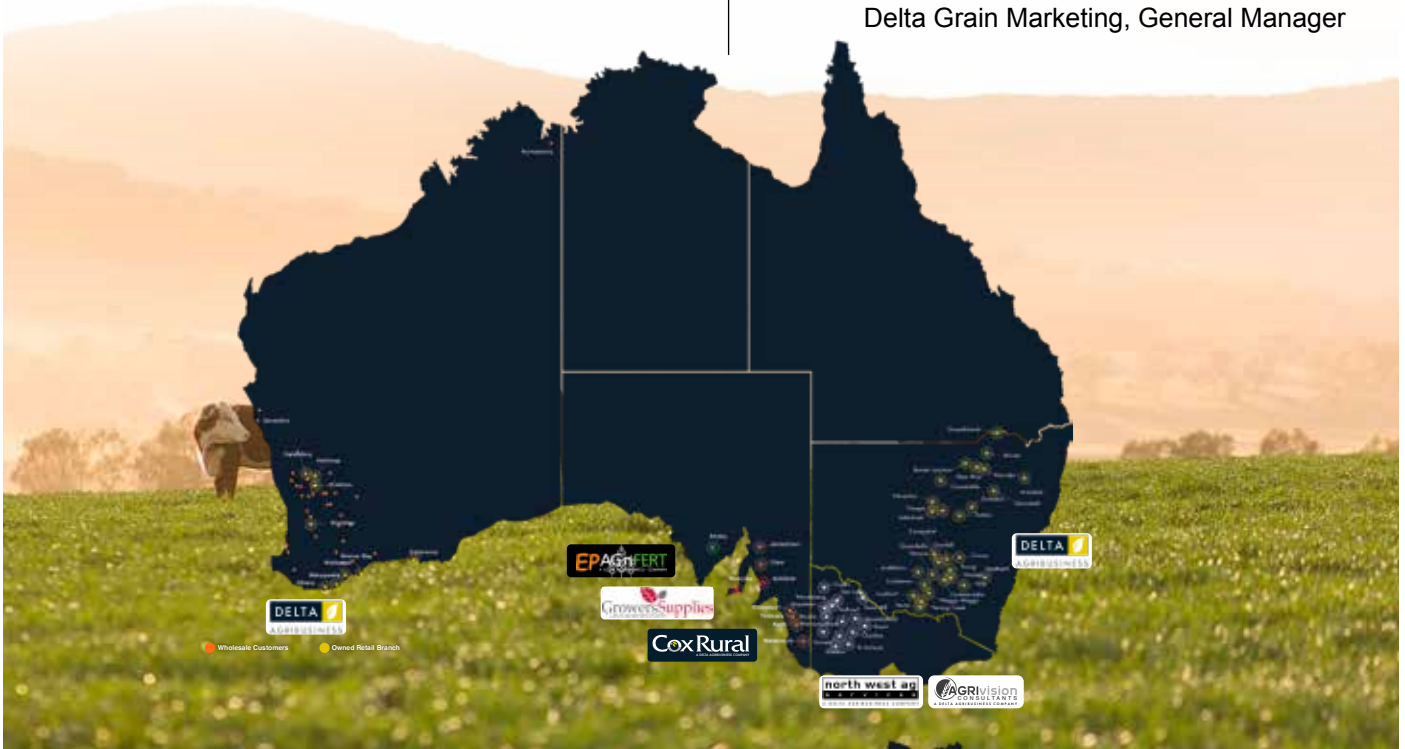
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A new era for

## EP AG n FERT

Article | Rosie O'Keeffe  
Photography | Katrina Koch

EP AG n FERT has bolstered its services in the Kimba region of South Australia in announcing a merger with Delta Agribusiness. Troy Maitland explains how growers on the Eyre Peninsula are leading the way in exploring different innovations to maintain water use efficiency to ensure productivity.



EP AG n FERT Kimba Branch Manager Troy Maitland has worked in the agricultural industry for more than 30 years

Leading Eyre Peninsula agribusiness EP AG n FERT has entered a new era, joining the Delta Agribusiness network.

EP AG n FERT has been providing services in the Kimba region in South Australia since 2015, with its experienced team working alongside growers to provide crop protection, nutrition, seed, and agronomic and technical advice.

And with just 345mm of average annual rainfall, these local farming enterprises, predominantly family-owned operations, have become some of the most water-efficient in the world with healthy crops hinging on proven agronomy strategies – crop rotations, varietal selection, timely sowing, ample nutrition and prompt weed and pest control.

In announcing the merger, Delta Agribusiness Managing Director Gerard Hines says the development introduces another key production region into the broadening Delta Ag network and will deliver positive synergies to both businesses, including providing EP AG n FERT with centralised backend and network support services, increased capital to grow its business, and access to the scale and benefits of Delta's overall procurement capacity.

"We are delighted to welcome Troy and Kelly Maitland and their team to our business. They have built a substantial and successful business since inception with a strong and credible reputation in the market and are a natural fit for our culture and strategy," Gerard announces.

"We have known Troy for many years, and both parties believe that we have a strong cultural alignment and are excited by our future together."

EP AG n FERT's Kimba branch manager Troy Maitland who has worked in the industry for more than 30 years, says that whilst the business had experienced significant growth each year since its establishment, he identified the need for additional resources and firepower to take the operations to the next level and enhance its offering to local growers.

"Both EP and Delta Ag are privately owned and independent businesses which we see as very important as it aligns with the way we operate our business and our desire to ensure that the much larger listed and foreign owned corporates have strong and capable competitors that are investing in and competing in regional Australia," Troy says.

"Delta Ag is a company I see as the ideal fit to take our business to its next stage of growth. Additionally, the Delta Ag shareholder model allows our EP team to invest in the merged business if they choose to. This is a great opportunity for our highly valued team to be able to become a shareholder and share in the success of the overall business."

Troy says that the team has also grown since its establishment and now has five people at the branch working in agronomy, sales, business development and administration.

"The increased scale of the combined businesses provides further career opportunities for our team, and we believe will only build on the positive outcomes that we strive to deliver to our clients."

"We remain committed to providing agronomic and technical leadership to growers in the Kimba region, supplying the best crop protection, nutrition and seed from around the world, backed with our agronomic advisory service. We have invested heavily into expanding our experienced team to ensure we have a true partnership with growers, sharing the risks and rewards of farming."

Troy says through the process, the day-to-day running and service offering of the business will not change, with improved access to finance, access to more grower incentives, and supplies.

"Our business is no different to our farming clients' enterprises. While they are investing in more efficient machinery and land holdings, we are doing similar, investing in our staff to ensuring we have the experience and capacity to service our customers whilst maintaining our key relationships with them as the business grows."

Troy has been involved in agriculture in the local region since 1989 and comments that the strength of the relationships he has with growers now means he is working alongside the second and third generations of some farming families.

"The industry has changed, and our business has seen a huge escalation in growth. Even in the first three years of opening EP AG n FERT has maintained and expanded our footprint to a level beyond all expectations."

"Having the respect and the relationship with our clients with over 30 years in the ag industry has been the corner stone of our growth, and the team is proud of that," Troy says.

"It really is about the relationships you have with the growers and the knowledge you have about their operations when it comes to inputs."

Troy said EP AG n FERT's region (which extends across a 100km radius) has farming operations with mostly cereal crops wheat and barley, grain legumes such as peas, lentils, lupins, and canola.

He commented that the biggest issue facing growers in the Kimba region is water use efficiency.



Simon Arcus, Kim Redden, Kevin Dart, Bob Rodda & Troy Maitland



Kevin Dart & Bob Rodda

"We know summer rainfall is our spring rainfall, so we need to keep our paddocks clean from summer weeds so we can retain subsoil moisture. We don't always get spring rainfall, so we rely heavily on what's in the profile and that comes from the summer rainfall. The focus is really on implementing the water use efficiency and growers are investing in modern efficient machinery, and precision agriculture to enable them to capitalise on every opportunity," Troy says.

"We are focused on delivering services and making sure we are continually developing our technical knowledge in new chemistry, so we are confident in introducing new products to our clients. That is why our trial program and in-field paddock demonstrations are vital in keeping up with modern innovations to improve farming practices. We want to make sure these products really become an investment for growers to enhance profitability rather than using older chemistry that have become ineffective and resistant."

In addition to demonstrating emerging chemistry and new varieties, EP AG n FERT's trial program also generates local research data, so growers can receive targeted advice on crop rotation, varietal selection, pasture types, tillage techniques, plant nutrition and fertilizer application.



# Delta Ag welcomes **Growers Supplies**

Growers Supplies has become a market leader across a diverse range of agri services with outlets at Burton and Warooka in South Australia. As the company becomes part of the Delta Ag network, Managing Director Bruno Di Manno reflects on his family history in agriculture and the productive region he's been working in for more than 40 years.

Article | Rosie O'Keeffe

Photography | Sweet Lime Photo



Growers Supplies' Charmaine Librandi, Shane Librandi & Bruno Di Manno are excited about the new opportunities a merger with Delta Agribusiness will have on their established business in the Adelaide Hills, Yorke Peninsula & Mallee regions of South Australia

**B**runo Di Manno has always been passionate about agriculture. Having grown up in Virginia, a township on the outskirts of Adelaide, with his father owning and managing a market garden business, Bruno always knew he would be involved in the industry.

After working within his family's market garden enterprise growing vegetables including carrots, potatoes and onions, it was in 1980 when he and his brothers took over one of the seed and chemical resellers in Virginia.

In 2005, after growing the business to more than 30 staff and as his older brothers were embarking on retirement, that operation was sold to Elders, and Bruno went on to work within that company, and then other agricultural businesses.

"Over my years in business, I have had a number of clients in the Adelaide Hills, Yorke Peninsula and Mallee regions who have continued to follow me, even when the business names changed. It was about the people they were dealing with rather than the branding. If you do the right thing by them, they will do the right thing by you," Bruno says.

Bruno explains that the larger corporate entities he experienced, were not as focused on the staff and customer relationships as he was accustomed to, which led to him embarking on his own business venture once again.

In 2009, along with Bruno's partner Charmaine Librandi, who also worked within the agricultural sector for many years, Growers Supplies was established. Charmaine's son, Shane Librandi, started his agricultural career with Growers Supplies on the first day of trading and during his journey, eventually joined Bruno and Charmaine by becoming a Director of the business.

Originally Growers Supplies was based at Burton in the Adelaide Plains area, north of Adelaide, before it grew from just four team members at one branch, to 21 dedicated team members across two branches, with a further outlet at Warooka and a warehouse depot facility at Owen.

"Every year really has been a highlight – we have experienced so much growth each year since 2009, increasing turnover and profits. I have always believed that if you base your business on pricing alone, there is always going to be someone cheaper, so we have become loyal to our growers, and even the challenging times like the height of the COVID-19 pandemic when supplies were difficult to source, we were still in a position to supply our key customers," Bruno explains.

"We have always wanted to maintain an independent model and this is why, when the opportunity arose, what attracted us to a company like Delta Ag. Having the same cultural fit and values we have towards our employees, customers and suppliers, but also being able to maintain our relationships and keeping our identity. Every day is what it used to be."

Managing sales, Shane Librandi says that merging with Delta Ag provides several new opportunities for Growers Supplies.

"We really didn't want to join a large corporate structure, and not be fully aware of the direction it would take moving forward. So, it was important for us to find the right people. It was through a tour of Delta Ag head office at Young where we realised that we have similar ways of running our businesses on a day-to-day basis and we felt comfortable with the people we would be working with," Shane says.

"We really see benefit in the backend resourcing that the Delta Ag team gives us.

