

# The Link

FarmLink Newsletter

Vol 37. - Autumn 2014



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Dear FarmLink Members,

Welcome to the Autumn edition of The Link. Rain has been patchy but I know you are all either busy planning for or getting underway with sowing.

Since the last edition of The Link I have met many of you at our member consultation meetings. I would like to thank all of our members who were able to attend one of those meetings at short notice. And I would like to thank all of the members who have responded by renewing their membership, contributing additional subscription fees and volunteering to help in many other ways. The support of members has been very positive.

Through the regional member meetings we were able to gather good feedback on research priorities for our area as well as general feedback on the performance of FarmLink and member expectations. All of which is valuable to us in planning our activities and ensuring that we are delivering information and services that are important to you as members. The important thing to remember is that as a member you OWN FarmLink. It's a cliché but it's true - the more you put in the more you will get out of it.

These regional meetings will become a feature of our annual calendar and we hope more members will take the opportunity to have input into the future of FarmLink.

For those of you who were not able to attend one of the meetings held in February the key messages from those meetings were –

- FarmLink delivered a significant financial loss in 2013 and faced a significant forecast loss in 2014. We have now taken steps to improve governance, financial management, reduce the cost base of the business and to raise revenue. The latter, primarily through sponsorship in 2014 and, by securing additional project funding in 2015 and beyond.

Rebuilding our reputation with funding providers and research partners will be critical in securing new projects in 2015. We have raised memberships to \$250 (plus GST) to better align membership with the value of the research and activities undertaken by FarmLink – it is still well below the cost of membership for similar organisations nationally. Membership renewals are already coming in but if you still have the renewal form on your 'to do' list could you give it your attention this week.

- The response from sponsors – old and new – has been encouraging and we are continuing to work with companies to secure a minimum of \$120k from sponsorship for 2014.
- We are confident that with prudent financial management the business is secure in 2014. The major financial hurdle for FarmLink will come in the first half of 2015 when cash flow will be constrained. We have asked members to consider contributing a one off, tax deductible, additional, subscription fee in an attempt to raise \$350k to create a reserve fund of \$550k that can be used to manage fluctuations in cash flow. So far we have received additional contributions from many members which is a wonderful show of support but more is required. If you intend to make a contribution – even if it is later in the year – you let us know. As a guide \$1 per hectare will secure the business and ensure the levies you pay are returned to this region. You will find some more information about the contributions later in the link. (RMS Consulting) and Ron Heinrich (you can read more about Ron in our board member profile!) join the board and Darryl Harper, Rob McColl, Rob Hart and Lyndon McNab agreeing to continue as directors.

# CEO Message

I will endeavour to keep you informed of our progress throughout the year but please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

In the meantime, we have been busy planning research activities and setting up trial sites for the coming year, developing a five year plan for the Temora Agricultural Innovation Centre (TAIC) and preparing for sowing at the centre.

Some of the highlights from the beginning of the year have been –

- The FarmLink R&D committee meeting held at Junee on the 18th February with 21 consultants, researchers, growers and advisors participating in a discussion of research conducted to date and future research priorities. Darryl Harper, the new Chair of the R&D committee, hosted his first meeting and already has some ideas to enhance the process of identifying and prioritising research requirements for and with members.
- Project steering committee and planning meetings have been held for all of our major projects – Stubble Matters, Early Sowing, Strategic Tillage, Crop Sequences – and we have a great program of trials, site visits and research outcomes to deliver this year.
- FarmLink hosted the GRDC Grower update at Wallendbeen on the 12th March which had over 60 attendees and a great line up of presenters. Feedback from the day was positive with attendees getting a lot out of the day.
- The TAIC trial users group meeting earlier this month and we have already started planning the FarmLink TAIC Expo for the 10/11th Sept. Over the coming months we will provide you with information about the trials and activities at TAIC and our plans for the Expo this year.
- Erika McAllister, a 4th year student from CSU School Agriculture, joined us for a two week trial period in February and will be back in earnest at the end of April to complete a work experience program with us. A major project that Erika will undertake while she is here will be to contact our members and find out more about you! This will help us provide better service, represent your needs more effectively to funding providers and in research proposals and demonstrate benefits to sponsors.

In addition to this, we have had a few staff changes with Paul Breust and Judith Neill leaving us to pursue other opportunities and Cathie Fox re-joining FarmLink on a casual basis as our Office Administrator. I would like to thank Paul and Judith for their commitment and hard work while they have been with FarmLink and wish them well for the future. Welcome aboard Cathie!

Good luck with sowing and I hope to see you at one our events in the near future.



