

# Prospect

FOR FARMERS IN THE KNOW

Autumn 2020



The Delta Agribusiness group of companies



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Donnan Family sheep stud - top of the flocks

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Welcome to this edition of *Prospect*.

**W**ell what a dramatic change to our parched landscape in the last two months. Drought breaking rains have occurred across NSW and shifted our barren, brown lands into a sea of green. For central and northern NSW, the level of rain in most districts has been extraordinary with many locations receiving in the range of 200 to 400mm. For NSW as a whole it will see one of the best autumns in decades and importantly, provide a strong seasonal start with soil moisture profiles replenishing to effective levels once more. The autumn rains have also occurred in most Victorian cropping regions, and whilst not to the same extent as NSW, they also are off to a promising seasonal beginning. However, whilst the drought has broken and with strong seasonal forecast this now needs to be converted into much needed income for farmers. Fortunately though, we are off to a fantastic start for 2020 and prices for all commodities have remained very strong (with the exception of wool).

On a larger scale, it is difficult to comprehend the combination of critical dramatic events in recent times. Firstly, the prolonged drought for large tracts of eastern Australia, followed by the devastating summer bushfires (on unprecedented scales not seen in our lifetime), and then to be followed up with worldwide repercussions of the Covid-19 virus. Whilst this dramatic event has impacted all our lives in a multitude of ways, it has been vitally important that agriculture has sensibly continued to fully operate and moreover, show promise for the 2020 year ahead. Our staff have strived to keep the focus on effectively servicing you, our clients, through these uncertain and challenging times and to have the least interruptions to your farming operations. We would sincerely like to thank you for your understanding, patience and cooperation in embracing our new measures around people movement and appropriate distancing within our retail premises and with our advisory staff, and to do whatever we can to protect the health and safety of everyone.

Within this issue you will find stories of resilience and positivity emanating from such testing times. The 'Buy from the Bush' and 'Purchase a Post' campaigns are wonderful initiatives that have emerged in response to the devastating disasters of both the drought and bushfires. This link of community spirit quickly flows into the 'Positive Play Program' introduced during the drought to many northern NSW smaller schools. Throughout this period, smaller schools have come together for regional events, encouraging wider interaction and sport development programs that children would otherwise not have had the opportunity to be involved in. These stories promote the wonderful initiatives which emerged in the face of adversity and remain a key ingredient of the rural community spirit.

This autumn edition of *Prospect* criss-crosses the eastern states, firstly stopping at Woomelang in Victoria, then Harden in southern NSW and finally lands at the Weston's family property near Gilgandra in central NSW. Our cover story at Woomelang in the Victorian Mallee, is based on the wonderful history of the Donnan Family property and their multiple sheep stud enterprise. This thread of history and agriculture is then the focus for the O'Connor family at "Oxton Park" in Harden, NSW, who this year are celebrating 100 years of family farming across multiple generations.

In closing, I would like to pay special tribute to Larry McDonald who was a long time Delta employee and who recently passed away at the age of 73. Larry was the manager of Delta's Caragabal branch and had not long retired (August 2018). He was one of life's special blokes; community was always at the front of his mind, he offered a helping hand to anyone in need, was a friend to all and the undisputed 'Mayor' of the much-loved Caragabal community. He will be sadly missed.

From all of the staff at Delta Ag, LFR, North West Ag and AGRIVision, we thank you for your patronage and ongoing support. As we have turned the corner into 2020, we extend all of our best wishes for the coming season and despite the challenges, may it let you prosper and continue to enjoy all that is good in rural Australia.



**Chris Duff**  
Executive Director - Group Manager Advisory  
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**Prospect**  
FOR FARMERS BY THE BUSH

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North West Ag Branch Manager Rick Johnston &amp; Tyre Specialist Steve Herath

## On Location Woomelang North West Ag



Article | Natasha Lobban  
Photography | Jane McLean Photography

**W**oomelang may be just a small dot on the map, but the Victorian town's rural supply store certainly punches above its weight, especially when it comes to its bustling tyre operation.

North West Ag is the leading agricultural supplier in the Wimmera Mallee region, and last year, Delta Agribusiness merged with North West Ag, also bringing this store into its network.

The larger centres of Ouyen (70km north), Sea Lake (30km north east), Birchip (50km to the south) and Hopetoun (30km to the west), perhaps could have drawn away farming business, but Woomelang Branch Manager Rick Johnston is proud that many growers travel the kilometres to use Woomelang's agricultural services, and have been doing so for many generations.

"We have clients who actually live closer to the larger centres, but choose to do their shopping with us instead," Rick says. "They come to us for their farm inputs because we go above and beyond to get what they need, when they need it."

The Woomelang branch has always been a retail hub for the district. It was also known to have housed and sold giftware in its early years. Now, there is the full suite of ag products available, including animal health supplies, fencing, poly pipe and poly fittings, car batteries, basic hardware supplies, and tyres.

The branch is operated by Rick, Customer Service Officer and Tyre Specialist Steve Herath, and Rachel McClelland, who takes care of office administration.

It is the only location in the network which operates a tyre business and it was this labour-intensive part of the retail offering, that brought Rick to the branch 25 years ago.

"I was lucky I fell into the job, all those years ago. I love it here and have no plans on going anywhere," Rick says.

"Tyres have always been a big part of what we do here. From the biggest header tyres to a wheelbarrow tyre, there is not a brand we can't access. We always stock a good range of the most popular tyres for tractors and other farm machinery, and we have daily freight delivered from Melbourne, so there is nothing we can't access reasonably quickly."

He says the key to longevity and tyre safety is to ensure the right size and type of tyre is fitted to each vehicle and there is the right pressure applied for the different terrain and situations the vehicle or farm machinery will be used.

Rick says he taught himself all there was to know about the job back then, and since taking on the role as branch manager now to oversee the day-to-day operations of the store ordering and purchasing, he's passed all his knowledge on to Steve Herath.

When Steve first moved to Woomelang eight years ago, he was still working a job in Melbourne and travelling back and forth – more than four hours each way.

"It was a lifestyle change for my family to start with and we love it here," he recalls.

As Steve looks up from changing a tyre, he smiles, saying he relishes that each day is different.

"We've got a good group of clients," he says. "They're very loyal and easy to get along with, and the opportunity to help people really offers great job satisfaction."

The tyre service is invaluable to the community, the only retailer for around 100km offering the service, whether urgent tyre changes, or servicing those with pre-arranged appointments. Steve says the tyre sales have really taken off in the past seven years, and Rick believes this is all to do with Steve's hard work and enthusiasm for the job. ►

The local landscape surrounding Woomelang is mostly made up of broadacre family farms, with growers predominantly planting wheat, barley and legumes.

He says properties average about 1,200ha, but can be upwards of 8,000ha.

Rick concedes that as farming families have sold properties over the years, neighbours have largely bought them to expand their enterprises, so farms are progressively getting bigger and bigger, meaning the population has declined in recent times.

He says it left a lot of empty farm houses and the effect of that was felt around the community. The town itself lost its right to be called a 'town' in recent years, however, while the population is small, the spirit is strong. Rick says the community worked tirelessly to get Woomelang officially reinstated as a town.

Rick is proud to be a part of such a passionate community and the team at the North West Ag branch are involved in organisations such as the Lions Club and the Woomelang District Development Association (WDDA) – Rick holding the presidency until 12 months ago.

Whilst the school has now closed, and the footy team no longer exists, the 150 to 200 people living in Woomelang are still passionate about their community, and support for the branch is strong.

"We've been really lucky the past few years have been good," Rick says.

He says last year was the best ever on record for some farmers, with strong rainfall in December 2018 setting up good subsoil moisture for the 2019 season and he is looking forward to seeing how the 2020 season will shape up for farmers in the district.



North West Ag Woomelang Tyre Specialist Steve Herath



North West Ag Woomelang Branch Manager Rick Johnston

“Tyres have always been a big part of what we do here.”

*Rick Johnston  
Branch Manager, North West Ag Woomelang*



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# Grace Brennan

## Buy from the Bush

Through a simple hashtag, a new story on the bush and its contribution to Australia's identity has been written. The strength of the Buy from the Bush online campaign has achieved real change for rural communities in the midst of devastating drought conditions. In the first six weeks, \$2.6 million in revenue was generated for featured businesses through this connection between the city and the country. The hashtag has been used 63,000 times and more than 400,000 people are engaging, following the social media pages – also potential customers to sustain our regions into the future. Buy from the Bush founder/creator Grace Brennan tells **Rosie O'Keeffe** her story.

“What is emerging is incredible talent, incredible productivity, a positive energy...”

*Grace Brennan, Buy from the Bush*

Photography | Rachael Lenehan Photography

Grace Brennan was sitting at the family's kitchen table when she received a call from the NSW Premier's office asking her to present the annual Australia Day address to the nation.

"I remember there was so much chaos at home at that particular moment with my children and I actually initially asked if I could think about it," Grace, who lives near Warren in western NSW with husband Jack, and children Eliza, 8, Maggie, 6, and Charlie, 5, chuckles.

"I don't think the gravity of it was sinking in, but I soon realised how great an opportunity it was, so I was thrilled and honoured to be asked. I am so pleased they took a chance on a 'nobody', having read the amazing biographies of past speakers, and to have rural life on the national agenda in a time of great celebration... Rural towns and communities are such a core part of the Australian identity, and then the devastation of the bushfires happened, giving an even greater appetite to talk about it."

Her address themed "Every One, Every Story" gave an inspiring account of the self-reliance of rural communities in solving their own problems, but how there was an underlying feeling of uncertainty and fear as the drought continued to bear down on families and businesses.

She spoke about while government support through drought relief packages was constantly referred to, the conversations weren't focusing on why all Australians should care that if farming businesses fold on mass, so do our rural communities.

"I felt it was important for it to be more about sustainable support for rural communities in the long-term. It's not about charity, it's about investment."

She mentioned how the strength of the Buy from the Bush online community and a simple action "see it, like it, buy it" allowed people to feel more visible and valued. It engaged the community, not out of pity, but of pride, curiosity and desire. It achieved real change, and the message to strive for significant progress, not necessarily always perfection.

It was in October last year that Grace Brennan created a Buy from the Bush social media page and shared it amongst her friends.

She says they hit "follow", but had laughed together, somewhat questioning the potential reach and what it would mean for rural businesses, and their community.

Then, upon hearing that Nine's *Today* show team was planning a live weather cross at the local RSL club as part of its *Let it Pour* visits to drought-affected areas, and buoyed by a strong, can-do attitude, Grace decided it was time to take more action.

"I put out a message to the women of Warren on Facebook, asking if anyone wanted to come and stand behind me while they were filming the live weather reports, and remarkably we had around 80 people turn up with Buy from the Bush shirts and cardboard banners," Grace says.

