



Winning irrigators revisited

Michele Groat

in a nutshell

On the 20th Anniversary of the IREC Irrigated Farm Competition, all the winners of the competition over the years have been showcased to track the changes in their farms and businesses since winning the competition. The event was marked with the Irrigation Showcase on 31 July, 2007 in Griffith. This article reports on where the winners are now, how their farming systems have or haven't changed and their views on irrigated agriculture into the future.

1986 & 2004: Graham & Jean Menzies, Willbriggie

Graham and Jean have won the IREC Irrigated Farm Competition twice – they were the inaugural winner of the competition in 1986 and almost twenty years later in 2004 they were the winners of the Excellence in Rice Growing Award, when the competition coincided with the International Year of Rice. Sticking to a simple rice/wheat rotation on their 360 ha property at Willbriggie, Graham is widely regarded as one of the area's top rice growers, winning acclaim for being a consistent producer of high yields and good quality.

Graham viewed the IREC Irrigated Farm Competition as "an important way of giving farmers access to methods employed by other people involved in similar types of farming businesses and by this means increasing the standard over all farms".

Graham was recognised in both competitions for his excellent crop management and attention to detail. He has utilised a combination of factors including laser levelling, NSW DPI support, installing a recycling system, and NIR tissue testing and aerial imaging to determine optimum nitrogen fertiliser application rates, to consistently produce high yielding crops of excellent quality.

The Menzies are continually looking at ways of refining and improving their farming system and say "greater emphasis has to be placed on the efficient use of water and other resources".



Graham & Jean Menzies

1987: Peter & Mary Burrell, Coleambally

Peter and Mary Burrell won the IREC Irrigated Farm Competition (Broadacre) in 1987 for the well designed layout of their 242 ha farm at Coleambally. Originally a traditional contour system with the usual constraints in water management and machinery operation, the Burrell's totally redeveloped the farm after taking it over in 1972. Their carefully considered development program had four basic objectives:

1. to minimise earthworks and cutting depth by planning paddock sizes, shapes and grades to conform to existing slope and direction
2. to maximise paddock size and suitability for both contour and border check systems to allow flexibility for both crop or pasture enterprises
3. to provide full all-weather access roads around each paddock
4. to capture and recycle drainage water.

The Burrells completed their farm development works in 1985. The judging panel was impressed with the way the redevelopment enabled the Burrells to use their water, land, labour and machinery resources much more efficiently to produce high yields of a variety of crops.

Sadly Peter Burrell has since passed away and Mary has moved from the area.





1988: Warren & Betty Kirkup, Whitton

Warren and Betty Kirkup of Whitton won the IREC Irrigated Farm Competition (Broadacre) in 1988. Judges were impressed with the Kirkups' adoption of a well designed whole farm plan when redeveloping their property. Warren said participating in the IREC Irrigated Farm Competition gave him the opportunity to "meet other farmers who were also changing their farm layouts by landforming and doing proper surveys to achieve better irrigation efficiencies".

Warren made further improvements to the farm after winning the competition, putting in a recycling system and converting much of it to beds. Although Warren retired about ten years ago, his son Barry now runs the farm and Warren says "he is still making improvements".

Barry and his wife Gillian have expanded their business, buying two neighbouring properties and leasing another. Barry is just as committed to the importance of using a whole farm plan as his father was, saying "good planning and landforming has saved them both significant water and labour".

Warren thinks present and future challenges to farming in this area will be "water availability, commodity prices, finding suitable labour, fuel and fertiliser costs, and the misinformation in the press".



Warren (left) & Barry Kirkup



1989: Roy & Brian Sainty, Hanwood

Roy Sainty and son Brian won the inaugural IREC Irrigated Farm Competition for horticulture in 1989. The Saintys were awarded the top prize for the excellent management of their Hanwood prune orchard and vineyard. The judging panel was impressed with the Saintys' good farm layout, efficient irrigation practices, use of permanent sod culture, innovative trellising systems, and eagerness to try new techniques and varieties to consistently achieve excellent yields of good quality fruit. The Saintys were also commended for their diversification as they also operated a prune dehydrator, a vine nursery and a contract mechanical tree harvesting company.