Cindy Cassidy  
FarmLink Research CEO

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# Project Update

## Maintaining Profitable Farming Systems with Retained Stubble

**PROJECT PARTNERS:** CSIRO, FarmLink Research, Farmers and Advisors.

**FUNDING SOURCE:** GRDC. This project is part of a wider initiative by GRDC delivered across Australia.

**PROJECT DURATION:** 2014-2019

**PROJECT LOCATION:** FarmLink Region

**PROJECT AIM:** This project will investigate the potential of management systems to increase profitability when farming in full stubble retention systems.

### RECENT EVENT:

A demonstration of the K-line trash cutter was held at the 'Pretty Plains', Downside on the 12th of December 2013 (pictured below).



### PROJECT STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING:

The project steering committee meeting was held on the 18th of February; the members of the committee discussed the progress of the Stubble Matters trials and planned the timing of operations, application of treatments and crop varieties to be sown in the coming season.

Associated communications and events were also discussed in order to provide timely and relevant information to members. A project steering committee meeting is scheduled for July at the Temora Ag Innovation Centre – TBC.

### TRIAL SITE DETAILS:

#### Crop sequences for seeding equipment

The Temora Agricultural Innovation Centre will host the trial comparing disc and tyne seeding equipment used for three different crop sequences in the coming year.

The sequences are rated as conservative, aggressive and sustainable. The conservative sequence is Canola – Wheat – Wheat, the aggressive sequence is a more intensive Canola – Wheat – Wheat rotation and the sustainable rotation is Legume Brown Manure – Canola - Wheat – Barley.

#### Rotary harrows for improved herbicide efficacy

At 'Felix Farm' near Aria Park a trial using steel rotary harrows to improve herbicide efficacy is being set up for the 2014-15 season. There will be farmer sown strips comparing emergence and pre-emergent herbicide efficacy following the use of rotary harrows behind a disc seeder.

#### Harvest and post harvest stubble management

This trial at 'Pretty Plains' near Downside will investigate short (20cm) and tall (60cm) stubble heights, and the impacts of burning tall stubble after grazing and using the K-line trash cutter to mulch tall stubble as post-harvest treatments.

Over the duration of the trial the soil, crop response to treatments, the effect of the stubble canopy and the efficiency of harvest operations will be monitored.

#### Stubble management, nutrition and moisture conservation in mixed farming systems

At 'Moascar' south of Temora this trial compares the impacts of single disc, spear point and knife point openers and different stubble grazing options. The treatments included in the trial are nil grazing, grazing and vegetative winter grazing and stubble grazing.

# New Projects 2014

## National Paddock Survey

**PROJECT PARTNERS:** Birchip Cropping Group, CSIRO, FarmLink Research, Farming systems groups, Farmers and Advisors.

**FUNDING SOURCE:** GRDC. This project is part of a wider initiative by GRDC delivered across Australia.

**PROJECT DURATION:** 2014-2018

New Project

### ABOUT THE SURVEY

The research project for the 'National paddock survey initiative' is a joint tender, led by BCG in association with CSIRO, farming systems groups and agronomic consultants in the Western, Northern and Southern GRDC regions.

Growers are asking: "Why aren't my crops reaching their full potential and using the available soil water efficiently?", "What is the yield gap between my actual yield and potential yield?", "What are the biotic and abiotic constraints to production and which ones can I change to make more profit?", and "Where can I find the information to improve my understanding of crop production". These are the KEY questions to be addressed by this initiative.

In this proposal crop performance data will be collected throughout the cropping cycle (pre-sowing to harvest) on two to three identifiable production zones in 240 paddocks nationally and correlated to plant water use. These data will be used to identify the major constraints to production in different regions and soil types.

The project will work with agronomic consultants, farm groups, and importantly farmers to improve their understanding of factors limiting production and gain invaluable skills in targeting attainable and profitable crop yields.

A major outcome of this project is the identification of the yield gap between actual, attainable and water limited, Nitrogen unlimited yield for all monitored paddocks. Soil water, soil chemical analysis and crop monitoring data will be used to identify why the yield gap in some paddocks/zones is small relative to other paddocks/zones. A decision aid will be developed from a multivariate statistical analysis of the paddock data and delivered as a functional tool applicable to each region.

## Increasing yield and reducing risk through early sowing in the Southern Grains Region

**PROJECT PARTNERS:** CSIRO & FarmLink Research

**FUNDING SOURCE:** GRDC

**PROJECT DURATION:** 2013-2016

**PROJECT LOCATION:** Junee Reefs

**PROJECT AIM:** To increase the proportion of total farm wheat are planted to appropriate varieties prior to May 1, either dry or following early autumn rain at four locations in the southern grains region. This will be measured using sowing time data from the Yield Prophet database, and paddock records for ten growers in each location included in the study.

