Riverine Plains September 2022 Newsletter

A (Final) Word from the Chair

with Ian Trevethan

It was great to see Mazz on a recent episode of Q&A on ABC TV. Mazz spoke very eloquently and was a great ambassador for rural and regional areas and almost certainly helped raise the profile of our little organisation… well done Mazz!

We are fortunate to again be coming into spring with a full moisture profile and some high yield potentials. It is a bit of a relief to see the longer days return to enable the crops to pump out moisture and try and keep in front of these regular, heavy rain events. Whilst there are a lot of big crops that are just keeping in front of the wet weather, there are plenty that are succumbing to the pressure and given the forecast of another La Nina, there is a good chance that there will be more crop lost to waterlogging. With high input costs, we have spent more than ever on our crops this year, so any areas lost to water will certainly challenge the bottom line.

Our AGM will be held on Friday 28 October with several Member Director positions that will require filling. The Riverine Plains' Board presently has a fantastic mix of farmers, from those with limited board experience right through to experienced directors, and we're hoping that this mix will continue. Given my own previously limited experience on Boards, I have found my time on the Riverine Plains Committee, and then the Riverine Plains Board, to be an extremely safe and supportive one that has allowed me to develop personally. Whether you have no Board experience or are an experienced Director, I'd encourage you to consider applying for a position. We will be holding an online question-and-answer session via Zoom on Wednesday 12 October for anyone wishing to find out more about what's involved.

This will be my last Chairman's article as I won't be going around as Chair again, but will continue for another 12 months in the role of Immediate Past Chair. I have enjoyed my time immensely as Chair; there was a period where the group found it incredibly difficult to deliver value to members and where, I feel some members became disillusioned with the group. I am proud to have led the Committee and then Board through this time to reach a point where we now have the staffing capacity and a Board that has the group positioned to become one of the pre-eminent grower groups in Australia and one that again has the capacity to deliver solid value to members.

I see it as a privilege to have had the opportunity to put my thoughts down in these articles. Thank you for reading them and being involved in the group.

Cheers,
Ian Trevethan

With thanks to Premier Partner

IKC rural
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AN AGnVET SERVICES BUSINESS

Above: Livestock handling was a focus of the Innovation Expo Farm Tour

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CEO's Update with Catherine Marriott

What a quarter we have had!

Since our last newsletter, we've held the regionally significant Riverine Plains Innovation EXPO, brought on four new projects and employed four new staff. Sadly, we also farewelled one of our team, Kate Parker, who has moved with her family to the Snowy Valleys.

We are especially excited to welcome four new staff members to the team; Claudia Powell, Lynn Macaulay, Brooke Sanderson and Anna Lonergan (see profiles on opposite page).

Lynn Macaulay is our new Membership Officer, which is one of our most historically exciting appointments! Lynn's position is part of Riverine Plains' strategic focus to put our energy back on serving our members. Lynn is originally from Ireland and has spent three years working on-farm, both in WA and more recently in the Riverina. We are delighted she has chosen to join our team. If you haven't reached out to Lynn, please do as she is looking for ideas on how she can serve you better.

Claudia Powell also recently joined us in the role of Communications Manager, based at Wagga Wagga. Claudia has already made a huge difference to our team and is working hard to manage both our internal and external communications.

Brooke Sanderson has joined the organisation as our Executive Assistant. As a Mulwala local, there is no one in this community she doesn't know (which was very handy during her first week, which coincided with our Inaugural Innovation Expo!). She is a delightful addition to our team with her honest, passionate, organised and upbeat manner. She is looking forward to meeting many of you at our upcoming AGM.

We were originally introduced to Anna Lonergan in late 2021 while she was working with NECMA and helping us out on some projects. Anna officially joined the Riverine Plains team in late June 2022 and has done a power of behind-the-scenes work on project management and administration.

The big achievement this quarter was the successful delivery of our first Innovation EXPO (see report on page 7). The next Innovation EXPO is being planned for 2 years time and will have a slightly changed format. Thank you to all our members, partners, attendees and importantly staff and Board for believing in and supporting our vision for putting Riverine Plains, and our region, on the map as a driver of innovation and connection.

We are also pleased to announce that we have brought on several new projects this quarter. These include a *Weather Stations Feasibility* project through a Preparing Australia Grant, a *Nitrogen Banking* project (led by Farmlink), the *Validation of Organic Fertiliser Sources for Crop Nutrition in NE Victoria* project (FAR Manures) and the *Whole-system Redesign of Broadacre Farming of SE Australia* project with Dr Dorin Gupta (University of Melbourne). We will provide more detailed information about these projects in the next newsletter.

Finally, an early heads up about our AGM, to be held on 28 October from 5pm at the Mulwala office. This will be followed by a Pre-harvest Christmas party; all members and partners are invited to join us down on the Mulwala foreshore to share in a sausage/steak, a beverage and some socialisation before the manic harvest season. I look forward to seeing as many of you there.

Catherine Marriott

Farmers inspiring farmers
riverineplains.org.au

Introducing our newest staff members and a farewell to Kate Parker

Communications Manager
Claudia Powell

Claudia grew up on a mixed cropping and livestock farm in far northwest NSW and has an affinity with the land. After living in Sydney for two years, Claudia returned home to Walgett in 2020 for a drought-busting harvest – reaffirming her connection and love for the country life.

Claudia recently commenced work with Riverine Plains in the role of Communications Manager, based in Wagga Wagga.

Claudia manages Riverine Plains' communications channels and the engagement with Riverine Plains' partners. Through collaboration with the Research Team and industry stakeholders, Claudia's role is to ensure an effective strategy is in place to manage both internal and external communications.

Claudia holds a Bachelor of Media and Communications from the University of New England.

Claudia can be contacted by email at claudia@riverineplains.org.au

Executive Assistant
Brooke Sanderson

Brooke joined Riverine Plains Inc as Executive Assistant in 2022 and oversees the day-to-day operations of the organisation.

Prior to this she worked as a Business Development Consultant/Employment Consultant at CVGT Australia, Advertising Consultant at the Yarrawonga Chronicle & Clerk at Belmores Accountants. This experience has provided her with extensive knowledge and a range of skills and attributes.

Brooke strives to be regarded as honest and trustworthy, while combining hard work, discipline, efficiency, dedication and passion.

Outside work, Brooke spends time following children's sporting careers and trying to understand the rules to netball, football and golf. Brooke loves to take off in her caravan with the family and see what Australia has to offer.

Brooke can be contacted by email at brooke@riverineplains.org.au or by phoning the office on 03 5744 1713.

Membership Officer (Graduate)
Lynn Macaulay

Lynn's role is to provide services to members while also aiming to grow the Riverine Plains' membership base. Lynn will be speaking with members to identify gaps and opportunities in our membership services.

Lynn has previous experience working on broadacre cropping farms in NSW and WA, as well as in England, where she spent three years completing her degree in Agriculture and Business Management.