"I think people really needed to get involved in something that was productive. All of a sudden people started stalking celebrities and sharing the page with their friends. There really was an appetite for positive action, everyone was just feeling so helpless.

"It was so amazing to see the energy instantly shift in Warren.

"For me, the implications and effects of the drought had been so evident on a community scale, the vibe in Warren was getting more and more deflated as they realised their plight did need to be recognised nationally. Although they didn't think they needed sympathy, I had an instinct that's exactly what they needed and for others to have a real understanding of the human element of the suffering around the drought, rather than just images of dying livestock.

"So often we also talk about the impact on the farmer in the paddock, and for me it was seeing the first casualties like contractors leaving town, small shopfronts suddenly empty, less people visiting the butcher, the hairdresser... It happens over time, but it was reaching boiling point in townships like Warren, so it really activated me to do something about it.

"I think I was called to act because things were as bad as they get. As soon as the campaign took off, I recognised the need was so great and the work was justified."

It was 10 years ago that Grace moved out to western NSW after having grown up in Sydney and studying at university. She met her husband Jack at school, who went on to become a third generation farmer on his family's property.

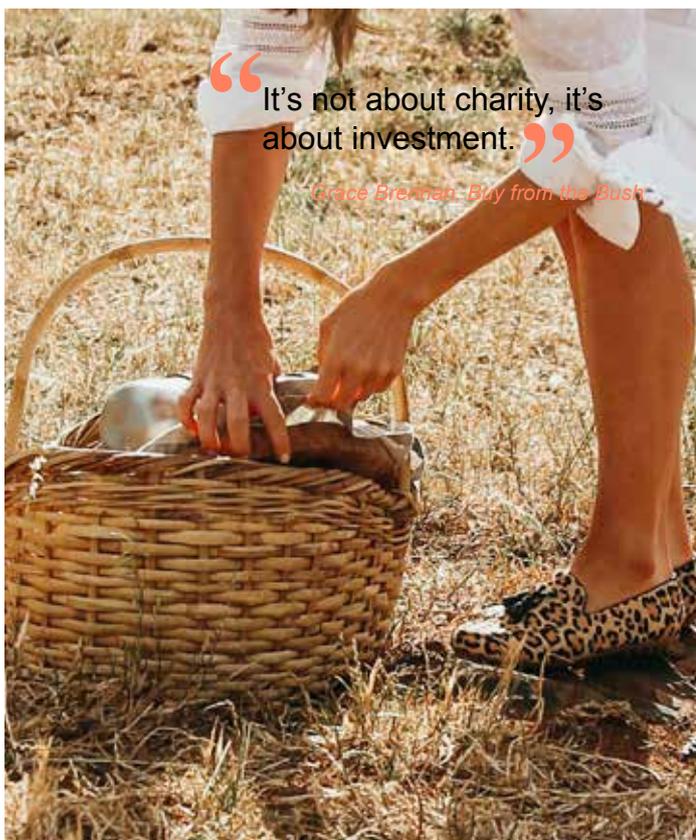
It wasn't long after moving to the country, she saw firsthand how stressful running a farm operation could be, with consecutive years of floods, rising debt levels and constantly being involved in physical hard work in extreme conditions. Jack's family made the decision to sell their farm eight years ago and he has since been working in on-farm roles for Paraway Pastoral Company.

"We got engaged, we got married, and then we got flooded. It was certainly a much bigger culture shift than I anticipated, and I think that anyone anticipates when they move to the bush for love. When you marry a farmer, it's forever. It's not going to be spending a few years on a farm and moving somewhere else. If that's who you marry, it's in their blood, so that's going to be your life.

"I had always had a fondness for the country, but there were subtle cultural differences and in the beginning the lack of anonymity was especially overwhelming, everyone knew everything about me before I'd even met them, and that was jarring, but it's this friendliness and inclusiveness that is what I love about living in the country now.

"It was something else I found really interesting too when I moved to the bush, that women were taking on domestic and nurturing roles they weren't in the cities, and now I have the greatest admiration for how rural women balance both their interests and the traditional expectation of looking after their partner.

"I think what is often typified in images of drought are a poor sheep, or a poor cow and a tired farmer, when what I see is so often inside the home the woman trying to keep spirits high for the farmer. She's carrying the stress of the finances and uncertainty, while caring for children and often working her own job as well. It's a general view, and it's not the case in every farming household, but what a woman carries in the stress of her own business and the weight of having to keep spirits high at home and the household running is huge, and for so many, they are here because it was initially their husband's passion and choice to live here." ▶



Developing Buy from the Bush has dramatically changed Grace's life. When I speak to her, she's just a few weeks away from giving birth to her fourth child, the family has just moved house, and this week she has a full schedule of travel to meet with large multinational organisations and deliver presentations in corporate boardrooms, she's preparing to be involved in a fashion shoot, podcasts, and building industry collaborations. She has also still been working in the start-up she co-founded – Ag Draft – an online employment platform connecting rural businesses with workers.

"The past few months have certainly been a fast learn on media performance, public speaking, strategic negotiations with partners... it's called on every unique skill I had developed over time and it's a funny example of a project that has called on my whole experience in my working life and my personal life. It has taken knowledge of the community and what we were going through on a personal level, but at the same time employing work experience I thought I'd shelved for a while. It's certainly been a rewarding challenge for me," Grace, who has also worked in various community development roles, says. "We have probably dropped the ball a little bit, making school lunches and volunteering for school canteen, but it has just been such a great opportunity to put rural communities and the drought on the national agenda and we know that any short-term challenges at home are necessary ones, knowing how worthwhile this is."

The Buy from the Bush campaign has some staggering statistics. In just the first six weeks, \$2.6 million in revenue had been created for businesses featured and 25 jobs were created for rural communities. When the website was launched there were 54,000 unique visitors in just the first eight days. Being launched close to Christmas, meant shoppers were purchasing gifts for family, not just in Australia, but overseas.

"The connection between strangers is striking. We've had baskets made in Bogan Gate, cricket bats constructed in Guyra, a ham direct from a farm at Barham, artworks from regional artists, children's books, clothing... posted to places such as Perth, Melbourne, London, New York, and not out of pity, rather it was about joy and the precious story of their origins."

Grace believes that Buy from the Bush demonstrates a key image of rural and regional Australia with so many innovations and efficiencies already being driven in Australian agriculture.

"What is emerging is incredible talent, incredible productivity, a positive energy... People are having a crack, and that's what it was about, being able to provide for families and create a brighter future despite the weather.

"Unfortunately the 'poor thing' narrative became more dominant over time, when there is so much good news to come out of the bush and that should be celebrated. There is a great opportunity for unique offerings in ethical shopping and meaningful consumption. This is a good story to tell and we have great brands to push, and if we can invest in these small businesses in the bush there is an enormous commercial opportunity that exists. I don't think the city/country divide is there. In reality, city people care, they might not understand, but it's up to our rural communities to frame the narrative and connect with the cities."

Grace didn't anticipate how Buy from the Bush has also largely connected communities on a more local and regional level.

"The mindset shift was always the big picture and thinking about what doing a little shop might actually mean for a rural community. I keep hearing from store owners saying locals are coming back in now... those people looking to source locally. That has been heartening. If people have 'locals supporting locals' in their minds, that's a great outcome.

"The increase in cash flow to these local businesses is flowing on to other services now also being used to undertake projects or for goods to be purchased in these districts too.

"I also hear from lots of makers and creators who are excited about discovering others and I think there is power in rural businesses working together so we are looking to facilitate bigger growth in that business-to-business element across different regional areas."

Grace believes that developing the campaign on the social media platform was paramount, as it offers a great mechanism for storytelling.

"Sharing images of businesses on social media was a way of telling their story allowing engagement that wasn't going to cost anything. If you see it, you want to buy it, then you're connected. So many businesses we feature don't have e-commerce capabilities, so human connection had a huge impact on isolated business owners. People would call me saying they were in tears on the phone to a customer because they wanted to buy a handbag.

"I think people want to be a part of a collective and we are creating a community.

"It wasn't a conscious motivation, but it was at the core of the idea, that 96 per cent of the businesses featured on Buy from the Bush are women. In my mind that is an incredible reflection of what can happen when women are empowered to establish businesses and engage with others."



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With such a growth in Buy from the Bush in a short period of time, Grace now works alongside Millie Fisher and Georgie Robertson, who engage with local businesses, arrange markets, and coordinate public relations and media opportunities.

"We're in the phase of consolidation and getting some strategic partners on board, building a team sustainable enough to grow it, and really investigating the best ways of doing that. There's enormous opportunities for the bush to be marketed as super appealing globally as well."

It's early in autumn and rain has fallen in the area bringing some positivity, but with just 2.5 inches falling in total in the past three to four years, depleting stock numbers, no crops and no break, it's been a psychological battle for farmers, and Grace senses a bigger challenge to overcome.

"We hope that this rain brings a new fortune, but now we have both people in these farming and household partnerships working so hard... There are so many new decisions to make around investments, whether to spray, whether to buy stock when the market is peaking... Someone said to me the other day, 'it's like Santa has turned up, but his sack is empty', it's not over, but it's certainly an opportunity.

"And, for now, we'll be positive."



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# Top of the flocks

Strong genetics key to Anden Stud success

The Donnan family have long been early adopters of new technology and have become industry leaders as sheep breeders and broadacre farmers in Victoria's Mallee region. As a new generation joins the productive mixed family enterprise, they share their story. ►

Article | **Natasha Lobban**

Photography | **Jane McLean Photography**



Joel, Lauren with Arlo, Leni, Denita, Andrew & Trent Donnan



The high performance of Anden Stud at Woomelang is the result of the hard work and vision of generations of dedicated Donnan family farmers.

Whilst Andrew and Denita Donnan's farming business spread over 3,800 hectares is a mixed enterprise, they've built their reputation as sheep breeders, being early adopters of new technology and leaders in the industry.

The property is located in Victoria's Mallee region, the heartland of broadacre farming in the state, and is home to the Anden White Suffolks, Anden Ultra Whites and Kerangie Suffolks stud operation.

Andrew says the stud runs about 600 breeding ewes on the farm, typically White Suffolks, but the Ultra White numbers have been built up in recent years.

Currently breeding ewe numbers are 250 each for Ultra Whites and White Suffolks and there are also 95 pure Suffolk ewes on the property.

"We've been increasing the sheep numbers in the operation over the past 20 years. We have been working on producing a consistent line of composite White Dorper/Poll Dorset cross rams for several years with the aim being to produce an easy-care, shedding ram with low to moderate birth weights with a strong structure that are able to do well in any condition," Andrew says.

Donnan family involvement in farming spans several years. In mid-2000, the Poll Dorset Stud, Viewdale was introduced back to the Donnan farm. Viewdale, Flock 368, was originally founded and registered in 1960 by Andrew's grandfather and father, George and Stan Donnan. It went into a recess in the early 1980s before being reactivated in 2006.