We are hoping that as we work more closely with the procurement and agronomy teams, we can further enhance our resources," Shane says.

As well as the usual services Growers Supplies has been known for, such as plant nutrition, animal health and crop protection, the partnership with Delta Ag also extends the offerings to precision ag products, seasonal finance and its real estate relationship with LAWD.

For the past 13 years, Growers Supplies had been a part of the NRI Group, which had previously supported the company and provided networking opportunities.

"Our industry is ever evolving and farming practices in themselves have changed over the years..." Shane says.

"Since those early days I have focused on growing my industry knowledge as much as possible, while maintaining the focus on customer service."

Shane explains that Bruno has been a mentor since he joined the company at just 19 years of age.

"As we were growing quickly as a business, it was about managing the business at a commercial level and making sure I knew what the agronomists were doing in the field and what challenges the customers were facing and learning what I could do to increase my product knowledge."

Shane and Bruno say that with such a broad agricultural production area, including broadacre crops such as wheat, barley, lentils, canola in the region surrounding the Warooka store, to fresh vegetable growth in the Adelaide Plains region - cucumbers, tomatoes, eggplants, capsicums, zucchinis, lettuce and herbs, to wine grapes in the Adelaide Hills area, and apples, pears and strawberries, it is important to be at the forefront of emerging products and technologies.

"We really took a different direction about seven years ago, aligning ourselves with more research and development companies and forming strong partnerships so we could look into the chemistry up to three to four years before their official release into the market," Bruno says.

"That to us, became important and these partnerships have really benefitted our growers and have also enabled us to expand our trial program which is intensive. We invite growers for site visits to look at the new chemistry and strategies, ensuring growers understand it all by the time it is released. Agronomists Jake Rademacher and James Chard have been an integral part of this research and development platform.

"These programs actually cost us money, but when you are showcasing new products, new chemistry, new inventions, it also showcases to the grower that you are caring about and investing in their future."

Bruno says it has been important to connect with and support the wider community too, from sponsoring local football teams to purchasing fuel and vehicles from other local businesses.

Despite servicing a diverse range of growers across the geographical location, Bruno says the majority of the farming properties in the region are established family-owned enterprises.

"It's really nice to be able to focus on these family operated businesses because we can sit down with them directly and discuss the specific issues relevant to their properties. It ensures that we have an in-depth knowledge of their operations, so we can really help them out when they need it."



# Young farmers' network finding out 'what's app'

Article & Photography | Rosie O'Keeffe



“ We try to regularly publish new information in the group chat that might be relevant within the growing season... ”

*Jake McDonnell, Branch Manager, Delta Agribusiness Coolamon*

Delta Ag Coolamon branch manager Jake McDonnell & agronomist Glenn Dyason (right) have created a network to connect young local farmers like Ryan Jennings (centre)



**W**hilst Ryan Jennings might be a 5th generation farmer on his family's Coolamon property, he is still taking every opportunity to explore new and emerging farming practices and form conversations with other young farmers.

The local concept of the young farmers' group was first introduced five years ago by Delta Agribusiness agronomist Glenn Dyason, who says as more young people were working within farming businesses, he believed there was the opportunity to create a local network and extend their range of knowledge through on-farm field events, seminars and social media conversations.

Whilst the COVID-19 pandemic somewhat restricted communications, the group of more than 20 young farmers, aged between 18 and 32 years, are beginning to come together again to share information.

"As more older generation farmers were retiring, I thought it was important to offer as many opportunities to enhance younger farmers forward thinking and innovative ideas, so I started to arrange a series of events to enable them to gain new insights and information, while socialising with other farmers nearby," Glenn, who has more than 20 years' experience as an agronomist in the Coolamon region, says.

"A lot have been able to connect through the internet and social media, but being able to visit other farms and seeing how these enterprises are run, the farming practices undertaken, and any challenges being faced seasonally is very different and has been beneficial to them."

It is not just Glenn involved in facilitating the group, other Coolamon Delta Ag team members, branch manager Jake McDonnell, and agronomist Harry Wakefield and Sarah Hillier, also contribute to discussions in agronomy and animal health topics.

Already several events have been held with a highlight being a workshop in conjunction with Rabobank to inform farmers on financial management and chemical supply companies offering facility tours. The formation of the group has also been another platform to disseminate information on government grants and programs available within the agriculture sector.

Jake says conversations are started through WhatsApp with photos and information shared which then generates further comments too.

"We try to regularly publish new information in the group chat that might be relevant within the growing season, and we are aiming to host more monthly breakfast meetings," Jake says.

Ryan Jennings farms with his parents Stuart and Wendy on a 2,700-hectare mixed farming operation at Coolamon, with further farmland at West Wyalong. The cropping focus is on growing wheat, barley and canola, with multispecies crops also in the rotation. The sheep run are self-replacing flocks Meat Plus, Dorsets and Dohne breeds, with Aussie whites run in the more remote properties.

Ryan says being involved in the group has offered an opportunity to gain information on developing farming niches and diversification too.

"The idea has brought the young farmers in the community closer together. I think these days it can be easy to become quite introverted on the farm as everyone is busy in their own right, but networking is also really important and it has many mental health benefits too..." Ryan says.

"There is still so much I can learn, either through my own research, or to be involved in this young farmers' project to look at different ideas you may not have considered trying before.

"The events have been a broad range of workshops so far from looking at different forms of sowing equipment and new technology available, new chemicals and financial management."

Jake says it's not just the Coolamon group that is increasing, he comments that the concept of the group has now been replicated in other Delta Ag areas.

"Other branches have been establishing their own groups, with interest in other Delta areas such as Trangie, Nevertire and Tottenham, Henty and Yerong Creek, Cowra, and the Cox Rural business in South Australia is also looking into opportunities," Jake says.



Coolamon farmer Ryan Jennings & Delta Ag agronomist Glenn Dyason in a multispecies paddock on Ryan's Coolamon property

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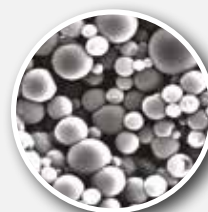
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# On Location Harden, NSW

Article | Rosie O’Keeffe

Photography | Camilla Duffy

# DELTA

## AGRIBUSINESS



“What differentiates us really is our high level of expertise, very strong agronomy and consultancy business, strong animal health and nutrition business and ag chem...”

*John Fisher, Branch Manager, Delta Agribusiness Harden*

Bill Perrignon, Jason Manwaring, Tim Condon, Julian Jones, John Fisher, Luke Basham, Ben Lenehan & John Quinn

The Delta Agribusiness branch at Harden was one of the two foundation sites to open its doors in 2006.

Fast forward 17 years and four of the original team members are still working together today and their history dates back even further and over more than two decades prior to that.

John Fisher, branch manager and a foundation shareholder of the business, says that there have been several highlights in his role, and he has not only enjoyed working with farm consultant Tim Condon, Julian Jones in merchandise sales, and operations manager, Luke Basham, over so many years, it has also been rewarding to have mentored so many younger team members as well.

“Certainly, one of the strengths of our business has been the stable and effective staff team who all work together well,” John explains.

“The branch has grown over the years and we have more in the team now with Bill Perrignon as fertilizer manager, Jason Manwaring responsible for seed mixes, and John Quinn in merchandise and administration, who has also brought his horticulture knowledge to enable us to be involved in other markets too. Then, to have had the group of us who have been working together since the branch was established and with prior entities, one being Chandlers Rural, and with so much experience amongst us, I think we have all been very well trained over time.

“What differentiates us really is our high level of expertise, very strong agronomy and farm consultancy business, strong animal health and nutrition business and ag chem... We are a one-stop-shop when it comes to the team’s experience and we try to also exceed expectations with our customer service.”

Born and bred in Cootamundra and still residing on a small farm at Stockinbingal, John has been working in the agricultural industry since the 1980s, originally working as a stock and station agent in north west NSW, then managing his own farming property and other regional distribution businesses and rural shopfronts before working with Gerard Hines and Chris Duff in the 1990s and then the Delta Agribusiness network was established.

“Every day can be a highlight if you look at it in a positive way. I have been very fortunate that every business I have been involved with has been successful and I’ve been really lucky to have good people around me all the time,” John says.

The Harden operations started from a container box in an old machinery shed, and since then it has been transformed into a space with spacious open offices, capability to facilitate high transport, and the movement of goods can be done efficiently and safely.

The Harden branch has community involvement too, sponsoring functions and organisations, and has developed a close relationship with everyone within the wider district.

Farm consultant and foundation shareholder, Tim Condon, has been working in the industry for many years, starting as a seed production manager for the NSW Department of Primary Industries before spending time as an agronomist and managing the rural business, Higginsons IAMA at Junee.

Originally growing up on the NSW South Coast, he completed his studies at Charles Sturt University in Wagga and has stayed in the region since, commenting how productive the region is.

“It’s a highly productive area, with a great climate and landscape for mixed farming and relatively consistent rainfall, averaging 500 to 650mm annually. Wheat and canola are the base crops, both winter grazing and spring types. There are some lupins and faba beans grown, as well as, barley, triticale and oats. Productive and persistent perennial pastures are the backbone of the system, sustaining the livestock enterprises and the landscape. Farmers are very good at quickly adopting and adapting to new ideas and technologies, and there have been so many changes. Direct drilling, rotational grazing, and liming have been three of the major game changers in the industry.



Delta Agribusiness Foundation Shareholder & Harden Branch Manager  
John Fisher



Delta Agribusiness Foundation Shareholder  
& Farm Consultant Tim Condon





Luke Basham



Ben Lenehan



Julian Jones & Jason Manwaring

"There has also been a significant improvement in varieties across that period, whether it be livestock genetics, pasture or crop varieties or chemicals and crop nutrition... It's been rewarding to work with growers to discuss what to adopt next to keep their systems productive, profitable and sustainable and at the forefront of advancements," Tim says.

"It's been a great region to have a career as an advisor, I really enjoy working within the dynamic and diverse mixed farming systems. Every farm business is different and things change every season. We've just come off the back of three wet seasons and this has been one of, if not the best autumns ever, with spring like conditions right into the winter..."

Tim has been involved in research and development projects too, and has a long association with the CSIRO.

"I thrive on being involved with people researching new ideas, whether it be with growers, researchers, or industry colleagues, things are constantly improving. For example, Delta Ag is currently part of a national project with the CSIRO and Kalyx to get into how we can build stable soil carbon out of stubble."

Tim also says being a part of the leadership team at Delta has been a rewarding part of the job and he also agrees with John that he has enjoyed working with other colleagues Julian Jones and Luke Basham for more than two decades, as well as newer team members.

"I can do what I do in the paddock and can be assured I am going to be backed up by a great team in the shop. We all support each other and it's been a really good team for a long time."

Also from Cootamundra, Julian Jones had been working with the team at Chandlers Rural before the Delta Harden branch opened with him taking on a role in sales and merchandise and he also had prior experience in the industry in rural contracting and as a station hand.

He has seen several changes in farming practices over the years, especially a growth in grazing crops sown in the region, the increased time frames of sowing paddocks and in the advancements of machinery used in operations.

"It is always really interesting to be involved with different growers seeing how they manage different sowing methods and to get the best for them out of their cropping programs and livestock enterprises," Julian says.

"We are very lucky to have the team we have working together and there is so much diversity in the Delta network now with its growth.

"If we want to see how different parts of the world manage their operations, we can now see that and learn about different ways of farming."

Luke Basham works as operations manager at Harden and also manages the Yass branch.

His role with Delta has evolved over the years, commencing in administration and then moving into training and supervisory roles.

