

Making expansion possible

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: Corowa

Farming operation: cropping, sheep and fish

Livestock: 1600 Merino breeding ewes

Crops: wheat, canola and pasture

Machinery: Fendt 924 tractor, Horwood Bagshaw 6000 litre, two bin airseeder, Topcon 2cm GPS

Ian Trevethan and his father Paul see a lot of value in farm diversity. So much so, in fact, that not only does their mixed farm business feature cropping and sheep enterprises, it also includes fish.

While managing such a diverse operation has had its challenges, in the past two years these Corowa farmers have succeeded in doubling the area they crop.

Ian and Paul credit this success to their no-till system, which includes a livestock enterprise that fits around the cropping regime. The practise of grazing cereal crops delivers benefits to both enterprises. And, of course, less time is spent on the tractor.

"No-till and grazing crops have also helped to lessen the workload," Ian said.

"The fish (Silver Perch and Murray Cod sold to Sydney and Melbourne markets) don't really complement what we do, although we use the same tractors and trucks."



Ian said that, being so diversified, it was easy to overlook a job that needed to be done while the focus was on another commodity.

"The logistics of it all can be hard because we often have conflicting priorities. When there are 10 things that need to happen it can be a real battle to prioritise," he said.

To overcome this, the management of the farm's three enterprises is divided, with Ian responsible for the cropping, Paul responsible for the fish and the livestock managed by both. Full-time employee, Kate Greenaway, works across all areas, particularly the sheep

and the fish.

With the adoption of a no-till cropping system, the farm has invested in machinery (a Fendt 924 tractor, Horwood Bagshaw 6000 litre airseeder and Claas Lexion 750 header) which, in turn, has allowed them to increase the area cropped.

"Having invested in the machinery, we are conscious of the need to keep the cropping area up," Ian said.

They were also putting more thought into their rotation, looking to plan well ahead of the current or subsequent season.



"We want to get our rotation sorted out 10 years ahead so we have a plan and don't have to make it up one year to the next as we go along," Ian said.

"It's typically been wheat-wheat-canola, wheat-wheat-canola, in the cropping paddocks."

"We haven't got a pulse included in the rotation. At this stage, we are using our pasture phase rather than a pulse for a disease break and to build up organic carbon. It seems to be less risky for us."

A third canola and two thirds wheat is usual, but last year they elected to sow half canola and half wheat, partly because of the improved canola prices and partly because they had a lot of 'dirty' paddocks, especially with ryegrass.

"We grow a fair bit of grazing wheat so that's like being able to have your cake and eat it too," Ian said.

"From the last week of June until the first week of August, we have our sheep on the grazing wheat."

"That early grazing is just so beneficial in being able to give the pasture paddocks a decent spell and allow them to freshen up while the sheep are grazing your wheat."

"We actually lamb down during the six weeks on winter cereals."

The sheep enterprise comprises of 1600 Merino breeding ewes, with 1000 joined to merino rams and the remainder to Poll Dorset and White Suffolk terminal sires.

Growing 700 hectares of wheat and another 200 hectares of grazing wheat puts Ian in an ideal position to assess the impact on the soil.



He said despite winter wheat crops being grazed twice during the growing season compaction was not a problem.

"When we are grazing the winter cereals, they are quite dense and we don't notice any compaction issues. Overgrazing stubble with minimal cover, especially when there has been summer rain, is when you can run into strife with compaction."

Ian said that as long as paddocks had reasonable stubble loads and sheep weren't walking on bare ground, compaction could be minimised.

"If you have summer rain, get the sheep off the stubbles," he said.

Sheep pastures are predominantly of lucerne although Ian said they have been keeping the stands way too long (7 to 8 years). They also have some areas, unsuitable for cropping, which are sown down to a phalaris-clover mix.

In the last couple of years Ian said they had noticed inputs required for the long-term cropping paddocks, were skyrocketing, especially nitrogen.

"Ryegrass control is becoming increasingly difficult too," he said.

"Having sheep in our no-till system gives us a chance to use techniques other than chemicals for controlling ryegrass, such as cutting it for hay and using it for intensive livestock grazing."

Find out more

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

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