



e-news www.agex.org.au

February 2010

e-news is designed to share information and improve linkages between SA Grower Groups, NRM bodies, Researchers and key agricultural stakeholders - *please feel free to share it around to your members and key stakeholders*

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Ag Excellence Alliance Forum & Awards Dinner

The Annual **Ag Ex Forum & Awards Dinner will be held on Monday March 22nd, 2010 at the Arkaba Hotel, Fullarton.**

Ag Ex acknowledges the support of the following to provide this Forum free of charge to invitees;

- * **Platinum & Awards Sponsor – Elders Ltd**
- * **Gold Sponsor - Viterra**
- * **Silver Corporates – Syngas, and PIRSA**
- * **Silver NRM – Adelaide Mount Lofty NRM Board, Eyre Peninsula NRM Board, Northern & Yorke NRM Board, South Australian Murray Darling Basin NRM Board, and the South East NRM Board**

The day provides an opportunity for key people from the SA Grower Groups, NRM bodies, and other agricultural stakeholders, to come together to share information and ideas, and build networks.

Program includes;

- Grower Groups reporting on their key activities and learnings over the past 12 months
- Australian Grains Industry R D & E Strategy – Professor Rob Lewis, Executive Director, SARDI
- Soil Protection – Are We Meeting Our Targets – Tim Herrmann, Senior Technical Advisor, DWLBC
- Joint presentation by Father and Daughter team, Belinda and Andy Barr, on Engaging Youth, and Working with all Generations
- Workshop on Mentoring and Working with the various Generations

The **Elders Ag Excellence Grower Group Award** winners will be announced at the Dinner with the Winners taking out the \$3000 prize pool. All Grower Groups are welcome to nominate for the Award, check www.agex.org.au for the criteria

Nominations close on Friday February 26th. Please forward an electronic version and hardcopy to Ag Ex Admin officer, Lorraine Rice, at PO Box 15, Minlaton, 5575 and lorraine@agex.org.au

The 2009 joint winners were the Mallee Sustainable Farming Group and the Yorke Peninsula Alkaline Soils Group who shared in the \$4000 prize money.

Invitations will be going out shortly to Grower Group, NRM and other key stakeholder representatives.

Ag Ex Welcomes Mellor Olsson

After a break of a few months the Ag Ex Stock Journal page featuring a different Grower Group each month and the Around the Regions section will return, thanks to a 12 month sponsorship arrangement with Mellor Olsson.

Mellor Olsson Lawyers have been working with South Australian businesses for over 100 years and have a history of serving regional communities. They offer one of the most comprehensive legal services in the state. To find out more about their services and experience check out www.mellorolsson.com.au

The Stock Journal page has operated on a rotational basis so those Grower Groups who didn't have the opportunity of a Ag Ex funded page in 2009 will be first on the list for 2010. The Around the Regions section is available to all Groups to briefly promote activities.

Due to funding constraints Emma Leonard who previously worked with the Groups to write stories will no longer be doing this. Each Group will need to pull the story together ready for Stock Journal editorial staff to put finishing touches on. Ag Ex staff will make contact with Groups prior to their opportunity to take up the Stock Journal page.

DWLBC and PIRSA partner with Ag Ex

The Department of Water, Land & Biodiversity Conservation and Primary Industries & Resources SA are partnering with Ag Ex to take facilitated workshops into NRM regions to bring NRM staff, growers, agencies, and other industry stakeholders together to discuss current Sustainable Agriculture programs and priorities and identify any gaps. These workshops will be rolled out from early April with 6 initially in the South East, Eyre Peninsula, Northern & Yorke, and SA Murray Darling Basin NRM regions, with a further two to follow after evaluation of the first round.

DWLBC Sustainable Ag Initiative

Ag Ex has been fortunate to receive funding through DWLBC's State NRM Program Sustainable Dryland Agriculture Initiative. The regional meetings mentioned above are part of this funding, along with support to continue with the Ag Ex E-News, organise the annual Forum and Awards Dinner, supporting face to face planning and review meetings, and several other roles that Ag Ex plays in coordinating and supporting Groups. Ag Ex welcomes this support and acknowledgment of the role it plays.

