

Building a profitable business for future generation

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Providing a sustainable asset for the next generation is a key driver for third-generation South East farmer Lachie Seears.

Third-generation farmer and Nuffield Scholar Lachie Seears has spent many years studying and improving farm practices to increase profitably, ensuring his family farming operation is sustainable and profitable for the next generation.

No-till farming practices, improving machinery, conserving soil and utilising new technologies are just some of the practices he is using in pursuit of these goals.

“The practices we do on farm, we do to ensure we have a profitable business that is able to grow for many years,” Lachie said. “We have a diverse farming operation, consisting of a progressive cropping regime (wheat, barley, canola and broad beans) plus first-cross sheep and Angus cattle.

“We see it as important to have a farming mix of livestock and cropping and to value add where we can. People have often asked why we don't double crop, as our annual rainfall is an average of 650 mm. I point out to them that we do double crop; it's just that the second crop on the paddock has four legs and a mouth. This is how we add value to the crops that we grow. Our second-cross lamb operation wouldn't be as profitable if we didn't grow beans. We are also able to value-add wheat by using it for feed and we grow lucerne for grazing.”



LACHIE SEEARS, THIRD-GENERATION FARMER AND NUFFIELD SCHOLAR.



ON-FARM STORAGE ON BOONDEROO HAS THE CAPACITY TO STORE MORE THAN 5,000 TONNES OF GRAIN.

He currently grows Revenue winter wheat, Oxford feed barley, Clearfield and TT canola varieties and broad beans.

“We try to have a balanced rotation that allows us to keep on top of weeds and crop diseases. Wheat and broad beans are the two major crops, with barley and canola used to control various issues.

“We use the crop rotation to strategically target any weeds we see may be an issue. Because of this management practice, we think we are getting on top of issues early.”

He broadcasts single superphosphate ahead of seeding and uses DAP as a start up at sowing. Because his soils are trace element deficient he ‘tops up’ crops with applications of trace elements such as manganese, zinc, copper and iron during the growing season.

Lachie, with his wife Rebecca and their two young children, farm 2,920 ha of high-rainfall country on Conmurra Flats, in the Lower South East, about 30km south-west of Lucindale, where the family business, Boonderoo Pastoral Company, has been operating since 1976.

No-till farming methods are a big part of his management practices and are helping maintain soil health and overall crop production.

“Since 1997, when we converted from using a combine drill to an air seeder, we have been using no-till farming methods. These practices include stubble retention, minimal furrowing, minimal burning and ensuring a balanced crop rotation program,” he said.

I see the benefits of the practices we are employing today and they will pave the way to how this land will be farmed in 20 years' time.

“I have noticed huge improvements in our farming system from implementing minimum till methods.

“We also used chicken litter when high-analysis fertilisers were extremely expensive. We like it on our lucerne for

grazing and seed production. Because of the slow release nature of chicken litter we feel it fits the needs of a plant that grows all year around.”

Heavy black self-mulching soil high in organic matter is the dominant soil type on Boonderoo.

“Organic matter levels are naturally high in our soils but we are improving this with our minimal-till cropping system and retention of as much stubble as we feel necessary. We bale straw to remove excess stubble loads from high-yielding wheat crops to allow for the best crop establishment in the following season.”

Lachie predicts the Lower South East region will have a great future for broadacre crops, particularly as the region offer greater seasonal stability than marginal country.

“The seasonal variation in the high rainfall zone is lower than in most other growing regions, so I think that as the need grows, more and more land in the South East will be cropped,” he said.

Choosing the right machinery for the often wet winter conditions and heavier soil types is important for the business.

“We currently use a Horwood Bagshaw ScariBar 350 with knife points and a 9000L two bin Simplicity seed cart, but are exploring the idea of a disc seeder. We have always struggled to find a seeder that can handle our black sticky soils, so it’s important to choose the right machine. Also, we require a seeder that has the ability to handle higher sowing rates of the large-seeded broad bean.

“The beauty of the tyne machine we are using at the moment is that it has the ability to sow in any conditions; wet, dry or other. We like to get our crop in on time so we sow 24-hours-a day during the sowing season, generally at average ground speeds of 8-8.5km/hr.

“The seed placement and crop evenness, however, is not as good as we would like with this tyne machine, so we are looking at discs.”

Lachie has been using GPS technology on all his cropping machinery for more than 12 years and has seen significant improvements in manageability and convenience in his daily operations.

“Using GPS technology has produced input savings and helped reduce driver fatigue,” Lachie said.

He has also invested in on-farm storage to help improve harvest logistics.

“On-farm storage for our business is a big part of what we do. We have the ability to store 5,000-plus tonnes of grain at any one time.

“Because of our proximity to the local domestic feed market (mainly dairy farms), we have set up a storage facility with our own trade-accredited weigh bridge so we can market grain and supply our end users throughout the year.”

Keeping up-to-date with the latest industry news and developments has helped Lachie improve his farm practices.

I have noticed huge improvements in our farming system from implementing minimum till methods.

“Working closely with our cropping agronomist has helped keep me up to date with chemical changes and new products. My time on the MacKillop Farm Management Group, in particular my time as Chairman, has given me a great opportunity to increase networks.”

Lachie also sees the need to work closely with other young farmers and provide advice where he can to ensure they are creating sustainable businesses.

“Studying at Marcus Oldham College in Geelong opened my eyes to the opportunities in the agricultural industry

and I have undertaken various leadership programs and am involved in a mentoring course to provide leadership and guidance to young people entering the agricultural industry.

“Most recently, I undertook a Nuffield Scholarship that involved travel to 12 countries on three different trips over four months. This has been a life-changing and worthwhile project that has enabled me to study a topic and part of agriculture that was of particular interest to me. It has also given me the tools to be able to take the information gathered back to industry, for the benefit of the industry.

“I also like to attend as many grower workshops as I can, such as fungicide management courses, to further increase my agronomic knowledge,” he said.

He sees increasing farming knowledge and ensuring the best management practices as vital to the future of Boonderoo Pastoral Company.

“Our succession plan for our family is a work in progress and something we realise we must spend time getting right. I see the benefits of the practices we are employing today and they will pave the way to how this land will be farmed in 20 years’ time.

“I am always looking to continue the growth and profitability of our business and am constantly looking to new technologies that will give me that 1% increase in production and/or profitability. With a young family, I would like to achieve a good work and family life balance.”

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