

case studies

Peter & Christine Conn

Hillview, near Wellington, NSW

Peter and Christine Conn are the 4th generation operating 'Hillview', located approximately 15km north of Wellington. They have been operating the 880ha farm for the past 18 years. In 2006 they increased their holding to 1269ha by purchasing the 389ha 'Towri' property.

The Conn's farming system is based on a sheep flock, cattle herd and cropping. Crops are grown on a 5 year rotation of oats/wheat, canola, wheat, lupins/pasture and pasture rotations for livestock. They run a small Dohne stud (dual purpose merino) and cattle on separate pasture areas to the main cropping system area. The soil types on this property range from red clay earths to red granite soils.

Motivating factors

Peter's father noticed erosion and soil damage occurring in the dry 1970s and realised that the sustainability of the family property depended on making some changes to the farming system.

By 1980 they operated a conventional system, but used tillage sparingly. During the next 15 years the family looked at various no-till options, attended field days and seminars and observed other farmers. They could see that maintaining groundcover and stubble with minimum disturbance and improving soil biology was important. In 1994/95 they purchased a Conservapak and moved into direct drilling. In early 2006 they were able to source cheap chicken manure and started composting and spreading this nutrient source. In 2008 they purchased a Trimble GPS Easyguide 500 for spraying, spreading and sowing.

Benefits

Benefits have included improved moisture storage, better soil structure with less compaction, better soil biology, more earthworm activity and improved water use efficiency. When rain occurs, it now goes into the soil instead of running off.

During drought periods soil biology remains active and wind erosion does not occur.

Unforeseen problems

Increased chemical use and higher machinery capital costs have been problems but are well out-weighted by the fewer hours spent on the tractor. Stubble management was a problem, but has been overcome by purchasing a modified header, utilising a chaff spreader and straw chopper/spreader.

Plans for the future

Peter and Christine want to leave the family farm in the best possible condition for future generations. They want to involve the next generation in the learning process and want to make better and more efficient use of new technology. They want to achieve this while maintaining a viable and sustainable farming system.

Acknowledgements

This case study was prepared by NSW DPI's on-ground implementation of conservation farming team, with the valued assistance of the landholder.

Funding for the project was provided by Central West Catchment Management Authority, NSW Department of Primary Industries and Central West Conservation Farming Association.

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