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MEDIA RELEASE

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Hart field day group repays council loan ahead of schedule

A loan for land purchased by the Hart Field-Site Group in 2000 has now been fully repaid to the Wakefield Regional Council, five years ahead of schedule.

The final loan payment was made at the group's Getting The Crop In seminar in Clare last week and past committee member, Clare agronomist Dr Allan Mayfield said it was a significant achievement for the community group.

"Hart is the longest running field site group in Australia and as far as we know we're the only farming group in Australia that owns its own land," he said.

The 40-hectare parcel of land was purchased in 2000 for \$102,000, with the Wakefield Regional Council stepping in to finance the loan through the Local Government Finance Authority after a bank loan fell through at the last minute.

Wakefield Regional Council chief executive officer Phil Barry said council had seen the loan as a value-adding opportunity for the region.

"The loan itself is really just the foundation for the Hart Field-Site Group to leverage up. It ensured the opportunity for the group to pursue its vision to get the land but also to build permanent infrastructure on-site," he said.

"It wasn't just for the benefit of the council area, it was something that would benefit the whole region. The Wakefield Regional Council is fortunate to have the Hart Field-Site Group within its area to provide for the rest of the state."

Dr Mayfield said early repayment of the 15-year loan in just 10 years was possible as a result of good financial management, proceeds of commercially cropping three quarters of the site as well as substantial sponsorship and low overheads.

Significant improvements have been made to the site over the past 10 years, including construction of permanent sheds, toilets and meeting room as well as water tanks and power generator.

The vision of the Hart Field-Site Group has been backed by a strong group of supporters, among them Dr Mayfield, founding chairman Kevin Jaeschke OAM and David Maitland who were all personally guarantors of the loan.

It was in 1982 that the first Hart Field Day was held, on Kevin Jaeschke's farm, where all the trials were also conducted until the group purchased its own trial land in 2000.

About 18 farmers attended the first field day. The group's annual field day in September now attracts closer to 600 farmers and industry professionals.

The Hart trial site has also carved an admirable reputation amongst numerous visiting farmer groups from across the country and overseas, researchers and education groups.

Dr Mayfield said the significant commitment of the Jaeschke family in allowing all the initial cropping trials on their farm had been invaluable to the group's success and growth.

However, purchase of the group's own site has meant greater flexibility in trials including rotation of crops over a number of years.

The Hart field site includes a variety of soils – from rubbly Mallee-type soil to heavier soils – which Dr Mayfield said gave a wide representation of land-types in the district.

An area of remnant Mallee scrub has been regenerated on-site, experimental windbreaks have been planted and as well as the regular field days, crop walks and cropping trials at the site, native vegetation trials are also conducted.

The Hart Field-Site Group continues to provide relevant and timely information for its members and visitors.

“It always strives to present the latest information on cropping,” Dr Mayfield said.

“Whether that be new grain varieties or new seeding systems, it's very well presented and when growers and industry people come to our field days and seminars they realise they're right up to date and it's a one-stop-shop for information.”



Photo caption:

Hart 1: Wakefield Regional Council deputy mayor Barry Nottle, Hart Field-Site Group founding chairman Kevin Jaeschke OAM, Wakefield Regional Council chief executive officer Phil Barry, Hart Field-Site Group chairman Grant Roberts, and Hart Field-Site Group treasurer Graham Trengove celebrate the final loan payment to the Wakefield Regional Council for land purchased by the Hart group in 2000.

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