

## Youth drive

Whilst the statistics tell us the average age of farmers is increasing one farming systems Group is bucking the trend with nearly 50% of the management committee under 35 years old. At last year's annual general meeting the MacKillop Group elected Lucindale farmer Lachie Seears as their chairman. At 26 Lachie is probably the youngest chairman of a farming systems group in SA; but how are the MacKillop Group successfully recruiting younger farmers to the group?

Executive Officer Ken Solly believes much of the MacKillop Group's success in involving younger farmers is due to past chairmen Ian McNeil and Wayne Hawkins enthusiasm for encouraging young people. Both of these farmers employ young people including undergraduates and graduates from Marcus Oldham College. They have actively encouraged younger farmer to be involved with the group and together with other committee members have mentored younger committee members.

Part of the mentoring process the group has in place is to support financially two members, each year, to attend the Rural Leadership Program at Marcus Oldham College, organised by the Southern Farming Systems project, to which MacKillop is affiliated.

Current chairman Lachie Seears reports that attending this program gave him the communication skills and the confidence to chair meetings, introduce speakers and developed his skills to work as a team. Lachie also found the program a great place to meet with likeminded people.

The management committee of the MacKillop Group consists of 14 members. Nine farmer representatives of which four are under 35, three executive positions including Jen Lillecrapp who is in her thirties and two agribusiness members including Jonothan Reichl of Rabobank, who is also under 30 and the groups treasurer. To ensure continuity but also change the group has a succession plan in place.

"We have two positions deputy chair and chair," explains Ken Solly. "A person starts as deputy chair for a year, then is chairman for two years and returns to deputy chair for a further year, after this they can remain on the committee but we are constantly encouraging a rotation of responsibility so no one becomes burnt out."

Lachie believes that it is vital for farming systems groups such as MacKillop to have young farmers actively involved as they are the industries future but he also recognises the strength the group gains from being able to harness the experience and knowledge of his peers to the enthusiasm and drive of his contemporaries.

The MacKillop Group has also organised its committee meetings so they do not become onerous, especially as the group has representatives from the whole of the South East. The committee meets every two months from 3pm until 6pm followed by a dinner. This combination of business and social activities very much reflects the style of the MacKillop Group that roughly divides its activities between 60 percent research and 40 percent extension.

The annual tour that has taken growers to WA and NZ is an example of the type of combined extension, education and social activities that the MacKillop Group organises. This year's tour is to northern New South Wales and Queensland in September. Other activities for the year include spray technology and grain marketing workshops.

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