New Project

### EARLY SOWING

Due to the ongoing decline in autumn rainfall and increasing farm sizes, the widening of farm sowing windows through adoption of early sowing has the potential to significantly increase average farm wheat yield and profitability. There are two mechanisms behind this yield increase;

1. Slow maturing wheat varieties sown early if managed correctly have a yield advantage over mid-fast maturing varieties sown later as they capture more resources (water, nutrients, radiation) particularly during growth stages vital for yield formation.
2. Including a slow maturing variety which allows early sowing in conjunction with currently grown mid-fast varieties in a farm program results in more area of crop flowering on time, increasing average farm yield. Pre-experimental APSIM modelling using the last fifty years of climate data indicates that including a slow maturing wheat in a farm program which can be sown as early as 10 April has the potential to increase average farm wheat yield by an average of 0.7 t/ha across the southern grains region. Use of the ADOPT model indicates that because of its low cost, high visibility and reversibility, early sowing is readily adoptable, with 68% of growers predicted to adopt the practice over 8.9 years. Assuming 7.1 million hectares of wheat area in the southern region, this represents an extra 3.4 million tonnes of wheat production per year across the southern region at little or no cost to growers.

# New Projects 2014 cont.

## Increasing yield and reducing risk through early sowing in the Southern Grains Region (cont)

### WHAT WILL BE ACHIEVED?

Robust regional guidelines describing seasonal suitability for early sowing and appropriate varieties and management to optimise harvest index and maximise yield of early sown wheat will be developed in conjunction with five grower groups using a collective inquiry model of research. These guidelines will be based on regional experiments, and will be extended via fact-sheets, field days and grower group and GRDC updates.

The experiments will examine;

- The optimal phenology to allow early sowing at four locations in the southern grains region
- The management required in different environments to optimise harvest index of early sown slow maturing wheats
- Quantification of any yield penalty associated with slow maturity achieved through vernalisation compared to photoperiod sensitivity

Regional grower groups will be responsible for developing and conducting trials in 2013, 2014 and 2015 that address local barriers to early sowing in conjunction with focus groups of interested growers and advisors, CSIRO and FAR Australia. Experimental design will be informed by pre-experimental modelling provided by CSIRO.



Above: CSIRO research scientist Dr James Hunt urges growers to be ready to take advantage of any early-sowing opportunities to guard against a dry autumn. Photo: GRDC

## To Burn or Not To Burn

**PROJECT PARTNERS:** FarmLink Research and Ag Grow

**FUNDING SOURCE:** DAFF

**PROJECT DURATION:** 2013-2015

**PROJECT LOCATION:** Barellan

**PROJECT AIM:** This project aims to measure and explore the effect of pre-emergent herbicide efficacy and measure and quantify varietal performance in different stubble management systems.

**There will be a field day in spring, which will visit the trial site. More information will be made available at a later date.**



New Project

# Events

## Conservation Agriculture Field Day

This year's Conservation Agriculture Field Day was held at the Condobolin Agricultural Research and Advisory Station on the 20th of February. The organisations that worked together to host the day included the Conservation Agriculture and No-till Farming Association (CANFA), Central West Farming Systems (CWFS), FarmLink Research and NSW Department of Primary Industries.

Those present had traveled long distances to see what the next big thing might be with farmers from as far as Walgett, Nyngan, Young and Lockhart.

The prototype microwave weed killer from the University of Melbourne garnered a lot of interest with demonstrations by Dr Graham Brodie. The machine uses microwave energy to superheat weeds and weed seeds close to the soil surface. Active displays included new disc and tyne seeding equipment, weedseeking, spray and stubble management machinery. It was good to see the machinery working in wet soil and the interest of crowd of farmers following the active display. There was also the latest in soil health, nutrition and precision ag on display on the day.

Despite the current drought in parts of New South Wales, farmers are looking to the future so that coming out of the drought they can be proactive and prepared to take advantage of new technologies. Many farmers have taken the no till path and are now looking to find the next big efficiency gain for their farming system.

**To view a short video about the field day visit:** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-qd-JBHSWbw&feature=youtu.be>

## Peter Westblade Memorial Merino Challenge at TAIC

The final shearing of the Peter Westblade Memorial Merino Challenge (PWMMC) 2012-2014 was held at the Temora Agricultural Innovation Centre on March 6-7, 2014 where over 200 people attended. The Challenge compared the genetics of commercial Merino breeders from more than 60 flocks Australia wide over the past two years at the Temora Agricultural Innovation Centre.

