

Hart

SA's premier cropping field site
Est 1982



MEDIA RELEASE

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Hart celebrates 40 years of farmer-led grains research

It is hard to imagine a group initiated four decades ago with the idea of advancing agronomy research in the field and hosting an event to share the findings, could be still relevant today.

But that is exactly the case for the Hart Field-Site Group – Hart as it has become affectionately known – which this year celebrates its 40th year.

Hart has cemented itself as one of the leading agronomy field days in the country, has been the inspiration for many other now well-known groups who have modelled themselves on its successful formula, and remains relevant and important to growers and agriculture as a whole.

It was from humble beginnings in 1982 on the property of Kevin Jaeschke and his son Michael that Hart was born.

Kevin passed away earlier this year, but much of the success of the Hart group and its annual field day and associated events was a result of his infectious passion for advancing agriculture in the Mid North.

On board from the early days was Dr Allan Mayfield who was bitten by Kevin's enthusiasm when he arrived in Clare in 1985 as plant protection officer with the Department of Agriculture.

He has remained involved ever since and ridden the wave of the evolution of Hart and game changing advances in agriculture, but says Hart has stayed true to its roots and is as relevant today as it was 40 years ago.

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"It remains so because it works on current issues – you go to the Hart Field Day and you leave there knowing you are up-to-date," Allan (pictured left) said.

"It covers a wide range of aspects of broadacre cropping, whether it be herbicides or varieties, and there's trials, speakers and other information that is really current.

"It is run by a voluntary group of farmers and industry people with a good interaction of ideas, all dedicated to make it work and all involved for the right reasons."

Allan will be joined by farmer and former plant breeder Dr Andy Barr as the lunch time guest speakers at the 2022 Hart Field Day on September 20, where they will reflect on the past 40 years of Hart and some of the key changes in agriculture.

And there have been many.

Hart began in 1982 on the Jaeschke farm at Hart – located between Brinkworth and Blyth - on a 50-square-metre trial site, featuring trials of medics and herbicides.

A total of 18 people attended the first year.

Fast forward to current day, when all roads lead to Hart in mid-September, with about 650 people regularly in attendance at the annual field day to participate in a rolling program of more than 20 sessions throughout the day.

Most excitingly, it is held on a 40-hectare site purchased in 1999 and owned outright by the Hart Field-Site Group since 2010, making it what is thought to be the only grower-owned trial site of its size and type in Australia.

Allan recalls some of the major developments in agriculture throughout the decades, with Hart and its trials evolving along the way to keep pace.

He says the 1980s saw advances in herbicides that enabled growers to consider direct drilling seeding options and continuous cropping.

Our cropping landscape changed with those herbicide advances in the 80s, and the once pesky soursob that limited crop production, delayed sowing and reduced yields was controlled "almost overnight" and rendered mostly to roadsides.

Cereal cyst nematodes were a problem, but the emergence resistant crop varieties such as Galleon barley in the 1980s was a big leap forward and yields boosted as a result.

Granular fertiliser was released in the same era, moving away from the powdery predecessors that caked up on machinery and had caused "no end of grief", and also seeding systems changed dramatically.



The 1990s brought even more advances in machinery with stronger tyres and press wheels, chemicals continued to improve, canola became a popular and successful cropping option, and oaten hay production increased in part due to ryegrass that was resistant to some herbicides.

In the 2000s, more herbicide options became available, with the introduction of imi (imidazolinone) herbicides controlling weeds – like brome grass - that had been previously an ongoing issue.

Peas became easier to “handle” with the development of semi-leafless varieties that made them far easier to harvest, and the chick pea industry that had been “knocked over by ascochyta blight in the late 1990s” enjoyed a recovery.

The 2000s saw the emergence of precision agriculture and even further development in chemicals.

“In the last 10 years we've seen more herbicides, particularly aimed at ryegrass control in cereals and the development of a lot more crops,” Allan said.

“And machinery continues to develop, with variable rate applications using crop imagery – satellite imagery – and yield maps and data to try and make some sense of the changing needs of fertiliser across paddocks, especially in these days of high fertiliser prices.”

While the 2022 Hart Field Day will have a rolling program of the latest trial results and agronomy information, the ruby anniversary of Hart also provides an opportunity to reflect on just how far the group and the region's agriculture has come.

Demonstration plots of key historical varieties and a display of other key game changers will provide a trip down memory lane, while Hart's first ever trial undertaken in 1982, focussed on herbicide tolerances to medic pastures continues still to this day and will be on show.

The Hart Field Day will be held on Tuesday, September 20, with gates open at 9am and an official opening at 10am. First sessions start at 10.30am sharp.

Admission is \$44 (students \$15), and includes access to all sessions and guest speakers, as well as a comprehensive, full colour Hart Field Day Guide with articles and information from each of the sessions.

Full catering is available throughout the day (some vendors taking cash only).

The Hart trial site is 10 kilometres north of Blyth, just off the Blyth to Brinkworth Road.

Bus and group tours are welcome and are encouraged to contact organisers now.

Early ticket purchase is encouraged, and will remain open online until lunchtime on the 20th, so even if you only decide on the day to head along it is easy to sign up before you arrive and fast track your way through the gate.

To purchase a ticket, or for more information and full program of sessions, take a look at the Hart Field-Site Group website www.hartfieldsite.org.au (look for Events/Hart Field Day in the main menu) or contact Sandy Kimber on 0427 423 154, or email admin@hartfieldsite.org.au



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