

ENVIRONMENTAL CHAMPIONS PROGRAM

CASE STUDY - THE DALTONS



THE DALTONS – YENDA CLUSTER GROUP, YENDA

The Ricegrowers' Association of Australia's (RGA) Environmental Champions Program (ECP) provides farmers with formal recognition for their environmental stewardship while also helping them to develop a local network with their neighbours to share ideas and meet new challenges.

The ECP is proving popular for many farmers who place high importance on generating increased awareness of the significant advancements that have made farming practices more sustainable.

Farmers Nayce and Helen Dalton (pictured above) believe the ECP initiative not only acknowledges sustainability achievements but also creates a local 'think tank' to take environmental leadership to a new level in the future.

DRIVING ON-FARM CHANGE

The Dalton family has been farming in the Yenda region for more than 50 years. Nayce and Helen Dalton have a mixed dry-land and irrigation enterprise and currently farm

livestock and crops. They became members of the ECP Yenda Cluster Group when it was formed in 2004 and Helen took up the role of Group Leader.

"We became involved in the Environmental Champions Program because we wanted to be recognised for our environmental stewardship that we've already done on the farms. We also see that (by) working in a cluster group we would see more of our neighbours," said Helen.

Very few industries could claim the level of efficiencies and environmental advancements that have been achieved by farmers on the land in recent decades. Nayce Dalton has seen first hand the commercial and sustainable results that come from improved farming methods. "The irrigation efficiencies have certainly improved immensely in my 25 odd years. Now we totally recycle all our waste water. No waste water leaves the farm. Our water to production ratio is increasing all the time and so our water efficiency has certainly increased."

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THE YENDA APPROACH

Whilst recognising the successes that have already been achieved, the ECP format also assists farmers to find even more improvements for the future. The Yenda Cluster Group is made up of around a dozen farming families that produce livestock and cropping and they've taken a problem solving approach to address issues of regional significance in the Murrumbidgee area.

The compliant chemical shed design is a good example of an on-farm result that's been achieved through the ECP process. The issue of chemical storage was highlighted in the early stages of the ECP being trialled. In response the RGA developed streamlined guidelines for chemical storage and a chemical shed kit that can be purchased. The first step was to liaise directly with the then NSW Environmental Protection Authority (now Department of Environment and Climate Change) and WorkCover NSW to determine relevant chemical storage requirements. The RGA worked with growers and the shed manufacturer to design a chemical shed that succeeded from both a farmer and regulatory standpoint. A number of the sheds are already in operation on the individual farms with more to come online in the near future.

Helen says the success of the chemical shed is a positive outcome that all farmers can benefit from when trying to meet the chemical management regulations. "Even other farming groups, people that are farming other enterprises are looking towards the ECP for some solutions like the dairy people and the broadacre farmers."



The ECP framework has provided a forum for the group members to share information and work out productive and efficient ways to tackle challenges, meet Government on-farm requirements and their own goals. Important topics of discussion have included revegetation, water management and the commercial benefits that come from improved efficiencies. The group has developed a coordinated vision for their land and the ECP meetings have generated a level of energy and enthusiasm that's sure to drive the program forward.

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TAKING A LEAD ROLE

Farmers manage close to 70 percent of Australia's land mass giving them the essential role as guardians of the majority of the nation's landscape. The evolution of sustainable agriculture methods is a high priority and has resulted in enormous changes in farming and rice growing practices over the last few decades. There are still further advancements to be made and the Yenda Cluster Group has a keen interest in helping the industry to move in the right direction.

Rather than simply responding to new regulations in environmental sustainability, the group members want to play a lead role in determining new and more efficient ways of farming for the future.

According to the Nayce, one area of interest that's earmarked for further discussion is climate change and how farmers can find ways to benefit from carbon trading instead of allowing it to become a liability.

"Things like carbon trading would certainly be an opportunity if we can get together and keep the benefits of carbon trading at home rather than exporting them off to the city."

ECP – THE ONE STOP SHOP

The Yenda farmers see the ECP as a valuable pool of information not only from within the group but also through the support of the Ricegrowers' Association of Australia. The ECP has more than 20 program partners, including government departments, environment groups and irrigation and chemical companies. Helen believes the ability to seek advice on how to find specific and accurate information has been a big help for farmers.



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“If we’ve had any hurdles to overcome we can just contact the team and they can direct us to those people that are specialised to help us.”

In addition, the social and support networks that are created through the ECP have been another positive outcome for the group members. Helen highly recommends the program for farmers who are thinking about joining.

“You become greater friends with your neighbours and you can work through different problems and you can create opportunities for yourselves. The benefits really outweigh the little bit of time you need to put out in getting together.”

The Environmental Champions Program is an initiative of the Australian Rice Industry.
Find out more by contacting us or visiting our website

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