

The WEEKLY TIMES



Presented by

RAS

2006 Catalogue of Results



2006

The Weekly Times Farm Business Awards

Proudly presented by The Royal Agricultural Society of Victoria

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The Royal Agricultural Society of Victoria thanks The Weekly Times for providing many of the images in this document.

OFFICE BEARERS

The Royal Agricultural Society of Victoria Limited

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LIST OF OFFICE BEARERS, 2006 - 2007

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COMPANY SECRETARY/CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

A. Mansour

MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

The WEEKLY TIMES



It would be fair to say modern farming has rarely faced the challenges that it has in the past 12 months. The tentacles of drought spread further than many had ever imagined, with all parts of southeast Australia in its maddening grip. Water, which has always been the number one issue for the rural community, was suddenly discovered by politicians and city-dwellers. Headlines across the daily media trumpeted the latest water crisis (and the many plans to miraculously fix it), while city-dwellers started to get a taste of the issues constantly faced by their rural counterparts.

Yet throughout all this Australia's farmers continued doing what they do best – producing some of the world's best food as efficiently as they can.

Each week, The Weekly Times reported on those farmers who have shone through

the tough times. These farmers kindly shared their methods, philosophies and hopes with thousands of Weekly Times readers. And the best of these farmers are now finalists in The Weekly Times Farm Business Awards.

The finalists in these awards are focused, creative, energetic and determined to not only survive tough times, but to prosper. Their achievements deserve the accolades they will be given today. They really are the shining lights of modern agriculture.

The Weekly Times is delighted to join forces with the RAS to honour their achievements in these prestigious awards.

Ed Gannon,
Editor
The Weekly Times

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



The Royal Agricultural Society of Victoria is pleased to present The Weekly Times Farm Business Awards, developed through a strong partnership with The Weekly Times and a close working relationship with the Department of Primary Industries and peak bodies in agribusiness.

Launched in 2005, The Weekly Times Farm Business Awards has brought together a number of awards conducted previously by both the RAS and The Weekly Times. The program identifies and celebrates the achievements of farming business leaders across all primary agricultural sectors.

We are very grateful for the strong support of our sponsors, Bayer CropScience, CASE IH, Genetics Australia, Incitec Pivot, Rural Finance, The Department of Primary Industries and of course The Weekly Times. Their involvement in the Awards extends beyond financial input, forming a much valued network in helping

us seek out the best of the best in the field of agriculture and is indicative of their commitment to excellence in Australian agribusiness.

I extend our congratulations to The RAS Alternative Farming Business of the Year, Glenspean Partners – also the overall winner of the coveted Weekly Times Farm Business of the Year. Congratulations also, to Matt Tonissen, winner of the DPI Young Farmer of the Year and to all of our finalists and winners of the other five categories.

Our thanks must go to our hardworking teams of judges, all of whom have had a challenging task in determining the winners of each category.

We thank the farming community, for continuing to develop and advance primary production despite the economic, environmental and social hurdles that are thrown at them each day.

It is our hope that through The Weekly Times Farm Business Awards, we can not only reward those that excel in their field, but provide a vehicle that can assist them in sharing their knowledge and experience with others.

We look forward to continuing this important awards program into 2007, and encourage everyone in rural and regional communities to get behind the Farm Business Awards by nominating those that demonstrate innovation and business practices that maximise productivity and profitability, and shape the future of Australian agribusiness.

Jack Seymour AM
President
The Royal Agricultural Society of Victoria Limited

ABOUT THE WEEKLY TIMES FARM BUSINESS AWARDS

The Weekly Times Farm Business Awards are proudly presented by The Royal Agricultural Society of Victoria Limited (RAS) to recognise and reward outstanding achievement in commercial agricultural production.

Through the assistance of expert industry personnel and the generous support of sponsors, the Weekly Times Farm Business Awards honours the best farming business across Victoria and the Riverina district of New South Wales.

The Awards recognise producers who demonstrate innovative business practices, optimising sustainable productivity and profitability.

The program caters for all sectors of the agricultural industry through identifying and rewarding:

- The Bayer CropScience Horticulture Producer of the Year
- The CASE IH Crop Producer of the Year
- The Genetics Australia Dairy Producer of the Year
- The Incitec Pivot Beef Producer of the Year
- The RAS Alternative Farming Producer of the Year
- The Rural Finance Sheep Producer of the Year
- The Department of Primary Industries Young Farmer of the Year
- The Weekly Times Farm Business of the Year



The RAS and The Weekly Times congratulates all award winners on their achievements and wishes them ongoing success.

Cash Prizes

The award winner in each category receives \$3000 in prize money. The farming enterprise which is named the overall Weekly Times Farm Business of the Year will receive a further \$7000.

THE JUDGING PROCESS

Farm businesses were eligible to enter the Awards if they had been in operation for more than three years and located within Victoria and the Riverina district of New South Wales.

The DPI Young Farmer of the Year was open to producers 35 years of age and under.

The Production Category Judging Panels

There were six specific Production Category Judging Panels consisting of expert industry personnel who completed the first stage of judging.

Each farming enterprise was assessed using information they provided in the Business Assessment Questionnaire, which were developed with the specific commodity in mind, but a balanced range of criteria was maintained throughout.

Judges assessed performances of each entrant over the past three years and their future plans based on the following criteria:

Production Assessment	50%
Environmental Management	15%
Technology Applications	15%
People Development	10%
Future Plans	10%
TOTAL	100%

The winner of each specific Production Category – Alternative Farming, Beef, Crop, Dairy, Horticulture and Sheep proceeded to the final stage of judging to compete for the overall Weekly Times Farm Business of the Year Award.

