KENSAL GREEN

AgriRisk High Achiever of the Year

COTTON
- Industry Awards -

Scott and Tonia Morgan farm 730ha of high quality black soil on the Breeza Plain near Gunnedah in NSW. Almost half of their operation is put to irrigated cotton each year as part of a wheat/cotton/sorghum/cotton rotation.

Having suffered a 68% cut in their groundwater allocation recently, the Morgan's are highly focussed on ways to maintain their yield and quality consistently, every year, with very limited water. This drove their recent decision to convert 2km of open channels into an in-ground channel and to transition half of the farm from flood to sprinkler irrigation.

On a family holiday in Malaysia Scott realised he could save half the cost of the pipe and fittings by importing the pipe and fittings directly from the manufacturer. His new system reduced the amount of water storage needed and eliminated the need for one of his pumps. This conversion reduced evaporation, saved maintenance costs and has significantly simplified their watering operations, reducing stress levels during summer. Scott estimates the new system has created savings of more than $8,000 p.a.

This year was a "perfect storm" for Scott with a significant loss in ground water and a devastating lack of rain, however the farm still achieved a consistent yield of 11 bales/ha. When seasons allow, Scott uses rainfall to push irrigation water into the subsoil, believing it is better to store water in the soil and work on topping up the soil profile, than keeping it in a storage dam and seeing it evaporate. His heavy use of moisture probes, particularly manual spears, means he is constantly aware of the moisture levels in his soils.

A key strategy successfully used by Scott is direct drilling of wheat and cotton into standing sorghum stubble. His system of telemetry helps further simplifying his farming system by remotely monitoring pipeline pressures and water levels and operating

HOME PROPERTY
"Bruan Park" & "Kensal Green", Gunnedah NSW

OWNERS
Scott & Tonia Morgan

TOTAL ENTERPRISE SIZE
730Ha

AREA TO COTTON 2015/2016
300Ha irrigated

YIELD TARGET
11 B/Ha

WATER ALLOCATIONS
1,004 ML Bore
247ML Unregulated river

TYPE/S OF IRRIGATION
212ha laterals
200ha flood siphon

NO. STAFF
Owners plus 2 FTE

ENTERPRISES
Dryland and irrigated cropping plus contract solar installation.

his lateral irrigator. Whilst Scott is a high user of technology, he insists on letting others experiment first and introducing proven technologies.

Scott was initially quick to capitalise on the financial incentives, good feed-in tariffs and short pay back period offered by solar but has since become highly engaged in the renewables industry. He is very interested in the savings and benefits of meeting the farms' energy needs through on-site, self-generation. His vision for the future is one where everyone produces their own energy to meet their own needs, eliminating the inefficiencies and environmental impacts of centralised power plants and the coal mines that feed them.

Scott has spent the last two years upskilling himself with new qualifications in renewable energy engineering to establish himself as a designer and installer. Not only is this an effective risk management strategy for his farming operation, it has also allowed his 2 full time staff to increase their skill base and be provided with a year-round base workload.

Ultimately Scott questions all of his management decisions through the prism of "will this simplify my operation whilst maintaining yield and quality?" He seeks the "sweet spot" noting that it costs a lot more water and money to get that extra small percentage of yield. He is a highly effective cotton grower clearly demonstrating cost-effective solutions to industry challenges of increasing energy costs, reduced water rights and threats from competing industries.