Lynn has a keen interest in innovation, diversification and technology in Agriculture and is based in the group's Mulwala office.

Lynn can be contacted by email at lynn@riverineplains.org.au or by phoning the office on 03 5744 1713.

Project Support Officer
Anna Lonergan

As Project Support Officer, Anna provides administration and project management support to the leadership team, as well as field support for Field and Project officers with new and existing projects.

Anna has a background in Environmental Science and Management, and has a strong passion for sustainable agriculture, research and development, and the conservation of native ecosystems.

Anna can be contacted by email at anna@riverineplains.org.au or by phoning the office on 03 5744 1713.

Above: Anna Lonergan and Rhiannan McPhee

Farewell to Kate Parker

We recently bid farewell to Livestock Project Officer, Kate Parker, who has made the move to the Snowy Mountains region to manage a beef enterprise with her husband and family. We wish Kate all the best.

Uncle Tobys Scholarship Recipient Update with Tom Hatty

We were fortunate to have inaugural Uncle Tobys Scholarship recipient Tom Hatty (pictured above at the Innovation EXPO) join us for a week's work experience recently. The following is an update from Tom on his progress over the past year.

I am currently studying a double degree in Agricultural Science and Commerce, majoring in management at Latrobe University in Melbourne. I am in my 3rd year, with a year still to go. 2022 has been a year much better for study; the return of face-to-face classes has made learning much easier, especially for participating in labs and interacting with classmates.

I'm very much enjoying my degree, especially as I move into more focused subjects such as land and soil. University has been a great place to learn from others and understand aspects of farming to a micro level.

Once I finish my degree, I hope to move straight into the workforce. I'm currently leaning towards the Agribusiness sector and would like to experience different areas of work to see how different people operate. In the long term, I hope to have the opportunity to take over the family farm and continue to work with my dad.

I continue to work on the family farm near Tocumwal at harvest and other busy times. I've also worked for a potato farmer near Tocumwal and a Berrigan-based contractor. I've also experienced other work placements at Kelly's Grain and Elders in Finley. This is all to try and gain knowledge on different areas of farming and to see the different ways that people operate and the reasons why they do what they do.

Most recently I was able to complete a week's work experience with Riverine Plains, which I really enjoyed. I was able to interact with many of the team and learn about what they do and the different trials and projects they are managing.

Finally, I would like to thank Uncle Tobys for their generosity through the Scholarship, as well as Riverine Plains for their continued support of my degree and for supporting youth in agriculture.

Thank you to the Hanrahan Family

Last month, Riverine Plains Senior Project Officer Jane McInnes attended a special event at Coreen, hosted by the Coreen Daysdale Hopefield Buraja United Football/Netball Club.

During the event, Jane spoke about the positive impact that the John Hanrahan Scholarship, named in honour of the late John Hanrahan from Coreen, is having on recipients.

Jane also described how wonderful it was to see the whole community coming together to support the Hanrahan Family and continue John's legacy.

Riverine Plains is privileged to count the Hanrahan Family as supporters of our community and we wish to thank the Hanrahan's for their incredible generosity in donating additional funds towards the Scholarship.

Left to Right, Brianna and Sarah Hanrahan, Jane McInnes, Sean Hanrahan, Denis Tomlinson.

Highlights from the EXPO

A highlight of the Riverine Plains Innovation EXPO (report on page 7) was hearing from our Scholarship recipients on their future aspirations in agriculture.

Congratulations to John Hanrahan Scholarship recipients (pictured below, L to R) Sophie Hanna, Lachlan Quibell and Jess Ryan, as well as Uncle Tobys Scholarship recipient, Tom Hatty, on their excellent presentations!

Irrigated break crops show profitability

At a GRDC Irrigated Discussion Group crop walk in July, demonstration of the "Water Can Profit" economic tool showed that gross margins for irrigated faba beans stack up as well as irrigated canola, based on current prices and using local farmers projected yield, input costs and water use. Irrigated wheat was less profitable than irrigated faba beans and canola.

There was discussion as to why irrigated faba beans have a low level of adoption in the region. One of the issues is the fickle nature of faba bean prices, which fluctuate greatly compared to other crops. In some years, on-farm storage may be required if the grain can't be sold when there is an oversupply. Hence, although potentially quite a profitable crop, beans can be a higher-risk option.

Attendees at the crop walk were also able to view a faba bean seeding rate and variety demonstration at Tim and Ian Trevethan's farm. The demonstration highlights the GRDC and FAR Australia irrigation research at Finley, that shows yields of up to 7t/ha can be achieved. A key factor to achieving this yield is establishing a plant population of 20-30 plants/m^2. The demonstration is examining two varieties (Bendoc and Amberley) and three plant populations. 21 plants/m^2 (farmer practice) compared to 25 plants/m^2 and 28 plants m^2. Discussion on the day included faba bean varieties (i.e. Bendoc can be used for paddocks with certain weed issues, while Amberley has good disease resistance).

A second irrigation crop walk was held during August at Rutherglen, which focused on the agronomic attributes of high yielding irrigated canola crops. The key message was that timing and quality of establishment was critical for producing high yields. The Roundup Ready hybrid canola varieties also provide a genetic yield advantage over the open-pollinated and triazine tolerant varieties. Another key message was that canola plant density is highly correlated with yield, with target densities of 30 - 50 plants/m^2 for hybrid varieties. Lower plant densities may not impact final yield if the plants had even spatial distribution.

Finally the importance of paddock fertility was discussed as a key driver of yield. Management practices that could improve paddock fertility included legume pastures, pulses and manures.

There was also discussion about the impact of slugs in stubble-retained, poorly drained paddocks, which could impact the potential yields achieved in canola. If the paddock is cultivated, rolling is recommended to remove surface clods which provide a favourable habitat for slugs. Any practice that improves soil structure, such as the addition of gypsum which keeps the soil from crusting, can aid in protecting establishing crops from slugs.

Attendees at the July Irrigated Crop Walk discussed faba bean agronomy and gross margins.

Japanese Encephalitis Vaccine

Japanese Encephalitis Vaccine is recommended for people working outdoors for four or more hours per day.

In Victoria, Japanese encephalitis vaccine is available free-of-charge for specific priority groups aged between 50-65 years, including people who may be exposed to the virus where they work.

Vaccinations will be available the GV Health Vaccination Hub in Shepparton, via Jabba the Bus at General Practitioners, and at some pharmacies.

The virus is spread to humans through mosquito bites and may cause a rare and potentially life-threatening infection of the brain. At-risk groups include people in northern and north-west Victoria, and along the Murray River, including people who live near or work on a pig farm.

Visit https://www.health.vic.gov.au/jev for further information about eligibility for the vaccine and to find an immunisation provider as above (vaccination details on the GV Health website)

There were numerous informative presentations at the Riverine Plains Innovation EXPO Field Day

Hay and Silage – finding a secure market & understanding quality

Riverine Plains, together with five other farming systems groups, are participating in the Fodder for the Future project, led by Murray Dairy, which is looking at growing quality fodder for the dairy industry.