The Finalist Judging Panel

The Finalist Judging Panel comprised of representatives from leading agribusiness organisations. The Panel selected the overall Weekly Times Farm Business of the Year using the same criteria as the Production Category Judging Panels.

Producers who had nominated as young farmers were selected by each Production Category Judging Panel to be considered for The Department of Primary Industries Farmer of the Year Award. The recipient of this award was also determined by the Finalist Judging Panel.

THE WEEKLY TIMES FARM BUSINESS AWARDS JUDGING PANELS

The Production Category Judging Panels were selected for each award category based on their knowledge of the relevant industry. The judges were as follows:

THE BAYER CROPSCIENCE HORTICULTURE PRODUCER OF THE YEAR

Mr Kym Baldock

National Supply Manager – Juice, National Foods Ltd

Kym is responsible for the purchasing and supply of all Australian fruit processed by National Foods/Berri Ltd. Kym has vast experience in the citrus processing and packaging industry through his past employment roles.

Mr Luis Gazzola

Vegetable Producer – Gazzola Farms

Luis Gazzola is the president of the Vegetable Growers Association of Victoria and is a vegetable producer, with his business Gazzola Farms based at Somerville producing broccoli, carrots, celery, lettuce and Asian greens.

Mr Henry Schneider

FruitCheque Officer, Department of Primary Industries

Henry has been a district horticulture advisory officer for 33 years and specialises in deciduous orchard fruit tree management. Henry received a Department of Primary Industries Executive Award for his work on Oriental Fruit Moth control in 2003.

THE CASE IH CROP PRODUCER OF THE YEAR

Mr Banjo Patterson

Grains and Drought Project Manager, Department of Primary Industries

Banjo has been involved in judging the RAS Victorian Farm Management Competition since 1980 and is an honorary life member of the RAS. Banjo has worked with the Department of Primary Industries since 1980, specialising in farm business management, emergency management and project management of the livestock and grains industries.

Mr Rohan Wardle

Research and Extension Agronomist, Southern Farming Systems

For the past two years Rohan has been the trials program coordinator for Southern Farming Systems with a focus on stubble retention, preceded by working as a Lecturer at Marcus Oldham College in crop and pasture production and commercial agronomy at Elders Horsham. Rohan has a share farm at Lismore, Victoria.

Dr Cherie Reilly

Research Coordinator, Birchip Cropping Group

Cherie completed her PhD on Genotype x Environment Interactions in Wheat Breeding in Southern Australia from The University of Melbourne in 1998 and has been working for the Birchip Cropping Group for four years.

THE GENETICS AUSTRALIA DAIRY PRODUCER OF THE YEAR

Ms Jo Crosby

Sub Project Manager – Dairy, Department of Primary Industries

Jo is currently the manager of the CAS Dairy Project in south west Victoria and specialises in dairy cow nutrition, pasture management and general dairy extension.

Mr Peter Owen

Producer

Peter is a dairy farmer from Driffield in central Gippsland and is the immediate past President of United Dairyfarmers of Victoria and Vice President of Australian Dairyfarmers Ltd.

Mr John Watson AM

Chairman of Incitec Pivot Ltd, Primesafe and the Dairy CRC and Director of Rural Press Ltd and Tassal Ltd.

Previously a dairy farmer from Northern Victoria and a past President of the United Dairyfarmers of Victoria, John now is a director of various agricultural organisations and has also received an Australian Centenary Medal and is a Member of the Order of Australia.

THE INCITEC PIVOT BEEF PRODUCER OF THE YEAR

Mr Bill Bray

President, Cattle Council of Australia

Bill was elected as President of the Cattle Council of Australia in 2004. He runs a mixed beef/sheep operation and has been an active member for the Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) for the past 21 years and is the immediate past-President of VFF Livestock Group.

Ms Emma Weatherly

Beef Industry Development Officer, Department of Primary Industries

Emma has been based at Hamilton as a Beef Industry Development Officer since 2004. Prior to this Emma was an extension officer and youth coordinator for the Angus Society and has had her own Angus stud since 1991.

Mr Dick Whale

Managing Director, Independent Breeding & Marketing Service Pty Ltd

Dick has had years of experience in the beef industry working in research and designing breeding programs. Dick now manages his own breeding program company and has clients in the eastern states of Australia and the USA.

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THE WEEKLY TIMES FARM BUSINESS AWARDS JUDGING PANELS

THE RAS ALTERNATIVE FARMING PRODUCER OF THE YEAR

Mr Charles DeFegeley
Producer and Farm Consultant

Charlie manages his family's property "Quamby" which is situated near Ararat in western Victoria and is also a partner in the Ballarat agricultural consultancy company, Mike Stephens and Associates where he specialises in productive livestock systems. Charlie's property 'Quamby' has been a demonstration property since 1989 where they have hosted over 5000 producers at field days and seminars.

Ms Meg Miller
Rare Breeds Victoria

Meg is a small farms writer and self employed publisher. She publishes 'Grass Roots' and 'Australasian Poultry' magazines, writes Backyard Farm for 'Burke's Backyard' magazine plus farm stock articles for 'Victorian Lifestyle' magazine.

Mr Banjo Patterson
Grains and Drought Project Manager, Department of Primary Industries
Refer to the Finalist Judging Panel notes.

THE RURAL FINANCE SHEEP PRODUCER OF THE YEAR

Mr Garry Hallam
Sheep and Wool Specialist, Department of Primary Industries

Garry has 36 years experience in sheep and wool extension and research with the Department of Primary Industries. Garry has his own farming business focussed on prime lamb and wool production and provides specialist support to the Bestwool/Bestlamb and EDGENetwork projects.