Whilst the introduction of the Ultra Whites in 2016 was the last time Poll Dorsets were sold in the Anden Stud sale, Andrew still acknowledges the part the genetics from the Viewdale Poll Dorset Stud has played in the development of the Anden Ultra Whites breeding program.

"The breeding has come from the result of using high performance Dorper and Ultra White sires over our best performing Poll Dorset ewes," Andrew says.

The Donnans are aiming for "easy care" goals such as good shedding ability, fertility, milking and mothering instincts and low/moderate birth weights. Good growth and sound structure, muscling and high yielding carcass across medium-heavy weight carcasses, the right amount of fat, and the ability to maintain exceptional do-ability and hardiness of the Dorper breed are also attributes they are striving for.

Pure Suffolks, those with black faces, came back to Anden in 2010 when Kerangie Flock 2187 was re-activated.

Whilst Andrew comments, it's perhaps a "hobby" to breed the Suffolks, years of genetic selection and hard work has gone into this program.

All three sheep breeds are sold in a combined on-property sale the first Thursday of October each year, attracting buyers within a 250km drive of the farm. What doesn't make the cut is sold over the hooks or at the Bendigo and Warracknabeal saleyards.

The Donnans operate a split mating operation, which has lambs dropping in June and August. "We get a couple of hundred lambs in a week when in the thick of it," Andrew says.

Andrew's flock has been artificially inseminated for the past 15 years, one of the first in Australia and also uses embryo transfers, with all the semen purchased on our own shores.

When it comes to selecting genetics, he spends a lot of time keeping up to date with what's available and regularly visits studs to view genetics and the rams available.

He doesn't sell his rams' semen regularly, but is open to it if the opportunity arises.

Andrew says whilst there have been advances in artificial insemination techniques over the past 15 years, scanning results had actually decreased.

"We don't know if it's a change to some of the medicines that goes into the sheep or something else. The other theory is that hybrid animals are harder to breed from," he says.

This use of artificial insemination means that Andrew has a surprisingly small number of rams on the farm – generally just one of each breed to be used as mop up rams.

"I generally just use ram lambs - it's better for genetic gain," he says.

Ewe lambs are given an opportunity to join at about eight months old. He says the percentages of maiden ewes of that age varied a lot, sometimes as low as 25 per cent, and the remainder of the flock are mixed aged ewes.

The most important indicator for maiden ewe success is weight, according to Andrew.

"We have to supplementary feed them this time of year normally," he says.

In the second week of April he was able to let them into a paddock with green feed – a pleasant surprise due to some recent rain events.

A key LambPlan figure they have increased over the years is the post weaning weight, lifted from a score of 12 to 17 to 18 across all breeds on the property. It's taken many years to achieve, but Andrew says faster growing lambs is a much sought after trait for both himself and his clients. He believes it's particularly important in the Mallee, where farmers were constrained by a short growing season – typically from the second week of May for just four to five months.



Arlo & Leni with their grandfather Andrew Donnan

The recent rains have also buoyed confidence in the cropping enterprise, with 2,500ha of wheat, barley, oats and vetch sown each year on the property.

The Donnans had sown 320ha of feed by the first week of April - a mixture of Morava vetch and Winterroo oats.

They will start cereal sowing after Anzac Day this year - more Winterroo Oats, Spartacus barley and Scepter wheat. They are also trialling Yallara oats. The oats and barley will be grazed.

He says, if done right, grazing sheep on crops doesn't take away anything from yields, as long as they are taken out at the right time, and in some cases he believes it can improve it.

Even though 2019 was a bumper year, there was still no spring with the growing season being cut out in September for the past 10 years. Moisture from earlier in the year held the crops on to finish, and a cooler spring assisted, but the last "spring" was in 2016.

Whilst rainfall average for the area is 320mm, the past two growing seasons they've recorded 180mm or 200mm, but despite the lower numbers, Andrew says last year's harvest results were good.

Their wheat yielded 3.2t/ha to 4t/ha and the barley 2.8t/ha to 4t/ha.

"We have changed farming so much in the past 10 years, it's difficult to know what an average is anymore. Timing and sowing earlier, dry sowing if it hasn't rained... We make sure we get all the crops in before the end of May – it's vital in our district. We concentrate on summer spraying to preserve moisture and direct drilling the past 10 years has also been a game changer for us too," Andrew says.

“We're the ones left of about 20 Donnans that started here over the past 102 to 103 years.”

*Andrew Donnan*



The Donnans are big supporters of the Woomelang's North West Ag branch – Andrew has been supporting the store for 45 years and his father and grandfather before him did as well.

Now his sons Joel and Trent are the fourth generation to support the branch throughout its many owners.

Trent, 26, returned home last year and has joined Joel, 30, in running the farm with their parents.

"It's so much easier, I don't need to go working half the night now," Andrew laughs. "Your own children work more than an employee because they have more enthusiasm for it, they're more invested."

He also says having the next generation who could take advantage of new technology he didn't understand was invaluable to the farm.

He's proud of what his sons can do and knows the farm will now keep getting better each year.

"Last year was the first year Trent was home for harvest, so this year will be a massive gain having that experience," he says.

The Donnans' five children had all left the nest and Andrew and Denita had lived on the farm on their own for a while.

Denita has the "handy role of all mothers and is also the bookkeeper" carefully keeping all the stud's records, spanning several years. In recent times, Joel and his wife Lauren have lessened her load by taking on the stud's LambPlan data entries and refreshing the Anden Stud website and social media.

Joel and Lauren's children Leni, 4 and Arlo, 2, are being raised on the property, which is an absolute delight for their grandparents.

Trent's partner Brigette is a teacher and lives in the house across the road with him as well. Their other children work off farm including Ashlee, 28, who has her own business in the disability support space in Melbourne, Kane, 24, who is a qualified builder at Swan Hill and Wade, 20, who is a third year apprentice builder in Melbourne. The Donnans say Wade and Kane may eventually choose to return home to the farm, whilst Ashlee is building her business and has settled in Melbourne with husband Laurence.

"We're the ones left of about 20 Donnans that started here over the past 102 to 103 years," Andrew reflects. "I don't know why I'm the only one left, we started out in the worst situation."

His grandfather had four brothers and a sister and they branched out everywhere, but for Andrew, farming was always the ambition.

"I guess I just always wanted to be involved in farming," he says.

His toughness and determination has been evident since he was young. Andrew got the nickname Bruiser when he was just 12 and used to play under 16's football. He says he bruised as easily as a nickname sticks for decades in rural communities.

This determination has led to some big accomplishments in his sheep breeding career.

In 2016, Anden Stud broke the record for the highest price paid for a meat ram in Australia with a \$68,000 price achieved for a White Suffolk ram. It went to a stud at Streaky Bay.

Anden Stud has also enjoyed great success at shows, most recently taking out the supreme champion white suffolk exhibit at the 2019 Royal Adelaide Show.

At the same event the stud was also awarded Reserve Champion of all Breeds, Grand Champion White Suffolk Ram and Junior Champion White Suffolk Ram. And, what's a sheep farm without a good sheep dog? Andrew places great value on the importance of having the right working dog, recently paying \$21,000 for two-year-old black and tan male kelpie "Ace" at the Jerilderie Dog Auction.

He says he copped a bit of flack for paying \$3,000 for a border collie 10 years ago, but Andrew knows that "Boss" was worth that and much more.

Now, with the next generation home working on the farm, the Donnans continue to progress their chosen breeds.

"We can always improve. We're trying to get more muscle in lamb without it getting too tough to eat. We're always after better tasting lamb with better eating quality," he says.

For Andrew, the greatest pleasure of years of breeding sheep is when he hears great results from clients.

"As I'm getting older now, I get a lot of joy out of people selling good lambs and getting good prices from them," he says. "They'll call and say 'they weighed heavier than I thought they would'. When you're having a bad day, a call to tell you this really turns it around."

# Safflower success

New Australian crop variety provides exciting prospects for grain growers

Article | Rosie O'Keeffe

Photography | Tegan Slade, GRDC GroundCover™ magazine



“ It has proven to be drought tolerant too and an alternative break crop in low to medium rainfall areas.”

*Chris Duff, Delta Ag*

**T**he recent commercialisation of super high oleic safflower crops is set to be a game changer for grain growers.

Delta Agribusiness has signed a new exclusivity agreement with GO Resources, which has given Delta the distribution and marketing rights for super high oleic safflower crop growth in south east Queensland, NSW and Victoria.

Research trials in various regional locations last year showed that despite dry conditions, the versatile safflower crop can be a valuable addition to various dryland and irrigated cropping systems, providing a number of strategic, agronomic and financial benefits, as well as cash return.

“The addition of super high oleic safflower crops into the market is cutting edge. It’s a brand new crop which I think is going to be really exciting for the industry,” GO Resources Research and Development Lead, David Hudson says.

“This is an Australian technology that has been developed and funded by the CSIRO and GRDC, then our Australian company GO Resources has brought this technology to the market, to the growers, and now we have partnered with an Australian company Delta Ag in its delivery, and that’s really unique and something we are really proud of.”

According to David, it was experiencing Delta’s approach in the paddock during field day events and trials at Goondiwindi and Quandialla during the 2019 season that affirmed their commitment and enthusiasm for innovation.

“We were impressed with the way they had a real drive to produce new innovations for their growers with both agronomic and economic benefits for them,” David says.

Safflower is a winter/spring growing crop that is heat and drought tolerant, proven performance in sodic and saline soils, is suited to both dryland and irrigation farming systems, has low inputs, is low maintenance and easy to grow. It can be used in rotations to effectively break the lifestyle of cereal root diseases like take-all and crown rot. It has an extensive root system which can break up hard-pans and create channels in the soil profile facilitating air and water movement.

Delta Ag’s Executive Director and Group Manager Advisory Chris Duff is looking forward to the significant development and market prospects the crop will bring growers.

“It is an alternative crop, it’s a risk splitting crop and has a wide sowing window which is another attraction.

"I think it will do well where canola has lost flavour in recent years. It has proven to be drought tolerant too and an alternative break crop in low to medium rainfall areas."

Chris says while safflower crops were planted 20 years ago, a lack of processing facilities and a declining market meant its growth diminished.

"Over the years there has been development in specialty canola oils, but safflowers have a speciality market that is going to be classified as a premium oil in the industrial market and that is where the big interest is coming from," Chris says.

David adds, "We are seeing the opportunities in the bio-based oleo-chemical industry and particularly the lubricant industry sector where its benefits and performance are coming to the forefront. Compared to palm, HO soybean and HO canola oils, GO Resources super high oleic oil provides superior thermal properties and functionality which makes it ideal for use in industrial applications such as lubricants, plastics, polymers, cosmetics, paints and inks, biofuels and food. The results have been outstanding. We have had increasing interest in the US, Europe and in Australia. These markets are global markets."