Lucerne Australia

Ag Ex welcomes Lucerne Australia as the most recent Grower Group to come under its umbrella. Many members of Lucerne Australia are also broadacre farmers. Chair is Shane Oster, and Charlie Crozier the Executive Officer based at Keith. Charlie can be contacted on info@lucerneaustralia.org.au.

The Ag Ex Forum in March will provide an opportunity for strengthening networks and information sharing between Lucerne Australia, Ag Ex, Grower Groups, and other industry stakeholders.

Caring For Our Country Grant

Grower Groups intending to submit C4C applications are encouraged to contact Ag Ex. We have developed a hard copy "dummy" project template that may assist Groups in completing the online application process. Ag Ex could help bring Groups together to choose whether to partner in any similar project themes.

At this point Ag Ex is not planning to submit an application to fund its operations under this current round as the criteria appears to be specifically geared to delivering on ground change which is more suited to Grower Groups activities rather than increasing collaboration between NRM, Grower Groups and available expertise to improve farm practices.

Grain & Graze 2

Ag Ex has completed a national Livestock Training Needs study for GRDC to benefit Mixed Farming Enterprises. Ag Ex's Jen Lillecrapp, supported by a sub committee has prepared a very detailed report which has recently been presented to GRDC.

On March 9 -10, Ag Ex representatives have a meeting with all participating state bodies, GRDC, and other partners to finalise the Grain & Graze 2 Project. Ag Ex will be in touch with the relevant Grower Groups in the near future with information of how this will be carried out.

“Landcare Celebrates – 20 Years of Achievements and Future Challenges

The 2010 National Landcare Forum will be held at the Allan Scott Park, Morphettville, Adelaide, on 23-24th March with Field trips on the 25th March. The Forum will include workshops, presentations, demonstrations, a gala forum dinner, and an exhibition including displays from around Australia.

Delegates will have the opportunity to learn about the latest research developments in Natural Resource Management and sustainable agriculture, develop new networks and new skills, celebrate 20 years of achievements and recognise the significant contribution the community has made over the last 20 years.

For details and registration please go to: www.nationallandcareforum.com.au

Partners In Grain “Understanding Biotechnology”

PinG is working with the Molecular Plant Breeding CRC to bring two “Understanding Biotechnology” workshops to South Australia. The first on February 23rd will be held at Cleve at the Hotel, and the other at Naracoorte at the Settlers Café on February 25th. Contact Kim Blenkiron for more details 0427 592 243.

SPAA News

Like most Farming Systems Groups, February and March see a plethora of activities. The SPAA committee will be meeting in February and will be spending time in developing its future by revising and updating its strategic plan which plans to set the directions for the organisation for the next three years.

Our flagship newsletter will also be released in mid March, and expect to see articles on the mallee calculator, water management and new PA developments such as robotics.

SPAA was successful with two sustainable farming grants awarded by the Eyre Peninsula NRM board, and this has led to the workshop hosted in the Western EP later this month.

SPAA has also been invited to participate in a number of meetings and activities including the GRDC Precision Agriculture Think Tank, comments on the N&Y NRM plans and the rural R&D council investment plans and an invitation to present at the Sugar Cane Technologist conference in May.