Mr Neil Harris
Wool Producer

Neil is primarily a wool producer with 28 years farming experience. Neil has previously been Chairman of BestWool 2010 and the Seymour Wool Marketing Group.

Mr Jamie Ramage
Producer, Chairman of BestWool/BestLamb

Jamie specialises in feeder lamb production and marketing. He is currently President of the Australian Coopworth Council and is Chairman of Bestwool/Bestlamb and is a bursary winner of the Wool Market Linkages Program.

Mr Jack Spiers
Producer

In addition to operating his own enterprise, Jack works as a private consultant. He is also a Director of Land and Water Australia and a Director of Glenelg-Hopkins Catchment Management Authority. He was

awarded the prestigious McKell medal for Natural Resource Management from the Australian Federal and State Governments.

THE FINALIST JUDGING PANEL

The finalist judging panel comprised the following leaders in Australian agribusiness and selected **The Weekly Times Farm Business of the Year** and **The Department of Primary Industries Young Farmer of the Year**:

Mr Banjo Patterson
Grains and Drought Project Manager, Department of Primary Industries

Banjo has been involved in judging the RAS Victorian Farm Management Competition since 1980 and is an honorary life member of the RAS. Banjo has worked with the Department of Primary Industries since 1980, specialising in farm business management, emergency management and project management of the livestock and grains industries.

Mr Mike Carroll

Mike comes from a family that has been involved in agriculture for over 130 years. Mike Carroll is the immediate past General Manager of the National Australia Bank Agribusiness division and has recently been involved with Birchip Cropping Group as part of an initiative for on farm financial strategies. Mike is also a director of the RAS.

Mr Neil Clark
Chairman, Farm Management 500

Neil is the founding member and chairman of Farm Management 500 and has 36 years experience in the agricultural industry. Neil owns and manages his own cropping farm in central Victoria and is a skilled rural market analyst.

2006 AWARD WINNERS

THE WEEKLY TIMES FARM BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

Glenspean Partners
Meredith, Victoria

THE DEPARTMENT OF PRIMARY INDUSTRIES YOUNG FARMER OF THE YEAR

Matthew Tonissen
Hamilton, Victoria

THE BAYER CROPSOURCE HORTICULTURE PRODUCER OF THE YEAR

Malakoff Estate Vineyards
Landsborough, Victoria

THE CASE IH CROP PRODUCER OF THE YEAR

E, J & D Stephens
Shelford, Victoria

THE GENETICS AUSTRALIA DAIRY FARMER OF THE YEAR

GW & SM Croft
Mepunga West, Victoria

THE INCITEC PIVOT BEEF PRODUCER OF THE YEAR

Warrawillah Pty Ltd
Bruthen, Victoria

THE RAS ALTERNATIVE FARMING PRODUCER OF THE YEAR

Glenspean Partners
Meredith, Victoria

THE RURAL FINANCE SHEEP PRODUCER OF THE YEAR

MJ, TK & JA Tonissen
Hamilton, Victoria

THE WEEKLY TIMES FARM BUSINESS OF THE YEAR FINALISTS

The
WEEKLY TIMES



MALAKOFF ESTATE VINEYARDS

Landsborough, Victoria

Winner of The 2006 Bayer CropScience Horticulture Producer of the Year

E, J & D STEPHENS

Shelford, Victoria

Winner of The 2006 CASE IH Crop Producer of the Year

GW & SM CROFT

Mepunga West, Victoria

Winner of The 2006 Genetics Australia Dairy Farmer of the Year

WARRAWILLAH PTY LTD

Bruthen, Victoria

Winner of The 2006 Incitec Pivot Beef Producer of the Year

GLENSPEAN PARTNERS

Meredith, Victoria

Winner of The 2006 RAS Alternative Farming Producer of the Year

MJ, TK & JA TONISSEN

Hamilton, Victoria

Winner of The 2006 Rural Finance Sheep Producer of the Year



Bayer CropScience



Malakoff Estate Vineyards

Malakoff Estate Vineyards is a family business run by Robert John and his son Cameron. Their estate is a 215 hectare property, which nestles in the western end of the Pyrenees Ranges, near the Malakoff Gap between Elmhurst and Landsborough.

"The moderate slopes with no frost traps, north easterly aspect, good drainage, protection from wind and good depth of top soil over permeable clay, all influenced our site selection," Robert said.

Most of the 23 hectare vineyard is planted to shiraz, taking advantage of the Pyrenees' reputation as a prime shiraz region. The initial planting of 4 hectares in 1997 doubled in the next two years and was increased by another 4 hectares in 2000. Robert said the expansion had been gradual, only planting when a contract had been secured.



A civil engineer, Robert helped draw up a business plan for the vineyard and Cameron, who manages the vineyard, has studied level one and two viticulture with local winery and vineyard Mt Langhi Ghiran, and level three through Ballarat University.

"We formed a business plan and stuck to it," Robert said. "The philosophy has always been to expand gradually so we can control quality," Robert added. Part of the business plan included rationalising equipment and modifying existing equipment to suit their needs. They use one tractor in conjunction with a modified 2000-litre spray unit. Low overheads and careful management of vineyard operations has kept costs under control. Robert is keen to boost the profile of shiraz from the Pyrenees through Malakoff's single vineyard wines.

One judge stated that Robert and Cameron have an "excellent focus on market demands and product quality using the latest technologies in their industry."

THE BAYER CROPSCIENCE HORTICULTURE PRODUCER OF THE YEAR FINALISTS

Vilenza Produce

Citrus is uncommon in East Gippsland, yet the Zagami family has developed one of the biggest lemon plantations in the state. The mild climate and light frosts at Wairewa, between Lakes Entrance and Orbost, make for an ideal environment for lemon trees.