In the 2019 season, 25 growers were involved in its market development year, with 1,700 hectares of GO Resources super high oleic safflower seed planted.

"We had commercial release last year for the first time, and despite it being a drought year, we did get encouraging results and there is significant interest from farmers and agronomists planning to grow it this year," David says.

"The real opportunity seems to be in sodic and saline soils where growers have struggled to get canola to establish particularly in tough years. One of the benefits of safflower is that it has a very deep tap root and while last year the yield wasn't as high as it could be, we had farmers who didn't harvest any canola, but managed to harvest the safflower, so it's definitely a semi drought tolerant crop."



Mixed farmers Bruce Slade (left) and Garreth Brose (right) check a safflower crop with GO Resources Research and Development Lead, David Hudson, on a Quandialla property before harvest in 2019

The safflower market opportunity is offered on a closed loop system, with a guaranteed 'farm gate' price of \$650/mt at the start of the season, taking out the risk to the grower.

Delta Agronomist Leigh Norton was involved in the growth of a safflower crop at "Willaroo", 30km from Goondiwindi last year and is excited by positive results despite a dry year.

"Last year unfortunately there wasn't a lot of profile... but it has performed well in sodic soils and is a good break crop. We received 53mm of in-crop rain last year and achieved up to 2.2t/ha in some areas that were planted early," Leigh says.

"In these northern areas it definitely grew well at the start and seemed to tolerate frosts during the season and low rainfall. We are going to grow 100ha this season on the same property and we are in discussions with another grower who is looking for a different rotation. If it's as frost tolerant as the research has shown, it'll perform well in this region, we are just waiting on a trial screening herbicides to see what may work with weed control. With canola results up and down, it could definitely be the new canola for the north."

Safflower fits well into cereal cropping operations as no additional machinery is required, and David says that an advantage over canola is being able to direct head the crop eliminating the additional costs associated with windrowing.

This season, under the new marketing and distribution arrangements, Delta Ag will be setting up trials, demonstrating to growers where super high oleic safflower can fit into their locations. Delta will then be managing these trials, signing grower contracts, and will be responsible for the distribution of the planting seed.

"Our focus is really targeting south east Queensland, northern NSW, the Riverina and Victoria. The rain falling at the moment has been encouraging and it's building significant interest from the growers and agronomists we have been in contact with and we are looking forward to Delta taking the market opportunity forward into the future," David says.



Last year 1,700ha of safflower crop was planted last year and harvested in south east Queensland, NSW and Victoria

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# PADDOCK PRECISION

Central West NSW growers Gary and Tom Weston have taken more of the guesswork out of their winter cropping operation, increasing the efficiency of inputs applied to each paddock. ►



Article | Rosie O'Keeffe

Photography | Emy Lou of Vivid Editorial

The Weston family have always seen value in making on-farm investments.

Since Don Weston originally purchased “Hazeldean” in 1967, located in northern NSW at Curban, 30km north of Gilgandra, his family’s farming practices have reflected a progressive approach.

Over the years, the family enterprise has evolved into one that had involved livestock and a more mixed operation, to one with a sole focus on cropping production.

Now, as his son Gary, and grandson Tom, lead the family’s farming operation spanning 3,600 hectares, with a further 900ha of leased/contract farmed land, they are also adopting new technologies and innovation.

After having been collecting yield data on their crops – a rotation that includes wheat, barley and grain oats, with lupins, canola, chick peas and field peas – the Weston family moved into a precision agriculture approach, which they say has dramatically improved the impact of their inputs.

“We started with 400ha, zoning and soil testing paddocks, and then last year we expanded the area, and with the purchase of a spreader with variable rate capabilities, the data was used for lime and urea applications,” Gary says.

Delta Ag Precision Agriculture Specialist Dan Rigney says, “Precision agriculture has allowed us to identify where high and low production zones are within every paddock, why they perform differently and how we can better manage inputs to improve efficiencies.”

Delta Ag Agronomist David Strahorn, who has been providing advice to the Weston family for a number of years, agrees precision agriculture was the next step in striving to improve agronomic practices.

“Zoning and soil testing has given us the ability to be far more accurate in prescribing inputs to match the yield potential across each paddock and more confident in making these decisions. Getting answers as to why different areas of a paddock are consistently producing at varying levels has been invaluable,” David comments.

Gary says there is a combination of red soil, deep red loam and some sand and lighter loams across paddocks.

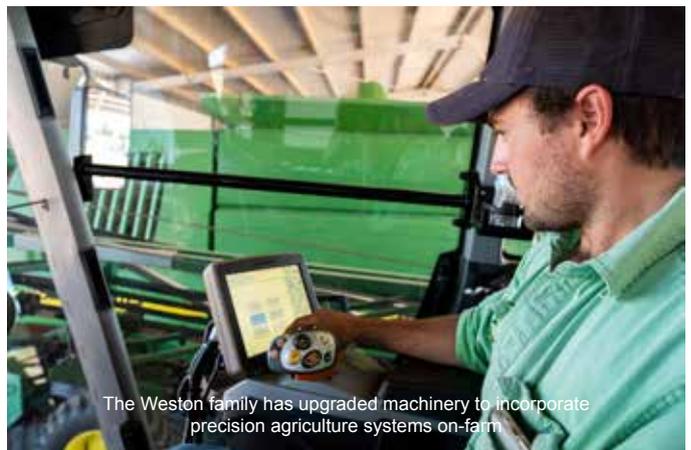
“With variations in soil types within the one field, we are not really saving any inputs, but we are putting out inputs into more of the areas that require it. We are now getting bigger bang for our buck out of fertilizer and the requirements for lime application and that’s a big part of our program,” Gary says. “While we would normally be putting out a blanket 2.5t/ha on a field, we are still putting out the same 2.5t/ha, but some areas will be getting 4t/ha and other areas 1t/ha. Our overall cost hasn’t been a lot less, it’s putting the inputs in where they are required.”

Dan says that in lower performing soil types within some paddocks inputs have been reduced by 30 per cent, while rates on high production areas have been increased to really push yields.

Tom Weston, at 27, takes a big interest in the new practices on the farm and is excited about the big role he believes precision agriculture has into the future.



Four generations of the Weston family – Don, his son Gary, grandson Tom & great grandsons Flynn, 2 & Noah, 6 months



The Weston family has upgraded machinery to incorporate precision agriculture systems on-farm

“These recommendations will be driven by data and an increased knowledge of soil variation across the farm.”

Delta Ag Precision Ag Specialist Dan Rigney





Delta Ag Agronomist David Strahorn (left) & Precision Ag Specialist Dan Rigney chat to growers Gary Weston & Tom Weston about incorporating variable rate applications into their operations

“I have always been passionate about farming. Getting out of it what you put in is really rewarding,” Tom says.

“I think it’s really important to stay ahead of the game, it can take a long time to catch back up again... I think we have really been building on the soil testing and data recording, seeing how it can really benefit our operations, but it’s a long-term process and where we will really see the gains.

Through the purchase of further farmland and on-farm infrastructure growth including the construction of a large 10,000 tonne capacity grain storage facility in 2015, originally to be used to store feed barley and weigh bridge and testing site, the operations are well equipped to maintain productivity into the future.

The Westons have also invested in farm machinery equipped with the technology to handle this new way of farming – last year a Gason spreader converted to 3 metre centres, and this year will be the first time they will plant using a Boss Engineering 18 metre bridge frame model parallelogram planter and box with a capacity of 20,000 litres.

“We have already planted some wheat this year and it’s really going to make everything a lot more efficient. Being able to really put the seed in the right area and having the capacity to variable rate fertilizer too as it’s needed is also a new saving,” Tom says.

“I think having the different machines now, and so much more is being shared between farmers on social media too, it’s making everyone more excited. I think the uptake of precision agriculture will grow, especially as inputs become more expensive and land is harder to obtain...

“With Dan and Dave from Delta Ag involved as well, it’s been a real team effort for our operation and we’ve been enjoying seeing the results.”

The Weston family employs one other full-time farm worker and seasonal workers are contracted if needed at planting and harvesting.

Whilst the cereal crops make up 50 per cent of the crop growth, Gary says the introduction of pulses over the years have also proved to be a game changer.

“It’s been important for us to have pulses in our cropping system too, and a wheat and lupins rotation has proven profitable for us over many years,” Gary says.

Dan is excited about this year’s season and says Gary and Tom will have the ability to do variable rate phosphorus, nitrogen and lime.

“These recommendations will be driven by data and an increased knowledge of soil variation across the farm,” Dan says. Using this data has meant we can put inputs out with more confidence. Across the farm there are small bands of soil that have reduced yield potential due to subsoil constraints, now having the ability to do variation rate application will allow Gary and Tom to pull back on inputs in these areas.

“They wanted a good simple platform and process, and they’ve got that now. Going forward there will be some serious gains for them.”

Gary believes there are also results evident in higher protein levels in some of the grain in lower yielding areas.

“It’s cost us money to make the investments to enable the technology of precision agriculture, but we are certainly hoping that the results at the other end of the season is where it will pay dividends.

“In one paddock the average protein of wheat recorded was 11 per cent, in the better areas producing higher protein and yields of 5 tonne, we saw the yields of 2 tonne still achieving up to 13 per cent protein levels. If we can’t lift the yield everywhere, we may also see significant benefit in having protein levels lifted.

“I think it’s the average or above average years is where we will really see the results.”

Average rainfall on the property is up between 500 and 600mm, and despite last year’s total of 190mm, this year is already promising with 300mm having fallen up until early autumn.

“We have a full profile now, urea has been pre-drilled through prescription maps, so we are looking forward to a nice early kick off,” Gary says.

As Tom looks out across the paddocks with his own small sons, Flynn, almost 3 years of age, and Noah, six months old, he believes the future is bright.

“On a world stage I believe Australian agriculture is going to be very strong going forward. Agriculture is always going to be there and relied upon more than ever.”

# Farming for the future

Photography | **Rachael Lenehan Photography**

As the O'Connor family celebrates 100 years of family involvement in their Oxton Park farming enterprise at Harden in the picturesque Hilltops region, they reflect on what the centenary milestone means to them. **Rosie O'Keeffe** discovers how a family passion for agriculture, community involvement, and a well-planned business structure and advice, have been instrumental in unlocking the possibilities for future generations to write their own pages in the history books when they take the reins of this mixed operation.



“The ability we’ve had for several family members to work together within the business, is quite unique.”

*Peter O'Connor, Managing Director, Oxton Park*

It's autumn 2020 and the annual shearing operation is in full swing at Oxton Park at Harden. Spanning three large woolsheds and with some 30,000 in the flock to go under the clippers over just a few weeks, it's certainly one of the most labour-intensive operations on the farm.

