

MEDIA RELEASE

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Rewarding and retaining staff as the number one investment in farm business

Break it down and it is a fairly simple concept, but farmer Beau Longmire's approach to ensuring his staff are valued for the work they do is having a profound impact on retention of his 'co-workers'.

Beau will be the keynote guest speaker at the Hart Field-Site Group's free, Getting The Crop In seminar on Wednesday, March 13.

Always a highly-anticipated session on the half-day program, Beau will throw open the gate on the operations of his Sunny Hill farm, at Balldale, 22-kilometres north east of Corowa, New South Wales.

Beau's mainly-dryland farm located in 500 millimetre-rainfall country includes full ownership, share farming, contracting and part contracting enterprises.

The business centres mainly around wheat, barley, canola, hay and straw.

Beau (pictured right) also has the farm's first corn crop being grown under irrigation currently in the ground.

It is part of a three-stage irrigation development that he hopes will capitalise on better summer crop margins.

With wife Bec working off-farm, Beau's number one asset for his diverse operation is his 10 full-time staff, along with five seasonal staffers during busy periods.

And it is his innovative approach to giving them the incentive to stay with him that is turning heads.



"In our business, they're not workers, they are people who work alongside us," Beau said.

"We see them as absolutely integral parts of our business, in fact, they're clearly the most integral part of our business."

Seeing the value of good staff, Beau initially began offering a high hourly rate of pay instead of salary.

He says it comes down to valuing his staff for the work they do.

"It is something that I think a lot of traditional farming families struggle to get their head around," Beau said.

"They want to pay a salary and expect their employees to work, say, 55 hours a week on average, rather than the 40 they're getting paid for.

"I'm a strong believer that people should get paid for the hours they work.

"Instead of paying a salary and offering time in lieu, which realistically is hard for them to take, we pay an hourly rate from the time they arrive at work until the time they go home."

Longer term staff, and those willing to "take the risk and additional work load that goes with it", are being offered investment in business opportunities within the farming operation.

Beau said it was not a model for everyone, and staff that chose to pursue a higher hourly wage, with less risk attached, were equally supported in their decision.

It is not a new concept for Beau, who has been working with one of his longest-serving staff members successfully for 15 years.

He is now a business partner with a 50 per cent share in the farm's secondary contracting business.

"We took the view that he was either going to end up working for himself in competition to us, or we were going to be part of his growth," Beau said.

"So we chose to be part of his growth."

Another staff member was given the opportunity to enter into a syndicate with two other farmers, buying machinery that is used across the three farms and also for dry hire.

"We now dry hire that machinery from their company and support him that way. He runs the machines for us and ensures they're efficient because he's got an interest in it," Beau said.

The 'buy-in' is giving Beau's staff an opportunity to boost their income, and it rewards their ambition.

"They drive the outcome," he said.

"Skin in the game is a wonderful thing, it certainly makes them feel part of the outcome because the results are dictated by them rather than me."

Beau is also working through a new annual bonus structure with staff in management positions.

While he is still finetuning the logistics, the aim is to further boost retention of his valuable team.

"We're trying to link an annual bonus to net outcome for the farm, although it's a little challenging getting the ratios right," he said.



“We want them participating in profitability of the farm as much as we can without having to drop away in a drought year, because that's quite often when they're most valuable.”

Hear more from Beau about his farming operation during his keynote address at the Getting The Crop In seminar.

He will also join a guest panel for the popular 'on the couch' question and answer session, which makes its return to the stage in 2024.

The free Getting The Crop In event will be held on Wednesday, March 13, from 8am to 1pm at Futures Church (formerly Influencers Church), Stradbroke Road, Clare (just north of the Clare racecourse).

A light breakfast and morning tea will be provided.

Register now via Eventbrite, or head to the Hart website for more information www.hartfieldsite.org.au

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