



ENVIRONMENTAL CHAMPIONS PROGRAM

CASE STUDY - PAUL MARTIN



PAUL MARTIN - NOORONG DOERS CLUSTER GROUP, BARHAM

The benefits and results of the Ricegrowers' Association of Australia's (RGA) Environmental Champions Program (ECP) are enhanced when cluster groups have a strong leader to drive the program at the local level.

Cluster group leaders provide a point of contact for ECP regional coordinators and group members. They help to organise meetings, as well as playing a role in setting the direction for the group's focus and providing a link to the Ricegrowers Association for information and feedback. Group leaders are supported by their regional coordinator and tackle their role in different ways.

Murray farmer Paul Martin (Pictured above) has been the leader for the Noorong Doers Cluster Group since its formation in April 2005 and has found the experience to be both challenging and personally rewarding.

THE LEADING EDGE

The Noorong Doers Cluster Group was formed to give local farmers the opportunity to share information and work together to find solutions to common problems. Group Leader Paul Martin has been farming in the Murray region since 1995 and produces rice, beef and cereals on his property near Barham. He volunteered to lead the group in order to expand on his skills, knowledge and experience. Paul feels the group aspect and support of a cluster is very important as there's plenty of encouragement to get things finished.

Paul also took part in the Environmental Champions Development and Leadership Program in 2006. The Leadership Program was conducted for individuals involved in the ECP and allowed participants to work in teams to complete activities and further develop skills.

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The leadership program challenged me in a lot of ways and it probably exceeded my expectations. I was able to meet like minded people who were in similar positions to me but not necessarily from the same industry.”

Through that experience Paul learnt valuable leadership tools and developed an increased industry awareness to take back to his cluster group members.

“Some (participants) were from rice growing regions, some were from water industries and others were from the rice industry itself, in the production side. So I was able to get a holistic view of the production of food from farms and learn more how I can deal with some of these roles within our community and within industry and utilise skills of other people and manage situations which (we) are confronted by.”

ACHIEVING REAL RESULTS

The Noorong Doers Cluster Group meets twice a year to compare notes, discuss issues of concern and pro-actively develop strategies for the future. The group setup generates a degree of peer group pressure to get things finished while also providing much needed support.

Paul likens it to a group of people hiking, who can only go as fast as the slowest walker. “The key is to get everyone up to speed and over the line.”



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As well as gaining great leadership experience, the ECP will recognise Paul for a variety on-farm achievements, particularly in the area of environmental sustainability. Many of these achievements have been assisted through Murray Irrigation’s Land and Water Management Plan.

“We’ve fenced off approximately 100 hectares of remnant vegetation and within those zones we’ve done a lot of replanting and a lot of direct seeding.”

There has also been extensive work to ensure that the commercial areas of the farm are highly productive and environmentally responsible through the development of an efficient drainage system and a whole farm plan.

Other changes have included the creation of a wetland area, improved water efficiencies and the introduction of a new watering point to reduce the impact of stock on the zoned environmental sections of the farm.

NEW IMAGE - NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Paul says the rice industry in Australia has the opportunity to improve its image and gain a valuable marketing advantage by highlighting its environmental strategies in biodiversity, chemical management and water efficiencies. By developing a reputation for incorporating responsible and sustainable environmental practices, the overall rice industry will benefit from strong consumer support.





Initiatives such as the ECP are essential in achieving these outcomes as the program facilitates the sharing of knowledge not only between rice growers but across all farming enterprises.

“Farmers need to be able to utilise skills from the industry because we don’t necessarily have all those skills ourselves. The program is set up and structured in a way that it meets industry expectations and rural expectations, but also has benchmarks and measuring standards in a concise and controlled way.”

Paul believes that farmers need to work together to ensure that they have the most up to date information and can develop important strategies for the future.

“My advice to any farmers who are considering the program is to get involved and be part of a growing number of farmers taking the right steps. A lot of these issues, you don’t want to tackle on your own.”

The Environmental Champions Program is an initiative of the Australian Rice Industry.

Find out more by contacting us or visiting our website

Ricegrowers’ Association of Australia Inc. Yanco Avenue (PO Box 706), Leeton NSW 2705.

Phone: 02 6953 0433. Fax: 02 6953 3823. Email: ecp@rga.org.au

www.environmentalchampions.rga.org.au