July Fodder Producers' workshop (online)

A fodder producers' workshop was held at Youanmite on 7 July, with a focus on building relationships, knowing your hay or silage quality and identifying the advantages, barriers and challenges of selling to different industries.

A key topic was the risky nature of high-quality fodder production given the reliance on the weather being just right at the end of the season. This was raised in the context of 2021, which saw the wet finish affect the quality of silage and hay across the region. Growers also discussed the peace of mind that comes with having good relationships with a buyer before the season starts, as well as the opportunities that exist to grow their networks.

This workshop followed-on from a fodder buyers' workshop held last year and aimed to identify the strengths and weaknesses of being either a buyer or a seller of fodder, and to develop a framework for growers and buyers to establish a long-term plan.

Fodder Paddock Walk - September

On a wet day during September, growers and buyers came together to inspect the fodder demonstration site at Youarang. The site features both Morava and Benetas vetch side by side, with and without oats. The demonstration was established to look at varietal differences, disease and harvestability issues on a paddock scale.

Fodder producers and buyers braved wet conditions to discuss the production and marketing of quality fodder.

During the Field Walk, Kim Honey (IK Caldwell) spoke about fungicides and the importance of timing, as well as the diseases currently being seen in the region. Scott Rathbone from CRC Agrisolutions gave growers an understanding of what consumers are looking for in terms of quality and what is needed from an animal nutrition point of view.

Results from the individual grower and buyer workshops (held in 2021 and July 2022) were also presented. Both buyers and producers of fodder agreed that building the buyer/seller relationship can take time, but once established takes the headache out of selling or buying fodder. The trust in quality also eases a burden and can guarantee product, or sale of a product, in years where it is needed.

For further information about the Fodder for the Future project, please email Jane McInnes at jane@riverineplains.org.au or phone 03 5744 1713.

Soil Extension Workshops; Rand and Buraja

In early September, Riverine Plains hosted Soil Extension workshops at Rand and Buraja, focusing on soil mapping, common soil constraints in the region and amelioration strategies.

Thanks to Dr Kirsten Barlow (Precision Agriculture), Dr Cassandra Schefe (AgriSci) and Helen Burns (NSW DPI) for sharing their expertise and for their assistance running these events. Thanks also to Roy Hamilton for hosting the Rand workshop.

As a follow-up, we will be hosting discussion group meetings in early October to plan amelioration treatments for demonstrations in 2023 and will be engaging with farmers and consultants to ensure practical treatments of local interest are included.

If you are interested in joining the Discussion Group and/or helping to design a treatment plan for two of the paddocks discussed at the workshops, please contact Rhiannan McPhee by emailing rhiannan@riverineplains.org.au or phoning 03 5744 1713.

Soil acidity was a key topic of discussion at the recent Soil Extension project workshops

This project is funded by the Australian Government's Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry through the 'National Landcare Program Smart Farms Small Grants' initiative.

This project is co-funded by the Grains Research and Development Corporation.

Riverine Plains inaugural Innovation Expo a success

Riverine Plains delivered a very successful Inaugural Innovation Expo from 27-29 July, 2022.

The event featured a Farm Tour, Upton Engineering Welcome Drinks, a technology-focused Field Day, the News Edge Microbials Gala Dinner and the Seed Force Innovation Conference.

The three-day EXPO brought over 700 people from across Australia to the Yarrawonga/Mulwala region under the theme 'Farming Ahead of the Curve' and provided an opportunity for farmers and businesses to showcase technologies, create connections, challenge the status quo and share insights.

Agriculture as an industry has always chased opportunities to produce more with less, in a sustainable way, and this event was designed to help farmers capitalise on new technologies, research and ideas to help them continue to achieve prosperous and sustainable businesses.

Riverine Plains CEO, Catherine Marriott said the event exceeded all expectations – the quality of the exhibitors and speakers was incredible and the number of people from our region who engaged with and supported the event was mind-blowing.

The event featured agronomy and animal-technology focused Farm Tours, an Innovation Field Day showcasing the latest in AgTech from across Australia, an Innovation Conference, as well as networking events and a Gala Dinner, which raised over $15,000 for the Riverine Plains' Scholarship fund.

The Field Day also hosted the National Farmers Federation and Victorian Farmers Federation Towards 2030 Forum, which brought the nation's brightest policy minds to the region and gave members an opportunity to engage directly with elected leaders.

The Innovation Conference event hosted a plethora of brilliant speakers, including Mary O'Brien from 'Are you Bogged Mate?', brought to us by Seed Force. Mary presented an important message around men's mental health; shockingly, seven people die by suicide daily in Australia, with a large proportion being rural men. Mary explained that this isn't a problem with men, it's a problem with the environment we create for them to resolve challenges. Mary also spoke of how important it is to lean in and ask the difficult questions if we are worried about someone, as scary as it may seem, because it's hugely important (so don't wait for RUOK day).

Richard Heath, from the Australian Farm Institute, spoke on sustainability markets (carbon credits). He was able to demystify the complexity that surrounds the carbon and environment, social and governance (ESG) space by defining what is a fad, a trend and a principle. His key message for farmers was to start benchmarking your properties as pressure will commence from banks and insurance institutions before it starts to inevitably impact markets.

Decision making in farm businesses was the focus of a presentation by Cam Nicholson (Nicon Rural), who highlighted the difference between a good decision and a right decision (a good decision is informed, a right decision is one where you roll the dice and end up in the right spot). He described decision making as a skill that can be learned but it takes discipline. Key to Cam's messaging was the importance of slowing down and understanding the metrics behind your decisions.

Riverine Plains would like to thank all our partners for their support and in particular; Seed Force, Upton Engineering, New Edge Microbials, AgriFutures Australia, the Grains Research and Development Corporation and Destination NSW.

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Elders Insurance Michael Middleton

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RIVERINA OILS

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Seed Force

syngenta

Soil Sampling

Ag n Vet Precision Agronomy Services
Grace Barden, IK Caldwell Ballarat.

Soil Sampling:

Utilising the latest technology, AGnVET Precision Agronomy Services (incorporating IK Caldwell/ Wheelhouse Group) can provide the tools needed to allow yourself and your agronomist to make informed decisions with confidence.

From collecting the soil samples to analysing the results, our aim is to provide you with absolutely certainty when it comes to management decisions. With input prices showing no signs of slowing down, there has never been a more imperative time to maximise productivity and profitability.

We are now offering grid and zone sampling.

Grid sampling refers to laying a grid of a pre-determined size (1, 2 or 4ha) over a paddock and taking 6-8 cores within each grid. Grid sampling is a great way to gather a large amount of information for an affordable price, allowing for specific areas of the paddock to be treated uniquely, putting fertiliser only where it is truly needed.