Luke, who is from Stockinbingal, enjoys working within the teams and the diversity of the farming enterprises within the regions – with the Yass area having smaller holdings and the Harden farming region renowned for its established growers.

"We've always been a great team working together and I enjoy the training role which takes me to other branches to meet new people there and helping them to manage the systems," Luke says.

With an on-site fertilizer storage capacity of up to 500 tonnes, Bill Perrignon's role in managing the selling and logistics at the Harden branch is an important one.

Bill Perrignon commenced working with Delta over 12 months ago, having been studying a Bachelor of Agriculture and Bachelor of Laws at Armidale before he took the opportunity to join Delta's graduate agribusiness program.

"It really has been a huge opportunity and a fundamental experience being able to learn from John Fisher and Tim Condon, they've been so welcoming in allowing me to grow in many areas," Bill says.

"Managing the fertilizer has been particularly busy during sowing time, but whilst it's challenging, it's also rewarding once each farmer has what they need and the crops are all in the ground."

Bill, who grew up on a small cattle farm between Dalby and Toowoomba in Queensland, always had a passion for agriculture.

Since moving to Young in southern NSW, he has been involved in community organisations and events and plays with the local Yabbies Rugby team.

John Fisher has not only been involved in developing Bill's knowledge, but has mentored other graduates too through the various training programs across the Delta network.

"It does make me feel proud to see a younger person develop their skills on different subjects, and if I can contribute to that, it is certainly a rewarding part of the job."



## In the zone

Article | **Rosie O’Keeffe**  
Photography | **Camilla Duffy**

**Robert Taylor** has enhanced the efficiencies in his mixed farming operation at Greenethorpe through investing in technology and new management practices. He explains how his dryland cropping, Merino sheep production and commercial hay enterprise has evolved, and in recent years even achieving record yields.



“ I have gone through the new phases of ‘no till’, we were early adopters of GPS technology and we are using full controlled traffic practices with matched implements... ”

*Robert Taylor, farmer, Greenethorpe*

Delta Agribusiness Farm Consultant Dave Crowley with Robert Taylor at “Glenalla”, Greenethorpe



**A**s 4th generation farmer Robert Taylor (Rob) sows the remaining winter crops on his 2,500-hectare operation at Greenethorpe, he hopes the 2023 season is as productive as the past three seasons which harvested some of the highest wheat yields on record.

“We are already experiencing a magnificent autumn, with weeds emerging early so we can control those, and we have had a full profile of moisture... I believe it has been a perfect start to the season,” Rob explains.

Last year, not only did some of his crops harvest 8.5 tonne/hectare, but 2021 also proved to be a productive growing season, with canola averaging yields of 3.6t/ha and wheat crops averaging above 6t/ha.

And Rob has not only been the only one to celebrate his achievements, being awarded state champion in the Suncorp Bank Championship Dryland Field Wheat Competition for two years’ running.

“It’s really rewarding to have achieved at this level, particularly when so many growers were experiencing such productive years as well,” Rob says.

The Taylor family has been involved in agriculture for several years, with Rob’s father Bob originally farming with his brothers around Monteagle, north of Young, before he acquired a property at Greenethorpe in 1959, with further properties purchased over the years to expand operations.

Rob recalls always having an interest in farming and returned to the family enterprise with his father Bob after completing a Bachelor of Applied Science in Agriculture and then gaining different experience on-farm in Canada.

Bob is still involved in the farm operations, however, with one full-time employee within the family’s Hazeldene Pastoral Company, Bob has now reduced his practical involvement.

Rob’s wife Mandy and sons Thomas, Stirling and Fletcher have also been involved in the farm’s activities over the years at “Glenalla”, however, it is Fletcher who is now most likely to continue the family farming legacy, currently studying agriculture in Wagga, while Thomas and Stirling are now working in other industries.

“I am definitely passionate about farming, but we do also pursue off-farm business interests as well,” Rob says.

“Our property suits a mixed farming operation. Since the early days we have grown wheat, oats and cereals with managed sheep and wool production. From the early 1980s we started growing canola and pulse crops and the balance has progressively changed to 60 per cent of area to cropping and 40 per cent to pasture for livestock enterprises,” Rob says.

“We have expanded the enterprise to include more land as the opportunity became available.”

Rob explains that the farm is almost all arable land. With the Tyagong and Brundah creeks running throughout the property and the elevation varying throughout the farm, paddocks are now zoned so grazing crops and pastures are planted predominantly in low lying areas, with others used for intensive cropping.

“Our rotation is mainly canola/wheat for 6 to 8 years then barley undersown to pasture. The cropping intensity varies somewhat depending on the farm location. The legume based pasture phase replenishes nitrogen, helps to rebuild soil carbon and assists with weed control.” Rob says.

This year, 60 per cent of the canola crops are Clearfield hybrid varieties and 40 per cent are triazine varieties, while the spring wheats are Raidar, Sunmaster, Mustang, and a little bit of RockStar. Rob concedes that RockStar is susceptible to disease, but when protected with fungicides has been a high yielding variety. ▶



Rob, Mandy, Fletcher & Bob Taylor prepare paddocks for more winter crop planting

“ Since the early days we have grown wheat, oats and cereals with managed sheep and wool production. ”

*Robert Taylor, farmer, Greenethorpe*



“I have always embraced technology when it became available. I have gone through the new phases of ‘no till’, we were early adopters of GPS technology and we are using full controlled traffic practices with matched implements to 12 metre seeder, header, 36m sprayers and spreader on 3m wheel spacing. We have been doing that since the 2012 season, not so much from a production point of view, but for efficiency. It works well to improve traffic ability and fuel efficiency and minimises compaction. We have also found that with the wet years we have been experiencing, it has enabled us to get back into paddocks more quickly after rain events,” Rob explains.

He says the family has had a long association with Delta Ag, now led by farm consultancy and agronomy advice from Dave Crowley, and the precision agriculture team.

“Dad was a client of Chandlers at Monteagle and this association continued right through to when Gerard (Hines) and Chris (Duff) originally established the Delta business. We have a great working relationship with the team and they always go that little bit extra to give us the best advice and service to ensure we maximise productivity in our operations. They are always knowledgeable in the latest information and research and the field days extension activities always hit the mark too.”

Rob has been using precision agriculture technologies for variable rate lime, urea and nitrogen applications.

“The property is zoned, so we are also using other technologies in conjunction with precision agriculture, such as NDVI satellite imagery, moisture probes and yield mapping. We have been soil testing on a zone basis and are moving towards grid sampling to fine tune the system further.

“I wouldn’t say we are growing better crops because of these practices, but we are certainly managing our inputs better.”

Rob says with the philosophy to manage the farm operations themselves with machinery investment, it has ensured the convenience and flexibility to adapt practices and timings to suit changing conditions.

Rob recently invested in an updated boom spray which will enable the use of drone mapping so we can implement precision spraying.

With a view to cost savings and more efficient use of herbicide both in fallow and crop.

“We use harvest weed seed management and rotate pre-emergent chemistry to keep seed banks down. Selective crop topping, hay making and the pasture phase has allowed us to stay on top of weeds but you need to be diligent,” Rob says. We also use strategic cultivation to incorporate lime and are not afraid to burn stubble when required.”

Rob says with average annual rainfall of 600mm, “Glenalla” is in a reliable area with good productive soils and the landscape is reasonably well drained.

“Our biggest challenge is frost because of our elevation. We try to combat that using zoning of the paddocks, running livestock and making hay to spread the risk. Grazing canola and wheat comprise about 20 per cent of the cropping rotation, which allow us to run more stock and are usually the highest gross margin paddocks.

“We have a good network of dairy clients on the South Coast who we have sold clover, lucerne and cereal hay to over many years. In years of a bad frost event or drought we have baled canola and wheat crops as well.”

Rob says the livestock enterprise has always focused on Merino sheep with Pooginook bloodlines, with currently around 5,000 Merino ewes and their replacements run in the paddocks.

“It fluctuates depending on the season, but we try to target 11 to 12 DSEs per hectare, the last few springs have been huge allowing us to run more numbers, but if conditions taper off and pasture availability falls then we will ditch surplus sheep,” Rob says.

“We have changed the focus of our breeding a lot. It used to be based mainly on wool production, but now we are selecting for quicker maturity, large plain bodies, managing our sheep for dual purpose. We fatten all our wether progeny. Ewes are managed to target high conception and weaning rates. Adult ewes are 19 to 20 micron, heavy cutting, easy care sheep.”

Rob says around 25 per cent of ewes are joined to terminal sires for lamb production, with the core breeders making up 75 per cent of ewe numbers joined to merino rams as part of the self-replacing flock.





Delta Agribusiness Farm Consultant Dave Crowley advises Bob & Robert Taylor on a range of broadacre & grazing crops at "Glenalla" at Greenethorpe

"The returns for meat and surplus sheep have increased significantly over the past decade and now contribute more to gross earnings than the wool income. However, the combination of all three enterprises wool, meat and surplus sheep sales I believe rank very highly in comparison to all livestock options and is a good fit for our farm. Albeit the sheep side of the business requires plenty of time, labour and management to get it right."

Rob says pasture management is also a key part of the enterprise.

"We have a lucerne clover blend, then depending on the area of the property we also grow perennial grasses phalaris, fescue, cocksfoot and chicory in the mix. We tend to use the perennial grass mixtures on the lower creek country which is likely to be in the pasture phase for longer and provides great groundcover and protection for lambing ewes. The lucerne, clover pastures are shorter duration and can also be used for hay. The lambs particularly thrive on that and it enables us to fatten stock all year round too."

Just as the farming land has expanded over the years, significant capital investment has been made in improving infrastructure over the years.

A large machinery shed/workshop built in recent years has now enabled maintenance, servicing and repairs to be done regardless of the weather and machinery to be stored undercover, while a new 6-stand shearing shed and covered sheep yards currently being constructed will further improve efficiencies in the on-farm livestock operations.

"We are constantly updating our water systems and fencing and we plan to also increase the grain storage on-farm in the coming years," Rob says.

Hopefully, as now late winter approaches and Rob gives a seasonal update, the outlook will remain positive for a successful harvest once again, despite conditions drier than when Rob first spoke to *Prospect* as he planted the last of his winter crops.

"Crop prospects are still looking solid, although I am very conscious of a forecast dry spring and possible El Nino developing. We still have a decent profile of moisture and provided we get average spring rain and dodge late frosts the outcome should be okay," Rob says..

And with the strong interest from youngest son Fletcher to return to the farm in the coming years, and a focus on continuing to embrace innovation, there is no doubt the Taylor family's farming legacy will be instilled for years to come.



Fletcher Taylor is currently studying agriculture



Bob & Fletcher Taylor





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## Targeting efficiency

How Roberson family invest in new technology in machinery to grow farming productivity

Article | **Rosie O'Keeffe**



“ Technology has changed our business a lot and it will definitely change it more in the future. ”

*Mark Roberson*



**B**rothers Adam and Mark Roberson have experienced considerable gains in efficiency and profitability from making key machinery and technological investments in their mixed farming enterprise based in southern NSW.

With a 2,300-hectare operation now spread geographically across 15 properties at Mangoplah, The Rock and at Ganmain, the brothers say the key to the productivity of their enterprise is being open to new innovation and farming practices.

“We keep our practices simple, but we are always researching new ways of farming to then adapt for our own business,” the brothers say.

“Farming is certainly our passion, and our choice of career, but you need to make decisions based on what will be best from a business perspective.”

For the cropping operation which is their main enterprise, Illabo and Beckom wheat varieties are planted each season, with one variety of lupins and one variety of canola sown.