Vince Zagami has been growing lemons for 12 years on a 130 hectare property in the heart of Gippsland's Riviera district. Together with his son Matthew and daughter-in-law Katie, the family now have 10,000 trees alongside their snow pea and bean enterprises.

The lemons are grown on hill country away from the risk of frost bite and the vegetables are grown on creek flats. They have close to 30 hectares of peas, snow peas and sugar snaps and plan to expand that on 134 hectares purchased nearby. They have also planted 1000 avocado trees as a trial plot and have long-term plans of value-adding to the lemon operation with on-site juicing and possibly export. One judge commented that the Zagami's have a "strong grasp for maintaining year-round production and income using sound horticultural practices. For this to occur, production diversity is the key."



Most of the vegetables are irrigated from two bores and catchment dams with 80 megalitres of storage. "We have just switched to underground trickle-tape irrigation from overheads and we have noticed big savings in water and time," Matthew said. Isolation from other citrus regions means there are few problems with pests and diseases. "Unlike most other areas we can grow lemons for 12 months of the year so we can really take advantage of good summer crops," Vince noted.

* Matthew Zagami is also a finalist in the DPI Young Farmer of the Year Award.

Lake Marmal Vineyards Pty Ltd

If it can be counted or measured, chances are the managers of Lake Marmal Vineyard have crunched the numbers. The directors and managers of this large corporate operation know how deep the soil is, how much water each block uses, which blocks yield the biggest volumes and which produce the best quality wine grapes.



All on 172 hectares of irrigated vines on a 570 hectare low rainfall property west of Boort in north central Victoria, most of the varieties planted are red wine, predominantly Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon. A second phase included Sangiovese, Durif, Mataro (Mourvedre), Barbera and Marsanne.

The site was chosen because of the soil type, good drainage and, in such a dry climate, the ability to use water as a management tool to manipulate the quality and quantity of grapes to suit individual customers. Isolation from other vineyards also helps limit the risk of disease.

Operations began in 1998 and most of the planning was based on the requirements of the then Southcorp, now Fosters. Manager John Henderson has overseen the development of the property from its previous life as a cropping and sheep farm. "The aim is to offer buyers of wine grapes defined,

predictable and consistent grape quality," John said.

For the past three years, LMV has been involved in a Grape and Wine Research and Development Corporation funded project aimed at understanding the impact and management of the variability of fruit quality in the vineyard.

Techniques now employed include remote sensing to identify variation across the vineyard, differential harvesting of fruit to suit the end use and changes in the vineyard to give more consistent performance from each block. Judges observed that "known technologies have been implemented and (they) are leaders in the field of market driven quality parameters," and were impressed by their quality assurance and financial management.

THE CASE IH CROP PRODUCER OF THE YEAR FINALISTS

CASE IH

SMARTER FARMING



E, J & D Stephens

David runs his 480 hectare cropping farm in Shelford, Victoria. David and his parents, Ted and Judy, moved to the property in the 1980's where they sheared as many as 10,000 Merinos. But when the price of wool declined, the Stephens shifted their focus entirely to cropping.



Despite the change, David said quitting the sheep was an easy decision. "Wool was really hurting," he said. "The fences were stuffed, the yards were stuffed and the dog was 12 years old." The last of the sheep were sold in August last year. With the switch came more education. Three years ago, David set up his own concept farm to trial new cropping practices, such as wide row spacing, and a year later the farm was a focus farm for Southern Farming Systems and the Department of Primary Industries. One judge commented that the Stephens enterprise "was not large by cropping standards, but compensated for this through the adoption of new technologies and basing management decisions on sound information sourced from on-farm research."

Today David is more enthusiastic than ever about cropping in the Western District and is always willing to share his knowledge with other farmers. His wife, Fiona, is an integral partner in the business and has a big input into the machinery decisions. Technology is now an important part of the operation with a 2cm global positioning system, controlled traffic technology and yield mapping. He expects the current path to result in healthier soils with better microbial activity and less soil compaction. "It's all about sustainability and leaving enough for the next generation," David emphasised.

The farming operation has expanded to include another 500 hectares of lease and share-farmed land and the Stephens are looking for more cropping country in the Shelford district.

THE CASE IH CROP PRODUCER OF THE YEAR FINALISTS

BD & SI Doery Pty Ltd

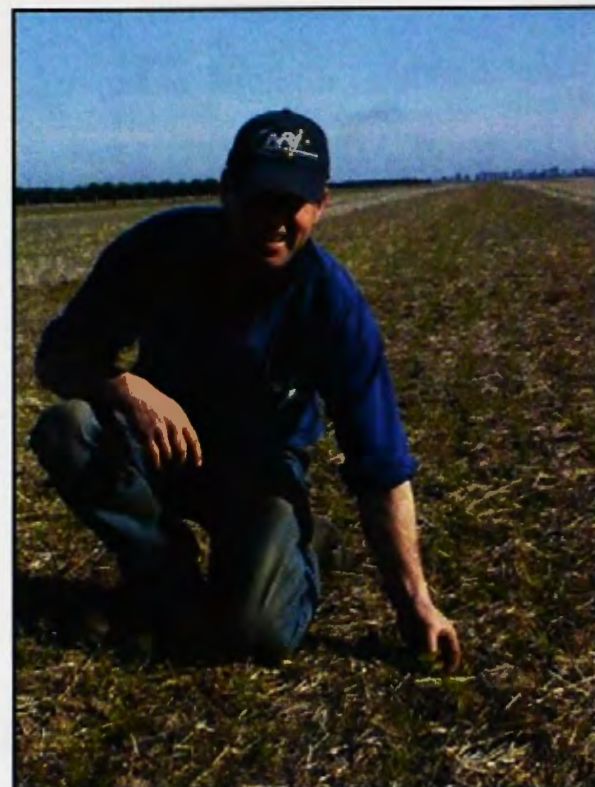
Bruce and Samantha Doery run a 844 hectare sheep and cropping enterprise west of Streatham in southwest Victoria. About 60 to 70 per cent of the farm is cropped each year, mostly to wheat, barley and oats but also canola and pulse crops (mostly field peas, vetch and some faba beans).