Grower groups

The February/ March Variable Rate Workshops are well and truly underway with its planning. We continue to look forward working with the many farming systems groups involved with our GRDC funded project. The next series of workshops will take place on the following dates;

- 22nd February with LEADA (Lower EP) @ Cummins
- 23rd February with Minnipa (Western EP) @ Wudinna
- 23rd February with EPARF (Upper EP) @ Kimba
- 15th March with YPASG (Yorke Peninsula) @ Maitland
- 16th March with UNFS (Upper North) @ Jamestown
- 16th March with Hart Field Site Group (Mid North) @ Clare
- 17th March with Ag Bureau (Upper South East) @ Coonalpyn
- 18th March with MSF (SA Mallee) @ Loxton
- 19th March with MSF (Vic Mallee) @ Mildura

These workshops offer attendees to learn about how to make variable rate happen! (even if you don't have the controller equipment), these workshops are designed to improve knowledge on the principles of PA, prescription maps and about targeted phosphorus use. It will also be a chance for each group to choose a PA trial for their region that will be visited at the next workshop. The cost to

participate is \$50 or you can join SPAA membership which provides admission to all 3 activities planned for 2010.

Precision Ag EXPO - at the **Clare Sports Club on Thursday 18th February**. The annual event is an opportunity for all landholders and industry personnel to gain some practical knowledge in the use of PA technologies.

Mr Nick Poole for the Foundation of Arable Research in New Zealand is our international guest speaker presenting on whether active crop sensors allow growers to make better decisions on crop management in cereals. We also have Ian Delmenico from CropRite talking about EM mapping (soil surveys) and Ben Jones on pre-seeding N application, Sam Trengove updating us on Site Specific Weed Management, and Leighton Wilksch discussing how soil moisture monitoring will aid decision making.

A facilitated panellist session including Giuseppe Cuteri (Leeton grain grower), Richard Heath (GRDC Northern panel member and Gunnedah farmer) and local PA users offer attendees the opportunity to quiz leading PA users on the pros, cons and practicalities of such technologies plus lots more such as sponsor displays and presentations. The cost to attend is only \$25 for SPAA members and students or \$75 for non-members. Further details are available from the SPAA website www.spaa.com.au including registration forms.

Churchill Fellowships - Congratulations Bill Long

Congratulations to Ag Ex vice chair and YP Alkaline Soils Group stalwart Bill Long on being awarded a Churchill Fellowship. Bill and Jeanette will be travelling overseas during March and April to investigate the effect of varroa mite on bee populations and how it has impacted on crops that are dependent bees for pollination. They will be looking at the "Operation Pollinator" projects in the UK and Europe. Danny LeFeuvre, and Michael Richards, will be joining them for short periods to be involved with various aspects of the study tour.

Perennial Pastures - Providing more feed when you need it Right Plant, Right Place, Right Purpose

When Wednesday 24th February 2010
Where Elad Shed, Yacca Park, Lucindale (South East Field Days site)
Time 8.45am to 4.00pm
Cost \$20 payable on the day to cover costs of smoko, lunch and bus trip. **Free Childcare available**

For more information:

- contact Dr Nick Edwards, SARDI, Struan Research Centre P: (08)8762 9184 M: 0427-012 810
Email: nick.edwards@sa.gov.au

RSVP by Wednesday 17th Feb for catering & organisational purposes to **Krysteen McElroy, Executive Officer, MacKillop Farm Management Group, mob; 0408 655 108, email; mfmfg@bigpond.com**

New NRM Research Alliance Project

The Natural Resource Management Research Alliance is supporting a research project on “Regional communities adapting to climate change” under its Human Dimensions program. The lead researcher is Professor Guy Robinson, Director of the Centre for Rural Health and Community Development at the University of South Australia. He will be assisted by two new recruits to the Centre, Karen Cosgrove and Jen Cleary, both formerly with PIRSA/Rural Solutions.

The research project focuses on key networks and organisations in South Australia which provide advice to farmers on environmental schemes, including guidance on adaptations to increased heat and drought, and related policy options and policy delivery. The project aims to increase understanding of the roles and activities of the various organisations and networks, to help coordinate advice to farmers.

One wider aim of the project is to understand the role of the various agencies and groups in influencing and designing NRM policy and in policy implementation, with a view to giving relevant stakeholders more understanding of their role in policy development. The project should help to identify limitations in the current chain that connects farmers to government (farmers’ organisations, farm advisers, NRM Boards and government departments at state and federal level) thereby producing policy that can better deliver desirable outcomes in adapting to increased heat and drought.