Challenge organiser, Craig Wilson from Wagga said the variance in profit between the top and bottom performing teams was a massive 70 per cent. He said this figure showed how there was big gains to be made in the Merino industry by selecting high-performing genetics and making individual operations far more profitable.

The top ranking team entered by TA Field Estates achieved a total lifetime value of \$219.10 per head.

### TOP FIVE TEAMS

- TA Field Estates, total life value= \$219.10, bloodlines: Hazeldean (ram), Mixed (ewe)
- Glendale Partnership, total life value = \$198.10, bloodline: Centre Plus (ewe and ram)
- GF and RK Davidson, total life value = \$214.52, bloodline: Middle View (ewe and ram)
- Damien Hosie, total life value = \$208.52, bloodline: Pastora (ewe and ram)
- Coombes and Poole, total life value = \$197.32, bloodline: One Oak (ewe and ram)

The data gathered from the Challenge was vital to each individual's Merino enterprise. "People see it as a good investment," Mr Wilson said. And some of those involved have already made major changes in focus and sought out new bloodlines if it meant there was an opportunity to improve the bottom line.

One of the participants in the first challenge used the information to benchmark their flock. As a result they were able to determine that their sheep enterprise was outperforming the cattle operation. Since that time the producer has replaced cattle with high-performing Merino genetics. Mr Wilson said.

Mr Wilson said the information from the Challenge clearly showed there is such a vast difference in profit margins between the various teams.

"There is the capacity to be making a lot of money, or to be losing money," he said.

"If you consider what the bottom figure was, over the lifetime of the sheep, there was a 70% a head difference in profit," he said.

Each of the teams started out with 30 wethers and to perform well the sheep needed to achieve good results in meat and wool values.

"There are teams that are excelling in their meat and wool production," Mr Wilson said.

TAIC will host the 2014-2016 PWMMC starting next month where there is interest from 50 flocks throughout Australia. "There is no shortage of people who are keen to get involved, it is unique, there is nothing else in the industry like this," Mr Wilson said.

**To view a short video from the final shearing visit:** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bs3NijymYIA>

# News

## FarmLink Research Office Move

In the near future FarmLink Research will re-locate its office to the Temora Agricultural Innovation Centre. Information regarding our contact details will be provided to you via email.

## Sowing Windows and Water Use Efficiency

Farmers are being encouraged to think broadly about sowing times to take more direct advantage of late summer rainfall. James Hunt from CSIRO suggests a three pronged approach which has been successful in higher rainfall zones of the southern region where winter wheat varieties are still available.

Winter wheats do open the sowing window period, yet there is no yield advantages unless the Autumn break is very late. There are advantages in using the winter wheats as a dual purpose option.

The ideal time for yield is the first half of April, the second window of opportunity for slow maturing spring wheats is mid April. If there is no Autumn break, then dry sowing is another option for main season wheats. Basically, get a crop in the ground as water availability allows it.

Slower maturing varieties and winter wheats sown early tend to yield as well as or more than the mid sown wheats sown later.

**Recommended reading visit,** <http://grdc.com.au/Media-Centre/Ground-Cover/Ground-Cover-Issue-109-Mar-Apr-2014/Experiments-fine-tune-early-sowing-strategies>

## Weed Control Pays Off

New GRDC funded research has found that;

- Every \$1 per hectare spend on summer weed control can return up to \$8/ha in the following crop.

**Recommended reading visit,** <http://grdc.com.au/Media-Centre/Ground-Cover/Ground-Cover-Issue-108-Jan-Feb-2014/Stop-summer-weeds-draining-your-profits>

## Beating the Frost Window

Delaying sowing time to beat the frost window is not necessarily the best approach. What should be considered when choosing your varieties and sowing time is choosing varieties that have the optimal flowering window determined by water and water stress. But there is no perfect time to flower, however by managing your farm spatially and planting low risk crops like barley or oats.

**To read about Managing the Risk of Frost visit,** [www.grdc.com.au/GRDC-FS-FrostRisk](http://www.grdc.com.au/GRDC-FS-FrostRisk)

## How often should you soil test your paddocks?

Nigel Wilhelm, Research Agronomist with SARDI says in an ideal world, we would be soil sampling everytime we were going to invest in a important crop or pasture in a paddock. However, every two or three years is a realistic goal. Soil depth is extremely important as some nutrients move readily through the profile, such as Sulphur and Potassium. Sampling 0-60cm in shallow soils captures the variability of nutrients available, 0-100cm in better soils. Soil test results will give a guide to help inform the fertiliser decision.