Zone sampling refers to a paddock/area that is split into multiple areas. A single zone refers to a full paddock sample, while a 3-zone sample refers to 3 separate regions within a paddock. These regions are each tested and sampled separately. These zones can be created using historical data such as yield maps, NDVI imagery, EM38 maps or general crop performance.

All sample points are georeferenced to ensure consistency and allow for accurate zone creation. Additionally, this georeferencing allows for re-sampling in following years to gain an understanding of how your soil health has transformed as a result of management decisions.

AGnVET's point of difference is that your agronomist is a part of the process from beginning to end, allowing for the agronomist's experience and knowledge to be combined with quantitative data, building a cohesive and bespoke management plan. Collecting high quality data is important, but this data only becomes genuinely worthwhile when it can be implemented in field, to increase on-farm efficiency.

Yield Data Packages:

AGnVET Precision Agronomy Services are also offering yield data packages to help you make data driven decisions and get the most out of your precision ag implements. For many years, modern machinery has been recording yield data. However, generally we have been underutilising this information, often disregarding that yield maps can assist in informing our management decisions.

Our skilled agronomy team can ensure that your machinery is accurately recording before processing and cleaning your yield data at the end of harvest. Additionally, there is the option to create nutrient removal and profitability maps, as well as variable rate prescriptions to find greater efficiencies and achieve more with less.

Welcome to Riverine Plains' newest Valued Partners

Riverine Plains recently welcomed three new Valued Partners; Farmers Business Network, JMH Training and Compliance and the City of Greater Shepparton.

We thank each of our new partners for their support and look forward to working with these organisations in delivering value to our members.

AGT offers more choice to growers with new canola varieties

Australian Grain Technologies (AGT) have broken new ground with the release of three new Open Pollinated (OP) canola varieties, Bandit TT, Renegade TT and Outlaw.

According to Haydn Kuchel, CEO and head of breeding at AGT, the move reinforces Australian Grain Technologies' commitment to providing Australian growers with more choice when it comes to canola variety selection.

"OP canola can provide most growers, especially those in the low and medium rainfall zones, a reduced risk and more profitable option. The cost of seed shouldn't stop you from having better genetics," he says. "When yields are lower, or opening rains are less certain, OP varieties show their greatest profitability improvement over hybrids. "

"Why pay $50-100 upfront to access hybrid seed, if you can get it, without knowing if you will get good establishment, or how the season will finish? AGT is passionate about providing Australian farmers with improved genetics in a way that suits Australians and the Australian climate, " he says. "We believe that these varieties can play an important role for growers, they help to put flexibility and resilience back in the hands of growers."

AGT is also taking an innovative approach in the initial launch of the seed, according to Haydn.

"We are doing this a bit differently. Leading in to the 2023 season, if you're an AGT grower that has planted our wheat, barley, durum or lupin varieties in the past, we will be in touch to offer you free seed of Bandit TT, Renegade TT and Outlaw," he says. "This seed is our 20th anniversary gift to you to say thanks for supporting the company over the past two decades."

AGT canola breeder, Sami Ullah, says that the three varieties have been named in line with the rebellious spirit required to enter the hybrid dominated canola market.

"Bandit TT is a very quick flowering variety that has shown its best adaptation in quick season environments and lower yield potential areas. Meanwhile Renegade TT is a quick flowering variety and picks up from Bandit TT in environments that are mid-yield potential and appears to have wider adaptation. Finally, Outlaw is a very quick flowering conventional variety with impressive yield. Overall, Outlaw has shown yields 4% higher than AV Garnet, leading the charge in the smaller conventional market segment."

Further details regarding AGT canola varieties can be found at agtbreeding.com.au

Photo: Canola Breeder Sami Ullah inspects the new crop at the AGT Roseworthy trial site

Calling aspiring Victorian AgTech entrepreneurs & researchers!

Rocket Seeder's AgTech Seeds pre-accelerator program helps researchers and entrepreneurs take on the opportunities that exist in AgTech today.

The program supports the creation of early-stage AgTech startups in Victoria by bringing together "hybrid" teams of aspiring AgTech entrepreneurs and researchers creating AgTech-applicable IP/know-how at Victorian universities/PFROs.

Rocket Seeder's AgTech Seeds program is suitable for Aspiring Victorian AgTech entrepreneurs, researchers and research teams and farmers/producers with a great idea, looking to scale this up in Australia and beyond

People interested in AgTech Seeds but who live outside of Victoria can express their interest by emailing agtechseeds@rocketseeder.com

Applications close: 28 November 2022

Program dates: 3 February to end April 2023

More information is available at https://www.rocketseeder.com/agtechseeds

Cool Soil Initiative - Progress and GHG emission results

By Dr Cassandra Schefe, AgriSci

The Cool Soil Initiative is an industry program designed to quantify greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) from wheat production and support farmers in reducing emissions, with a focus on soil health. The project is funded by Mars Petcare, Kellogg's, Manildra Group and Allied Pinnacle, in partnership with Charles Sturt University and the Food Agility Cooperative Research Centre, with support from the Sustainable Food Lab.

Riverine Plains Inc, Central West Farming Systems (CWFS), FarmLink and the Irrigated Research and Extension Committee (IREC) are currently supporting 185 farmers to participate in the project. During 2022, 45 dryland wheat growers and 10 irrigated Maize growers from the Riverine Plains region were involved.

Each year, participating farmers provide information on crop inputs and paddock history for up to five dryland wheat or irrigated soft wheat/corn paddocks. This information is combined with results from 0-10cm soil tests and used to calculate GHG emission results for each paddock, which are reported below.

Greenhouse Gas emissions

Crop-based GHG emissions are reported as both emissions/tonne and emissions/ha to consider the impact of variable seasonal conditions. In a high yielding season, the emission footprint/tonne is low, as there are more tonnes to spread the emissions across. In a low-yielding season, there are less tonnes produced, but the up-front inputs don't change, which often leads to more emissions/tonne of yield.

By also considering the hectare values, the total emission footprint per unit of land can be captured; this shows less seasonal variation and better reflects changes to inputs/practice over time.

Figure 1 shows net emissions from Riverine Plains and CWFS from 2017 – 2021 (FarmLink joined the program in 2020). The 2017 dataset was from a small number of paddocks, with the datapoints increasing since. The impact of poor rainfall in 2018 and 2019 can be seen, with increased yield variation and related emissions. 2020 and 2021 were good seasons, though significant rainfall and flooding prior to and through the 2021 harvest resulted in yield penalties.

The median, or middle emission, values for each region in 2021, calculated using the Cool Farm Tool, were 230kg CO2e/t for CWFS (from 133 paddocks), 278kg CO2e/t for FarmLink (from 47 paddocks) and 322kg CO2e/t for Riverine Plains (from 128 paddocks).