There are also currently 9,500 Merino sheep run on the properties, 20 per cent on pasture, and 80 per cent on grazing crops.

“We find the wool returns are consistent each year. We can stock higher density with Merinos and get the same return as fat lambs.”

In doing the majority of the labour in their enterprise, Adam and Mark are concentrating on their cropping enterprise to maximise growth and profitability.

“We try not to employ many contractors or on-farm labour, and that means it has been easier to focus on our cropping program. For us it has been about using new technology and keep our machinery up-to-date – our machinery is all under five years old now,” Adam says.

“We focus on keeping our farming practices simple, doing as much as we can with what we can, making sure we use the biggest and best in the technology and machinery available, and that we can afford, so we can do as much as we can ourselves.”

The crop rotations are lupins, canola, wheat, wheat, and there is one crop variety sown on each farm. Most of the properties are farmed as one paddock for efficiency so during each part of the season, machines do not have to be moved as frequently, and as far.

“A lot of people will still say that they can’t necessarily justify the purchase of new machinery, however, it is showing up in our profitability increases, and we know our efficiencies have increased so we can grow the expanse of the farming properties in our operation, and use our inputs better too,” Adam says.

“Our spreader doesn’t over spread anywhere, so we have significant savings in urea and fertilizer. We have recently started using a stripper front on our harvester to increase harvest efficiency, and we have gone from running two headers, back to one machine. We have a disc machine for our seeding set-up. We have also focused on soil moisture conservation and the nutrient that goes with it, but the labour we save has really been evident before everything else from the investments we have made.”

The brothers say it was around eight years ago after several years of drought conditions they adopted the stripper front to retain more moisture in the soil.

“We had realised through even other farmers experiencing improved productivity, that it could mean we could get more out of our harvester for less fuel usage, and also get more moisture. The first year we ran it was had twice the capacity for half the fuel.

“We bought a disc seeder to go into the longer stubble, and it enables us to sow earlier in the year, so we don’t have to burn our stubbles.

“We still get enough moisture in February for the grazing crops, and in the productivity gains we can cover an extra 20 per cent per day and travel a lot faster.”

Adam and Mark say their spray equipment was upgraded two years ago and is a 36-metre boom used to 12 metre tram lines, with controlled traffic.



Brothers Mark & Adam Roberson





“The soil and nutrients are always increasing here, and the paddocks are certainly doing better than when we first started.”

Adam Roberson



Adam Roberson with Delta Ag Yerong Creek's April Kennedy

“We can now control our droplet size and get more coverage on the weeds at the same time. It has individual nozzle control with automatic shut off to minimise wastage.

“It has been a bigger game changer than what we thought – in the first year in one block we saved 2,000 litres of mixed chemical...”

“We are also researching using drones to map our weeds and spot spray using that technology.”

Adam and Mark say 80 per cent of the crops planted last year were harvested due to wet conditions. Yields were average with 2.2 tonne/hectare for canola, 5.4t/ha for wheat, and lupins 2.5t/ha.

This season has proved to be the wettest lead up to spring due to combined rainfall and soil moisture.

Average rainfall is generally between 580mm and 620mm, and even in the drought years, the family was able to bale and sell hay.

Infrastructure constructed including a large hay shed and silos proved vital in these drought years. There is also a fertilizer shed to store larger amounts of fertilizer on-farm, and there are plans to further increase on-farm storage for grain marketing.

“Our main harvest delivery point is just 10km away at The Rock and with good prices at harvest the last few years we haven't had the need in recent times for as much on-farm storage... Warehousing there and then selling grain throughout the year has been a better option.

“The on-farm storage we have from a quality point of view has good aeration to control insects. It is particularly beneficial for the lupins, we store them in grain bags at harvest before we get it into silos.”

The Roberson brothers have been using the Delta Agribusiness services at Yerong Creek for more than 10 years.

“We had been trying to find a business that would support us on a level that we wanted and we found that the agronomy package and delivery service has been great for our business.”

Whilst the Roberson family history in farming dates back to 1917 in the Mangoplah area, and Adam and Mark's father Peter still involved in working within the enterprise, Peter says it has been important for him to allow the business to evolve under his sons' new management, especially in recent years.

“My grandfather Charles Roberson originally took up farming, and then my father was the next generation and one of seven children.

I eventually acquired “Forest Vale” at Mangoplah and in 1988 “Wyrema” at The Rock was purchased, and then another farming property at Mangoplah,” Peter says.

“My brother and I were told we were going to come back and work on the farm, so there wasn't really a choice, but my brother and I were in partnership until 1995. The boys have then expanded the land through owned and leased properties over the years.

“I encouraged Adam and Mark to get a degree, or a trade, or work for a few years so they learn how to manage under different leaderships... I thought it would give them a good grounding. I never knew anything else other than what my father had taught me and I felt it was important they put into practice some of their own ideas.”

Adam and Mark both agree that their off-farm studies and experience has also been beneficial for their farming business.

Adam studied an applied science degree at CSU in Wagga before working as an agronomist, at Stolls undertaking spray work and in GPS technology. Mark completed a Bachelor of Farm Management through the University of Sydney at Orange before working during a harvest season in America, before working on properties in the region and casually at Hutcheon and Pearce.

“We have always been passionate about farming and being involved in agriculture,” Mark says. “The soil and nutrients are always increasing here, and the paddocks are certainly doing better than when we first started.

“The information from our data that is available now is just amazing, and there is so much more to come with autonomous tractors or drones being used in spraying activities to provide further savings on chemicals, there are so many savings to be made on inputs using technology.

“You've got to be open to the next best thing that will be available. You can't just sit still and do what you've been doing for the past 20 years. Farming practices are continually evolving.”

The Roberson brothers say that expansion is always in the back of their minds and enabling their own children to also be involved in the farming enterprise in the future.

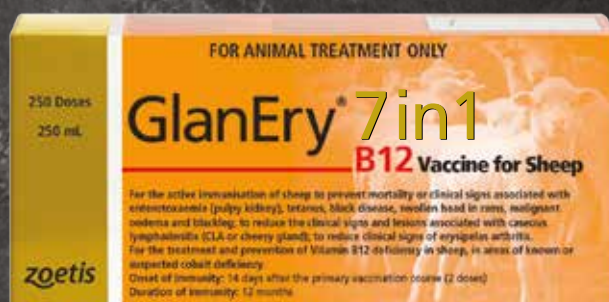
“We want to be leaving a profitable business to enable them to expand into the future,” Adam and Mark say.

“Technology has changed our business a lot and it will definitely change it more in the future. There will be bigger growth in the next 10 years to what we have seen now. It's not necessarily that everything will be just getting bigger and better, but farming practices will certainly be more efficient.”

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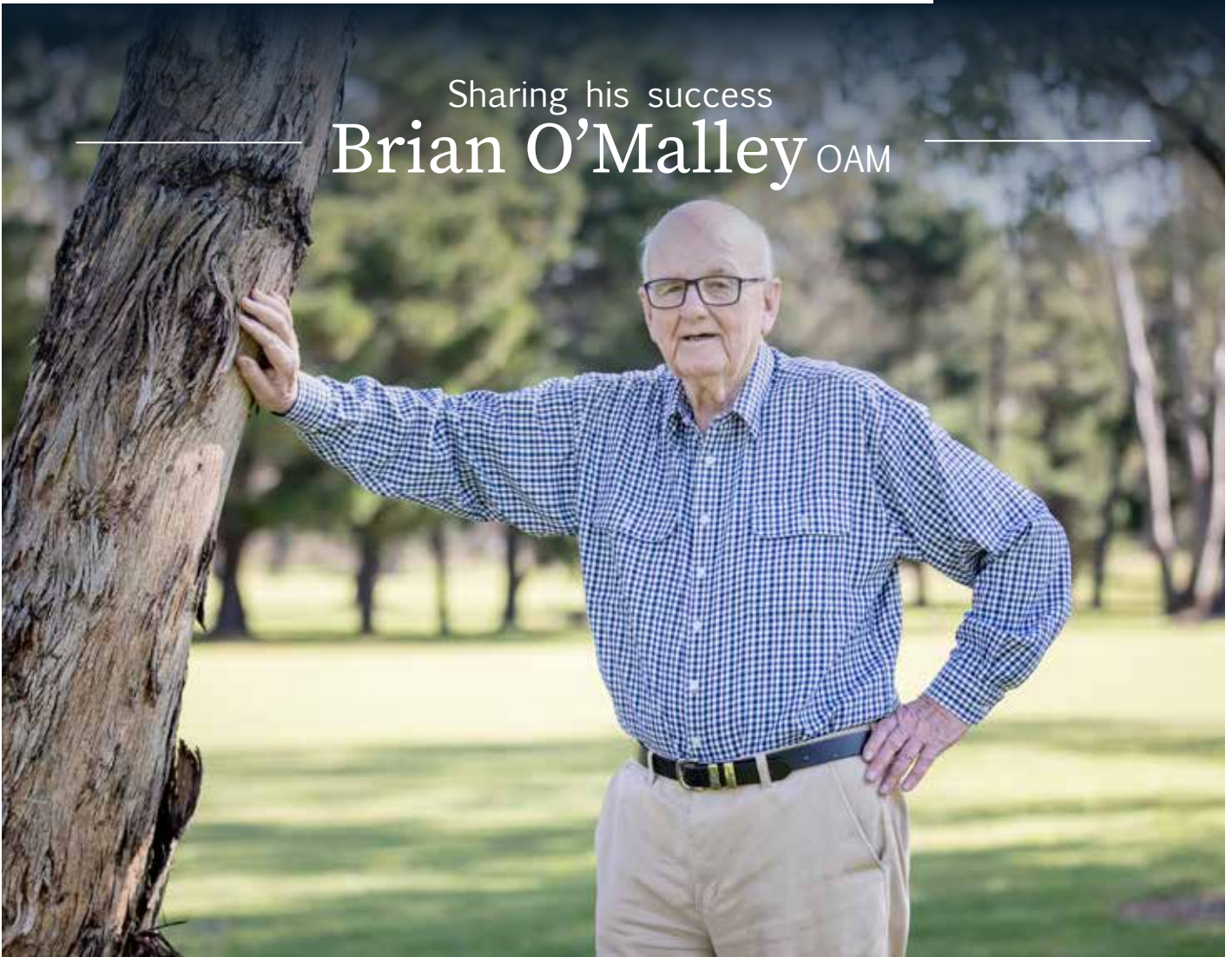
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Sharing his success  
**Brian O'Malley** OAM



Brian O'Malley OAM is highly regarded for his tenacity and leadership in agribusiness management, and his passion and commitment to the community of Cootamundra. **Rosie O'Keefe** gains an insight into Brian's story, particularly his influence in the early careers of Gerard Hines and Chris Duff, which led to the eventual establishment of Delta Agribusiness.

**F**or Brian O'Malley OAM, one of the keys to successful business has been sharing the rewards with the people who have worked within the companies he has owned and managed.

"I have always felt that it was important to not only attract good people, but to retain good people I believe you need to give them the opportunity to have equity and to share in the profits. This motivates them to be more efficient and increases their productivity and performance in their roles and delivers ongoing opportunities for all those working within the business to be high achievers," Brian says.

"At the end of the day, if you don't have good people around you, you don't have anything really."

Whilst it was the foundations in rural wholesale distribution that was built by Brian's father Jim in the Cootamundra region, it was his position as the first chairman of the association formed as the IAMA network in the late 1980's (Independent Agricultural Merchants Association) and his foresight to help lead the creation of this new national group of independent Agri retailers fitting between big corporates and small distributors, that Brian is most recognised for, and at the time was a game changer for the agricultural services industry.