**For more information visit,** [www.grdc.com.au/Resources/Factsheets/2014/01/Soil-testing-for-crop-nutrition-South](http://www.grdc.com.au/Resources/Factsheets/2014/01/Soil-testing-for-crop-nutrition-South)

## Diverse Weed Control Strategies

Weedsmart Champion Murray Scholz reported a total crop failure ten years ago from herbicide resistant ryegrass on his farm.

Murray believes weed control needs varied strategies for success. Basically, if weeds are in the paddock try and stop weed seed set and minimise the area, Successful strategies implemented on Murray's farm are;

- Narrow windrow burning, has been successful in significantly reducing weed populations.
- Cutting patches of weeds in a crop and making into hay or silage.
- Brown manure, then followed by a crop of hay, however a very expensive as you forgo two years of income.

The weed control program should be planned 3-4 years in advance, knowing which crop and which pre-emergents will be used and which herbicides will be used in which part of the rotation.

**“We have to farm as if there will never be another new herbicide,” Murray Scholz.**

**For tips and tools on weed control,** visit [www.weedsmart.org.au/10-point-plan/](http://www.weedsmart.org.au/10-point-plan/)

# Diary Dates

## March 2014

### Temora Agricultural Innovation Centre - Working Bee

21 March,

More information: 02 6924 4633

### Farm Funding Forum

25 March, MTC, Wagga Wagga

More information: 02 9431 8657

### Seasonal Production Outlook

26 March, Temora Ag Innovation Centre

More information: 02 69244633

### LLS Chairman visits Temora Ag Innovation Centre

24 March, Temora Ag Innovation Centre

More information: 02 6924 4633

### Soil Biology Workshop

28 March, Temora Ag Innovation Centre

More information: 02 6924 4633

## April 2014

### FarmLink Research Board Meeting

4 April, Junee

More information: 02 6924 4633

### Advance Spray Application

7 April, Temora Ag Innovation Centre

More information: 02 6345 5818

### Hutcheon and Pearce Technology Day

8 April, Temora Ag Innovation Centre

More information: 02 6977 1100

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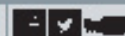


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# Ron Heinrich O.A.M

## FarmLink Research Board Member Profile

Ron Heinrich was appointed to the Board of FarmLink Research in December 2013. Ron was born in Temora and grew up on the family properties in the Trungley Hall/Narraburra districts.

Ron attended school in Temora and completed his leaving certificate at Temora High School before studying law through the Law Extension Committee Course conducted by Sydney University.

Ron is married to Jeannie and together they own a 2400 acre property at Springdale. Ron and his brothers Peter and David also own the family properties at Trungley Hall and Narraburra.

Ron and Jeannie have four children Jillian, (a former Miss Temora Show Girl), Sonia, Mardi and Andrew. Ron lives in Sydney and practices at TressCox as a Lawyer.

On Australia Day, January 26 2013, Ron was appointed as a Member in the General Division of the Order of Australia (AM), a wonderful recognition to Ron for his sustained efforts over many years on behalf of the Australian Legal Profession.

Ron has over 40 years experience in Corporate and Commercial Law. He is highly regarded for his expertise in assisting clients on issues requiring his broad experience in mergers and acquisitions, corporations law, trade practices law, revenue law, insurance law and administrative law. Ron advises on all aspects of mergers and acquisitions, corporate governance and probity, commercial litigation, defence of professional indemnity insurance claims, the drafting of insurance policy wordings, reinsurance agreements, developing due diligence systems for compliance purposes and trusts, business succession and estate planning.

Ron has contributed extensively to the legal profession, both in Australia and internationally. He is a past President of both the Law Society of New South Wales and the Law Council of Australia and a past President of the Commonwealth Lawyers Association which is a peak law body for lawyers in the Commonwealth nations. He is also a past director and Chairman of LawCover Pty Limited.

He is a past Chairman of the Law Society's Professional Conduct Committee and has been involved in the investigation and prosecution of solicitors guilty of professional misconduct, fraud and corruption. He is also a past Chairman of the

Law Society's Medico-Legal Liaison and Alternative Dispute Resolution Committees.

Ron is a past Chairman of the Law Council's National Harmonization Committee, Professional Indemnity Insurance Working Group and its ad hoc Committee on the review of the Insurance Contracts Act.



Above: Ron Heinrich, FarmLink Research Board

### FarmLink Board

- Bernard Hart, (Chairman)
- Darryl Harper, (Deputy Chair)
- Rob Hart
- Ron Heinrich
- Rob McColl
- Lyndon McNab
- Robert Patterson

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- Cindy Cassidy, CEO
- Karen Giddings, Communications Coordinator
- Tony Pratt, Research Technical Officer
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