Bruce and Samantha have found a novel way to make money out of the bogey of many grain crops, ryegrass. Instead of spraying the weed, the Doerys have fitted a seed collector to the rear of their header to harvest the seed when their grain crops are stripped. Later they separate the ryegrass seed from the chaff and sell it to lawn seed suppliers or use it as stock feed. Bruce said harvesting the seed reduced reliance on sprays and the risk of developing herbicide intolerance. The income from the ryegrass seed paid for fitting a second-hand seed collector to their harvester.

The Doerys use integrated pest management and integrated weed management. "We are out to maximise production, working with the resources we have while looking at maintaining the soils and looking after the environment," Bruce explained.

"We are loath to use too many chemicals." Bruce still leaves open the option to use herbicides if ryegrass gets out of control but so far, seed collection has been a cheaper alternative. One judge stated that the Doerys had an "optimistic outlook with a good environmental focus, with opportunities to diversify implemented."

Sheep work in well with the Doerys' cropping regime. A stubble cruncher is hired to speed up the break down of heavy crop stubbles, making them easier to graze, ensuring weeds are controlled and eliminating the need to burn straw. Bruce said slug and mouse numbers also seemed to have fallen due to more exposure to predators and grazing.



Bromley Park Pastoral Co

Just over a year after the sudden loss of his father, Aaron Sanderson is showing that he is more than capable of taking on the family business.



With his mother, Jenny, and grandparents, Oz and Glad, Aaron is running the family's 2200 hectare property with its 4000 sheep, Bromley Park Merino stud and 1200 hectares of cropping, along the way winning a VFF Grains Apprentice Award.

The farm is at Coonooer Bridge, about 20km north of St Arnaud. Aaron and Jenny said community support had helped them survive the past year. "If we hadn't had the help of friends and neighbours, it would have been too big a task," Jenny noted.

Approximately 50 per cent of the farm has been used for cropping over the past three years, with production of wheat, barley, canola and oats.

Aaron is now confidently looking to the future and beginning to make plans for the family property, which will eventually be run by him and his younger brother Paul. Jenny is proud of her son's achievements in what was such a difficult time and is confident about the farm's future.

"Aaron's matured a lot and learnt a lot and everyone in the family has become mentally stronger," she said. One judge commented that Aaron is "set for a big farming future."

* Aaron Sanderson is also a finalist in the DPI Young Farmer of the Year Award.

Genetics cs

A U S T R A L I A



GM & SM Croft

When Graeme and Sally Croft married in 1984, their farm was a beef and sheep property spanning 207 hectares. Later that year they decided to build a small dairy for 80 cows and the business has been growing ever since.



Now Graeme and Sally, and their three full-time workers, milk 750 Jersey dairy cows on 210 hectares, of which 100 hectares is irrigated and sell their milk to three or four different milk companies.

Irrigation allows the Crofts to have a high stocking rate of four cows per hectare. "If we didn't irrigate, we would have to have half the cows or twice the ground," Graeme explained. The cows are run as two separate herds with one 430-head herd calving from the beginning of February and the rest from the start of August. With the current climate and drought conditions, irrigation and forward feed purchasing has allowed the Crofts to minimise uncertainty surrounding feed sources.

easy calving and relatively low maintenance. With the farm development now complete, Graeme and Sally are examining how they can do things better. The judges agreed that the Crofts were "very strong in all areas of their business, had good long term planning and excellent use of technology."

The Crofts run Jerseys because of their smaller size,

THE GENETICS AUSTRALIA DAIRY PRODUCER OF THE YEAR FINALISTS

Hamily Pty Ltd

After purchasing their first 120 hectare property in 1994, Ian and Mary Hamono continued to extend and develop their farm business over four years. In 1996 they added a 50 unit rotary dairy, followed by a 73 hectare turn off block and an additional neighboring property.

Along with running a successful Holstein dairy operation, Ian and Mary have developed their property to be self sufficient, with all feed grown on farm.

With many farm businesses struggling under the present climate conditions, Ian and Mary were effective by planning early for the drought. Understanding that they could be significantly affected, they sold 100 cows and pre-purchased water as a part of their stockpile. As a part of their drought contingency, they will continue to forward plan to ensure their business remains competitive and viable in the long-term.

Ian and Mary not only plan for drought, they have also implemented a robust business strategy and have set milk production targets. They had set a 10-year goal of producing 3.5 million litres of milk per year. They have achieved this and believe they can maintain it into the future. One judge stated the Hamonos "understand their business and are smart operators."



In addition, they have a feed pad that enables them to buy cheaper feed, such as citrus pulp, kibble, grape marc and canola meal. Ian said cows would be on a 'half diet', getting a morning feed on pasture and a night feed of silage on the feed pad before they go into a dry paddock. "There is an additional cost to this approach but the cost is balanced by the improved quality of feed," Ian explained.

Netherway Farms

In 1992, Dean Netherway left university to return to his family's dairy farm in Quantong. Dean gradually took over the day to day management of the 120 hectare property and continued to help the business grow and develop. Over the next few years, Dean increased the cow numbers from 180 to 480 and built a new dairy in 1999.