Brian has many career highlights, including being involved in world study tours and an appointment as director of AVCARE (Australian Agricultural and Veterinary Chemical Association) as well as chairman of the Public Affairs Committee from 1993 to 1997, however, it is still his local achievements and dedication to giving back to his hometown of Cootamundra that has given him the most satisfaction.

These legacies also led to him being awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) earlier this year for service to his community through various organisations.

He has made several major contributions to Cootamundra including being involved in the town's development committee, being a benefactor of the Cootamundra nursing home and former treasurer of St Vincent de Paul.

"I am most proud of the work I did and investments made in funding the building of the Cootamundra Health Centre. The facility comprised a medical centre, the community health centre, a dentist, two pathology centres, a coffee shop and landscaped gardens and large car park," Brian smiles as he recalls the process of delivering such vital infrastructure to sustain and enhance health services for the Cootamundra township and local district.

It was in 1968 at 30 years of age after working for the NSW Department of Lands in Grafton and Sydney, that Brian decided to return to Cootamundra and acquire one third of the O'Malley and Co. business alongside his father Jim and his then business partner Eric Fisher (who is the father of one of Delta Ag's founding shareholders John Fisher).

The O'Malley and Co. partnership had been established in 1961 after Jim O'Malley had started initially trading from a small back street shed, the opening due to strong growth of the farm supplies business influenced by the wool boom then brought on by the Korean War in the 1950s.

Jim O'Malley had gained a reputation for fair business dealings and through his wholesale marketing, had developed a range of popular and quality products from good manufacturers including ICI and Bayer.

Brian recalls how instrumental it was to continue to display high business principles and fairness when pursuing new agreements with supply companies and still reminisces the challenges faced when arranging these contracts in what was a highly political and competitive space.

"I remember one instance Eric (Fisher) and I went to the head office of major drench producer Merck Sharp and Dohme, to try and set up an account with them. It was made very clear that we were wasting our time as we were too small an operation. But, within a year, that executive had moved on and we eventually managed to negotiate a wholesale account with them," Brian reminisces.

Although having expanded the business amongst a growing distribution area and moving into a purpose designed complex and head office for the wholesale business, it was not only the challenging scope of negotiating with supply companies, but the 1982 drought which was having a big impact on the rural economy too. Brian as general manager of O'Malley and Co, and the board had to make decisions that would ensure the retention of staff amongst challenging climatic circumstances.

It was in 1984 that a meeting with other supply company executives actually had a profound effect on the distribution of rural supplies not only at a company level, but also, nationally.

At the time, led by Brian after Jim and Eric retired in 1975, O'Malley and Co based at Cootamundra had 34 staff and 300 reseller clients in reselling and other distribution.

Brian decided to team up with other medium sized independent country distributors to discuss collective agreements with the supply companies, believing that larger corporate entities were favoured in the industry.

"We needed greater buying power to compete with our larger corporate competitors, and the gathering of like-minded independents gathered momentum," Brian says.

Being initially unsuccessful in their talks, in one instance Monsanto executives indicated they would only deal with individual companies and not coordinated buying groups, only sparked Brian's determination to ensure a deal could be struck.

So, along with Alf Salter who covered northern NSW through his Tamworth based Agro Services, Frank O'Brien and Danny Bourke of Seed & Grain Sales at Moree in the northwest NSW region, Victoria's Max Fremder's Wimmel and DGO Distributors in Melbourne, and Ian Cox of Vivco Rural Supplies Pty Ltd covering South Australia, they decided to form their own marketing enterprise.

Brian recalls that it was over dinner that same evening that the IAMA network was officially formed, with its slogan being "Far more for the farmer".

After this initial meeting and ongoing national growth under the IAMA banner, it was decided to float the businesses on the ASX with nine successful large independent companies coming together to sell their businesses on the same day in 1994 into its already listed Western Australian member, SBS Rural, to create IAMA Ltd. The founders worked together as a national team to agree on valuations into the listing and how the board and management would be structured, and Brian secured former NSW Premier Nick Greiner as inaugural Chairman.

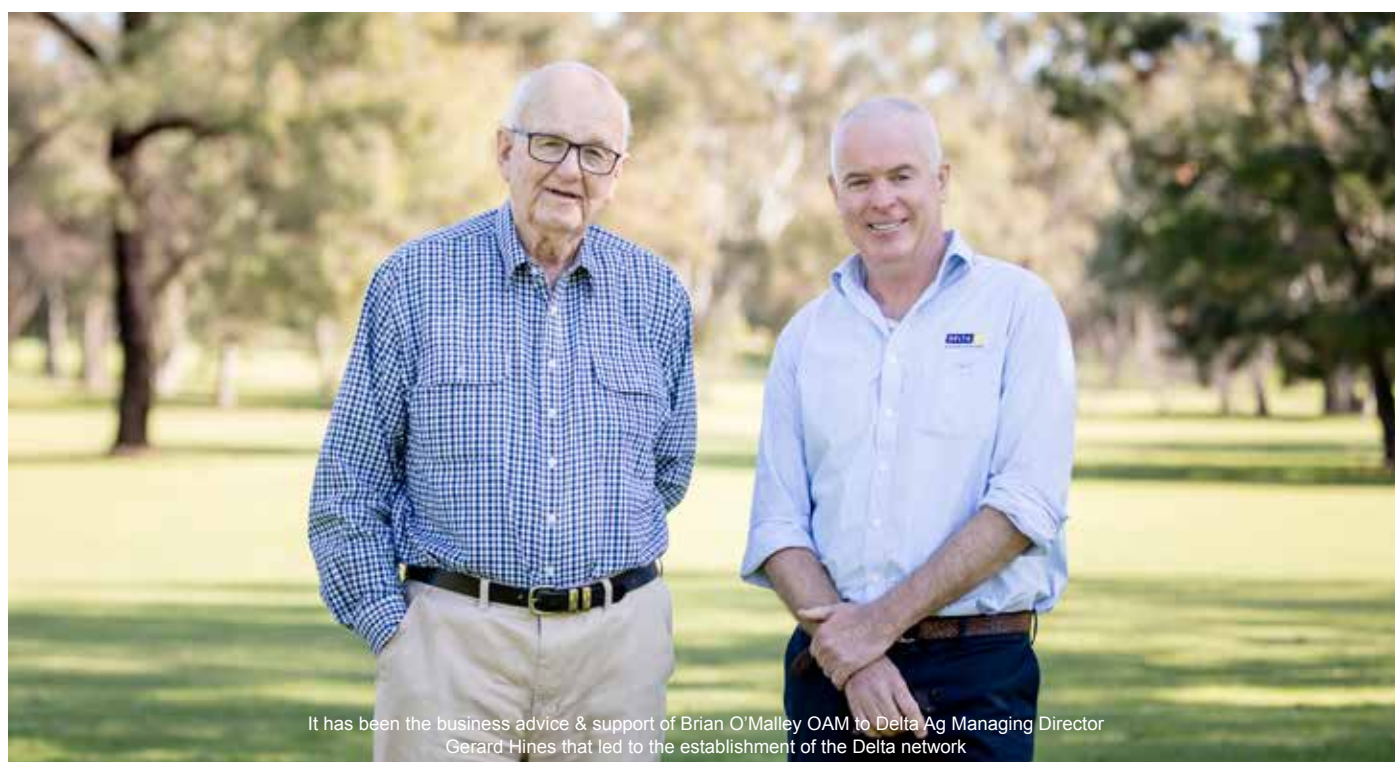
At the time that IAMA was established, O'Malley Distribution Group had sales revenue of around \$120 million and 120 employees, 70 of which were based at Cootamundra.

"It was a new concept and all the different businesses were from different regions from key production regions around Australia, delivering a diverse and strong earnings profile with specialist divisions across broadacre, agronomy, cotton and irrigation, animal health and nutrition, seed, and biotechnology offerings. IAMA also developed a market leading agronomy base and secured exclusive distribution of key new chemical molecules like Verdict 104 and others.

He is still proud of the way he developed the idea for IAMA to eventually hold 43 per cent of the national broadacre agricultural chemical market, 23 per cent of the animal health market and high percentages of the other areas within the industry.

Both wholesalers and retailers became members of the IAMA group which quickly spread Australia-wide with over 200 retail outlets. Annual sales from the original founders in 1984 jumped to more than \$1 billion by the late 1990s.

Eventually in 2001 the IAMA company was sold to the Wesfarmers group, who having already purchased pastoral house Dalgety, created Wesfarmers Landmark through that transaction.





And there have been similarities in the mantras in “sharing the rewards” that Brian O’Malley has held that the Delta Agribusiness enterprise has now also been based on.

It was at Brian’s home in early winter, when I sat down with Delta Ag’s Managing Director Gerard Hines and Brian, where Gerard reminisced about the early establishment of Delta and how much of an influence Brian has been in not only the beginning of his agribusiness career, but also the wider Delta group too.

Whilst the conversation certainly at times turned quite colloquial as Gerard and Brian swapped anecdotes about industry colleagues and even upcoming race meets, the focus was also on the story of how Brian somewhat took his own punt on Gerard as a young 24-year-old who had grown up on a farming property at Wallendbeen, supporting his entrepreneurial skills from the outset.

As Gerard recalls, “I always wanted to be a farmer, but took on a sales position at Cootamundra Fertilizers in 1986 for what I thought would be a brief spell of ‘off farm’ experience. I had grown up with the O’Malley family and played cricket with Brian’s son Paul.

“In 1988, Brian and Paul had decided they needed to add retail to their wholesale operations, as they saw significant market changes emerging to wholesale margins and approached me to head up a well-known business they wanted to purchase as their first opportunity at Monteagle, a little village just north of Young, owned by Bob and Lorraine Chandler.

“The caveat was that Brian wanted me to have equity, some ‘skin in the game’, and offered to personally guarantee my loan with the bank to enable me to take an initial stake of 25 per cent. This support and guidance gave me the courage to get outside of my comfort zone and have a real crack at it.

“I remember it was such a big thing, I mean banks generally talk people out of personally guaranteeing loans particularly to non-family members and it was massive to go from being a small customer of a local retail bank and suddenly, I was being introduced to a regional manager at a much larger Westpac business banking centre in Wagga.

“It really did make me feel like I really needed to fully commit to this, and for a young person at 24 years of age to be offered such a generous opportunity was life changing.”

A year later Chris Duff joined Gerard as a specialist farm advisor/agronomist, the first sitting within a rural merchandise business in our regions at the time and quickly became a shareholder.

“Chris joining the business gave us a strategy to really change the game in terms of a greater value-added service offering to our clients. Brian and Paul backed us on this new model, which was very successful, as the Department of Ag back in those days were considered the primary advisors in terms of agronomy, however, their budgets and resources were being squeezed just as the market became more complex with a raft of new chemistry,” Gerard says.

“We have never forgotten that critical help to get established into our own business, and over time Chris and I built our stake up to 50 per cent and the business evolved to be a joint venture with Wesfarmers Landmark, after the IAMA sale in 2001.”

Gerard explains that in 2003 Wesfarmers sold the entire Wesfarmers Landmark business to the AWB, and the ensuing Oil for food scandal and Cole enquiry really changed the culture and landscape within the Landmark business, so they decided it was time to get out and chart their own destiny.

Delta Ag was established in April 2006 as a true independent, with an initial two branches at Young and Harden in southern NSW.