And, when I glance through historical information including the late Patrick O'Connor's article written for The Bulletin journal published in 1934, wool production was at the forefront of the family's enterprise, even in the early years.

"If there is any secret to our success, it might be attributed to the loyal cooperation of every member of the family, and the adoption of a policy long before our time that proved to be a sure winner – sheep and wool growing," Patrick had documented.

From what began as an original 400ha purchased in 1920 by the O'Connor brothers James and Patrick of "Oakleigh" Marengo (later known as the village of Murringo), today the Oxton Park operation encompasses almost 20,000 acres (7,800 ha) with more properties acquired through the ages as the opportunity arose.

The total Oxton Park enterprise spans 19 separate holdings/properties all adjoined, including the larger farms "Newington" purchased in 1963, "Guerness" purchased in 1968, "Granite View" purchased in 1976, "Stanley Park" in 1981, with "Fernleigh" and "Werrington" the most recent to be purchased in 1990, which significantly increased the size of the overall Oxton Park enterprise by 25 per cent.

As markets changed, so did the focus of the operations, and today, just over 50 per cent of the land is used for cropping wheat, canola, triticale and pastures, and the livestock component has evolved from a Merino wool enterprise, to a flock with a composite meat and wool purpose.

But, more important than the growth of the enterprise, is that after 10 whole decades of ownership, the O'Connor family bloodlines remain strong. Four members of the family – brothers Peter, Paul, John and cousin Pat – lead a team of 10 full-time employees, between 20 and 30 casual workers during seasonal peaks, and the next generation has also begun involvement in the business, as cousins Jack O'Connor, Brad Cavanagh and Max O'Connor cement their on-farm roles at Oxton Park.

"The strength of Oxton Park has been the size of our enterprise and for our working directors to be able to specialise in particular areas of the business such as the wool, meat and cropping areas... But, what is most important to us, is that we are strong believers that we are just looking after the land and preparing it to pass on to the next generation and hopefully having made significant improvements along the way," Peter says.

"The O'Connor family's stoic attitude has enabled us to really roll with the punches and reflect everyone's passion for farming. The ability we've had for several family members to work together within the business, is quite unique."

Both Peter and John make reference to the secrets to their successful family-run enterprise and that it could actually come down to community involvement, with two generations involved in local rugby union clubs.

"Sport has been a big part of our family through the generations. We've all grown up playing rugby and involved in the local clubs at an organisational level too. I think the culture of teamwork could have flowed on from the football field to the farm as well," John says.

Peter adds, "Communication is also key, and having a strong corporate management structure that separates personal interests from business investment and operations."

The family business became an officially incorporated entity in 1996 after having been run as a partnership between brothers Justin and Kevin. A succession planning process ensued and a structure that sees regular board management meetings with external advice from chairman and farm advisor Chris Duff and accountant and financial adviser Stephanie O'Connor has ensured everything runs smoothly from the day-to-day operations to forward strategic planning.

Whilst the story of Oxton Park may date back 100 years, farming in the O'Connor family is documented much earlier – in 1861 it is noted Thomas O'Connor established "Oakleigh", with occasional support from brother James.

"The thing that stands out through all the history we've read about the enterprise, is that there were bushfires, droughts, floods, certainly plenty of tough times, but they always managed to get through them... Everything goes in cycles, like it still does today," Peter says.

The original "Oxton Park" was a part of the landholding known as "Demondrille", held by grazing right in 1851 by Wyse. Eventually subdivisions occurred and blocks were sold to the Commercial Banking Co. before in 1906 Thomas Allsopp, miller of Murrumburrah, bought a portion of what became Oxton Park. In 1910 it was sold to James Ford a grazier near Young, then the O'Connor family's legacy was to begin.

Interestingly, diary notes state that Patrick had assessed the property as worthwhile farmland, even back then, with the advantages of fertile and well-drained soil.

"Agriculture is positioned very well in this environment. We are still very fortunate that we are in a consistent and versatile area where we can produce different crops, we can breed livestock, and the accessibility of water is better than most," John comments.

During the first years, and notably in 1922, Patrick had recorded a good season with excellent crops and good prices, however a dry autumn and heavy rain and hail spoiled the wheat crop the following year. Despite the climatic challenges, this was when the first expansion of the property was negotiated when a block of 40 acres (16ha) was purchased. In 1924 wool boomed, and towards the end of the year a neighbouring 223-acre property called "Glendale" was purchased. It was also a significant year for the shearing operations, for the first time being held on-farm.

In the following years, the prices ebbed and flowed and the Oxton Park enterprise survived through a small bushfire in 1940 and while 1943 saw the heaviest wool clip on record with 152 bales, 1944 was one of the driest years and a dry December created fuel for a devastating bushfire that burnt out Oxton Park with hand feeding necessary for almost the whole year, although the crops were noted to have yielded reasonably well. The year 1955 was documented as an "abundant year on Oxton Park".

"Rain fell in the best quantities at the right time and accurate management of stock, crops and pastures provided an exceptional yield. Though grain prices fell, fat cattle and sheep became very dear. Oxton Park wool clip exceeded 200 bales for the first time," Patrick's records say. ►

Sadly Patrick O'Connor passed away in 1956, passing the farm on to brothers Kevin, who managed the livestock part of the business, and Justin, who managed the crops.

In the 1990s Kevin and Justin handed over ownership and management of the farm to the next generation. Kevin and his wife Val had six children and Justin and wife Monica eight children, and now Peter manages the cropping practices with Kevin's son Pat, and Paul and John, (other sons of Justin), oversee the livestock operation. The other O'Connor family members not officially involved still take an active interest in the happenings on the property. Whilst Kevin and his wife Val, and Justin have now passed away, Justin's wife Monica, still takes a strong interest in the management of Oxtan Park today.

"We also have long serving workers who have really grown up in the business and we consider as much a part of the enterprise as family. John Brown was involved at Oxtan Park for more than 40 years working alongside Kevin and Justin, and now his sons Greg and Nigel, have been working with us for more than 20 years," John says.

Over the years, boundary and internal fencing has been improved, water storages increased, and substantial tree plantations established across the properties in the past 15 years has been an integral part of biodiversity.

Capital improvements include two large woolsheds, 1,200 tonne capacity sealed silos to store niche marketed grain and a further 10,000 tonne storage capacity in what is known as 'West Shed' which has also housed a number of large charity events.

"Being a part of the community has been really important to us as well. We have hosted six charity balls at Oxtan Park over the years and also held events in Sydney to raise funds for cancer research through the Garvan Institute. Over the years more than \$1 million was raised for this cause," John says.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s under Justin and Kevin's management, Merino sheep breeding continued to be the mainstay enterprise of the family farm and there was a substantial Hereford cattle breeding operation, and then when Jim Wright became the farm financial adviser and agronomist through the Harden Rural District Advisory Service, wheat farming became an ever important enterprise, through development of new varieties and advancements in technology. This farm advice continued through the Chandlers Rural business, then to go on to become Delta Agribusiness.

Around the late 1990s, the family decided to cease cattle breeding and concentrate on buying store calves, fattening them up on grazing crops, or fattening sheep for meat.

The collapse of the wool price reserve scheme in 1991 meant there were 4.7 million bales of wool in the stockpile, which took 10 years to clear and had a dramatic impact on business and resulted in a shift towards a dual purpose flock. Whilst the O'Connors say immense lows have been experienced over the years in wool production, there have also been many highs.



Frank Lockhart pictured with Jim O'Connor



Monica O'Connor

“Being a part of the community has been really important to us as well. We have hosted six charity balls at Oxtan Park over the years and also held events in Sydney to raise funds for cancer research through the Garvan Institute. Over the years more than \$1 million was raised for this cause.”

*John O'Connor  
Director - Oxtan Park*



Siblings: Alma, Kevin, Mary, Justin, Rosari & Tess O'Connor



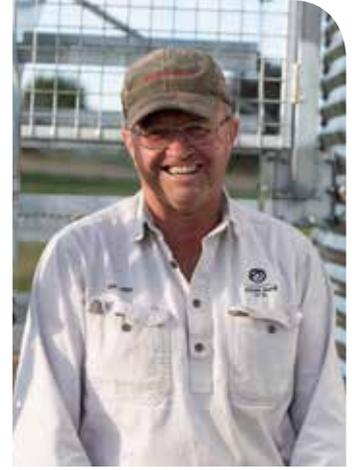
Peter O'Connor



John O'Connor



Paul O'Connor



Pat O'Connor



Brad Cavanagh

Jack O'Connor

The shift into more of a dual purpose Merino evolved when sheep meat prices improved. There is the aim to increase fleece weights, but at the same time improve carcase performance from a quicker maturing sheep. There has been an AI program since 1995 and current lamb marking percentages are about 110 per cent lambs marked to ewes joined.

The main objective at Oxtan Park is to continue to lift wool weights on the flock without losing the excellent lambing percentages recorded in the past decade.

Peter says another shining light that changed the farm's prospects was canola production.

"In the 1980s we had dabbled in rapeseed which was a precursor to canola. There were a lot of issues such as disease, the best varieties to grow, how to grow it and how to harvest it, but it became a very profitable crop and provided us with break crop between wheat crops. This also improved our wheat yields and weed control. It has been a game changer," Peter says.

The cropping program has continued to evolve and now encompasses 56 per cent of the farmland with canola increasingly important in the rotation and the production of more dual-purpose crops.

"In general terms, with the wool downturn in the early 1970s, we moved to cropping on a larger scale, machinery got bigger and wheat varieties improved dramatically.

"Chemicals were introduced and we got away from ploughing and working the fields to kill weeds. Glyphosate was a game changer and was the saviour of erosion problems generated by over cultivating paddocks.

"Growing the right varieties of wheat, triticale and/or canola to cover the shortage of feed during the winter time has been fine-tuned over the years, to the point where they are often the best gross margin of any enterprise on the farm."

At the start of the millennium, commodity prices were taking off, but drought years were to follow, but despite the challenges, the O'Connor family have been consistently achieving profits from their productive well-managed enterprise.

As the sun sets radiating a golden glow on Oxtan Park, the brothers reflect on the past 100 years and the bright future ahead.