This farm is a true family business with Dean, his brother, his mum and his dad all working full time on the property.

The cows consume all their feed on concrete, apart from an occasional green pick in spring. The area allocated to milking is 120 hectares of the 1300 hectare property and the rest is for grazing and cropping.

A steady stream of trucks delivers stock feed and every second day take away milk to a factory in Bendigo. He might be hours away from any major dairying district but he keeps in touch with dairy issues. "I have industry people from one end of the state to the other that keep me well informed," Dean said. One judge commented that this was a "most impressive performance in extreme conditions."

Dean and his brother are looking to take over the farm from their parents in the future. In the long-term their plans are to continue to grow the business, buy more land and be in the position to employ staff.



Because the land is your life.



Warrawillah Pty Ltd

Geoff Jennings runs his beef business according to a very simple formula: produce and utilise as much grass as possible at the lowest cost, use the pasture to grow the maximum amount of beef per hectare and then market as much beef from the farm gate. Using this philosophy, the Bruthen beef farmer has won Gippsland Natural's producer of the year twice.

Geoff has 92 hectares of river flats and 40 hectares of hill country on the Tambo River plus another 204 hectares of lease country, running up to 320 spring calving Angus cows. Geoff finishes steers for sale at 15-18 months to backgrounders (350-389kg) or feedlots (380-480kg). Empty heifers go over the hooks to Gippsland Natural, a brand of quality free-range beef raised on grass with no antibiotics or growth hormones.

Geoff runs the farm like a dairy farm, moving the cattle every two days around small paddocks of mostly ryegrass and white clover. Stocking rate is around 23-24 DSE per grazed hectare. The cows calve from the middle of July and the calves are weaned at six to seven months and sold from November onwards. Fertility is Geoff's first priority, then birth weight, calving ease and mature cow weight. From then, its eye muscle area and marbling. "I want heavy calves well built and muscled, but not too tall," Geoff emphasised. "And I'm not aiming for big cows."



Production figures show beef production per hectare in 2005-2006 of 386kg/ha, up from 346kg two years earlier. Geoff said his other key target was to lower costs. Production figures last year show it cost \$0.84 to produce 1kg of beef, compared with a return of \$2.02/kg. These compare with costs of \$0.955/kg and returns of \$1.76/kg in 2003-2004.

Judges commented that this was a "beef enterprise with a strong production track record and a leader in environmental management systems and beef marketing, with a sound business philosophy and a demonstrated commitment to consider new ideas and techniques."

THE INCITEC PIVOT BEEF PRODUCER OF THE YEAR FINALISTS

G & J Irvine

Cattle finishers Geoff and Jean Irvine run a full time beef operation, but for only part of the year. "We rest the property for two months in April-May to build a substantial feed wedge ready for when the trading cycle begins again in June," Geoff stated.

The Irvine's buy store weaner heifers in June at an average 220kg live weight and finish them to an average of 400kg for the domestic market.

Although they farm just 16 hectares near Warragul, their stocking rate is impressive, taking advantage of the normally reliable climate and fertile soils. However below average rainfall in recent years is a cause for concern. "It could mean a reduction in potential stocking rate," Geoff noted. Stocking rate has dropped from 45 to 34 DSE/ha over the past three seasons in line with a fall in rainfall. Beef production last year was 885kg/ha, down from 114kg/ha three years ago, although this has been off set by a lift in average sale prices from \$1.59/kg to \$1.77/kg.

Geoff places a high priority on pasture nutrition and grazing management. "When we bought the property in 1997, it was weed infested with little improved pasture. Since then we have established perennial ryegrass, cocksfoot and white clover pastures and planted 2000 trees for shelter." Fertiliser, mulching and aeration help achieve an annual pasture growth of 14 tonnes/ha and a daily weight gain in the cattle of more than 1kg/day.

One judge stated that the Irvines implemented "excellent pasture nutrition and grazing management (rotational grazing)," but would like to see them have a "targeted market approach to a specific domestic end user" for their cattle.



Frank Hill



Frank Hill loves putting his bulls to the test. The Heathcote beef producer has his Angus and Salers bulls gene tested in a bid to produce tender beef and improve the marbling content of his herd.

Frank runs 300 Angus-Salers cross breeders on his 600 hectare farm at Heathcote in central Victoria. He uses GeneStar technology to detect marbling and tenderness genes in his bulls. Like any good cattleman, Frank thinks about every facet of his farming. In a poor season, he can run a stocking rate of a cow and calf on 2.4 hectares of his poorest country. With calves last year averaging \$550 at nine months, his return was \$192 a hectare. In a good season in 2001, he averaged \$700 for his calves, returning \$264/ha. Frank also runs first-cross ewes on his best country at 2.4/ha.

Cattle provide 80 per cent of Frank's income and lamb 20 per cent. "I try and produce as much meat as I can at the highest quality I

can," Frank noted. One judge commented that Frank applied an "excellent use of cross-breeding hybrid vigour," but would like him to look at "alternative marketing strategies away from the local sale yards, to capitalise on his quality product".

Using the Brisbane based company Genetic Solutions GeneStar, Frank sends hair samples from his bulls to detect tenderness and marbling characteristics. Frank attends sales of different breeds throughout the year and searches for GeneStar results alongside the estimated breed values in the catalogue. "What I'm doing is using all the tools at my disposal to breed the most tender beef I can."



Glenspean Partners

Back at the height of the last wool boom in 1989, Sandy and Julie Cameron started looking for an alternative farming venture in case wool fell away.