“When we established Delta from scratch, we wanted to replicate the inclusive shareholder model that Brian afforded us, and to create a truly independent business that allowed all our people, if they chose to, to participate as shareholders and to create an asset. Brian once said to me that dilution is a good thing if it’s for the right reasons, and our view was and still is that we are better off and stronger overall by having a smaller share each of a larger and stronger business, that shares the rewards and attracts and retains the best people,” Gerard explains.



Brian O’Malley OAM teamed up with a group of other rural businesspeople to establish the IAMA network which proved to be a force in the industry for several years

Brian O’Malley, Jim O’Malley & Eric Fisher



This approach is the DNA of how Delta Agribusiness was set up, initially with 8 founding shareholders, and now with 125 shareholders across its 63 retail and wholesale outlets across Australia, 83 of which still work in the business.

“It facilitates our ability to attract and retain the best people, and promotes stable and high performing culture born from the opportunity and influence that Brian and his family gave us in our early 20s,” Gerard says.

“Our time with the Wesfarmers group in the Chandlers Landmark joint venture was also very formative in our career... They are a very disciplined and principled company, and we really enjoyed our time with them... Whilst IAMA may have had the strongest front end with agronomists and the best retail presence and a strong market share, Wesfarmers taught us about the critical importance of balance sheet, cashflow and disciplined systems and processes in the backend systems, and at a management level, we took these learnings and principals into our new business at Delta Ag.

“When we established Delta Ag, we were enduring a very severe drought in 2006 and we were also up against a very competitive market environment, however, we knew that if we stuck to what we were good at, which is adding value to our farming clients’ enterprises, we would ultimately have a relevant position in the supply chain and be successful.”

Gerard says the influence that Brian and his son Paul had on he and Chris was profound.

“Their early support gave us the opportunity to get started and they taught us a lot about business strategy and financial management, and these valuable learnings along the way are still foundation principles we have today.

“It has been a wonderful journey at Delta Ag, to be able to create a truly national business, with over 400 employees now across the country and to evolve into the leading private, Australian owned and independent Agri Services business in Australia.

“Chris and I have now been working together for 35 years, a strong and enduring partnership founded on appreciating different skill sets, trust, and a desire to always improve by surrounding ourselves with great people. However, it’s very important to understand, our success has been on the back of many great people, and a lot of collective efforts, friendships, and loyalty to each other across 17 years.

“It is a privilege to be able to recognise the contributions that Brian and the O’Malley family have made not only to the industry, but to us in our personal journeys, we are forever grateful.”



# Aviator® Xpro®

The new benchmark for foliar disease management in canola.



Aviator® Xpro® will deliver class leading disease control of both sclerotinia and blackleg, setting the crop up for an extended period of clean and healthy growth leading to unbeatable yields and return on investment.

### At a glance:

Aviator Xpro brings together bixafen, the first registered foliar fungicide in canola from the Succinate Dehydrogenase Inhibitor mode of action group (Group 7 – SDHI), with the proven performance of prothioconazole (Group 3 – 3rd generation triazole).

With the incidence and severity of sclerotinia spreading and increasing across key Australian canola growing regions, Aviator Xpro sets a new benchmark in longer lasting disease control for Australian growers. Aviator Xpro, with its two modes of action, will be a valuable new tool for the control of blackleg in canola.

### Aviator Xpro key features:

- Combines two complimentary fungicides, bixafen (SDHI) and prothioconazole (DMI), for excellent curative activity and long lasting residual control.
- Class leading control of sclerotinia.
- Superior control of blackleg.
- More than just a protectant, Aviator Xpro works across multiple stages of the disease lifecycle to give growers added flexibility on application timing.
- Formulated with Bayer's innovative Leafshield™ formulation.
- Rainfast in under 1 hour under most conditions.
- Physically compatible with key herbicides, insecticides and liquid fertilisers used in canola.

<b>Product name:</b>	Aviator Xpro
<b>Fungicide mode of action group</b>	Group 7 SDHI + Group 3 DMI
<b>Formulation</b>	Emulsifiable concentrate (EC)
<b>Active ingredients</b>	75 g/L bixafen + 150 g/L prothioconazole
<b>Crop</b>	Canola
<b>Sclerotinia rates and timing</b>	Sclerotinia: 550 – 800 mL/ha 20-50% flower
<b>Blackleg rates and timing</b>	Blackleg: 550 – 650 mL/ha 2 leaf to green bud
<b>Number of applications per season</b>	Up to two applications of 800 mL/ha are permitted



Sclerotinia infection



Blackleg infection



Leafshield utilises the latest advancements in formulation technology to further optimise the already impressive disease control benefits of bixafen and prothioconazole.



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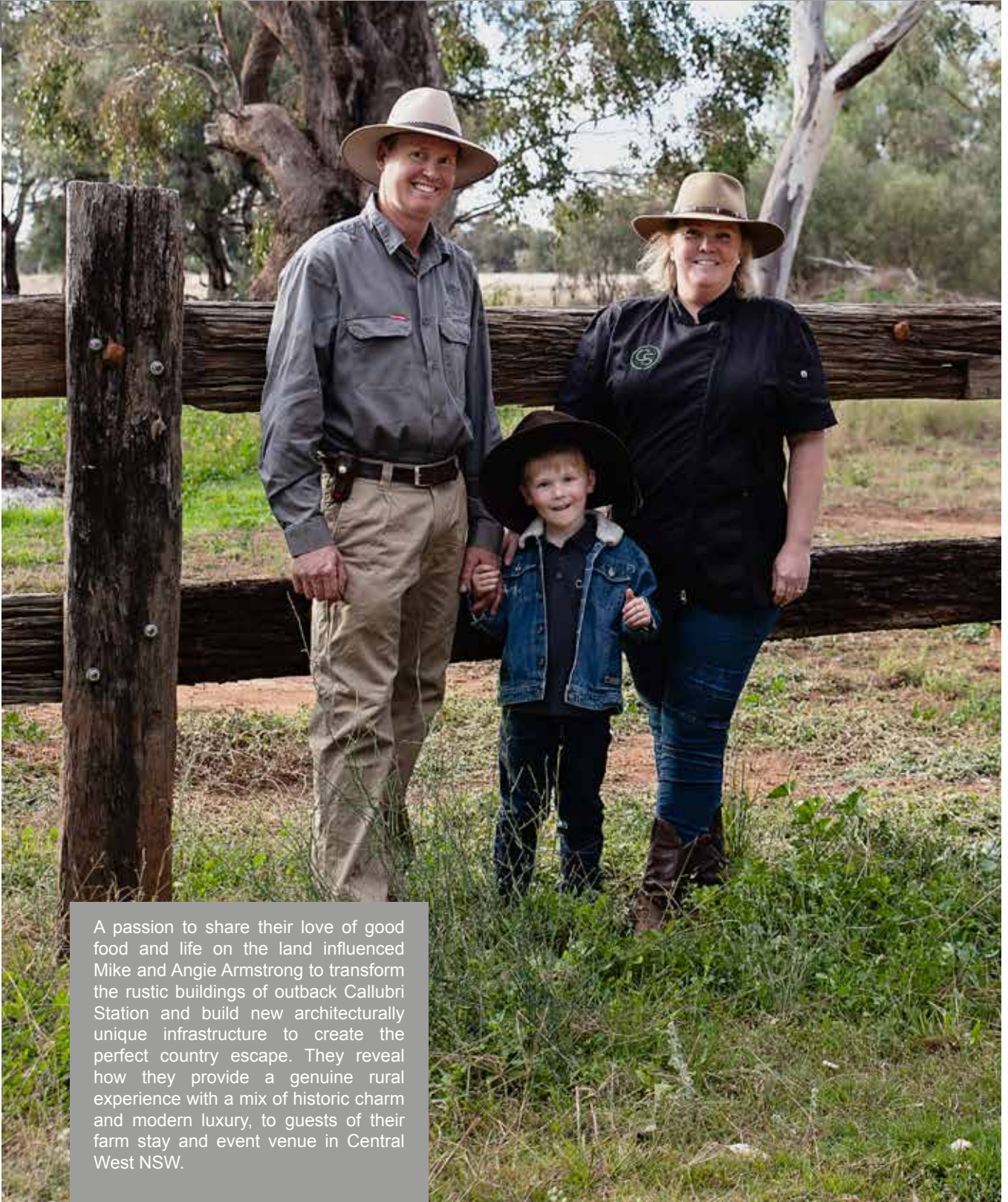


## HISTORIC CALLUBRI STATION

*An authentic country getaway*

Article | **Rosie O'Keeffe**

Photography | **Monique Wye**



A passion to share their love of good food and life on the land influenced Mike and Angie Armstrong to transform the rustic buildings of outback Callubri Station and build new architecturally unique infrastructure to create the perfect country escape. They reveal how they provide a genuine rural experience with a mix of historic charm and modern luxury, to guests of their farm stay and event venue in Central West NSW.



The Armstrong family farming legacy at Callubri Station dates back almost 150 years.

Today, fourth generation farmer Mike Armstrong and his wife Angie are now sharing the unique history of the remote property, restoring its original rustic buildings, while also constructing architecturally unique modern infrastructure to create a luxury farm stay and events venue.

They have achieved this while maintaining the authenticity of the working elements of the 11,200-hectare mixed farming operation, which is located between the townships of Nyngan and Tottenham, also educating visitors of the workings of the farm.

It was about five years ago, post drought, Mike and Angie investigated risk diversification measures they could implement in their farming business to bring other additional income, particularly in similar extreme weather events. There were several historical buildings that needed to be restored and Angie was also interested in including her culinary passions with the farm activities.

“For me it was really important to have something for myself on the land as well and whilst I had been running a café in a nearby town, I was looking for an opportunity that I could undertake from the property,” Angie explains.

Mike and Angie restored several buildings on the property, including the original shearers’ quarters, which has been transformed to a stunning event venue for retreats, conferences, weddings and private dining. There is a cosy guest lounge with gramophone on display and Chesterfield lounge area showcasing its 1920s/1930s heritage, an undercover sunset deck with 3 metre church doors and an outdoor container bar.

The 1930s homestead where Mike and Angie reside, has been extended and renovated, and the log cabin which was the original store for the property is set up with the bottling jars, and old butter churns from an era gone by.

“The really unique part of the buildings is that they are built from timbers that have been milled on the property, showing the pioneer part of the station,” Angie says.

“The next stage of the restoration process will be to refurbish the original woolshed built in the late 1800s, the original blacksmith’s shed and the

old wagon room which has farm belongings in it dating from the late 1800s to the 1970s. It’s a really beautiful old structure.”

Not only has there been a focus on restoring the historical infrastructure at Callubri Station, impressive three-level unique modern luxurious accommodation, constructed from single use shipping containers has also become a major attraction.

“With the farm stay building, we were not wanting to try and build something that looked historical, so we sourced single use shipping containers. We know they are safe to use and in incredible condition. They were refurbished by a company in Queensland and were craned in, including the feature 12 metre shipping container mineral pool with swim jet and sun lounges,” Angie says.

“There are striking architectural features from the timber and steel. There are certainly now two very different styles of buildings on the property.”

From group exclusive travel packages and self-contained escape packages, including visits to “The Lookout” which provides expansive views across the property’s vast landscape, to cruising the red dirt tracks in a LandCruiser Troopie, to a charter flight service, Callubri Station’s hospitality and tourism offering also showcases Angie’s passion for relaxed fine dining in her cuisines, and Mike’s passion for the land, also offering guests exclusive farm tours.

“The COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions has certainly affected our plans, but we’ve finally been able to showcase our unique farm stay experience. The international market is still opening up, however we have had some people stay travelling through to Broken Hill or outback Queensland, and others from city regions.”

