



New face of dairy farming is water-smart

Like many young dairy farmers, Duncan Crawford is convinced the efficient use of water is key to securing his industry's future in Goulburn Valley. To that end, the fourth-generation Tatura farmer was an early adopter of the Farm Water Program, rolled out by the Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority and its consortium partners. His most recent participation, in Round 3 of the program, resulted in the installation of a centre pivot irrigation system. He bought a 48 ha centre pivot which irrigates land previously used to grow perennial pasture. The paddock produced a 23 tonne per hectare maize crop last year and this year Duncan has opted to sow lucerne.

"With the use of the pivot we've been able to increase our dry matter production per megalitre of water. It's allowed us to grow a higher value crop on an area we used to grow lower yielding perennial pasture," Duncan said.

He said the old irrigation system on the paddock was inefficient and time-consuming.

"The existing irrigation infrastructure was poor and we really struggled to produce much at all. Having the pivot allows us to have security surrounding our yields," he said.

The works were scheduled as part of Duncan's long term farm plan but he said without funds from the Farm Water Program, it would have taken years to find the money.

"It would have been five years before we raised the funds. It was great to get it bowled over in one hit. Our ability to manage the water onto the paddock has been the main advantage. We're able to do more precision agriculture now," he said.

With the system modernisation complete for now, Duncan is able to grow three tonnes of dry matter for every megalitre of water he puts on the paddock.



"It's a fantastic result - compared with the old days when we were putting on one megalitre of water and growing one tonne of dry matter."

With the dairy industry precariously positioned due to falling milk prices, the father of three predicted only farmers who were smart about their water use would last the distance.

"With water being so valuable we have to be wise where we use it and putting it onto high value, water efficient plants like maize and lucerne is the direction we need to go in the future," Duncan said.

"We've seen temporary water go from \$80 to \$300 to \$800, so who know what the future holds? The work we've done secures a feed base and we know we've got a cut-off point that we can enter the temporary market to put water onto the paddock, safe in the knowledge that it's going to pay for itself."

The Farm Water Program, delivered by a consortium led by the Goulburn Broken CMA, has now funded over 600 individual irrigator projects worth over \$160 million over five rounds.