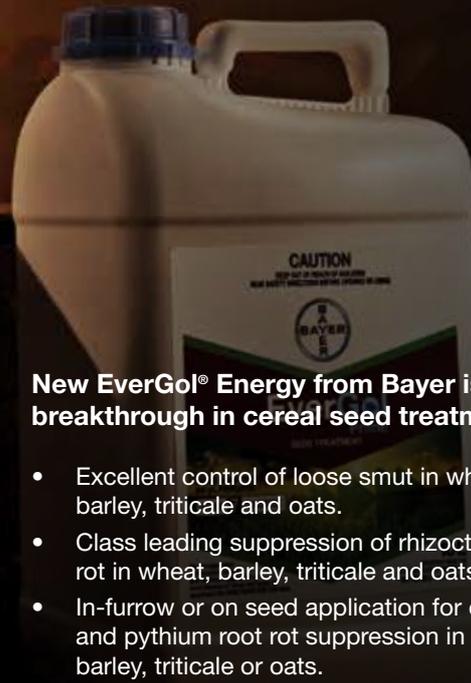
Whilst the O'Connor family farming genes remain strong, it's about involvement and inclusiveness, rather than ownership, and preserving the land for the future generations.

"There has certainly been some huge challenges along the way in putting it all together and keeping it all together. We are proud of the overall results and that the business is stronger than it has ever been... It really does give us a lot of satisfaction seeing the younger people coming through our business, whether family or the people working for us, we really are proud to be a part of such a wonderful part of history, farming at Oxtan Park."



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11/90/15	100
Available with or without apron	



## STOCKGRIP® LONGLIFE BLUE

WIRE SIZE*	ROLL LENGTH (M)
16/180/15	200



# Post by Post

Fencing connections help rebuild bushfire ravaged communities

Article | Rosie O’Keeffe  
Photography | Dean Kinlyside



Darcy & Mia Oldfield

## #purchaseapost

**D**riving through the scorched blackened landscapes in the Snowy Valleys region, green tinges emerge through the trees, showing a period of regrowth and the resilience of the communities devastated by ferocious summer bushfires. In amongst these scenes of sprouting leaves and grasses, another wave of positivity briefly shows on many farmers faces as they benefit from a special new rebuilding project.

Purchase a Post is a collaborative campaign in which Delta Agribusiness branches have been accepting community donations to purchase a black steel Australian Waratah Fencing steel post for \$6.25, or more if they wish, by contacting a Delta Agribusiness branch. These were then to be delivered and distributed to various farming properties affected by the Dunns Road bushfire, which burnt more than 333,000 hectares in the Adelong, Batlow, Talbingo and Tumbarumba districts.

Within 48 hours of the campaign launch, 2,500 posts were sold and it wasn’t long before the campaign really gained momentum. At the end of the first round, a total of 13,400 posts were donated, which was enough to fence 47km.

Now, after a second round which raised over \$47,000, more than \$130,000 in total has been received.

“We were all aware of the widespread devastation and loss of life and property that these fires delivered on our communities,” Delta Agribusiness Managing Director Gerard Hines said.

“As a private company that invests heavily in regional communities, Delta Ag wanted to do something special to contribute, and we are exceptionally proud of our team for initiating and driving this unique campaign, and very pleased to be able to directly help some of our affected clients and families in those affected areas.”

The support and contributions from suppliers and local businesses has been widespread. FMC donated \$36,800, made up of corporate donations and staff donations which the company matched dollar-for-dollar. Wagga’s Commonwealth Bank branch held a morning tea with participants purchasing a post to attend, and the NSW TAFE plumbing section held a series of barbeques for a total of \$2,000. The Koorngal Hotel ran a ‘Parmi for a Post’ campaign and Wagga business Teys Australia donated \$5,000. Other farmers and families donated, and even young children like Mia and Darcy Oldfield, collected up all their loose change and brought it into their local Delta branch to contribute to the campaign.

“It was definitely overwhelming to hear the stories of kids and their pocket money putting in that effort and wanting to be a part of it,” Yaven Creek cattle breeder and Captain of the local Rural Fire Service Brigade James Pearce said.

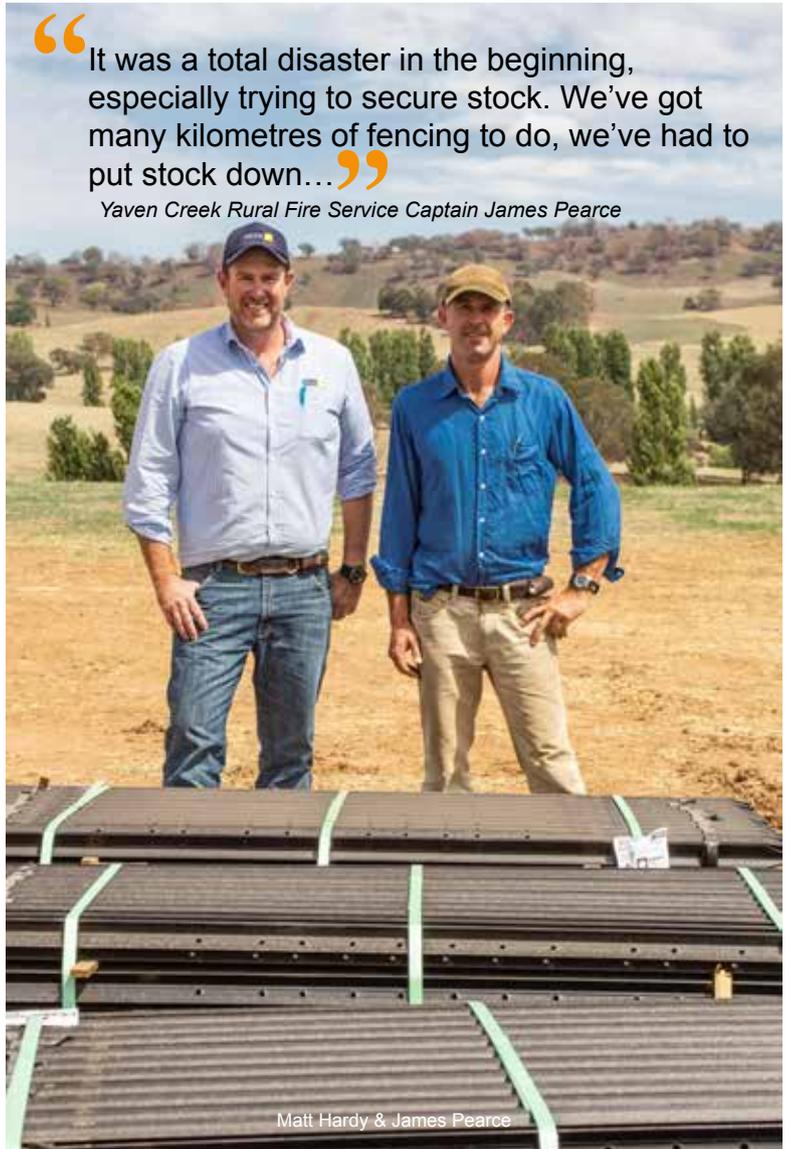
For the Yaven Creek brigade’s area, all 23 members endured devastating property losses in the fires, with the area faced with a minimum of 95 per cent grazing property lost.



Delta Ag Henty Branch Manager Hugh Nott joined the fencing team



Over 70 Farmers will receive a sling of 200 posts



Matt Hardy & James Pearce

“It was a total disaster in the beginning, especially trying to secure stock. We’ve got many kilometres of fencing to do, we’ve had to put stock down...”

*Yaven Creek Rural Fire Service Captain James Pearce*

“It was a total disaster in the beginning, especially trying to secure stock. We’ve got many kilometres of fencing to do, we’ve had to put stock down... The necessity for getting some fencing secure especially around the boundaries is paramount, so the Purchase a Post initiative was a valuable one to reduce some of the costs,” James said.

James and his family manage a Poll Hereford Stud with 1,600 head of cattle, across 1,800ha and had 95 per cent of the grazing country burnt. Two hay sheds were destroyed, 240 hay bales lost, a woolshed and house also destroyed, and they lost 170 head of livestock.

“We saved our house, but it certainly hit us very quickly and we could only do so much to prevent it. It’s an awful feeling to watch it burn having put so much work in to the property to have it damaged. We are grateful for the volunteers who fought hard at the time to save as much as they could,” James said.

As Delta Ag Wagga’s Branch Manager Matt Hardy coordinated a haul of utes and tractors gathered for one of the massive distribution operations, he reflected on the concept that was actually conjured up during a dinner table discussion with his own family. Whilst firefighters managed to save their house and woolsheds on his parents’ farm between Tumbarumba and Jingellic, around 60 per cent of their pastures were lost.

“We were chatting about the enormity of widespread losses, and my sister, Prue, initially made the suggestion that somehow if people could each buy a post to rebuild fencing it would make such a difference...” Matt recalls.

It took just 24 hours after Matt took the idea to senior management for the campaign to be launched on social media with Waratah Fencing also offering their support to supply bulk orders and donating extra posts, strainers and pliers.

“Without having fences, farmers can’t contain and manage livestock and we found that so many fences were burnt out with many also made of an old timber construction. With so many livestock on roads, fencing was certainly going to be one of the most important parts of managing the farms moving forward, which is another reason this campaign has been so worthwhile and appreciated by these farmers,” Matt said.

Delta Ag teams have assembled fully equipped fencing rigs with pneumatic tools to assist in the rebuilding process and have been staffed by Delta team members.

Several volunteers have been also on-hand to take part in the massive distribution effort and Delta Ag worked with the Yaven Creek, Darlow and Wondalga NSW Rural Fire Service brigades during the allocation process.

# PEDAL POWER



Jimmy Slender, Lefty Goodman, Max Goodman, Ross Turner, Doug Anderson, Chris Duff & John Coulter

More than \$110,000 raised for rural and regional charities as cyclists ride from Perth to Sydney

**C**rossing what is considered a quintessential arid, dry, outback landscape along the Nullarbor Plain is on many 'once in a lifetime' travel wish lists, but how about cycling the distance, all with a deadline and thousands of dollars literally riding on it?

Well, Delta Ag's Executive Director and Group Manager Advisory Chris Duff not only succeeded in crossing the Nullarbor on his road bike enduring strong head winds and unseasonal hot conditions in September, but along with a group of other riders from the Young district, they all rode a total of 4,700km from Perth to Sydney.

Inspired by brothers and retired shearers, Max and Kevin "Lefty" Goodman, celebrating their 40th year anniversary of completing the same journey embarking on the ride again, 10 riders successfully completed the entire journey from post office to post office (P2P). The journey took just 24 days – averaging 210km of pedalling each of the 22 days of riding – and others joined in for different sections along the way.

Along with his fellow riders John Coulter, Ross Turner and Jimmy Slender, a key focus for their involvement with the trip was for it to be a charity fundraiser. Five charities have now equally benefitted from the \$110,000 in funds raised:

- Black Dog Institute – assisting the prevention of rural suicide and providing strong support to communities in mental health and wellbeing.
- McGrath Foundation – breast cancer patient direct support through the employment of local breast cancer nurses.
- Give me Five for Kids – supporting and raising funds for children in regional Australia.
- Young Crisis Accommodation Centre – providing crisis accommodation for women and children in need.
- Young Hospital – providing essential local health care.

