



Thursday, March 1, 2018

Get on the 'hunt' for new ideas at Hart's 2018 Getting The Crop In seminar

An integrated whole-farm management approach, incorporating cropping and livestock enterprises, is paying dividends for Bordertown farmer Ben Hunt, who will share his experiences at the Getting the Crop In seminar in Clare on March 14.

Hosted by the Hart Field Site Group, the annual pre-seeding seminar brings together some of the country's leading agronomy specialists and this year Ben will be the key-note farmer speaker.

Ben and wife Jules are working through the transition of running the family's 1200-hectare farm following the recent retirement of Ben's father Bill, and along with the challenges that in itself presents, they continue to look at ways they can "spread the risk between cropping and livestock".

Anyone who follows Ben's Twitter handle @funky_farmer will have seen some of his trials and tribulations in running the farm of which 70 per cent is focussed on cropping, alongside a flock of 1300 self-replacing Merino ewes.

"I guess we've had four or five different approaches to our farming which is all integrated between our livestock, and our long-season canola, vetch, barley, canola and wheat," Ben said.

"We integrate the livestock operation into the cropping side of things and use it as a three year fallow which helps with weed control and we can grow clover for three years and get paid for it at the same time.

"It's a seven year rotation – five years cropping and three years pasture and it works well.

"What I'm basically trying to do is space out the number of times our paddock is exposed to pre-emergents, it's exposed to the one pre-em every seven years.

"A lot of blokes are burning up their herbicide options with tight rotations and we see the herbicide resistance breaking down quickly, but especially in the last two to three years – and at the moment the sheep job is 'scone hot' gross margin-wise.

"And the other side of that when we've had two droughts in a row in 2014-15, if we didn't have sheep it would have been mighty uncomfortable, things got a bit hairy for a while.

"So I guess it's all about spreading risk over some of our crops and our livestock."

Long-season canola has also proved beneficial on the property, providing an extra six weeks or so of feed options for their livestock.

"It means we're getting a full 12 months of growth – six months grazing and a crop out of it, and our first experience with it has been fantastic," Ben said.

“One of the biggest issues we’ve got on this place is that green feed drought when the stubble runs out in March – July.

“Our lambs drop in July and usually we’re out dropping silage and grain at that time of the year and we haven’t had to do as much of that, it’s really opening up our feed options three weeks prior and three weeks later.

“It’s just one of the ways we’re putting as much effort into sheep and pastures as we do into our wheat paddocks.”

Ben is also a member of the Durum Growers Committee and will provide an insight into his experience with growing the crop.

He will also speak about growing clover inter-rowed with barley, along with other crops including faba beans, vetch, millet, and growing oats for the Quality Wise rolled oats brand for which he has become a ‘farming face’ for consumers as part of the company’s traceable product initiative.

Hear Ben speak at the Getting the Crop In seminar, sponsored by Rabobank Clare, at The Vines Christian Church, Stradbroke Road, Clare (northern end of the racecourse) 8am-12.15pm.

Ben will also be a guest on a Q&A panel during the event, providing an opportunity to gain a further insight into his operations. Joining him on the panel will be farmers Neil Wittwer from Paskeville and Andrew Mitchell from Mintaro.

For more information and to register for this event, see the Hart Field-Site Group website www.hartfieldsite.org.au

Media contact:

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