

Morton Vale Farms, Lockyer Valley

Growcom's Farm Business Resilience Program (FBRP) is assisting horticultural growers to identify gaps in their current farm management systems and develop plans that support growth and aid in mitigating the impacts of future droughts.

Using Growcom's best management practice platform, Hort360 growers can easily undertake a gap-analysis and develop their Resilient Plan using the inbuilt template. Financial assistance is also available through QRIDA.

Greg Lester and his brother Wayne are co-owners of Morton Vale Farms in the Lockyer Valley. The business grows a mixed range of crops, from seasonal pumpkins, melons, vegetables, and corn as well as lucerne hay production under irrigation.

THE ISSUE

Like many farm businesses, their farming area is spread across a number of blocks up to 2km apart and until recently the Lester's farm only had a single hard hose boom irrigator. In drier times, the existing boom irrigator must be moved from paddock to paddock creating significant delays in water application damaging the soil health and increasing crop stress.

Following a few good years of rain in the Lockyer Valley, the Lester brothers knew from experience that a dry spell could be just around the corner. Greg also knew that he needed to take steps to strengthen the long-term viability of the farms' drought resilience now if the business was to flourish during drier times ahead.

The FBRP process, facilitated by Southern Queensland Resilience Officer Brock McDonald through a short series of workshops, enabled Greg to think through their business operations from a broader angle and clearly identified the current irrigation infrastructure as a major risk to future business security in drier times.

THE SOLUTION



To enable the business to irrigate more efficiently during lower rainfall periods, it was necessary to duplicate the existing irrigation infrastructure, removing the need for the hard hose boom irrigator to be moved large distances between paddocks.

Building on the existing capability and integrating the latest technology in efficient irrigation, Greg designed and specified a new hard hose irrigation system with a turbine propeller drive capable of irrigating a 62-metre-wide strip with a high level of accuracy. The boom has a

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mixture of sprinkler styles to optimise the evenness of the water distribution, whilst preventing the wheels from bogging.

The farm sought funding from QRIDA under a Drought Preparedness Grant and successfully received a 25% rebate of the eligible costs, making the acquisition affordable and boosting the long-term viability of the business.

THE OUTCOME

With the new irrigation infrastructure, the farm can now apply the right amount of water across the farm sooner during drier conditions. Maintaining soil moisture at optimum levels during a crop's life leads to the best available yield outcomes as well as using less water overall, reducing off-farm water costs and improving environmental outcomes.

THE FARM BUSINESS RESILIENCE PROGRAM

Greg reflects that although he knew there were a number of risks to the viability of his business, he hadn't spent the time to think about his business as a whole. The FBRP process provided both the mechanism and the support needed to enable Greg to really understand what was needed to build resilience into his farming business. Like many farmers, he's not comfortable with a lot of paperwork activities but Greg strongly recommends that other growers invest the time to complete the FBRP with the assistance that is on hand from the Growcom team.

A secondary benefit for Morton Vale Farms is that the FBRP triggered thoughts about the longer-term plan for the farm within the family. The next task that Greg will be tackling is to develop a succession plan with the next generation over the next few years.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT

Karen George

Manger, Resilience

0408 135 003

kgeorge@growcom.com.au

John Targett

Central Queensland

0418 803 997

jtargett@growcom.com.au

Brock McDonald

Southern Queensland

0418 893 442

wmcdonald@growcom.com.au