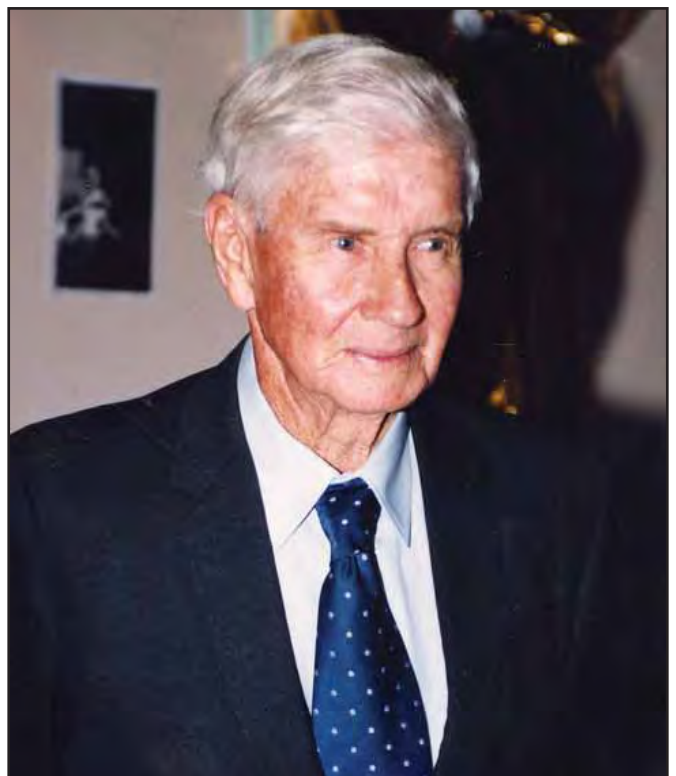
"The benefits from winning the competition were firstly an endorsement of our farming philosophy and practices by our peers, and being in any competition you always learn from others," Brian said.

Brian said that from the time of winning the award they didn't need to change much as the big changes had all occurred in the 20 years prior.

"Once we had settled into a highly sustainable total farming practice, which delivered high production on a constant basis, and which we were able monitor and maintain, we asked *why change?*".

Although they trialled drip irrigation on their properties, both Roy and Brian firmly believed that well designed broad furrow irrigation using pipes not ditches, and using partial root zone drying techniques, was more productive and used the same water input as a drip system.

Sadly, Roy passed away not long after being awarded the IREC Lifetime Achievement Award and membership into the Irrigators' Hall of Fame in 2005. Brian, having no family wishing to farm, has since sold the farms.



Roy Sainty



1990: John & Carol Davidson, Stanbridge

John and Carol Davidson were joint winners of the IREC Irrigated Farm Competition (Horticulture) in 1990. John and Carol won the award for trialling new, higher producing citrus varieties and for the water use efficiency gains they had achieved by converting to controlled low head irrigation on their farm at Stanbridge. The Davidsons were also recognised for their diversification into growing carnations for the cut flower market.

Since winning the competition, the Davidsons have converted to drip irrigation in 2005 – however it is through a shared water delivery scheme which is proving challenging to manage. John and Carol have also recently purchased a new farm at Murrumbidgee which they have planted to 50 ha of new varieties selected for mechanical harvesting.

John feels the citrus industry “has to become more technically advanced especially in the areas of mechanical harvesting to combat labour shortages, water application and tree habits”. Challenges he sees for the industry include consumer habits (that is, whether consumers will continue to choose to drink fresh juice or eat fresh fruit), world commodity prices, growing more fruit per hectare, the continual threat of pests and diseases, and continued water availability.



Carol & John Davidson



1990: Paul Morris, Cudgell

Paul Morris was a joint winner of the IREC Irrigated Farm Competition (Horticulture) in 1990 for the overall management of his 36 ha citrus and avocado orchard at Cudgell. Judges were particularly impressed with the irrigation efficiencies Paul had achieved through the installation of a micro-jet irrigation system and his readiness to adopt new technologies to improve production.

