



AgForce Projects

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Qld grains industry punches above its weight

THERE is a quiet transformation taking place in grains farming across Central Queensland thanks to the success of a voluntary best management practice (BMP) program which is helping northern broadacre grain growers boost both their bottom lines and their sustainable farming credentials.

An industry report released this month summarising achievements for last financial year found between 60-70 per cent of growers involved in the program are using minimum BMP or industry 'best-practice' standard depending on the module.

The Grains BMP program to date has captured 195 growers which farm approximately 260,000 hectares across Queensland. Central Queensland contributes 70% of this area under production, with the remaining area covered by the Burdekin, Burnett Mary and Darling Downs regions. The report prepared by the Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation (DEEDI) found that 84% of the 97 questions that growers assessed their enterprise on revealed that more than half of the total area under production is being farmed using minimum BMP or industry best-practice standard.

AgForce Grains policy officer Nina Murray said the voluntary Grains BMP program supports the long-held industry view that Queensland grain growers are already widely adopting best management practice in order to improve profitability and sustainability of their enterprises.

Biloela-based DEEDI extension officer Rod Collins, who manages the delivery of the Grains BMP program, in partnership with AgForce and Fitzroy Basin Association Inc (FBA), said the aggregated data collected over the past four years about the number of growers now meeting minimum farm management standards, and proof of work underway to improve practices across the sector, would give the industry some solid positive facts to report to government and the community.

"The Grains BMP is a great opportunity for farmers to benchmark where they are at with sustainability and productivity," Mr Collins said.

"This is particularly important at a time when farmers are under constant pressure to prove they are good land managers and are doing the right thing by the environment everyday. Proudly we can now report 60-70% of participating Queensland grain growers are achieving this goal."

One such grower is Ivan Gowlett of Eldorado near Capella. Mr Gowlett runs a 1215ha dryland cropping operation and said the Grains BMP program provided him with the motivational and financial impetus required to complete a long-planned shift into controlled traffic farming.

A grant of \$8000 administered by FBA through the Australian Government's Caring for our Country Reef Rescue initiative helped the Gowletts purchase a \$30,000 Greenstar guidance system with 10cm accuracy for their tractor and boom spray, which is also equipped with a John Deere spray controller with swath control.

Grains BMP is delivered by the Queensland Government Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation, AgForce and Fitzroy Basin Association Inc with funding from the Australian Government Caring for our Country Reef Rescue initiative.

Mr Gowlett said the precision gained through the satellite guidance equated to savings of up to 20% in smaller paddocks and up to 10% in larger paddocks by preventing double planting and associated wastage of fuel, seed and fertiliser. GPS guidance also reduced operator fatigue and eliminated a problem with conventional spraying of disappearing foam markers.

A portion of the funding had been used to purchase a software mapping program based on satellite imagery to record all paddock treatments and to survey cultivation country for the planning of contour reconstruction work.

Mr Gowlett said the biggest advantage the family had received from the Grains BMP program was the incentive it provided to objectively analyse and improve their operation.

“Without it we probably would not have done a lot of this,” Mr Gowlett said.

“Farmers want to do the right thing but we need a financial incentive. It is not financially viable to go out and do all these things at once, but the Grains BMP and subsequent Reef Rescue grant has given us the incentive to go out and do it.”

A Grains BMP information session is being held in Biloela on 27 July and new workshops are scheduled to be rolled out across Central Queensland from September.

For more information visit www.grainsbmp.com.au or call Mr Collins on (07) 4992 9146.

How can grain growers get involved?

Step 1: Grain growers answer management and farm practice questions in six core self-assessment modules on the topics of pesticide application, farm design and layout, rainfall management, integrated pest management, managing climate variability and soil fertility management. This identifies whether their practices are above or below industry best practice standard. Modules are not complicated and generally only take a few hours to complete either online or at group workshops. Growers are often pleasantly surprised to find that in many areas they are already operating at industry best practice standard.

Step 2: Action plans for each of the six core areas are developed to help the grower identify the steps they can take to lift the bar in their own enterprise, whether new management techniques or approaches are needed and the priority these should be given so they can meet BMP benchmarks. The action plans form the farmers’ own list of new, achievable targets to improve the overall enterprise in both productivity and environmental terms.

Group workshops on the six core areas are often arranged to enable grain growers to hear from industry experts, analyse different enterprises and get outside ideas to incorporate into their action plans.

Step 3: Any government funding opportunities available to help growers implement improved practices are investigated, especially where water quality benefits can be achieved.

Step 4: Approximately 12 months after completing their self assessment modules, groups can be re-convened to look at which actions have been completed and which will be carried forward, along with a review of priority actions for the next twelve months.

Pic captions: IMG1402/1405: Capella grain grower Ivan Gowlett has completed a long-planned shift into controlled traffic farming with help from the Grains BMP program.

For comment call Rod Collins on (07) 4992 9146.

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