The first stage of the project will involve collecting material in the public domain from organisations as diverse as the Agricultural Excellence Alliance, government departments, NRM Boards, the Farmers’ Federation, the Native Vegetation Council, and representatives of community groups. Later in the year members from these organisations will be invited to participate in workshops, focus groups and interviews. The final report and any papers published from the research will be available to all participants, and there will be opportunities for all interested groups, organisations and individuals to have their views represented. In the first instance the focus will be on the Eyre Peninsula and the Northern and Yorke regions, but organisations throughout the state will be participating.

For further information please contact Professor Robinson: guy.robinson@unisa.edu.au (Tel. 0434181279).

Introduction to Pasture Cropping Courses

These courses will be held in SA at Berri 18 – 19 Feb and Clare 22 – 23 Feb and cover cropping and grazing practices to best regenerate and manage native grasses in a grazing and cropping farming system. Michael Richards recently attended this course in Dubbo rates it highly. FarmReady funding is available for eligible participants, needs to be applied for 5 days prior. The course is delivered by three farmers who use and have developed the practices and covers practical issues, financial, risk and environmental issues. For further information Contact Danielle Bonnington danielle@pasturecropping.com, 0402 211 657 or Michael Richards 0427 547 052, michael.nynrm@internode.on.net

Support to Northern & Yorke Region from DWLBC

Ag Excellence Alliance and the Northern & Yorke NRM Board have assisted groups operating in the Northern and Yorke with obtaining state government funds to improve farming practices in the Northern & Yoke Region. \$160,000 has been allocated to the Groups operating in the Northern & Yorke region through DWLBC and the 2009 – 10 State NRM Program Sustainable Agriculture Initiative. The money has to be spent by the 30 of June 2010. For more information contact Michael Richards 0427 547 052, michael.nynrm@internode.on.net

Caring For Our Country Funding – N & Y Region

Michael Richards Landcare Facilitator in the Northern & Yorke region is interested in hearing from groups and individuals in the Northern & Yorke region who are interested in assessing CFOC funding. Please contact Michael as soon as possible. Michael Richards 0427 547 052, michael.nynrm@internode.on.net

Well Done “Mallee Challenge Paddock” Winners!!

Last season the “Mallee Challenge Paddock” program involved about 40 farmers setting up split paddock demonstrations to try and find some answers for various issues in sustainable farming. As MSF members they were able to access highly subsidised soil, root disease and leaf tests, giving them key information about what problems may occur, or what management strategies might help.

As a result, 6 regional prize winners of \$250 Toolboxes (with tools) were chosen, based on the importance of the issue for sustainable mallee farming, and how well the demonstration was conducted and reported. The SAMDB NRM has also donated a prize of \$500 for the overall Mallee winner, which will be announced in the very near future.

Regional Toolbox Prize Winners Are:

- **Peter Loller of Borrika** who wanted to know if the areas he had clay spread were suffering manganese deficiency. After testing he found he had deficiency where he clayed, but also on his non-clayed red ground. He applied 5.7l/ha of 17.3% manganese complex or approx. 1kg/ha of manganese, costing about \$7/ha. The yield was 0.825t/ha in the control, and 1.0t/ha where the manganese was sprayed. This increased barley yield resulting in \$22/ha extra income. Peter will test more paddocks this coming season.
- **Wade Nicholls of Pinnaroo** tested 4 varieties in a paddock to see which might be the best option for wheat on wheat. Catalina resulted in the highest yield of 1.79t/ha, followed by Wyalcatchem (1.73t/ha), Gladius at 1.70t/ha and finally Espada at 1.55t/ha. However, after last years 85mm harvest rainfall only Wyalcatchem and most of his Catalina passing the falling numbers test, making them clearly the most profitable at \$190/t, against the downgraded feed wheat price of \$160/t. After grading his Tanami canola to maintain excellent seed quality, he sowed it on 60cm row spacing at 1kg/ha which gave a 20% yield increase over sowing 2kg/ha at 60 or 30cm row spacings. This was worth an extra \$50/ha income, which means Wade will definitely be giving this seeding strategy a go.
- **Mark Stoeckel of Paringa**, who tried various fertiliser rates, wheat varieties and tillage treatments across different soil zones on a paddock he has had zoned through EM38 mapping. Mark was aiming to tackle rhizoctonia, test the potential benefits of moving to variable rate farming, as well as explore the worth of cutting costs and better managing risk. This was a fairly complex arrangement, some key findings included:
 - * the benefits of zinc application,
 - * 25kg/ha of urea to all DAP rates from 0-50kg/ha gave a dramatic yield response, and with 30kg/ha DAP giving the best gross margin.
 - * While zero fertiliser generally gave the best gross margins across the zones, the highest yields were obtained from a base rate of 50kg/ha DAP (33% ave yield increase). This suggests that while dramatically cutting fertiliser may be okay in the short term in low yielding years, it will not be sustainable and could be quite costly for him in years of higher potential.

Mark said that he has also gained a clearer understanding of how to set up trials this season that will better target his issues and give him even more meaningful results.

- **Dean Wormald of Caliph** explored different fertiliser options to find which strategies are going to be the most efficient in the light of increasing fertiliser costs for his intensive farming system. Each of the fertiliser rates was set so that the cost per hectare was the same, so that yield differences would determine the result. Soil tests showed that soil P levels were adequate at 22ppm, with an organic carbon of 0.8 and estimated plant available N in the root zone of 36kg/ha and that an extra 25kg/ha N would be required to target a 1.5t/ha crop at 12% protein. All areas were seeded with Wyalcatchem wheat at 45kg/ha and 30kg/ha MAP+3%Zn. After a very difficult growing season, Dean found the area with 30kg/ha urea yielded 0.70t/ha, while 30kg/ha SOA produced 0.66t/ha (6% less) and a seed dressing product with 10lt/t VAM and 5kg/ha humates yielded 0.63t/ha (10% less).
- **Tim Starkey of Cambrai** was able to test 2 No till seeding machines into a paddock with high rhizoctonia soil inoculum, and found that the Morris Contour Drill with increased soil disturbance with fertiliser placement below the seed gave 8% yield advantage, and confirmed his move toward purchasing this machine. He was also able to test a range of fertilisers (including fluids) and seed dressings, and found that liquid zinc in furrow with granular fertiliser gave the best return, and that his soils were not responsive to liquid P.

Other points to note.

While paddock results were not all scientifically replicated trials, they have often given good indications of things that may require further investigation, or that farmers can easily improve their management on. One of the main benefits has been farmers getting out, doing tests and trying things out on their own farms. All farmers are to be congratulated for having a go, especially those visited by farmer groups during the year.

Other trial work has resulted from some of these paddocks, including a SARDI Variety Trial for low phosphorus soils and P response.

General trends also emerged. It was interesting that out of about 30 root disease soil tests conducted; all but one came back with high rhizoctonia, no matter what soil type or farming system. The run of dryer winters has generally favoured this disease over its microbial competitors that require a higher crop growth and fresh carbon turnover to build up. Despite this disease potential being widely present, it did not always cause major visual crop symptoms in paddocks. This may have been due to a number of reasons:

1. the greater use of early sowing and deep working narrow points mean that the primary roots are quickly growing away from the disease, and the disease tends to attach the secondary crown or surface roots as they develop when the soil temperature has lowered in June. Although rhizoctonia is present, it does not result in the classic distinct patches that we are used to seeing when the primary roots are lost.
2. many intensive farming systems with high residue retention, deeper working points and good seed placement and adequate fertility find that these things all work together to overcome the disease presence within the crop. It is worth mentioning that one Copeville farmer, (long with other anecdotal evidence) have noticed significantly less rhizoctonia with slightly deeper seed placement. Whether this was due to particular sowing conditions last years, or a general trend worth pursuing remains to be seen.