It was a decision that proved to be wise and changed the lives of the vet and his wife. Today, fine wool production at Glenspean near Meredith, mid-way between Geelong and Ballarat, accounts for just a small portion of profits.

Specialty cheeses and yoghurt produced from sheep and goat milk make up the bulk of the business income. The Camerons are milking 2000 sheep and 1500 goats, more than 10 times they were a decade ago. Other enterprises on the 1200 hectare property include 400 hectares of cereal crops and canola on raised beds, 1200 Merino ewes producing 17.5 micron wool and cutting 1000 rolls of silage for the dairy. They also supply pregnant ewes for medical research.

The Cameron's Meredith Dairy has defied the unsteady history of sheep and goat dairies. It is now the largest supplier of sheep and goat milk products in Australia, and has a long list of awards to its

name. Last year 130 tonnes of cheese and 260 tonnes of yoghurt were produced from 715,000 litres of goat milk and 216,000 litres of sheep milk. "Much of the growth seen in this business can be attributed to continuous research in crop production, out of season breeding in sheep and goats, improved dairy manufacturing techniques and improved animal genetics," stated one judge.

"We have seen a 30 per cent growth in milk production each year," Sandy remarked. "The emphasis on year round breeding, normally a challenge in animals with highly seasonal reproductive rhythms, has maintained the milk supply."

Sandy said the main aim was to add value to all farm products. "The dairy manufacturing business drives the production of pastures, grains and fodder. Milk production must be planned well ahead in anticipation of cheese and yoghurt demand. Planning for crops, pastures and breeding must be precise and decisions made many months ahead."

THE RAS ALTERNATIVE FARMING PRODUCER OF THE YEAR FINALISTS

The Pastoral Pork Company

The Pastoral Pork Company was formed in 1992 with the aim of becoming a leader in breeding and weaning pigs outdoors. The company produces about 56,000 pork pigs a year at its main site at Winchelsea and its Otway Pork site, 'Barwonleigh', at Inverleigh.

Several pig industry identities have a stake in the company, including nutritionist John Carr, grain grower John Watson and agricultural engineer and Pastoral Pork managing director Ian Farran.



The Pastoral Pork Company was the first producer outside the egg industry to get national RSPCA accreditation for its free-range Otway Pork and is the largest outdoor pig producer in Australia.

Weaners are grown out at Winchelsea to nine weeks of age and then transported to contracted farms with intensive pig sheds in the Bendigo and Cressy region.

Some weaners are bought from associated weaner farms. The females remain at Inverleigh, 30km west of Geelong, to be grown out on straw for Otway Pork. Ian said Otway Pork was developed to meet consumer demand on domestic and export markets for a premium product that was lean and tasty, as well as safe and natural. It was also insurance for the future. "The strategy will be fundamental in moving from being a commodity agribusiness to a value-added food company."

Otway pigs are grown in a free-range system and are fed a grain-based diet, free of growth hormones and antibiotics. All breeding animals are housed in huts that leave them free to roam the paddocks. The pigs graze only part of the property at any one time and are moved to new paddocks every two years. One judge commented that the Pastoral Pork Company "is based around superior genetics which are best suited to outdoor breeding and excellent meat quality standards."

Lavande Aromatiques

When the Rolfe family returned to their Riverina home after a stint in England, their place was a mess. Tenants had allowed the garden to die, but one thing remained growing strong and healthy - lavender. The survival of the lavender when all else has perished impressed Steve and Joanne, who now run Lavande Aromatiques lavender farm on their 22 hectare farmlet at Narrandera in southern New South Wales.

The Rolfes thriving business is based around 5000 lavender plants. They cater for tourists, produce essential oils and skin care products and export harvesting equipment worldwide. Training sessions are also provided for secondary and tertiary students.

Yet when they returned from overseas seven years ago, the Rolfes admit they knew nothing about farming. Steve is ex-Navy and runs an information technology business, while Joanne worked in hotel management. "We looked at lots of alternatives, things like lucerne, olives or proteas, but the experience with how lavender survived made it a winner for us."

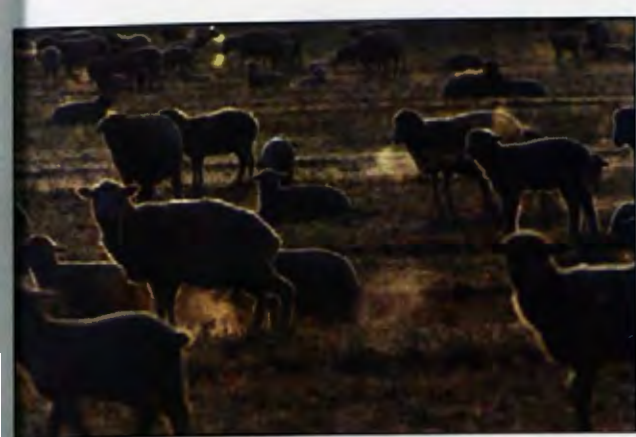


They have a boutique shop and gallery selling their skin care product range, dried flowers are used in food products out-sourced to food manufacturers and a website is used to promote harvesting equipment for export. "The Rolfes are driven by strong environmental goals and a commitment to educational needs and marketing excellence. They also demonstrate a commitment to innovation, especially in the areas of water use efficiency and harvesting," remarked one judge.

"We would do this for the fun of it if we weren't doing it as a business and we find it all fascinating," Steve said. However decreasing rainfall and high summer temperatures were a challenge for increasing production and keeping the business viable. "We need to find heat and drought tolerant varieties of lavender which will survive under extreme conditions."



