

NSW SUSTAINING THE BASIN *Irrigated farm modernisation*

Testimonial: Dick Estens, Moree

May 2012



Dick Estens, successful irrigator and social activist, fully supported the *NSW Sustaining the Basin: Border Rivers-Gwydir* pilot project.

Mr Estens said this project came at an opportune time for our region.

"It's keeping water in the valley enabling irrigators to improve productivity and provide flow-on benefits to local economies."

"We used a local drip irrigation supplier to install the new infrastructure which injected over \$1 million into the business", he said.

"Our cotton and citrus enterprise currently supports two managers, nine farm hands, a mechanic and citrus specialist, and there are

additional agronomic consultants providing specialised services to the operation on demand."

"The Grove Juicing Company also currently employs over 80 people with six new jobs to be established in Warwick once the factory is complete", Mr Estens added.

As a pilot working in Moree in the 1970's, Mr Estens could see the potential of the heavy black soil plains of the Gwydir Valley for irrigation farming. In 1979 he purchased his first irrigation block and thirty years later he has 2000 ha developed for irrigation over three properties.

Until recently, the Estens family were primarily cotton growers.

However, cut-backs to their bore water entitlement meant cotton production was no longer an economic option for their business. The Estens had to reduce the area of cotton they could effectively irrigate and look at alternative enterprises for their farm 'Beela' to remain viable into the future.

After extensive travel and research, Mr Estens and his son Heath found that citrus production was the safest option and had the highest return per megalitre on investment.

Furthermore, they established a secure export market for their fruit by purchasing a 50 % share of the Australian, family owned, *Grove Juice Company*, based in Brisbane and are now opening a juicing plant in Warwick, Qld.

Mr Estens points out that permanent horticultural plantings require a secure water supply and a large capital outlay to establish appropriate irrigation systems.

"Uncertainty of water makes forward planning very difficult and high risk."

"The benefit of this program is that it provides the opportunity to fast track this necessary development at lower debt level."

Mr Estens is dedicated to improving Moree and other regional communities around Australia and continues to nurture the Aboriginal Employment Strategy, which now has 14 offices around Australia with 85 permanent staff.

"Helping local communities to be empowered to make decisions and take back control of their future is the key to improving our quality of life", he said.

Mr Coulton says switching from furrow irrigation to pivots or lateral moves can save up to 30% of water in some cases however, the other big

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