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Farming the expanse - growing the family farm

In a farming operation that spans 1600 kilometres across the country, from the far eastern reaches of the Western Australian border to outback New South Wales, there is nothing clearer to the secret of CC Cooper & Co success, and that is the people that help them run their rapidly expanding agricultural enterprise.

“Always aim to employ people that are more capable than yourself, particularly in specialised roles”.

That is the key, according to managing director David ‘Seth’ Cooper (pictured) who, along with brother Tom, oversees CC Cooper & Co’s six properties, across vastly different country, with up to 30 employees at any one time.

Seth will be the farmer guest speaker at the Hart Field-Site Group’s 2021 Getting the Crop In seminar in Clare on Wednesday, March 10, where he will give an insight into the CC Cooper & Co farming enterprise.

The company’s roots are in Jamestown, but have steadily grown since 2005 when the family purchased Wonga Station (Broken Hill), followed by Narrung on the Coorong in 2009-2012 and an additional purchase in 2019, Madura Plains (the second eastern most station in the south of Western Australia), Coorabie in 2019 (the second most western farm in South Australia), and Broughton Vale Station (at Little Topar, New South Wales) in 2020.

The steady expansion has been driven by a desire to balance and manage risk.

“We have always endeavoured to keep our grain, hay, surplus sheep and wool gross income in balance to manage risk,” Seth said.

“We have also aimed to manage environmental risk across the business through covering multiple environments.

“Another driver for expanding into other areas has been that land is very tightly held in the Mid North, with land value being high relative to productive capacity. We have tended to target opportunities in other areas, where the value of country has tended to be lower relative to inherent productivity.



CC Cooper & Co managing director, David ‘Seth’ Cooper

“Narrung has proved to be extremely reliable grain growing country, particularly for canola, which balances the grain growing risk at Jamestown that occurs through high spring temperatures and frost.

“The balance between a strong and reliable grain income at Narrung and the ability to grow high quality export hay at Jamestown is a good mix.”

Seth will give an insight into the day-to-day operations of the family farming enterprise, including some of the practicalities in the use of a disc seeder at their Jamestown property and soil amelioration at Narrung.

“We have been running Tobin Disc drills since 2010, with reasonable success,” Seth said.

“The initial aim was to get away from pulling rocks up every year, particularly in a heavy hay rotation at Jamestown, a secondary benefit was the ability to get the crop in quickly.

“The Tobin machine is definitely not the best machine for seed placement, but we have tended to think that getting the crop planted efficiently and on the correct date is far more important than seed placement.

“On the downside, we would prefer to be on much narrower row spacing (currently 12”) for all crops and currently we have to cross sow all hay to utilise enough of the seed bed.

“Both machines at Narrung and Jamestown are due for a major overhaul after the 2021 seeding, so we will be looking at all options over the next 12 months.”

At Narrung, where the Coopers found soil types to be extremely variable - from heavy black flats, sandy loam over limestone, to sand-over-sand - they faced two main issues.

Firstly, most of their country was water repellent, and secondly, the sandy soil held water but was lacking in macro and micronutrients in the sub-soil.

“To rectify this, we ripped in approximately 10 years’ worth of phosphorus, copper, zinc, manganese, and a bit of boron, placing this in a continuous column of nutrition down to 60cm,” Seth said.

“We used an Agroplow ripper on 60cm spacing, with two seeding tubes down the back of each tyne.

“These were fluted such that some fertiliser was coming out all the way down the slot, so that we had a continuous column of nutrition all the way down the profile, at 60cm spacings.

“Root growth from plants that are not growing over the slot then tends to move sideways across the top of the untreated sub-soil, before growing down the slot to utilise the water and nutrients in the treated column, vastly improving crop production in years with dry spring conditions.”

To combat soil acidification of the top 10cm of soil on the Narrung property, the family have also included lime spreading over the past two seasons.

To hear more about it and how the CC Cooper & Co enterprise has grown, head along to the Getting The Crop In event, where Seth will ‘throw open the farm gates’ to share the family’s experiences.

The event begins with a light breakfast from 8am, seminar from 8.30am (including morning tea) and finishes at 12.30pm at The Influencers Church, Stradbroke Road, Clare (northern end of the racecourse).

To register for Getting The Crop In and for more information see the Hart Field-Site Group website www.hartfieldsite.org.au

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