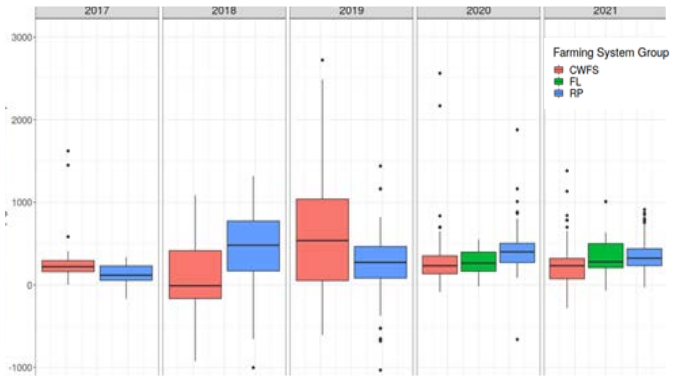


Figure 1. *GHG emissions/tonne (CO2e/t) for wheat grown in the Riverine Plains (RP), FarmLink (FL) and Central West Farming Systems (CWFS) regions. Data represented as box plots; the centre line in each box shows the median, the box shows 50% of the values, and the lines and dots show the degree of variance. If a value is <0, emissions associated with the production of that crop are less than offsets.*

The emission values/ha in Figure 2 show the impact of increased crop inputs in the good seasons of 2020 and 2021, with inputs lowest in the CWFS zone and highest in Riverine Plains. While nitrogen usage is a significant factor behind these emissions, the range in intensity is also driven by the degree of offsets.

In the 2017-2018 seasons, the contribution of pasture phases towards offsetting in-crop emissions may have been overestimated due to the lack of available information at the time, with a greater number of farmers also being within the 20-year window of converting from conventional till to reduced/no-till. Both factors may have contributed towards reduced reported emissions, particularly in CWFS, where most data came from mixed farmers. These GHG values will be recalculated and returned to farmers over the next 12 months, as the emissions calculator is updated with Australian relevant emission factors.

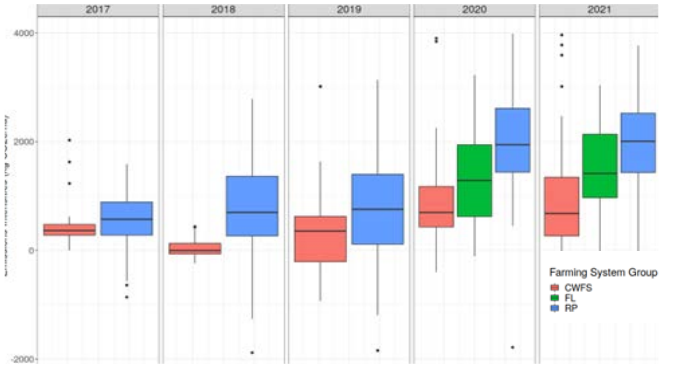


Figure 2. GHG emissions/hectare (CO2e/ha) for wheat grown in the Riverine Plains (RP), FarmLink (FL) and Central West Farming Systems (CWFS) regions. Data represented as box plots, the centre line in each box shows the median, the box shows 50% of the values, and the lines and dots showing the degree of variance. If a value is <0, emissions associated with the production of that crop are less than the offsets.

Cool Soil Initiative - Progress and GHG emission results

Soil carbon values

Soil carbon values are an important parameter in the emission calculation, providing significant offsets. They are also important in understanding the resilience of the farming system; higher carbon values mean higher amounts of soil organic matter, which means greater nutrient cycling, greater water-holding capacity, and greater diversity of microbes.

The range of soil carbon values measured in this program far-exceeded expectations. Note: These values are GPS-referenced, represent measurements at a single point and can be tracked over time.

Figure 3 shows that soil carbon values vary significantly within and between regions.

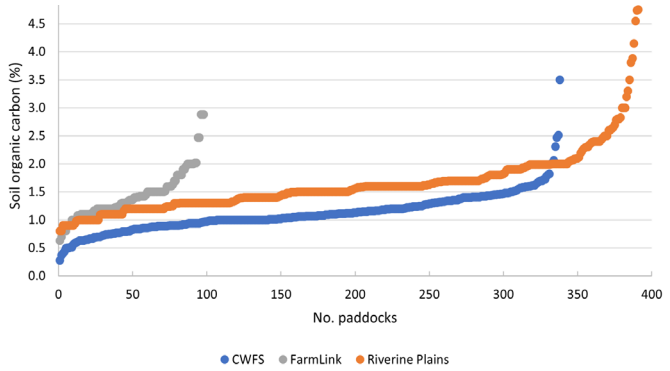


Figure 3. *Soil organic carbon (SOC) (%) values (0-10cm depth) from 827 paddocks across three regions, sampled from 2018 – 2021. Median values for each region are: Riverine Plains SOC = 1.51%, FarmLink SOC = 1.36%, Central West Farming Systems (CWFS) SOC = 1.07%.*

The key similarities (to date) from each region are:

- Riverine Plains: 35 paddocks had SOC > 2%. Of these, 26 had a history of a pulse or pasture phase. All yielded well in 2021, unless they experienced waterlogging.
- FarmLink: 12 paddocks had SOC > 2%. Of these, nine had a history of lucerne, clover-based pasture or pulses. Only one paddock had a pH value < 4.8.
- CWFS: 20 paddocks had SOC > 1.5%. Of these, 15 had a history of lucerne or clover-based pasture, only 1 with pH <4.8 and good yields in 2021 (unless flooded).

When farmers grew a legume in 2019 in both CWFS and Riverine Plains, the wheat yield in 2020 was consistently high, with a tighter range of yields, compared to a broad spread of yields when they did not. This trend was not clear in 2021, likely due to yield penalties from the wet harvest, and fewer legumes grown in 2020.

This very basic assessment shows there is a strong connection between the background soil fertility, SOC values and yields. This is a key area of interest for the program, which will continue to be explored.

Farmer Practices

While on-farm emission calculations are being undertaken for dryland wheat and corn/soft wheat in irrigated systems, the emission footprint from those crops is largely driven by the practices preceding them, and/or broader farming system practices.

There was a general reduction in legume content in 2021; this is likely due to farmers opting for low-risk options during the low rainfall years of 2018-2019 and strong commodity pricing for cereals and canola in the high rainfall year of 2020.

Several farmer practices were observed to have increased from 2020 to 2021, as shown in Figure 4, however not all can be attributed to the Cool Soil Initiative. The increase in lime application and incorporation by participants may be partly attributed to the program's messaging about the importance of increasing pH and physical mixing of lime into the soil to remove strongly acidic subsurface layers.