At this stage it is hoped that the Mallee Challenge program will continue in some form this year, but more information will be given at the various farmer group meetings held in late February and early March.

The SA MSF Committee would like to thank Focus Consulting for grant support, SARDI's Root Disease Testing Service, Syngenta, the SA MDB NRM Board and Rural Solutions SA for their sponsorship and support of this program.

Rural Solutions SA, Loxton

Chris McDonough,

Diary Dates

February

- 15 – 19th SheepConnect Focus Farm Field days on EP – Elbow Hill, Buckleboo, Lock, Kimba, Poochera, Ceduna, contact Mary Crawford 8683 3414
- 18th SPAA Precision Ag Expo at the Clare Sports Club
- 18 – 19th International Cleanskin Sheep Symposium, Wayville, contact 8210 5231
- 18 – 19th Intro to Pasture Cropping Course, Contact Danielle Bonnington 0402 211 657
- 22nd SheepConnect Evergraze Field Day, KI, contact Tim Prance 8552 8058
- 22 – 23rd Intro to Pasture Cropping Course, Contact Danielle Bonnington 0402 211 657
- 23rd Understanding Biotechnology Workshop hosted by PinG at Cleve Hotel
- 24th Perennials Pastures Forum, Lucindale, contact Nick Edwards 8762 9184
- 24th Sheep CRC Update @ Cleve. 8.30am, lunch provided. RSVP Janelle 02 6773 2927
- 25th Understanding Biotechnology Workshop hosted by PinG at Naracoorte's Settlers Café
- 26th SANTFA Conference at AAMI Stadium, Adelaide
- 26th **Closing date for Nominations for the Ag Excellence Grower Group Award**

March

- 2nd SheepConnect USE Women In Livestock "Financial & Climate Resilience", Keith, contact Tiffany Munro 8755 3166
- 3 – 4th GRDC Advisor Update, Adelaide
- 10th Integrated Weed Management Workshop, Lameroo, Limited numbers, contact Mallee Sustainable Farming 03 5021 9100
- 12th T & R Pastoral / Sheep CRC Lamb Forum & Lamb Finishing Code of Practice Consultation Workshop, Murray Bridge
- 18th Precision Ag Workshop, Loxton, 1- 5pm, Limited numbers contact Mallee Sustainable Farming 03 5021 9100
- 15 – 26th Annual Upper Eyre Harvest Report Farmer Meetings with EPARF
- 22nd Ag Ex Alliance Annual Forum & Awards Dinner
- 23 – 25th National Landcare Forum
- 29 – 31st EPARF Focus Site Meetings @ Minnipa, Mudamuckla & Wharminda

April

- 15th Closing date for Caring for Our Country Expressions of Interest and Open Call

July

- 27th Hart Winter Walk
- 28th EPARF Member's Field Day @ Minnipa Research Centre (TBC)

August

- 10 – 12th EP Field Days @ Cleve
16 & 17th Advisory Board of Agriculture AGM in the Upper North region

September

- 15th Minnipa Ag Centre Annual Field Day
21st Hart Field Day

October

- 21st Hart Spring Twilight Walk

The next Ag Ex e-news is planned for late April, so if your group has an activity to report or a diary date, please email Heather Baldock as per details below.

AEA Contacts & Committee

www.agex.org.au

Chair – Mick Faulkner, 0428 857 378, faulkner@sa.chariot.net.au

Vice Chair - Bill Long , bill@agconsulting.com.au

Committee; Mark Stanley, Leighton Pearce, Sharon Honner, Jeanette Long, Deb Baum, Mark Pedlar,

Jen Lillecrapp, Kieran Wauchope, Nigel Wilhelm,

Project Manager - Heather Baldock, 08 8627 4056, 0428 101 416, heather.agex@bigpond.com

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