



case studies

Steve & Geraldine Gough

Belmore, near Yeoval, NSW

Steve and Geraldine Gough live on their 2400 hectare property 'Belmore', 27km west of Yeoval. Geraldine's family first purchased this property in 1902. 'Belmore' has two soil types: a light granite and a clay duplex granite. The average rainfall is 636mm.

Steve and Geraldine run a mixed farming system with sheep, beef cattle and cropping. Crops are primarily used to sustain livestock production and maintain soil health, although some market crops are planned.

Motivating factors

Steve could see that traditional cropping practices of four or more cultivations were causing soil degradation, reducing soil organic matter and were labour intensive. In the late 1990s Steve started trialling minimum tillage (one scarifying action and then sowing). By the early 2000s Steve had pulled the working tines off the combine. He operated using only sowing tines, direct drilling into retained stubble. At this stage, they continued to burn stubble as part of management where necessary.

A 2006 trial of a 4.5m Baldan Disc Drill machine showed Steve that he needed to take a different approach. Using Central West CMA machinery incentive funding, they purchased a Titanium 36 disc drill, a 6.5m wide machine that can be towed by their current tractor.

Benefits

The benefits of establishing pasture within the top 5mm of soil have included preventing weed infestation, retaining soil moisture, improving water infiltration, improving biological activity and increasing organic matter.

Another benefit is a 30% reduction in fuel costs from changing from tines to a disc drill machine. They now have a reduced labour requirement and spend less time on the tractor.

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Unforeseen problems

Steve suggested that the very large initial cost of purchasing the disc drill machinery was something that they have had to budget for over time. They see that the benefit to whole farm system has outweighed this expense.

The change in machinery has come with increased maintenance due to an increased number of moving parts. This extra maintenance is worth doing to safeguard machine function and value for money.

Plans for the future

Steve wants to improve his retained soil moisture for pasture establishment and get higher pasture establishment rates.