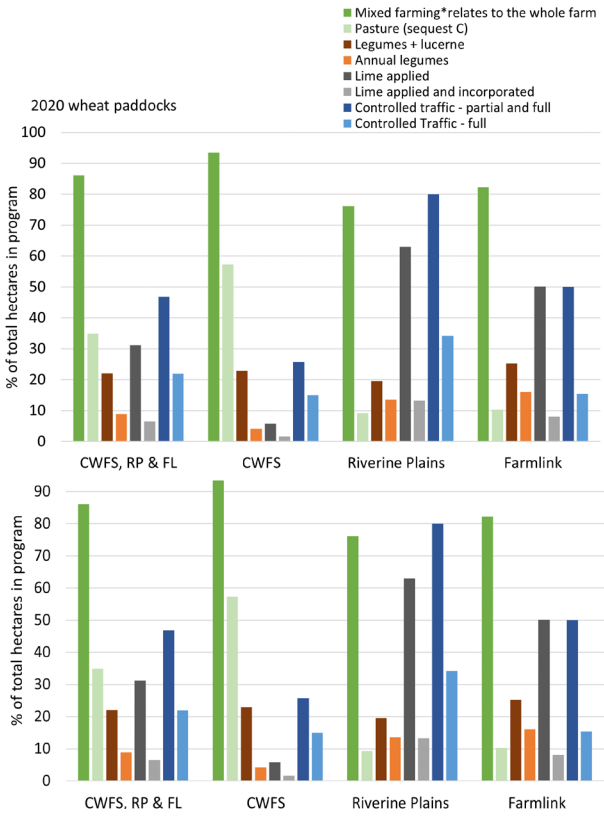


Figure 4. Farmer practices captured via Cool Soil Initiative data collection in 2020 and 2021 across all regions (CWFS, RP & FL), and separately. These practices are captured as activities within the current and previous 3 years of paddock activity. Total hectares represented were CWFS (2020: 12,653ha 2021: 16,335ha), RP (2020: 8,468ha 2021: 8,514ha), FL (2020: 2,672ha 2021:3,690ha)

Cool Soil Initiative - Progress and emission results

Conclusion

The Cool Soil Initiative is a pre-competitive, collaborative approach to understanding the key drivers to on-farm emissions, while supporting food industry partners in learning more about the farming systems from which they purchase their grain. Farmer engagement and feedback is pivotal to the success of this program, and farming system groups provide strong support and advocacy for farmers.

The Cool Soil Initiative is continuing to learn and grow to provide on-ground benefit in supporting farmers in the sustainable production of food from productive, profitable farming systems.

There are currently places available for wheat and maize farmers to participate in the project. Farmers interested in learning more about monitoring their emissions through the Cool Soil Initiative in 2022–23 can contact Project Officer Jane McInnes on (03) 5744 1713 or email jane@riverineplains.org.au

Riverine Plains' CSI farmers discuss GHG emissions, tour Mars Petcare

Riverine Plains' Cool Soil Initiative participants recently met to discuss their on-farm greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and tour the Mars Petcare factory in Wodonga.

Mars Petcare is a founding partner of the Cool Soil Initiative, which has been joined more recently by Kellogg's, Manildra Group, Allied Pinnacle, Charles Sturt University and the Food Agility Cooperative Research Centre.

The Initiative supports wheat and maize growers to monitor and manage their greenhouse gas emissions, while exploring how different farming practices can provide long-term carbon and soil health benefits.

As part of the program, farmers submit crop input and paddock history data, which when combined with soil test data and yield results, allows greenhouse gas emissions to be calculated for each paddock.

Riverine Plains' Cool Soil Initiative participants discuss their greenhouse gas emissions..

CSI farmers meet to discuss GHG emissions, tour Mars Petcare

Riverine Plains' Cool Soil Initiative participants also enjoyed a tour of the Mars Petcare plant at Wodonga.

Coming together to discuss individual paddock results as a group helped highlight the factors driving on-farm emissions and the factors that can influence the spectrum of results season-to-season.

Being involved in the Initiative also helps pinpoint areas of inefficiency and production constraints within farming systems.

This is one of the Cool Soil Initiative's major benefits because it helps identify areas for improvement and has the potential to generate significant input cost savings and production gains.

Mars Petcare is a significant purchaser of grain from southern NSW and north-eastern Victoria. The day also provided an opportunity for farmers to tour the Mars Petcare facility at Wodonga and hear how the company is working to reduce the environmental impacts of its business.

The group enjoyed the tour of the facility and appreciated the opportunity to hear how grain is sourced and integrated into products.

The importance of quantifying on-farm emissions is only likely to increase over time as a result of government and consumer pressure and this project is leading the way in providing a framework for local farmers to start considering their emissions.

Wheat/maize farmers interested in learning more about the Cool Soil Initiative can contact Jane McInnes on (03) 5744 1713 or jane@riverineplains.org.au

Further information about the Cool Soil Initiative is available at https://riverineplains.org.au/cool-soil-initiative/

The Cool Soil Initiative is funded by Mars Petcare and the Sustainable Food Lab, Kellogg's, Manildra Group and Allied Pinnacle, in partnership with Charles Sturt University and the Food Agility Cooperative Research Centre (CRC).

Riverine Plains Canada Study Tour.

Nineteen farmers took part in the Riverine Plains and Jeromy Nolan study tour to Canada from 14–22 July, 2022. The tour had a focus on learning from each other and sought to provide a perspective on how Canadian farmers are tacking big issues such as drought (which has been impacting Canada for 18 months), government policy and labour shortages.

Calgary Stampede / Background to farming issues

The group arrived in Calgary for the famous Calgary Stampede; "The Greatest Show on Earth", which was back at full-strength post-COVID. The Stampede is a huge Agricultural Show and the Riverine Plains group assimilated well in cowboy hats and matching cowboy boots! A highlight of the first day was seeing Australian buckjumper, Damien Brennan, who won his event.

At the Stampede, the group met farmers and young agricultural professionals from the International Agricultural and Agrifood Committee. They described political frustration towards the current government for not expanding Canada's gas reserves (Canada has large oil and gas reserves, with many of the farms visited also having small oil wells). The oil and gas sector also competes for labour and this has put upward pressure on wages of farm workers.

Carbon emissions and the environment are under the spotlight across all agricultural sectors in Canada and there is fear that the Canadian government may also introduce extreme measures (buying farms and putting them out of production) to reduce carbon emissions. Reduced nitrogen application on farm is a strategy being proposed to meet carbon emission reduction targets in broadacre cropping systems.

In the cropping sector, there is also pressure to regulate the use of some chemicals. Within the dairy sector, there is competition from non-dairy products, such as oat and almond milk. The Canadian dairy sector is still regulated and the government controls supply using a quota system. All industries promoted how they are trying to reduce their environmental footprint; i.e the beef industry has set a target

to reduce GHG emissions by 33% by 2030 and sequestering an additional 3.4 million tonnes of carbon every year.

Calgary is in Alberta, which produces about one third of Canada's grain. Alberta's main annual crop is wheat (8.3 million tonnes (Mt)), followed by canola (6.3 Mt), barley (4 Mt), peas (1.6 Mt), durum (1 Mt), oats (0.5 Mt) and lentils (0.16 Mt).