Paul continues to strive for improved production and better irrigation efficiencies, converting to a Martinez Open Hydroponic drip system in 2002. He believes the way water is managed in the future will be critical to the industry. He says “farmers need to implement better real time monitoring for both soil moisture and evaporation figures in relation to what they are actually applying to their crops”.

Paul also thinks corporate farming will expand and believes small farms will have to specialise in niche markets to survive. He says agricultural value-adders and manufacturers have made agricultural producers ‘price takers’ rather than ‘price makers’ because they will buy their produce overseas if Australian produce is not competitive. But Paul sees this as ‘serious short-term thinking’ on their behalf.

“The only way to overcome this is for farmers to utilise single desk marketing opportunities,” he said.



Paul Morris





1991: Roger & Cherylle Schiller, Hay

Roger and Cherylle Schiller of *Waradgery, Hay*, were awarded equal first in the IREC Irrigated Farm Competition when it was run specifically for river and bore pumpers in 1991. Judges were impressed with the water use efficiency and productivity of the irrigation property and how it was managed to complement the large area of dryland pasture to lift stocking rates.

Judges also commented on the fencing off of all channels and drains to prevent stock access and reduce maintenance, and improve overall stock and grazing management. Roger rotationally grazed large mobs of Merino wethers on irrigated winter pastures. He used electric fencing which allowed pastures to be watered without compaction of the wet clay soils by stock, and enabled better weed control.

"Attending the open days held at the winners' properties both prior to and after my win enabled me to see ideas for my own operation, particularly from an irrigation point of view. It also made me more aware of the valuable resource that water was, which in turn enabled me to achieve greater value per volume of water," Roger said.

When wool prices slumped not long after Roger won the award, he got out of sheep and grazed cattle instead. Roger has since retired and the property has been sold.



Roger Schiller

1991: Toscan Family, Darlington Point

John Toscan Snr, and sons Gerard and John Jnr of *Ringwood, Darlington Point*, were recognised for their outstanding farming operation when they were announced equal first in the IREC Irrigated Farm Competition (River and Bore Pumpers) in 1991. Their excellent layout using permanent beds combined with irrigation bores, storages and capacity to recycle enabled the Toscan family to intensively farm the property with multiple crops. This method of farming improved their soil structure, reduced machinery costs and maximised yields and returns per hectare. The permanent beds allowed the Toscan family flexibility in crop choice enabling them to take advantages of changing commodity markets.

The Toscan family gained access to surface water in 1994 which Gerard said gave them the daily flow rate needed in summer to switch their enterprise mix from double cropping (maize/wheat/soybeans/faba beans) to straight maize/popping corn. They also now have their own food grade cleaning and maize milling facility and supply popping corn and a range of maize products.

At the time of winning the competition, the Toscan family had ample water supply but were limited by land. Gerard Toscan said they now see their greatest challenge as water security.

"While we have been proactive over the last ten years shoring up water entitlements, we are still looking at building larger water storages to average out our water supply".

The Toscan family are also concerned about the control a few major outlets have on the country's manufactured food supply. This puts increasing pressure on Australian food manufacturers to cut their prices and Gerard thinks "in the future most of these products may be sourced offshore".



Gerard Toscan



1992: Phillip & Mary Andreatta, Lake Wyangan

Phillip and Mary Andreatta won the IREC Irrigated Farm Competition (Horticulture) in 1992. Phillip and Mary won the award for their efforts to maximise water use efficiency and their overall management of their 21 ha mixed citrus and table grape orchard at Lake Wyangan.

Recognising they had a watertable problem, the Andreattas adopted a single furrow flood watering system. Through careful management, Phillip and Mary reduced the amount of water they used and lowered the watertable while still achieving excellent productivity.

The Andreattas also impressed the judges for exporting their own produce internationally, marketed under their own name and for their innovation, using netting to protect their table grapes.

The Andreattas have since converted to drip irrigation although Phillip said it was poorly designed and not working as well as it should.