RURAL FINANCE



MJ, TK & JA Tonissen

Prime lamb producer Matt Tonissen had two choices. He could have sold all his lambs soon after weaning, and lightened his stocking load over a long summer. Or he could have found a way to both finish lambs and feed his breeding stock through to the autumn break. Matt, who doesn't seem to mind the odd challenge, naturally chose the latter. His farm near Braxholme, south west of Hamilton, saw the spring cut out four to six weeks earlier than normal. But all this wasn't enough to stop this third generation farmer, who farms with wife Tanya, brother Jon, father Graham and sister Susan.



Early last spring he started looking for alternatives to get his 4700 mixed aged ewes, 1300 ewe weaners and 2400 lambs through summer. It was not the first time Matt, who sheared for eight years so he could buy his first land, had looked outside the square.

For the past decade he has progressively adopted biological practices, fertilising with liquid phosphorus and using a variety of trace elements. He also applies liquid fish and uses lime and dolomite to correct soil pH and the calcium-magnesium ratio. "I think we need to try and get away from the chemical side of it and work with nature a bit," Matt said. Matt believes the different inputs have allowed the farm to hang on longer in what has been a very dry year.

"It would have been easier to off-load now, but I believe there are dollars to be made by hanging on to stock," he said. Matt is farming for the future and it might be his toughest season so far but his stock will still be there when the break comes. Judges noted that Matt is very progressive in prime lamb production, and were impressed by his "strong vision to expand and develop the business, strong production focus and good market awareness."

* Matt Tonissen is also a finalist for the DPI Young Farmer of the Year Award.

THE RURAL FINANCE SHEEP PRODUCER OF THE YEAR FINALISTS

Pendarra White Suffolk Stud

Murray Long simply wants to break the mould. His aim is to breed that elusive ram with superior growth and muscle with an index of 200-plus. To achieve his dream, Murray has teamed up with White Suffolk breeder Dennis Duffy to establish a high-performance flock.

Located two hours apart, Murray and Dennis have based their alliance on communication and trust. They have formed a pool of the best genetics they can find to produce elite rams, using embryo transfer and artificial insemination.

But the quest has not been easy for Murray and his wife Di, who have endured a long run of drought years. The Longs run 520 mature age ewes and grow grazing wheat, oats and barley on 728 hectares at Ardlethan, in the north-west Riverina.

They are in their sixth year of drought. "We just batted down and used our superannuation and farm management deposits to buy stock feed," Murray said. Buoyant lamb prices and strong demand for rams had kept the farm afloat. "Sheep have been a shining light above all enterprises in this region," Murray said. In contrast, the margins for grain were way behind. Drought had forced farmers to switch from cropping and wool to dual-purpose grazing crops and prime lambs. "I've got to produce rams for different climatic areas so we have developed a genetic supermarket." Murray said the drought had proven the White Suffolk's ability to do well on low-quality feed.

Judges noted the attention to long-term planning and commented on their "excellent promotion and marketing with emphasis on continuous improvement."

Murray and Di aim to breed profitable, easy-care sheep with high feed conversion, growth and survival rates. "My main focus is on growth and muscle. White Suffolk first-cross ewes make good, easy lambing mothers with a great temperament, milk well and produce fast growth rate lambs," he commented.



CM & SL Gellie

Colin and Sandra Gellie's composite lambs have delivered a double bonus. Not only do they achieve a premium of 20 cents a kilogram, but they have also won the major commercial prime lamb award in the 2005 RAS Prime Lamb Carcase Competition. The Gellies, with their son Zac, run a self-replacing flock of 2500 East Friesian - Texel cross ewes on their 500 hectare property at Derrinallum in the Western District.

They have produced a composite flock by putting East Friesian - Texel cross rams over their crossbred ewes. The resulting lambs achieve consistent fat scores of two and three, which provides a 20 cent premium from most processors.

"We are producing a high-yielding, low-fat animal and we like that cross," he said. "When you're producing prime lambs, it's all about the yield and fat score." Colin bought his first East Friesian ewes in 1998, shifting from Dorset rams over a Border Leicester - Merino cross base. "I've always had an eye for something different and I thought there would be an advantage in them," he said. Texels were then introduced.

Colin said the breeds complement each other, with the East Friesian increasing milk and fertility in the breeding ewes, while producing a lean lamb with a high growth rate, and the Texel adding hardiness and growth. "They hang up very well

and look good on the hook, which is why East Friesian lambs do so well in carcase competitions," Colin said. Judges were impressed by Colin's focus on marketing and productivity, achieved through his attention to genetics and nutrition. A change in the seasons has enabled the Gellies to grow lucerne and they will expand the area sown from 44 hectares to 160 hectares. Colin said it was too wet to grow lucerne in the 1980s, but this had changed. "It is growing now in areas where it would never have grown before," he remarked.





Department of
Primary Industries

Matthew Tonissen
MJ, TK & JA Tonissen

Matthew Tonissen is also a finalist in the Rural Finance Sheep Producer of the Year. Please refer to this section for notes on this finalist.

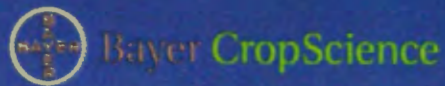
Aaron Sanderson
Bromley Park Pastoral Co.

Aaron Sanderson is also a finalist in the CASE IH Crop Producer of the Year. Please refer to this section for notes on this finalist.

Matt Zagami
Vilenz Produce

Matt Zagami is also a finalist in the Bayer CropScience Horticulture Producer of the Year. Please refer to this section for notes on this finalist.

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The CASE IH Crop Producer of the Year



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The RAS Alternative Farming Producer of the Year



The Rural Finance Sheep Producer of the Year



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