The group had a second day at the Calgary Stampede, with highlights the Chuck Wagon Races and the Indigenous Relay. Indigenous clans have a large site at the stampede, showcasing their culture and history.

Kyle Tarkowski

At the Alberta Canola Commission (Canada has commissions for each commodity, represented in each province of Canada, which are equivalent to GRDC), we met Kyle Tarkowski who farms 2,550 ha north of Calgary. Kyle grows red wheat (a high quality bread wheat), canola, peas and barley; his rotation is generally wheat after peas and barley after canola, with canola being the most profitable. Kyle block farms for ease of management and canola yields average 2.2t/ha and wheat yields an average 5.9t/ha. Similar to our local region, much of the barley and cereal straw goes into local feedlots.

Challenges include sandy soils and the risk of getting the soil-borne canola disease "club root" (detections of club root mean that canola cannot be grown on that area for at least 5 years). To manage the risk, Kyle grows club root resistant canola and prioritises shatter-resistant varieties. During the recent drought, Kyle had to pay out/roll over grain contracts, and as a result, is forward-contracting less grain.

In terms of carbon emissions reductions, a proposal is to reduce nitrogen applications on broadacre farms. Kyle believes that this can be achieved through variable rate nitrogen application, as well as reducing overlaps. Last year, Kyle reduced his inputs by avoiding overlap, which was equivalent to applying zero inputs to 32 hectares. Kyle also has a "TikTok" page (@darglenfarms) with 14,700 follows featuring fun videos of farming life.

Riverine Plains Canada Study Tour.

Columbia Icefields

The group visited the Columbia Ice-fields, stopping at Bow Lake and then onto the Athabasca Glacier, spotting some black bears on the side of the road! The glaciers on Canada's Ice-fields hold about one third of the world's fresh water. The Athabasca glacier has been receding/melting for the last 125 years and in that time has lost over half its volume. This is a reminder of the impact of climate change and its affect on the most fragile parts of our planet.

The group also visited the beautiful glacial Lakes Peyto, Louise and Moraine. These lakes are turquoise in colour, due to rock flour carried in the glacial melt that trickles down to the lake. The sun reflects off these particles, refracting blue and green wavelengths of light and a few of the group decided to take a dip in the (refreshing!) 8°C water. We then visited the spiral train lookout to see an engineering feat that allow trains to do a figure-eight in and out of the mountain to safely traverse the steep slope.

Banff

After a tour of the historic Banff Springs Fairmont hotel, the group rafted the Bow River, which runs through Banff (the river and waterfall freeze over during the winter months when temperatures reach -35 °C). From the raft, we had beautiful views of the surrounding mountains and unusual rock formations called "hoodoos".

DrumHeller

The group visited 'Cattleland', a family-owned 25,000 head feedlot, managed by Australian, Mick Taylor. The feedlot is located on 5,000 ha, which also has 600 cows, cereals, pulses, canola, silage and lucerne. The farm has 7 pivots, which are used to grow a variety of fodder and grain crops. Annual snowfall is 200mm (10% of which is available as soil moisture when it melts) plus 225 mm of growing season rainfall. During winter, cattle stay in the feedlot and the ground is frozen for 7 months to a depth of 2m.

The feedlot markets it's own branded beef "Authentic Angus" into the European Union (EU) market and also into North America. The EU market attracts a premium, but has restrictions on hormone use. Over the past two years, COVID has impacted the ability of abattoirs to process cattle, due to staff shortages. Due to a lack of capacity, Cattleland has entered a joint venture with European buyers to build a local abattoir.

Hutterites

Our next visit was to a local Hutterite Colony operating 10,120 ha. Their enterprise included a state-of-the-art 145 cow dairy, broiler production and 600 sow piggery. The Hutterites are religious communities made up of family groups who work collectively for the common good of the group, with an average size of 120 people. They are self-sufficient, making all their own food, clothing, housing and employing other Hutterites as electricians, plumbers, builders, mechanics, cooks, cleaners and teachers. They also generate a significant surplus from the farm, which helps fund new colonies.

The Hutterites originally left Germany in the 1500's (where they were persecuted) and they have retained the dress and language of their ancestors, who arrived in Canada in 1918. There are now 370 Hutterite colonies in Canada, who play a significant role in Canadian agricultural production.

Riverine Plains Canada Study Tour.

Although they adopt the latest farming technology, their social structure is old-fashioned. The outside world, television and social media is shunned and women are restricted to cleaning, cooking and are not able to have a driver's license.

The McDougalds

The group also visited Brad, Koren and Liam McDougald who have a mixed 2,000ha farm. Average rainfall is 275mm for the growing season, with additional moisture provided by snow melt in spring. They have 220 cows plus calves, which are grazed as one mob over the areas of the farm that are not suitable to crop. There are no fences and cattle are managed with electric fencing.

The recent drought saw feed prices sky-rocket, and many ranchers drastically reduced cattle numbers, however the McDougalds were able to keep their cattle due to good silage reserves. Droughts occur around every 15 years, with the adoption of minimum tillage dramatically decreasing erosion in the region, which is known for strong winds. As a result of the recent drought, Brad now aims to have two years supply of feed on hand.

The McDougalds crop canola, wheat, barley, field peas and more recently lentils. The family are trialing cover-cropping mixed species to see if they can produce more bulk in silage, compared to traditional barley silage. Their average yields are: wheat 4.7t/ha, canola 3.1t/ha, barley 4.8t/ha, field peas 3.7t/ha and lentils 2.7t/ha. Crops are sown in late April/early May and harvested at the end of August. Most of the canola in the district is direct-headed, which has been made possible with shatter-resistant varieties.

The McDougalds have adopted precision agriculture and satellite imagery to create zones, verified by soil tests in paddock. Maps are then used to apply variable rate seed, nitrogen, potash and sulfur inputs. They have also adopted a Fertiliser Best Practice system '4 R Nutrient Stewardship: Right Source @ Right Rate, Right Time and Right place'.

Harris (near Saskatoon)

The group visited the Tyrrell Museum, which is considered the world's finest dinosaur museum, featuring galleries and skeletons from the Jurassic period (the Drumheller region is famous for its many dinosaur skeletons discoveries).

The group met Ron, Judy and Jackson Leonard who crop 2,200 ha of red lentils, canola and Hard Red Spring Wheat (similar to Australian Hard wheats). Their average snow depth is 300mm, of which about 30mm is available as soil moisture. Average growing season rainfall is 200mm and average yields are; wheat 4t/ha, canola 2.5t/ha, lentils 2.0t/ha. Yields for 2022 are expected to be 60% down on average, due to low rainfall.

The Leonard's use liquid nitrogen and phophorus fertiliser, as it is easy to access and they believe they have reduced fertiliser application rates as a result. They also use a biological product called BioSul, which is a mix of foodwaste and sulfur. Their soil is mainly pH neutral and the topsoil is two metres deep.