Angie explains that with the menu she creates for the farm stay experiences and for events, there is a focus on taking local produce to the next level, with a paddock to plate concept.

“Food really is my true passion... We use our own wheat in our bread, we have a Danish stone mill to make our own flour and have had our mother yeast for years to make the sourdoughs for breakfasts and other dishes. When we show our guests our crops, we also demonstrate how the crops are used in our cooking processes. When we grow canola, we can use the greenery to create soups and risottos, and we also use a lot of grains...”



“There are striking architectural features from the timber and steel.”

Angie Armstrong, Callubri Station



Single use shipping containers were craned to Callubri Station as part of the construction of Sky Suites farm stay accommodation



"We use chickpeas grown on our neighbour's property in our hummus, and we use our Merino lambs for meat, which are grass-fed animals and have gone through low stress due to minimal transport, we source our beef and pork from the butcher in town, and a lot of the fruit and vegetables we grow ourselves.

"We have an extensive orchard here with citrus, figs, plums, nectarines, peaches, and we grow our own olives too for tapenades and to serve in our antipasto dishes.

"In our local suppliers including The Little Big Dairy Milk Co. and Mumblepeg Citrus, we use those businesses with a similar ethos to us and sustainability in farming. We also believe that in cross promoting other small businesses in the region we are supporting them and also building the attraction for people to visit our local area."

As well as being involved in the tourism and hospitality venture, Mike oversees the farming operations with two employees.

Up to 12,500 head of self-replacing Merinos are run on the property, with 19-to-20-micron wool, and the cropping enterprise consists of more than 2,000ha of wheat, canola, oats, lupins and barley planted seasonally.

"With our all-inclusive packages we have farm tours, also making sure we have personal contact with the guests. The groups are led by Mike to experience a firsthand knowledge of what's happening in the paddock, based on the farm calendar of events," Angie says. "We don't put on specific activities for guests... we make sure we keep it all authentic.

"They might see someone ploughing a field, or we show them what might be happening with specific growth under the soil... It's a side of food and farming that's not often shown in the cities and the fact we are a large farm with commodities, not the boutique traditional farm stay, people appreciate the scale of what we have here.

"I think the more we as producers can do to help consumers make informed choices, it's really important."

Angie, who was born and bred in Melbourne, has since learned there is ancestry of her own from the local area, her great grandfather grew up near Callubri Station too. She met Mike when they were both working in other city-based office roles – Angie in IT and Mike in banking management with NAB, before they both moved to Central West NSW.

She says it has been interesting to educate others on how their choices as consumers when buying fresh produce or a garment of clothing can have such an impact at the farm gate, and they are both also making sure their four-year-old son Eamon also gets an insight into the workings of the farm and the hospitality enterprise.

"The Merinos are all non-mulesed and it has been interesting too, in having Fox and Lillie guide us through our responsible wool handling certification, how important it also is to have that conversation directly to give that genuine understanding, not just promotion through mainstream media, digital marketing or social media platforms...

"As a consumer, I think it is hard to get exposure to that these days... Even running the farm stay, there is always a lot of risks in demonstrating what we do firsthand, so a lot of agritourism hasn't delved into the operations of larger scale cropping and livestock enterprises.

"I'm a passionate person... and it's taken me a while to find how to translate my passion here into something that is financially viable and that I was really driven to do... When we have guests here, you see how much they relax into the environment, and what we like to refer to as, surrendering to the rhythm of the land, embracing the wide-open spaces, the sunshine, the fresh air and how we live out here, and I think that's really important.

"I really love seeing people getting grassroots understanding of where their food and fibre comes from."

"The really unique part of the buildings is that they are built from timbers that have been milled on the property, showing the pioneer part of the station."

Angie Armstrong, Callubri Station



Delta Ag's Will Archer advises the Armstrong family on their cropping practices on Callubri Station



Photo: Jeff Chen

The next stage of the restoration process will be to refurbish the original woolshed built in the late 1800s. Photo: Jeff Chen





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# HARBOURING A STRONG AGRONOMIC CONNECTION

## Delta Ag National Advisor & Agronomy Conference 2023

Article | Rosie O'Keeffe



From gaining insight into the latest agricultural technologies to facing their fears of heights, the Delta Agribusiness agronomy team enhanced their strengths and skills at their annual conference in Sydney.

Delta Ag Executive Director Chris Duff said this year was the first time the entire agronomy team has gathered since 2019, and with the number of advisors having doubled since then to 80 agronomists/consultants now working across NSW, Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia, it was a particularly important event to connect the group.

“Our advisory team is the cornerstone of our business and with such a very diverse section of agronomy and experience within the team, finding out everyone’s specialties and connection is very important,” Chris said.

“Through the three-day program, we make sure there is a lot of technical content in a range of presentations and guest speakers and on this occasion, new advisors who have joined the wider Delta group through our various mergers gave updates and insight into their history and regions.”

Chris said the program included a range of industry bodies and chemical companies delivering presentations and internally, agronomists are also given the opportunity to inform the team on issues and topic areas specific to their area, and there is also a segment “celebrating the wins”.

“This is a part of the conference where we give three of the advisors the opportunity to highlight successes their clients may have had on-farm, or strategies implemented into farm programs and this time, we had a presentation on a young farmers group that has been established to try to give these group of farmers the opportunity to connect with others in the region and upskill in a variety of areas,” Chris said.

“We had an excellent speaker on spray and camera technology and how that will impact farmers into the future. Currently our clients are in that space, but it’s a small percentage, and with that technology growing so rapidly, it is important the advisors are across that. We also had a speaker about carbon farming. This is a challenging space to navigate with a lot of different methodologies and approaches, so again we need to ensure our team with consultants being the main advisors to the farm, that they are fully versed in the carbon farming space so they can be the go-to person for the grower. That representative from Select Carbon delivered on giving us some clarity in that space and we will be working closely with them to further develop our knowledge.

“Another notable presentation addressed the rapid rise in land values and what that means for our farmers into the future and one of our internal speakers informed the group about drone technology and where drones can be used in agriculture and where they won’t be used in agricultural practices. There is a place for it, but it’s going to be a niche place and a defined place.”







Whilst the conference held at Darling Harbour, is centred around broadening their knowledge, with peer connection so important within the Delta network, irrespective of experience, a number of team events were held as part of the program. Chris said the Sydney Harbour Bridge Climb did just that and became a bonding experience as several team members faced their fear of heights. The advisors also had the opportunity to tour Sydney Harbour via a cruise which was also an important social occasion to connect the group.

“We want to make it fun, but there is certainly a serious side to the value of it and making sure they are using their knowledge gained through the presentations and who they’ve engaged with on a more practical level. One of the biggest examples to come out of the connections that were made was that one of the businesses we have recently merged with, Cox Rural in South Australia has six agronomists and is based in a region that produces the majority of lucerne seed in Australia. Now our team has had an interaction elsewhere with lucerne, they have gained a resource there they didn’t have, and the communication in our internal chat groups has now increased, all as a result of this connection opportunity,” Chris said.

“Even though the team is becoming bigger, we are maintaining the same level of expertise and professionalism we have always had. We have always promoted heavily to our clients that all the agronomists in the group are across the issues that will impact their farming operations and they can be assured that in anyone they contact within the group, they can be assured they will be given relevant information.”

Chris said advisors are not just connecting annually though, with a series of regional advisor meetings held every six weeks to discuss the current issues facing growers and disseminating relevant information to clients.

He also said the Delta Ag agronomy graduate program is strong and provides a key part of the growth of the business and advisory service.

“(Our graduate program) has become the most well recognised in the industry. Certainly, when we have interviewed the graduates, they acknowledge that their universities recognise it as the best successful training program,” Chris said.

For 18 to 24 months, graduates are assigned a mentor/senior agronomist to work alongside and are to complete a series of training modules and programs.

“We also get the graduates together for a week to experience an intensive level of technical training. The advisory space has become smaller and there are less universities now offering agricultural science courses and less government agencies are providing the training they once offered, so we are aiming to deliver that ourselves through working with other industry experts. We are conscious we have to do that well, and properly, and we hope to continue to extend the program and our advisory team with the businesses we have recently merged with.”





## Weather and Network Data (WAND) increases safe spraying



John Woods (GRDC Chair and grain grower), Alicia Garden (CEO, Goanna Ag) & Dr Ian Taylor (Executive Director, CRDC)

**A** new spray drift hazardous weather warning system developed is now providing real-time weather data for growers and spray operators about the presence or absence of hazardous temperature inversions.

Goanna Ag was named the commercial partner to install 100 Weather and Network Data (WAND) inversion towers from Central Queensland to the NSW/Victorian border, as part of a project funded by the Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC) and Cotton Research and Development Corporation (CRDC).

Goanna Ag's Chief Development Officer John Pattinson said the systems have remote sensing capability and new proprietary software to provide growers and spray contractors with a two-hour forecast of real-time weather data that is updated every 10 minutes.

"The tool can be used to accurately identify whether a hazardous inversion or hazardous conditions are present, allowing farmers to understand whether they can spray or not against their label requirements," John said.

"It's a decision support tool they can use when considering spraying in the here and now..."

"We have now been running the network at full capacity for more than six months and when we look at that data, there has been increases of up to three hours of potential spray time identified, so it's a material difference when farmers are needing to take every opportunity to spray at the optimum time."

John said more than 2,000 growers across the regions are registered to use the technology and are regularly engaging with the system to check data recorded, which represents more than a third of farmers in the geographically area covered.

He encourages other farmers to register to use the technology, with registration to access the data currently at no charge for growers.

"The technology was designed to really be at the interface of cotton and dryland winter crop production," John said.

"This tool helps mitigate the issue of spray drift, and whilst it can occur any time of the year, the focus was on summer fallow spraying of the crop stubbles that can drift onto cotton crops.

"Research has shown that the dollar value of the impact of spray drift differs from year to year and source to source, however annually, it has proven to be a multimillion dollar issue for growers."



John said that using this methodology rather than just basing spray activity on temperature, has meant that there is an increased opportunity for operations.

"It is certainly an industry wide issue and despite our initial research being based predominantly around creating a tool for wheat growers to manage their summer fallow to mitigate drift onto adjacent cotton crops, the principles can be replicated for any spraying activity," John explained.

"When a grower applies a chemical to their paddock that drifts away from that particular paddock and into a non-target crop using mixes that can control that seed variety, the consequences can be significant."

The development of the network took eight months after several consultations were held with growers with proposed towers on their properties to introduce them to the concept before the team accessed the locations to complete the installations.

"The grower engagement has been better than we anticipated and has resulted in increased social media interactions too as growers share the outcomes they have had from using the technology," John said.

Goanna Ag had the resources to complete the project having already been working with 60 per cent of the cotton production area, deploying more than 8,000 sensors across the geographical area.

"We understand the challenges of dealing with installing technology such as batteries and SIM cards in various environments..."

Since the launch of WAND, more than 120,000 observations have been accumulated with findings including:

- The average hours/day/site where inversion is present is 10.9 hours
- On average hazardous inversion is present for 6.5 hours
- Translated to practical outcome and working on a spray rig covering 50 hectares per hour, one operator could theoretically cover an additional 200 hectares per day

Goanna Ag is currently working on developing a 24-hour forecast to allow growers to have a better insight into weather conditions to better manage their spraying and labour.

There are also now plans for further developments, including increasing the scope of the project to reach more sites and more growers.

Growers can register to use the spray inversion technology by visiting [app.wand.com.au](http://app.wand.com.au)





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**W**ith extended residual control of a wide range of diseases in canola and pulse crops and rainfast in one hour, MIRAVIS® Star fungicide has demonstrated excellent returns in trials and commercial applications.