Phillip and Mary are still on the farm and supplement their income with contract work, but the couple's two eldest sons have left the farm to find full-time work elsewhere. Phillip believes the exodus of youth from the land is a major threat to the continued survival of the industry and said young people view it "as too much work and not enough return". He is also concerned at the "uncertain future we face with the water crisis".



Mary & Phillip Andreatta

1993: Graham & Ruth Moon, Yenda

The Moons purchased the 305 ha irrigation farm *Silverton Park* in 1987 and over a three year period lasered and converted it into bankless channels. Predominantly a rice growing enterprise with wheat used as an alternating crop, the Moons won the 1993 IREC Irrigated Farm Competition (Broadacre) because of their outstanding farm layout, well integrated crop management and overall production.

Since winning the competition, the Moons have continued to expand, purchasing a neighbouring property and some more land at Murrumbidgee, and now they farm around 1300 ha. They have also put in a 150 ML dam and recycling system. Graham has "stepped back a bit" and his son Paul now does most of the day to day running of the business. The Moons have also converted most of their land to beds and grow a diverse range of crops, including wheat, corn, faba beans and canola, as well as rice. They also run a small cattle feedlot, using their own grain to fatten the cattle.

Graham said that with the severe cuts to allocations this year it was "the first in thirty-five years we haven't stripped a rice crop and I'm a bit dirty on that!". He added they normally grew 180 ha of rice but he can't see "that ever happening again".



Graham & Paul Moon





1994: Ray & Maryanne Zahra, Yenda

Ray Zahra thinks we have seen the last of cheap irrigation water. He thinks to successfully farm in the future we must "grow crops that return higher dollars per megalitre of water".

Ray and his wife Maryanne won the IREC Irrigated Farm Competition (Horticulture) in 1994 for the excellent management of their orchard of pears, peaches, nashis and nectarines at Yenda. The Zahras pack the fruit themselves before sending it directly to fresh fruit markets. Ray and Maryanne's efficient use of water using micro-sprinklers, effective trellising and pruning to maximise production and quality and the vertical integration of their business earned them the award.

Since winning the competition Ray has purchased another block expanding his orchard to just over 26 ha, installed some drip irrigation and continued to improve his irrigation management through the installation of soil monitoring equipment. He attributes soil moisture monitoring as the most important management tool available for irrigation efficiency and crop production. Ray says before they installed it, they were sometimes over-watering and at other times not watering enough, and his trees and production were suffering as a result.

Ray also sees the shortage of skilled labour in the horticultural industry as a real problem and is concerned at the lack of training available to anyone working or keen to work in the industry.



Ray Zahra

1996: Neil & Gina Wiseman, Coleambally

The 1996 winners of the Irrigated Farm Competition (Broadacre) were Neil and Gina Wiseman of Coleambally. Encouraged by the potential of double and triple cropping and concerned by their slightly higher than average rice water use, the Wisemans converted their traditional rice/wheat enterprise to bed farming and a more diverse range of crops. The judging panel were impressed with the Wisemans' whole farm plan, associated redevelopment of their property, business management skills and forward thinking management practices such as recycling of water and stubble management.

Neil and Gina have changed their entire farming operation since winning the competition. They are now 'A' certified organic, converting 403 ha and leasing a further 117 ha to grow mainly soybeans, onions, pumpkins and linseed. The Wisemans also have 6 ha of drip irrigation for vegetable production. Neil and Gina have put in a recycling system and have plans to put in a dam storage system. Their two sons have joined them to work on the farm full-time and they also employ two or three casuals.

Gina believes the challenge for irrigated agriculture in the future is to "show the greater public that we use our water wisely and efficiently and that we run viable and effective businesses".



Neil & Gina Wiseman





1996: Robert & Toni Wood, Nericon

Robert and Toni Wood won the IREC Irrigated Farm Competition (Horticulture) in 1996 for their outstanding management of their vineyard at Nericon. The couple were commended for their understanding of the environment, clear goals and objectives, and ongoing assessment of their performance. The couple were recognised for their willingness to try new methods, cutting their water use in half by converting their farm from flood to drip irrigation and continually adopting more sustainable farming systems.