"Being a part of a rural community is always about 'giving back' and it was great to be able to give 100 per cent of all the money raised to these local charities," Chris Duff says.

"It's really great to have the personal achievement, and it's really a lifelong dream, but it added so much more substance and meaning to what we were already doing to know we were also going to be contributing to such worthy recipients.

"There were so many donations being given throughout the ride, and so many acts of kindness, knowing we were doing it all for a good cause."

Chris, who has been regularly cycling since 2008, explains one highlight was after constant days of headwinds and some heat in SA. "We left Port Augusta and climbed a mountain range, with increasing heavy rain and 40km head winds. Through this climb a car had gone past and a couple of hours later in miserable conditions, the same vehicle had returned to the group of riders with 40 freshly home baked muffins in a basket – it lifted our spirits for the rest of the day." Another gentleman close to the Victorian/NSW border, accompanied them for 30km to alert truck drivers to the group and support the cause as his wife had just been diagnosed with breast cancer.

"We always seem to quote the tough times, and the Nullarbor was definitely tougher than expected, but moments like these capture the generosity of people and there was just so much comradery among the group," Chris says.

"Even despite varying riding abilities amongst us, and rider ages ranging from 40 to 70 years young, we always made sure we rode as a group and looked after one another, with the group riding in formation to protect any rider who might have been having an 'off day' or was just suffering 'tired leg syndrome'."



Cyclists Max Goodman, Doug Anderson, Mark Bryant, Chris Duff & Jimmy Slender take a break to view a famous part of Australia – the Great Australian Bite



Cyclists Jimmy Slender, Chris Duff, Ross Turner & John Coulter at Martin Place Sydney

And whilst fellow rider, organiser and Young businessman, John Coulter quips his motto is just to “train on the day”, (despite usually riding distances of 200km each week), countless hours of preparation and careful planning, from the routes to the roadhouse and hotel stops along the way, was paramount for the ride to be a success.

John had even completed the journey prior to this ride, in 2013, which was also all in the name of charity raising more than \$50,000 for Beyond Blue, the McGrath Foundation and the Young Hospital maternity ward.

“We certainly had stronger head winds this time which proved a test on the mental fortitude,” John says.

“I found it made it easier to break it all down into 5km sections, then before too long it was lunchtime, and then the day was gone and you’re reading the maps to reflect on the distance covered, suddenly realising you’re just counting the days until the end.”

The riders were accompanied by a support team with trailers – Nevin Holland and Shaun O’Sullivan, and were lucky to need minimal tyre and mechanical repairs, and treatment for any medical ailments.

“Often the roadhouses were 200km apart and we’d had to book our stays months in advance, so we had to keep going no matter what the conditions to reach our designated spots at the end of each day. We had one rest day after the fifth day, then rode for 14 days straight for 8 to 9 hours each day, to reach Young, before riding on to Sydney,” Chris said.

He recalls during the longest day, a 285km distance was achieved, and 170km was travelled on the shortest day.

John reflects, “It really is a spectacular landscape along the way. The countryside changes with every kilometre, and it’s just a beautiful trip to experience on a bike, being in the weather, smelling all the smells and looking around, and the wonderful people you meet because of the attention from the charity aspect, it’s just great to stop and chat and get to know so many different people.”

There were 60 people gathered at the finishing line in Martin Place in Sydney and the riders agree it was a treasured moment celebrated with family and friends.

“It definitely brought tears to our eyes seeing family for the first time in so long and realising what we had accomplished.

“I reckon I’ve definitely got another one in me,” John enthuses. ▶



**M**ax and Kevin “Lefty” Goodman clink their cups of champagne in the middle of Martin Place, a re-enactment of a scene of relief and elation originally captured in 1979 as they completed a massive journey from Perth to Sydney on pushbikes.

They not only had the opportunity to re-enact these celebrations, but they once again endured gruelling conditions to once again ride across country in just a few short weeks, 40 years later.

The brothers, aged 69 and 64 years, who were the last generation of a family of shearers living and working in the Young district for 140 years, reminisce about the differences in the journeys and how much it meant to again accomplish such an achievement.

“It was really special finishing with our families and having so many other riders involved was really nice along the way. The comradery really kept us going,” Max, who had actually just returned from a 60km ride to Harden and back when we spoke, says.

“We had some really tough temperature conditions and certainly didn’t factor in the strong head winds we endured along the

Nullarbor, but then maybe being 40 years older we might not have bounced back as quickly! We were pleased the conditions finally turned around in the Barossa, although it got quite cold.”

Back in 1979, after only purchasing their heavy steel framed bicycles just 12 months before, and with their dad in a small family caravan as a ‘support crew’, they accomplished their 4,153km ride in 16 days.

On their first journey they had ridden 920km in the first three days, before settling into riding 290km each day. Their only strategy was not to stop cycling each day until it was dark and they would often stay overnight far from any settlements, in contrast to the accommodation planned on this ride. After each day’s ride they recall heating water over a fire and hastily rigging up a shower, consisting of a bucket with holes punched in the bottom, slung over a branch.

“It was certainly different with riding our carbon fibre bikes which are 5 to 7kg lighter than what we had, the seats are more comfortable and they are more suited to our heights and reach. It’s amazing how much they keep changing the design and refining everything,” Max comments.



## **POSITIVEPLAY**

### Bringing small rural communities together

Article | **Rosie O’Keeffe**

**D**elta Ag has teamed up with JSP Sports Development to provide a program to promote positive play through multi-sport gala days for school-aged children.

The ovals in north western NSW may have been dry, dusty and barren, but the camaraderie and new friendships being formed was evident as children smiled, laughed and high-fived each other on completion of relays and cheered each other during matches played as part of seven gala events held last year.

“The gala days have been really well received because they really do bring these smaller rural communities together. It’s an opportunity for us to promote positive play, giving children to the confidence to not only learn new skills, but they are also learning about teamwork, hand and eye coordination, and a range of movement as well,” Jake Packer of JSP Sports Development says. ▶





“...it gave these rural areas such a lift and for the children to focus on something other than the strain the drought...”

*Delta Ag Agronomist, Dean Hancock*

Photograph **Kylie Browne**

Delta Ag Narrabri Agronomist Dean Hancock & Jake Packer of JSP Sports Development



More than 420 children have already been involved in seven gala days which have been held in Moree, Narrabri, Boggabri, Gunnedah, Wee Waa, Tottenham and Coonamble.

“The program was one that we really wanted to be a part of because it gave these rural areas such a lift and for the children to focus on something other than the strain the drought was putting on their families. It’s just another way Delta is being involved in community initiatives,” Delta Ag Narrabri Agronomist, Dean Hancock says.

“I think it was really wonderful to give these smaller schools exposure to large carnival style events, as often only selected children have the opportunity to attend larger regional competitions. It was an enjoyable experience for our Delta team members who were there helping with set-up, the barbeque and some equipment, and we were also appreciative of Nufarm’s involvement, providing support with hats and water bottles.”

Last year’s theme was “Footy Fever” with rugby union, Aussie Rules, rugby league, touch football and soccer games played.

Jake hopes to introduce more stick sports such as softball, hockey and lacrosse to heighten interest from more schools and create more excitement for returning schools.

Active sports participation has several health and social benefits for children including reducing the risk of obesity, increase cardiovascular fitness and helps the growth of bones, ligaments and tendons, improved coordination and balance, improve sleep, mental health benefits and increased confidence.

Jake established JSP Sports Development last year to facilitate a range of sporting programs in primary schools in rural and regional areas during the school term. There are 34 primary schools in his region and he now delivers sporting programs to these schools during the term, as he had observed limited visits from larger sporting organisations and exposure for the children to different sports.

Already there are plans to blow the whistle to extend the Positive Play sports program into communities in the southern regions within the Delta network.



## A tribute to the late **Larry McDonald**

The Delta community has been saddened by the loss of Caragabal Branch Manager Larry McDonald who passed away on 3rd February, aged 73.

He is remembered for his incredible community spirit - and the biscuit tin he kept stocked with treats for the kids when they came into the rural supplies branch with their parents.

Agronomist David Crowley fondly remembers Larry's unique way of communicating with customers and says his former colleague will be most remembered for his contribution to the Caragabal community.

"Larry was incredibly dedicated to the community and unofficially known as the 'Mayor of Caragabal'," David said.

He was also known to have the best coffee in Caragabal - Nescafe Blend 43.

Larry worked on the railway for 10 years, before spending a further 10 years shearing, then took up his post at the local rural supplies store where he managed the operations for more than 20 years, up until his retirement in 2018. He and his wife Helen also ran the Caragabal pub for 12 years during this time.

David says a lot of people have commented about how community-minded Larry was. He always put the community first. "Not too many people will drop everything to help you out like he did," David said.

"We once had a sales campaign running on a particular brand of glyphosate and I asked if he needed some help making a few phone calls. He promptly replied that he didn't have time for phone calls because he was busy resurfacing the local bowling green."

In 30 years, he rarely missed a Sunday of lawn bowls, and was a driving force in its revival in the town, and amongst Larry's community roles, was presidency of the local hall for two decades, installing irrigation to the local sports ground and running the local tennis club for many years.

He was also awarded the Citizen of the Year for the Weddin Shire Council, but he preferred to talk about community achievements over personal ones.

David also spoke of the particular way Larry interacted with customers - no nonsense - but it suited him, and he got away with it. "I remember recommending some chemicals which were on the more expensive side and the customer wasn't too happy, he just said 'don't be so bloody tight and he put it on the ute'. He was also a bit famous for saying 'you young blokes'," David reminisced. "You young blokes haven't seen it wet. You young blokes haven't seen it dry." It's a saying very much missed in the community, now that Larry has passed.

Delta Ag Young Branch Manager Stephen McClymont also worked with Larry for many years.

"Larry was a hard worker who was very customer focused and he would go out of his way to get what a customer required," he said.

"That bore long standing relationships and friendships with people. He was a true gentleman and a great colleague."

Larry is survived by his wife Helen, their children and their partners, David and Cath, Megan and Aaron. He was also the much loved Poppy to Christopher, Sarah, Sophie and Lucas.

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## New product **Overwatch** set for release next year

**O**verwatch® Herbicide is anticipated for commercial release in the first quarter of 2021 and is expected to be a new pre-emergent option for application as an IBS (Incorporated By Sowing) treatment in wheat, barley and canola.

Developed by Agricultural Sciences Company, FMC, Overwatch is currently under review through the APVMA.

Overwatch® Herbicide has long-lasting, residual control of Annual ryegrass (including herbicide resistant biotypes) and regionally specific broadleaf weeds. Its active ingredient Bixlozone trademarked Isoflex™ active, is proposed as a Group Q mode of action, making it a unique weed control option for the Australian broadacre market as an IBS treatment.