In canola, this new foliar fungicide has a wide disease spectrum covering seedling and upper canopy blackleg, as well as Sclerotinia and white leaf spot.

In pulse crops, including chickpeas and lentils, MIRAVIS® Star is a new tool for Ascochyta blight, Sclerotinia, chocolate spot, botrytis rot and for cercospora leaf spot in faba beans.

Syngenta Technical Services Lead Pete Wilson said MIRAVIS® Star had been extensively trialled prior to commercial release and demonstrated attributes demanded by the Australian broadacre market.

He said the new fungicide was absorbed into the waxy layer of the leaf and slowly released into the plant over time, for robust, residual control that's a step up from existing options.

"For canola MIRAVIS® Star can be applied at the four to six leaf range for seedling blackleg control or from stem elongation to 20 per cent flower for upper canopy blackleg control," Mr Wilson said.

Being the combination of a Group 7 and 12, Mr Wilson said MIRAVIS® Star provides residual activity well into the weeks following application.

"When it is applied at the 20 per cent bloom stage of a canola crop, we are seeing extended residual over that entire flowering period."

An advantage of keeping the canola crop clean during this vital stage of development is the added yields demonstrated in the trial programs.

"MIRAVIS® Star has the ability to extend the maturity of the crop since it contains an SDHI fungicide," Mr Wilson said. "We are seeing a stay-green effect which was very evident in our extensive trial program."

"Crops remained greener for longer, which produced a yield advantage. We were seeing a 100 to 240 kilogram per hectare yield advantage over products that are currently in the marketplace."

He said the yield advantage was even more significant under irrigated conditions where there was an exceptionally strong return on investment.

"It was not unusual to see yield advantages in excess of 500 kilograms per hectare with MIRAVIS® Star."

The performance of MIRAVIS® Star has been equally as impressive in pulse crops where it consistently produced higher yields in comparison to market standards.

"We have seen up to six weeks disease control in crops, with exceptionally strong control over the range of pulse diseases," Mr Wilson said.

"I think it has a significant fit at that canopy closure stage with an ability to keep the crop clean for an extended period. This is helping achieve higher yields."

Syngenta product lead fungicides (broadacre) Angus Rutherford said MIRAVIS® Star is competitively priced, with an excellent return on investment given the weeks of residual expected from the product.

"Application rates will vary depending on the crop type and target disease," Mr Rutherford said.

"Higher rates should be used when conditions favour severe disease development or when a susceptible cultivar is grown.

"It has shown excellent crop safety in all the trial work we've done to date and good compatibility with a range of products that could be applied to the crops at a similar time.

"MIRAVIS® Star has aerial and ground use registrations. When compared to other fungicides at similar use timings, it is fully rainfast in just one hour from application."







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## Livestock Health

**Matt Hardy**

Procurement – Animal Health and Merchandise



### New sheep lice control

Welcome to the new age of sheep lice control!

MSD Animal Health (better known as Coopers Animal Health) has announced the release of their new oral lice treatment Flexolt®.

Flexolt® is the first oral lice control for use in any length of wool which now gives producers flexibility in treating and managing lice in sheep.

Flexolt® uses the active Fluralaner which is novel in the agricultural industry. Fluralaner is exclusively used in animal health, where it is in Bravecto® an oral treatment for fleas, ticks and mites in cats and dogs.

Flexolt® is used as an oral treatment and is administered the same way as a drench. It works systemically by entering the blood stream and targets the lice at the skins surface. Lice feeding on the skin layer both ingest and have contact with the active which gives fast acting lice control. This new active means there is no known resistance to this product making it highly effective.



Because Flexolt® is an oral treatment, it is not affected by rain, cold weather or poor shearing as seen with common backline products. It can be used in lambs as small as 6kg, meaning you can treat all animals, which is critical in controlling lice on your farm.

It is safe at 5 times the recommended dose meaning if you are concerned the animal may have spat the product out you can rest assured that you can retreat that animal safely. It is a low volume product at 1.5ml per 10kg body weight.

Flexolt® can be used when introducing new sheep to your property without the need to shear and used in any length of wool. This makes controlling lice in introduced sheep easier and can be used as an effective part of your quarantine program.

It has a nil wool harvesting period, 14-day meat withhold and a 54 Day ESI. Coopers have completed extensive trials with this product to achieve registration, with proven control of lice in a wide range of environments and situations.

Flexolt® will become available in mid-July in a 20Ltr pack, with the 5Ltr packs available in September this year.

“Flexible lice control when it suits you.”

## Taking Stock

**Jon Bergmeier**

Livestock Agent, Delta Livestock & Property, Wagga



### Hopes for increased prices across livestock markets this spring

As we head out of the cold winter months and into some more comfortable conditions, livestock producers will be hoping that both lamb and cattle markets follow the same pattern.

It has been a tough slog across the board for all livestock markets and everyone involved in the industry will be hoping spring can produce some brighter times.

After coming off historic highs and a run of predominantly good seasons cattle producers have understandably found it tough to readjust to the pattern of prices and lower demand for all types of cattle this year.

The same can be said of the sheep and lamb industry, which at the time of writing is at prices we have not seen for several years.

Increased numbers throughout the eastern states have seen kill rates increase substantially this year with processors having no trouble securing adequate numbers for their needs. Staff shortages and the lingering COVID-19 protocols at some major works are still playing their part and have not helped the situation.

Because of such consistent supply, the meat companies are reluctant to open up too much room for forward contract lambs over winter.

It will be interesting to see what happens in this space heading into the sucker season. Because of the really good start to the season in this region I would expect to see good quality supermarket weight suckers hitting the market in small numbers by mid-July and increasing into August. If prices are reasonable, producers will be keen to offload given what the price of kept old lambs has done this autumn/winter.

As well as lamb dipping below \$6/kg, mutton has also felt the brunt of a subdued market. Having been so consistent and at times staggeringly high for quite some time, it struggled early in the year to get much over \$3/kg. With a few more orders coming in from China it did sneak up to hover around \$3.50 - \$4/kg. Like lamb, there has been a plentiful supply with Wagga alone yarding 10,000 to 18,000 old sheep every week this year.

With a weakening kill market and tough seasons throughout some parts of the country perhaps the biggest downturn has come in the form of breeding stock.

You have to rewind the clock a long way to see prices for quality breeding stock where they currently sit. For people enjoying a kinder season it has presented an excellent opportunity to step into quality breeders at a price close to half of the levels we saw at the peak not so long ago.

As we near the feature breeders' sales in the spring, it will be fascinating to see where the confidence of producers is at given what has happened to markets for the first part of 2023.



## Landscape

**Craig Landwehr**

Consultant, AgriVISION Donald, Victoria



### Subsoil moisture key for growers this season

Due to a wet spring in 2022, there is a significant amount of subsoil moisture in the profile. Growers were spraying knockdowns onto their paddocks early to preserve moisture for cropping season. As the weather bureau issued an El Nino watch, everyone was aware of the need to conserve as much moisture as possible.

The Wimmera Mallee region experienced a dry start to the season, and some growers started their cropping program in April by sowing vetch and oats for early sheep feed, with canola also being planted.

There was good rainfall across the region for 7 days during this time, ranging from 25 to 40mm which provided an opportunity for growers to begin baiting for white snails, as rain causes the snails to come down from stubble, trees, and fence posts, making it easier to successfully bait them. Additionally, mouse baiting occurred and is becoming a common practice in the Wimmera Mallee due to stubble retention practices.

Sowing was postponed in paddocks with a bad history of ryegrass, with growers opting for a double knockdown method using glyphosate and paraquat, spaced five days apart, enabling effective control of the ryegrass.

Towards the end of May, following a few heavy frosts, we found ourselves in need of rain, as the topsoil had become dry, making it difficult to sow. While there was plenty of moisture at a depth of 15cm and beyond, the paddocks in the southern half of the region with heavy black clays, had set like concrete on top due to being submerged in water during last year's season. Dry sowing continued where possible, and the rains in late May and early June allowed sowing to be finalised.

With more rain forecast in June and urea prices going down, decisions were being made on nitrogen application rates and many farmers were very proactive in this space. Many farmers in the area spread urea before the rain due to the excellent subsoil moisture. As predicted, several areas in Wimmera Mallee received between 25 to 50mm of rain within a week.

Research indicates that early nitrogen application on canola is crucial for achieving good crop yields, and with predictions of low rainfall in the upcoming months, there will be limited chances to apply nitrogen.

Additionally, it is hard to hay off canola crops, so any unused nitrogen from the current crop will carry over to subsequent crops in the following year.

Moving forward, focus has been on post-emergence spraying, particularly in crops that were sown early, and rolling lentil paddocks. The Weather Bureau has issued an El Nino alert, and while we've seen these forecasts before and the outcomes have varied, it's important to remember not all, but many areas have significant subsoil moisture, which can help combat the effects of an El Nino if it eventuates.

It is important to carefully monitor paddocks with low nitrogen levels and plan to apply nitrogen when a rain front presents.

Our goal should be to achieve potential yields and not let low nitrogen levels dictate our yields. Deep N tests and moisture probes gives us the confidence in making these hard decisions.

## Grain Watch

**Mick Parry**

General Manager, Delta Grain Marketing



### Grain prices strong despite record crops

Grain markets remain extremely volatile, mirroring economic and geopolitical tensions as well as wild swings in the weather around the globe. The rapid transition from La Nina to El Nino has had a profound effect on the weather in the major grain growing regions of the world, except for the Former Soviet Union which continues to experience a run of good seasons.

The drought in North America continues to support canola values but good rains across the US midwest and Central Plains appears to have saved the corn and soybean crops in the nick of time. Conditions have also improved across South America, where drought caused big losses in 2022, but is being replaced by big crops which has Brazil as the world's top corn exporter.

Global demand is more difficult to forecast with higher interest rates slowing the global economy, a very high US Dollar making US exports more expensive, and a reduction in Chinese demand slowing global export demand. Broadly though, the USDA expects a reduced carryover of grains but still ample to cover the global consumptive demand.

In Australia, three record cropping years in a row should have left us with a huge carryover of grains, pulses and oilseeds, but huge investments in export capacity has led to massive increases in our export volumes and revenue. That has been great news for growers because prices have remained unusually strong despite the record crops.

On wheat alone, 2021/22 crop year set a national export record of 24.3 million metric tonnes, while the last 22/23 marketing year was estimated at a massive 31 million metric tonnes of wheat. More than half that volume came from West Australia, but increased port capacity in all other states, including mobile loaders, increased train rolling stock, new locomotives and increased storage capacity at bulk handlers and on farm have all contributed to export growth. Assuming our average annual wheat crop is close to 25 million tonnes, of which 9 million tonnes is consumed domestically (almost all on the East Coast), 100% of our exportable surplus could conceivably be shifted in the first six months of the marketing year.

Domestic feeders and millers are more at risk than ever of finding themselves short of product, especially in the last three months of the cycle prior to the new crop harvest. Consumers can no longer rely on their well-worn "just in time" style of procurement management. This also presents an opportunity for growers willing and able to store volumes of feed grains for such periods, to take advantage of price spikes. This is also particularly true during periods of low production.

Winter crop for the 2023 season looks set to be smaller than the previous three seasons, but we look certain to produce a crop which is close to average, with great crops likely for South Australia, Victoria, southern New South Wales and the southern half of Western Australia's cropping zone. Mixed results for Central and Northern NSW and Queensland appear likely, but September rain will be crucial in determining the outcome.

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