"In the beginning I was reluctant to enter into the competition, as you don't think of yourself as doing anything special...so naturally we were both surprised and honoured when we were judged as winners," Robert said.

He said the contact with industry leaders and government decision-makers after winning the competition was also a plus.

In 1998 the Woods sold their vineyard to a local winery, Cranswick Estate and the following vintage, Robert joined Cranswick (now The Wine Group) as their Grower Liaison Officer.

Robert says "water and the way we use it" is the biggest challenge facing farming in the future. He is also concerned about "the future of small vineyards and their ability to compete".



Robert Wood

1997: Tony & Joyce Toscan, Coleambally

The Toscanos won the IREC Irrigated Farm Competition (Broadacre) in 1997 for using a well thought out whole farm plan when developing their 400 ha farm Rosewood. Judges were also impressed with the amount of remnant vegetation on the property and the Toscanos' vision to create extensive tree corridors throughout the property. Also, all runoff was captured and recycled.

Tony and Joyce's son Matt said entering the competition made them focus on their operation and look at it objectively as the judges do.

"It allowed us to identify strengths and areas we could improve on."

Following the competition, Tony and Matt undertook a study tour looking at maize growing in arid conditions in California and Arizona. Matt said they looked at different layouts, tracking systems for planting and cultivating corn, stubble management and different methods of establishment of a diverse range of crops including cotton, lettuce, tomatoes, onions, garlic, potatoes and grafted roses.

Since winning the competition in 1997, the Toscanos now include a percentage of wheat, instead of 100% summer crop, due to reduced water availability, and retain stubble where possible. They have moved to GPS auto steer in their permanent furrows. They have also installed drip irrigation to their prunes and vines on the home farm and constantly monitor moisture, installing a radio link back to their computer.

Matt regards "water reform and unpredictable weather" as the greatest challenges or threats to their farming operations in the future.



Matt & Tony Toscan





1998: John & Rosanne Bisetto, Nericon

John Bisetto was the 1998 IREC Irrigated Farm Competition (Horticulture) winner. John impressed judges with the water use efficiencies he had achieved through several low cost improvements to his 36 ha grape and citrus farm, flawless record keeping and environmental awareness.

John and Rosanne went on a trip to Israel and the USA after winning the competition. John said it was a "real eye-opener seeing the efficiencies of the Israelis". The couple were just as amazed at the excesses and scale of operations in the United States and were surprised that growers had no real idea of how much water they used.

The Bisettos are still farming at Nericon and now have two children, Chloe, 3 and Brock, 1. The Bisettos' property is regularly used as a showcase for visiting politicians and interest groups.

Since winning the competition, John has redeveloped half the farm into larger sized blocks of single varieties and replaced old handpicked vines with new varieties in an effort to meet new market demands. He regularly updates his farm plan and talks to his winery to check he is on the right track and views "keeping ahead of varieties a real challenge".

John sees the next year as yet another challenging one and whilst he thinks his vines will survive if water allocations are drastically cut, he is resigned to having little or no grape crop, and the real risk of losing his 20 ha of citrus.



Bisetto family



1999: Martin & Nick Maynard, Hay

Father and son, Martin and Nick Maynard from Woolloondool, west of Hay, won the Irrigated Farm Competition (Broadacre) in 1999. The Maynards earned the award for their overall management and early adoption and continual improvement of new technologies such as recycling, minimum and zero tillage farming, row cropping and the use of permanent beds. The Maynards also won the inaugural 'biodiversity/environmental' award and were commended for their hands-on approach to marketing their own produce.

The Maynards went on an irrigation study tour of Egypt, Israel and Turkey following the competition win. Martin says although they found it interesting "it has been hard to relate these experiences directly to our conditions in Australia".

Since winning the competition Martin said they have "continued to improve the farm with the construction of a major storage, experiments with bankless channels and further improvements to land levelling and layouts". They have also developed another large scale row cropping enterprise on a leased property, which Martin's other son, Simon manages.

