

Finding a better way

Through the Northern Victoria Grain & Graze 2 program, a project looking at combining no-till farming with a live-stock enterprise is occurring across northern Victoria. The project aims to identify strategies being used by growers to maintain the integrity of their no-till system, while incorporating a grazing enterprise.

Location: Thoona

Farming operation: cropping and sheep

Livestock: Poll Dorset stud comprising 1000 ewes, rams and hoggets

Crops: wheat, canola, pasture and hay

Machinery: Case IH Magnum, RFM 300 air-seeder, Trimble 10cm GPS

Tim Sammon is always looking for a better way to do things, and while this attitude has put him firmly onto the no-till cropping path, livestock remain an essential component on his 100 year old family farm.

Tim manages the 800 hectare property at Thoona, east of Dookie, with his father Bill. An auto-electrician by trade, Tim came back to the family farm 10 years ago and established the partnership with his father four years later.

"Dad has been mainly into sheep most of his life and it has taken time to get machinery and build up the cropping side of things," Tim said.

When Tim first returned to the farm, they ran a lot of first cross ewes, but as the cropping side expanded they decided to focus more on their Poll Dorset stud, 'Majella'.

Today Majella consists of about 1000 ewes that are mostly run on the hilly areas of the farm unsuitable for



cropping. They offer about 200 rams a year through an annual sale held in Shepparton.

But Tim's interest has always been in the cropping and in building up that part of the farm.

"With cropping there's always something new. I really enjoy that."

In fact, such is Tim's passion for cropping and machinery, that when he bought a RFM 3000 airseeder, the first thing he did was pull it completely apart.

Depth control was the biggest thing goal, but he said the spacings between the tines were also too narrow.

"I took them out to 305mm (12 inch) and made up brackets to fit press wheels. I also added a SeedVU venting unit to stop seed bounce and back pressure," Tim said.

"Now I've got it set up so that I can rip in as deep as I like and it will always set the seed at an inch and a half. It doesn't matter about the ground changing and that sort of thing."

To redesign a commercially manufactured machine was a big call for a young farmer with no engineering background but, come sowing time, apart from a few seeding depth hiccups, the adaptation proved a success.



Tim didn't stop with the air-seeder. He also replaced the vertical knives on the sides of his Massey Ferguson 8870 windrower with rotary blades.

"It was a very simple modification that reduced drag and is much easier to maintain," Tim said.

Despite a clear preference for 'all things cropping', Tim said incorporating sheep comprised "a good fit" in the business.

"The cropping sits well alongside the sheep," he said.

"I think it helps to have diversification so you have another income if you go into a tough period. When cropping is down, sheep are usually up."

Tim said the stud was well worth having as it provided a good income.

"If we can just focus on having the stud and the cropping, I think that's enough," he said.

The cropping program consists primarily of wheat and canola, split 50-50, on a one year rotation with about 50 hectares sown for pasture and hay production.

Sowing begins in the middle of March with about 80 hectares of Whistler wheat which is heavily grazed.

"It's a good variety to graze," Tim said.

"Grazing it pretty hard actually gets the root system going really well and it's amazing the crop we get off. In a drought it will probably be the best crop you'll get."

When the sheep are removed from the crop it is given a "good" application of urea and left to mature.

Tim said he believe the system



they had adopted on the farm was working well.

"By doing what we are doing, I think we are heading in a pretty good direction," he said.

"That's what is needed: more focus on doing things better. and it has got to be cost-effective too."

Find out more

For further information about the Northern Victoria Grain & Graze 2 program, including opportunities to get involved, contact:

BCG

Phone (03)5492 2787, www.bcg.org.au

Grain & Graze 2

www.northernvictoria.grainandgraze2.com.au

