

MEDIA RELEASE

Thursday, February 23, 2023

Farming, bushfires, recovery and opportunity

Redhill farmer Ben Mumford (pictured) was no stranger to the possibility of expanding the family farming operation 'overseas' to Kangaroo Island.

As a kid he got pretty used to working out the logistics of jumping on the ferry or a plane, making sure everything was booked and ready to go, when his father first took a similar expansion route, followed by Ben's brother as part of the family succession plan.

For Ben, wife Bronwyn and their three boys Charlie, 23, Lachlan, 22, and David, 18, looking for an opportunity to expand their Mid North farming enterprise, it was somewhat unsurprising then that the island beckoned.

And with it has come the highest of highs and lowest of lows, but what has shone out brighter than anything else, has been a resilience and community spirit that perhaps even surprised themselves.

Ben will share an insight into the Mumford family farming operations at the Hart Field-Site Group's Getting The Crop In seminar on Wednesday, March 8, in Clare.

Learn about the family's Mid North farm that sits "between Redhill and Crystal Brook, just outside of Goyder's Line in 15-inch rainfall country" where they crop wheat, barley and lentils, grow domestic hay and run a lamb and cattle feedlot.

And hear about their decision to expand to Kangaroo Island, into 800-millimetre rainfall country north west of Parndana, where water and feed have been plentiful, but the devastation of the 2019-2020 bushfires saw them lose almost everything.



"The evening the fire engulfed the farm, everything was burned – the house, the sheds, the shearing shed, hay sheds, the hay in the sheds, everything," Ben said.

"I think we had about two tennis court-sized areas of grass not burned, it just smoked the lot.

"Fortunately, I'd instructed the boys the week before during an earlier fire on the island to get all the stock they could into the yards.

"I had said to my boys that everything is insured – the sheds, the house, but not



the cattle - I said make sure as soon as the wind turns our way and you see smoke coming, get all the cows in the yard because if you get them in there they will survive.

"And that's exactly what they did, they bent over backwards and got every animal they could into the cattle yards and got a tandem disc out and started working fire breaks."

Fortunately, that fire was extinguished, but soon after, all hell broke loose.

"After Christmas one of my boys went back over there just in case, and then there was the second fire," Ben said.

"That day it blew like buggery, it was like the Pinery fire day, it was just like, get out of the way, it's coming.

"My brother Sam was on a CFS truck fighting the fire and he rang my son and said get out now, the fire is in the trees, it's Armageddon, it's coming your way, pack your bags and go.

"Well, he didn't leave. He was here with our stock agent Rob Purvis, and they got every cow they possibly could back into the yards and brought others up into close ground, they did what they could and then shut all the doors and left.

"Virtually everything that walked into the cattle yards survived that fire, anything that couldn't fit into the yards was burned."

Neighbours both at Redhill and Kangaroo Island sprung into action, turning up by the ute load to help with the clean-up, arranging to put cattle into their paddocks around the Mid North.

"Every truckie on the island rolled in to help get the cows out," Ben said

"I was fully-consumed here at KI and I didn't know what was going on at home, but the cows turned up at Redhill and there must have been a group get together, because all the neighbours just took the cows and put them on their farms.

"Cropping ground that hadn't seen livestock for years and years had our cows dotted around everywhere. They just took them and said don't worry about it, Ben, they'll be fine.

"Three months later they brought them back and the cows were fat and happy, they'd had a calf and it was all beer and skittles."

Within a year, the Mumford family had the KI operation all back up and running. "The year of the fire we sowed everything to pasture, we put fertiliser on, so it got us up and running virtually straight away," Ben said.

"Initially our stocking rate was much lighter and we used the opportunity to cull the rubbish out of our cows, but then in the second year we were up to our full production again."

The family has now purchased another neighbouring property on the island – a pine plantation - and is working hard to clear the trees, renovate pastures and re-fence it.

Back home at Redhill, Ben and Bronwyn are grateful they can run a family farming operation where "we can work together and everyone is pulling in the same direction".

With the 2022 season being one for the record books, they said it provided an opportunity to further plan for the future.

"Season 2001 was the year we were going to tell the grandkids about how good it was and how it will never be as good as that," Ben said.



“But the year 2022 was even better. We had exceptional rain through the spring and we had phenomenal yields – the highest yields we've ever had and it lined up with high grain prices – so we're in a very fortunate position.”

Hear more from Ben at Hart's free Getting The Crop In event on Wednesday, March 8, from 8am to 12. 30pm at Influencers Church, Stradbroke Road, Clare (just north of the Clare racecourse).

A light breakfast and morning tea will be provided.

To register and for more information, head to www.hartfieldsite.org.au

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