Martin has recently retired, leaving Nick to run Woolloondool. Nick says the last few years have been tough, although the drought has opened up some new opportunities with sales of straw and silage. Normally growing 700–800 ha of summer crop the cutbacks this year reduced them to only 60 ha. Nick said it has "highlighted the importance of retaining stubble and building organic matter into the soil to try and save as much soil moisture as possible".

Nick says if the dry conditions continue he can't see a future for traditional broadacre crops and they will have to "look at some sort of high value niche market".



Nick Maynard & son



2000: Steve Barbon, Hanwood

Steve was the winner of the IREC Irrigated Farm Competition (Horticulture) in 2000 for the excellent management of his family's 20 ha vineyard at Hanwood. Affected by high watertables, Steve replaced the farm's open channels and flood system with drip irrigation. As a result, the vineyard's water use dropped from 190 ML/season to 75 ML/season and the vineyard was no longer affected by a high watertable.

Steve went on a study trip to look at wine grape growing in France after winning the competition. Steve said the French have a tonnage limit in their vineyards to enable them to ripen their fruit sooner and to prevent over-supply situations occurring. He would like to see a similar system introduced into Australia and believes if it was, the over-supply situation the industry is just recovering from could be prevented from happening again. He said if such a system was to work in Australia though, prices would have to reflect this.

Steve now grows only premium varieties and has recently bought the neighbouring farm increasing the area of his vineyard to 40 ha. Steve has also got more involved in other farming businesses such as contract harvesting and pruning.

Steve sees the major threat to irrigated agriculture being the lack of security of water supply in the future and is also concerned at the future of small wine grape growers which he says "are put in second place as their area of production is too small for large wineries".



Steve Barbon

2001: Xavier Molloy, Hay

The Mirabelli family's Gravina Farms won the IREC Irrigated Farm Competition in 2001, which was held specifically for vegetable growers. Gravina Farms used modified row crop techniques to produce lettuce, broccoli and assorted melons for domestic and export markets on their 3900 ha property near Hay. Xavier Molloy, manager of Gravina Farms, went on a study tour of vegetable farms in the Bundaberg and Gatton areas of Queensland after winning the competition.

Judges were impressed with the combination of semi-permanent beds, minimum tillage and long rotations for good soil management and the use of soil monitoring equipment and short runs to maximise irrigation efficiency. Xavier said they used to surface irrigate on long rows which left water "hanging around for a long time" so they converted to 200-300 metre runs and found their water usage dropped significantly.

Since winning the competition, Gravina Farms has vertically integrated its business by purchasing a stand in a grower shed at the Sydney markets. They pack their vegetables on farm and send them directly to their stand in Sydney. Sav Mirabelli has relocated to Sydney to manage this end of the business.

Xavier said the current cuts to their water allocations was having a dramatic impact on their business with their production and workforce having to be cut back as a result. He views water availability in the future as by far the biggest threat to their continued success.



Xavier Molloy





2002: Terry & Maxine McFarlane, Widgelli

Terry and Maxine McFarlane won the IREC Irrigated Farm Competition (Broadacre) in 2002 for the excellent all-round management of their 383 ha farm 'Carawatha' at Widgelli. The McFarlanes impressed the judges with their attention to detail and whole farm planning which enabled the development of good layouts for efficient water use and crop diversification, including the establishment of a 5 ha woodlot.

Judges were very impressed with the McFarlanes' efforts to maximise water use efficiency through the use of permanent beds, ET data, neutron probes and a recycling system with significant on-farm storage.

The McFarlanes were also recognised for their environmental awareness and their efforts to encourage the regeneration of remnant vegetation on their farm.

Apart from shortening run lengths for greater water use efficiency and trying out some direct seeding of native vegetation on their hill, the McFarlanes haven't made any major changes since winning the competition. Terry said the drought has influenced what they can grow, and they are now growing more vegetables for seed and the fresh food market. He said he also "keeps looking at drip but is yet to convert".