Canadian farmers can access government subsidised multi-peril crop insurance for storm, hail, fire, drought and the cost of resowing a crop. Insurance is calculated using income from the farmer's five-year average yield and the previous season's price. In one example, the premium on a $2.3 million crop was $133,000, of which the farmer paid 45% and the government 55%.

Crops have a very short growing period, being sown in May and harvested mid-August; canola and lentils are 90 day crops and spring wheat is 110 days. The Leonards use EC Maps and five years of yield data for variable nitrogen and phosphorus applications. They also hire four weather stations, with mobile software applications, that provide weather and yield predictions (cost $12,000/year) through John Deere.

Saskatoon; Ag in Motion & Distillery tour

The tour attended Ag in Motion, the largest agricultural trade show in Western Canada, visiting the crop plot demonstrations at the "Discovery Farm" which showcases a range of new technology.

The head of Adama gave an overview of this year's harvest, which is expected to be average for Canada. There are constraints in agro-chemical production this year due COVID-related labour shortages and high energy prices.

Riverine Plains Canada Study Tour.

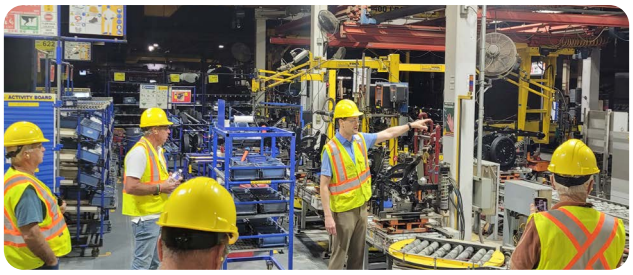
Some of the highlights of the field plot demonstrations included:

- Yara seed coat (trace elements) for improved rooting depth and water uptake. This process is designed with the 4 R Nutrient Stewardship in mind.
- SWAT maps of soil moisture and weeds across a paddock to make variable rate decisions.
- Canola forage intercropping with crimson clover.
- Lucent Bio Sciences Inc Soileos: a cellulose product that delivers micronutrients to the crop.
- Nutrien-slow release nitrogen (ESN) and sulfur (MST) products to better manage nutrients in crop and potential environmental benefits.
- Chrysalabs soil testing system that measures soil samples in the paddock, without having to send off for a soil test.
- Raven Precision Technology Farming Solutions autonomous tractor prototypes (whole package seed and spray units for $1 million).
- Drones with wings (which have longer endurance and the ability to spot spray).
- Nutrien is trialling a carbon scheme with 71 farmers and payments of $41 based on carbon reductions. Farmers must use the 4 R Nutrient Stewardship plan and no till practices. Nutrien also have 4 x 4ha plots for tracking carbon emissions of different management practices.
- Hand-held samplers were good for collecting grain samples for testing prior to harvest.

Afterwards, we visited the Black Fox Distillery, owned by John and Barb Stefanyshyn-Cote, former Canadian Farmers of the year who sold their grain farm to start the distillery. John and Barb outlined how they learned the complex process of distilling triticale grain to make whiskey and gin. They also discovered that storing their whiskey outside in the extreme Canadian climate made award winning whiskey, which has set a trend for other whiskey producers throughout the world.

CNH/Case IH/New Holland plant tour

The group had a tour of the CNH/Case IH/New Holland Plant where 500 Flexi Coil seeders are produced each year, primarily for the North American market. The factory employs 800 people with 300 staff on shift at any time. Main production challenges include getting parts and their cost.



Non-GMO markets

We met Rick Pender, CEO of Virtex, a farmer owned company that processes 30,000t/yr of non-genetically modified (GMO) canola for the North American Health Food market. Non-GMO canola only represents 5% of Canadian canola production, however is a growing health food market, with a premium price.

Virtex began in 2009 with 81 smaller farmers interested in value adding grain.; in 2013, they acquired a crushing facility and more recently oil-refining equipment. Plans are currently in place for expanding the facility to 140,000 tonnes/year.

Rules for non-GMO products are strict and solvents cannot be used in the extraction process; this means less oil is extracted than in traditional systems. There are also strict testing protocols for the finished product and grain is tested prior to and at delivery. Profits for farmer shareholders come from the $100/tonne premium received, plus a share of the profits. Virtex competes against Viterra in Canada which crushes 336,000 tonnes of non-GMO canola.

Many thanks for Jeromy Nolan who organised an action packed and highly informative itinerary and to all the tour participants.

Hands On Precision Agriculture Workshop - Yarrawonga

Riverine Plains hosted a GRDC and SPAA Hands On Precision Agriculture workshop during August.

Adrian Roles (JMAJ) demonstrated how to get data out of machinery to improve financial returns and how to use precision agriculture tools to work smarter, not harder.

Adrian Roles speaks about yield data at the Yarrawonga Workshop

Riverine Plains Diary Dates

Wednesday 12 October Board Q&A session (online)

Friday14 October FAR Australia & Riverine Plains Pulse Field Day, Bundalong

Friday 28 October: Riverine Plains Annual General Meeting and Christmas Party (4pm), Mulwala,

Early November: Evan Moll Gerogery Field Day (date TBC)

Catherine Marriott on ABC's Q and A

Our (fearless) CEO, Catherine Marriott, recently joined the ABC's Q and A discussion on workers, taxes and getting a fair go.

Congratulations to Catherine on being invited to join the panel (an impressive achievement and recognition in itself) and for being a champion and voice for agriculture and regional Australia!

Catherine Marriott during the Q+A discussion on 1 September.

Riverine Plains Board Contacts

Chair	Ian Trevethan	0428 265 015
Vice-chair	Fiona Marshall	0427 324 123
Treasurer	Murray Scholz	0428 238 398
Public Officer		
	John Bruce	0428 315 814
	Melissa Brown	0428 668 341
	Alison Penfold	0408 633 026
	Brondwen MacLean	0417 233 298

Invitation to AGM, Board Positions

Members are invited to the Riverine Plains Annual General Meeting, to be held on Friday 28 October at the Riverine Plains Office, 4/97–103 Melbourne Street, Mulwala, NSW at 5pm.

Several Member Director positions on the Riverine Plains Inc Board will be vacated at the AGM and will require filling.

If you are a current member of Riverine Plains and would like to know more about the positions available, please contact Catherine Marriott at the office on 03 5744 1713. There will also be an online Q & A session on 12 October (further details to follow).

Members and Partners Pre-Harvest Christmas Party

A Pre-Harvest Christmas BBQ will be held following the AGM on Friday 28 October from 6pm.

Members and Partners are invited to join us on the foreshore of Lake Mulwala for a social BBQ dinner and drinks (further details to follow).

More highlights from the EXPO!

Riverine Plains Inc

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Email: info@riverineplains.org.au
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Farmers inspiring farmers
riverineplains.org.au