

Leading the way

Lower Eyre Peninsula (LEP) has a unique combination of soils, climate and geographic conditions and is an important agricultural zone for the State. However, until the establishment of the Lower Eyre Agricultural Development Association, LEADA, there had been only limited research located in the region to focus on the major production issues.

LEADA is a relatively new farming systems group - while many groups in SA have celebrated their 10th anniversary, LEADA has been running just three years. Yet in its short life the group has made significant progress in securing funding and establishing trial sites to provide crop and livestock producers with locally based research and demonstrations of its application.

In 2005, the Department of Land, Water and Biodiversity Conservation funded a project coordinator for two days a week. By late 2005, a grant from the National Landcare Program (NLP) for a two year project "Improving water use efficiency of Lower Eyre Peninsula cropping systems" had been approved.

This project together with the first LEP Ag Expo, held in early 2006, provided the spring board for LEADA. With support from the Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC) and NLP LEADA now has a part time coordinator, Kieran Wauchope, and 14 trials sites across LEP. The LEADA Ag Expo is now an annual event.

"Increasing water use efficiency and crop productivity remain at the centre of the research and demonstration program," explained Kieran.

The combination of the focus site at Cummins and the 13 satellite sites enables results to be gathered for a wide range of soil conditions. It also means members are directly involved by either having a trial site on their farm or on a near neighbour's."

Sites are located in an area of about 100km square and include variety trials for wheat, barley, oats, triticale, canola, lupins, peas, beans, lentils, chickpeas and pastures.

At several of the satellite sites, trials on blackleg management in canola are being run. Elsewhere, black tip screening in barley and the impact of delayed harvest on black tip are being assessed. Trials at five locations are dedicated to livestock and pasture management, including animal nutrition and health.

"By having a formal group we have been able to attract researchers to locate trials in our area and have also attracted new research funding into the area," said Kieran

In 2008, LEADA secured a grant from GRDC for a total of \$500,000 over the next five years and a one year grant from the National Landcare Program. These funds will enable the group to continue towards its objective of improving agricultural production on LEP.

Every successful farming systems group is driven by farmers and agronomists from the region and LEADA is no exception. Greenpatch farmer Mark Modra chairs the current LEADA committee.

"Securing GRDC funding is an important milestone for LEADA and presents a unique opportunity for us to commission quality research relevant to our area," said Mark.

"Agricultural survival requires continued improvements in productivity and sustainability. LEADA provides a local research focus to help our region's agriculture to survive and thrive."

Mark believes that for the region to gain the most from this funding it is important that as many producers as possible in the region become members of LEADA.

“As members of LEADA, producers can influence how the funding is invested and ensure that they receive detail of the research outcomes,” said Mark

Membership of LEADA has recently doubled, with more than 50 new members joining in the last few months. The group now represents over 316,000 hectares of farming land on LEP.

An important part of LEADA's success has been its interactions with other farming systems groups through the Ag Excellence Alliance and on interstate visits. In 2006 the group visited the Southern Wheatbelt of Western Australia and in 2008 the high rainfall and cropping regions of Victoria. These visits and interaction not only provide information on production systems, but also enable members to see how other groups function and evolve as they mature.

More information:

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