Terry sees adverse (and ill-informed) government policy, weed resistance, weakening terms of trade and "the challenge of running our business with a lot less water" as being the biggest threats to the continued success of irrigated agriculture.



Terry McFarlane

2003: Murray & Jennifer Robertson, Tabbita

Murray and Jenny Robertson were the 2003 winners of the IREC Irrigated Farm Competition (Horticulture). Seeking to produce more income per megalitre of water than traditional summer crops like maize, the Robertsons established a vineyard on their broadacre farm Garrong at Tabbita.

Although the vineyard was only four years old and not fully developed when it won the competition, the judging panel was impressed with the Robertsons' research and planning to establish the vineyard. The site was selected based on soil suitability and a lot of thought and investigation went into selecting the right trellising design, variety and even clone of wine grapes to plant. The Robertsons were also very conscious of water use efficiency, scheduling irrigations using a combination of information including Enviroscan, evaporation figures and a dig around with a shovel.

Following the competition, Jenny and Murray travelled to Canada and the East Coast of America where they visited numerous vineyards and wineries and picked up some new ideas on how to train and manage their vines.

Jenny said "entering and winning the Irrigated Farm Competition was a terrific way to be recognised for something we do as part of our working life. To have your peers acknowledge this gave us a huge confidence boost and renewed our enthusiasm in farming".

The Robertsons have now completed the development of their 101 ha vineyard of Shiraz, Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay. Jenny said they "are always looking to the future for positive signs for the grapes and our other farming enterprises with water being the main concern".



Jennifer Robertson



2005: Dean Morris & Wayne Protheroe, Wamoon

Neighbours, Dean Morris and Wayne Protheroe farm 33 ha of citrus at Wamoon. The pair won the IREC Irrigated Farm Competition (Horticulture) in 2005 for their innovative use of technology and share irrigation systems to continually improve their business.

Limited by their small blocks, the pair formed a business partnership enabling them to implement state of the art technology across both properties, including an open hydroponic irrigation system, which has resulted in improved yields and fruit quality, and greater water use efficiency. Dean and Paul also vertically integrated the business to allow them greater market control and improved risk management.

Dean says entering the competition gave them "the opportunity to analyse the farm system a lot more and benchmark the production per hectare per megalitre against the industry average. It was also a good networking opportunity with all facets of the agricultural sector".

Dean and his father John recently purchased more land to expand their operation, and they intend to plant another 40 ha under the same irrigation system this year.

Dean says with the huge amount of superannuation to be invested, he thinks investors will see the value in secure water rights in this area resulting in a lot more large scale development in agriculture. He believes the challenge for local producers will be to work out how to capitalise on this.



Dean Morris & Wayne Protheroe




2006: Tim & Sally Watson, Hillston

Tim and Sally Watson travelled to California after winning the IREC Irrigated Farm Competition (Broadacre) in 2006. Sally said it was "quite sobering to see irrigation on such a grand scale and to look at the crops the Californians are growing".

The Watsons took out the award for their innovation, flexibility and overall good management across a number of properties. They impressed the judging panel by matching irrigation systems to suit soil types and crops grown, resulting in outstanding yields and impressive water use efficiencies. The Watsons used a combination of furrow, centre pivot and drip irrigation to produce a variety of crops including cotton, wheat, barley, sweet corn, maize, seed sorghum, faba beans, pumpkins and watermelons. Tim and Sally were also commended for protecting remnant vegetation on their property and for their additional plantings of native vegetation.

The Watsons say winning the competition has reaffirmed their commitment to drip irrigation and to sustainable irrigated agriculture.

"Many questions have arisen over the last 12 months about water availability, climate change and costs of other inputs due to a predicted increase in energy costs," Sally said.

"Ideally for us financially and environmentally, we need the wheat prices to keep rising so we can go back to producing a crop which grows in the winter and therefore is not totally dependent on irrigation. On the issue of carbon credits and the whole issue of the carbon cycle – carbon sinks, renewable energy sources, biodiesel, by products – we are looking into it." 



Tim & Sally Watson