Data from replicated field trials shows that the attributes of the chemistry in wheat, barley and canola may also maximise yield potential and provide flexibility with crop choice, replants and rotations.

As a proposed group Q product, Overwatch® Herbicide inhibits susceptible plants from producing carotenoids. Carotenoids protect chlorophyll in plant cells and help in the photosynthetic process of the plant.

While susceptible weeds are unable to metabolise Bixlozone and eventually die, tolerant crops can and will continue to grow. This process relies upon the metabolic ability of the plants, and therefore if a crop is not actively growing, crop discoloration from the herbicide may persist e.g. under cold, frosty conditions, with no adverse effect on yield.

FMC is currently investigating the potential use of Overwatch® Herbicide in several different crops, in different regions across Australia.

Through this work, FMC will also be identifying regionally specific weeds that may be added to the label.

For further information please visit [www.overwatchherbicide.com](http://www.overwatchherbicide.com)

This product is not yet registered, and the active constituent is under review for approval. A submission to register Overwatch® Herbicide is currently before the APVMA and is anticipated to be approved in 2020. No offer for sale, sale or commercial use of this product is permitted prior to the date of approval

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## Livestock Health

**Sam Simmons**

Delta Ag Procurement Animal Health and General Merchandise



### Controlling worms in lambing ewes

As sheep mature, their natural immunity to worms increases, however, during lambing and lactation this immunity is reduced, leaving ewes highly susceptible to higher worm burdens as they put all their energy into their progeny. This can lead to heavy contamination of lambing paddocks, resulting in high worm infestations in lambs and weaners. As young sheep are extremely susceptible to internal parasites, this can result in reduced growth rates and even deaths in these animals.

With an early autumn break across much of eastern Australia and sheep prices at record highs, it is more important than ever to look after your ewes in the lead-up to lambing. The current season is the perfect environment for worm numbers to increase rapidly in all flocks grazing fresh green pasture. With the temperatures still quite high, sheep will be susceptible to a rapid increase in Barbers Pole Worm which can be particularly damaging to production. Many autumn lambing flocks may traditionally get away without a pre-lambing drench, although 2020 is not the year to risk it. If in doubt, conduct a Worm Egg Count (WEC), preferably with a larval culture, to determine the level of contamination in your sheep and the species of worms present. Testing should be done six weeks prior to lambing and the drench administered four weeks before lambs hit the ground.



It is best practice to use multiple effective actives when drenching to prolong the on-set of resistance. Continued use of single active drenches has led to extensive resistance across many products and areas. If you are not aware of your resistance status you should be using a triple combination product or a new drench group such as those found in Zolvix™ or Startect®.

If using long acting products in injectable or capsule formulations, it is best to prime them with another effective drench and conduct WEC test after the mob has finished lambing to monitor drench efficacy. If these tests come back with worms present during the persistency period of the product, it indicates that the drench is breaking down and an Exit Drench (Tail-Cutter) should be given to the affected mob as soon as practically possible. Wait until lamb marking or weaning depending on levels of infection and continue to monitor. If you do need to drench, return the mob to the same paddock for three to four days before moving to a clean paddock. This lambing paddock should ideally be spelled for a minimum of two months, before sheep go back in.

Talk to your local Delta store about worm testing kits and ask for help if you are unsure of when to drench and what to use. The most expensive drench is one that doesn't work or one that wasn't necessary.

Also be mindful that vaccine boosters should be given to ewes approximately four weeks pre-lambing, which coincides with the drench timing mentioned above.

## Taking Stock

**Tegan Morris**

Delta Livestock & Property Livestock Trainee, Yass



### Increased rainfall influences record sheep and cattle sales

The National cattle herd is the lowest it's been for 30 years, and sheep numbers have not been this low since 1904. These key factors set the basis for trading conditions in the immediate future. As Australia moves into lockdown and some level of isolation as the government shuts state and international borders, this situation follows on from the recent drought then fires and floods. Farmers across rural Australia are facing many challenges.

Opportunities, born from a need to keep the wheels turning, will no doubt arise out of this complex mix of hurdles.

With the increase of rainfall over regional NSW and other neighbouring states, sheep and cattle have hit record levels in most forms of selling from physical sales to the growing online format, attracting nationwide interest.

Cattle have been a main focus for the last couple of months with a dramatic increase of yardings, driven by strong prices and a shortfall in supply driven by the lower herd size, largely due to the widespread drought.

Young unweaned steers under 200kg have hit a record of 669c/kg which is close to a 120c/kg increase from this time two months ago. The cow and heifer market have also seen a huge increase, with Angus cows making over 300c/kg and young PTIC heifers to the re-stocker returning at over \$1,800/hd. Prices have continued to fluctuate heading into April, although with recent rain and some increase in available feed, cattle are still in high demand and purchasers willing to go higher, or risk missing out.

The sheep and lamb market has also increased for the start of this year, with extra heavy lambs fetching up to \$380p/h in Bendigo last month, breaking the previous record. Lamb producers have certainly learnt how to feed lambs in supplementary and lot feeding to maximise carcase yield and carcase quality. High performance pastures and fodder crops have also added to this improved performance.

However, the lamb indicator right now heading into April has seen a decrease in price trend throughout the three different categories of lambs, falling 23c/kg (cwt) for light re-stocker lambs, 26c/kg (cwt) for medium trade lambs and 14c/kg (cwt) for extra heavy lambs. Mutton prices, linked to the warmest and driest year on record last year, impacting on water and feed availability created heightened pressures for producers, to offload, including some core breeding stock. Heavy cross bred ewes last month to the processor reached \$290/hd, with Merino ewes making up to \$250/hd, producers are hesitant to pass up the opportunity to sell, with much needed funding of cash flow.

Demand fundamentals should continue to provide support to prices and when combined with the supply dynamics, it would not be out of the question for lamb and mutton prices to reach new records this year. Rural Australia will get through this crisis, one way or another. We in agriculture are very fortunate to be classed as essential services. From the farmers, livestock agents, processors and consumers, we all can play our part to keep the Australian economy alive, and come out the other side of this crisis, hopefully stronger than ever.

## Landscape

### Rob Long

Delta Ag, Senior Agronomist, Moree



## 2020: A no-mistakes year, so mitigating production risks important

There is a buoyant feel about cropping prospects for 2020 after recent good summer rains. This has added valuable stored soil moisture which underpins the potential for promising crop yields.

It is important for growers and advisors to communicate and ensure all possible steps are taken to maximise crop production and to mitigate any foreseeable risks, including:

### Product supply

Clearly the COVID-19 pandemic has added a level of complexity to the world which must be accounted for. Delta advisors and merchandise managers have increased their level of communication with growers, to ensure the supply of key products is smooth and timely. Having said that, growers should make extra effort to provide concise forecasts to avoid disappointment. Some products are already sold out.

### Adequate nutrition

From early soil test results, nitrogen levels on fallow paddocks have benefited from good mineralisation rates after the recent summer rain. However, phosphorus levels continue to decline and Starter rates should be kept up to ensure that any extra N is fully utilised. Also, growers on clay vertosol soils should consider a deep P and K program. With help from the precision agronomy team, Delta agronomists are doing excellent work splitting paddocks into production zones, enabling VR Lime, VR Gypsum and VR Deep P and K, both saving costs and targeting the most responsive sites.

**Effective weed control** takes an acute understanding of what weeds are expected, their resistance status, and careful planning of using the right product at the right time. There are a number of new pre-emergent and post emergent products on the market (Luximax, Trezac, Callisto plus others), and your Delta agronomist is fully trained to advise how and when to use them. Additionally, Harvest Weed Seed Management practices work!! – and help drive down seedbank levels.

### Disease management

Good seasons often promote disease such as Stripe Rust, Blackleg, Sclerotinia and Net Blotches. Crop rotation, understanding inoculum levels, timely paddock inspections and pre-emptive spraying reduce disease impacts. New SDHI fungicides are hitting the market which will be highly effective, but more expensive and more prone to resistance if not used carefully.

### Insect Management

Be aware and monitor for Russian Wheat Aphid and Green Peach Aphid. Seed treatments such as Cruiser 350FS and Imidacloprid 600 give early protection for up to 12 weeks and can slow the rate of build-up.

### Frost

Sporadic in occurrence and devastating when a major event. Mitigate the risk by spreading crop type and variety. It is important to understand the phenology of the variety and sow at different times to spread flowering over a three-week window.

### Mice

Numbers are building up in southern regions. Monitor and act early as required.

## Grain Watch

### Mick Parry

General Manager, Delta Grain Marketing



## Marketing program reviews advised for 2020

The remarkable turnaround in seasonal conditions, especially through March and April, has changed the pricing landscape, especially for winter cereals. We have become used to seeing basis levels between \$80 and \$150/tonne over Chicago wheat prices over the past year, but suddenly we find local new crop values just \$10 over international values. Part of the reason is market participants have lost money over two consecutive crop years taking forward positions. This year they seem to be determined to start accruing wheat and barley from an extremely low base, so there is little risk of falling foul a third year in a row. Secondly, the market players are seeing the best start to a season across NSW in many years, and while other states are less than perfect, a big plant across NSW has many predicting large carryover stocks by year end.

There is a silver lining for growers when prices start the year with a very low basis. It means unless international prices slide, our market is not floating on large premiums which could give way with decent rain, and it also gives the market some upside potential should anything go wrong in other states.

Barley has been the grain of choice for graziers through the drought, and China's absence in the export market helped keep stocks onshore and available for the huge feeding program across NSW and Queensland. Barley is still making its way north from Victoria and SA in particular, but has recently improved in value with China buying some vessels out of West Australia. New crop barley is bid some \$60/tonne under new crop wheat, and as we have identified that wheat is historically cheap relative to world values, a \$60 discount to barley is too great to encourage forward sales, or should be until that spread narrows.

Canola is a great news story, with reduced stocks of non-GM canola in Europe after two poor seasons combining with near zero carryover locally and a low Australian dollar, giving us a rare opportunity to sell new crop canola at new historic highs. Whilst it's great to see good planting conditions and high prices, the danger is that prices fall during the growing season. We will be looking for selling opportunities once the crop is established and moisture profiles give enough confidence to consider a forward sales program.

Pulses have had a shaky start to the season from a pricing perspective, with lowball bids for both faba beans and chickpea. Both have rallied some \$100/tonne from initial pricing in February to near \$500/t delivered packer for fabas and \$720/t delivered packer for chickpea. It's a fickle market and prices are bound to be volatile given the state of the global economy. It's worth being conservative in what could be a wet year because quality downgrades are common.

Globally, food safety and food security will be an even greater focus this year. We are already seeing nations like Russia and Egypt building food grain stocks and the trend will likely continue.

It will be useful this year to review your crop production estimates and the prices available for those tonnes each month from planting to harvest. This will ensure you do not miss obvious opportunities to capture some high values, or change your exposure.

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