

SEPWA Harvest Review

More than 100 farmers and industry representatives attended the SEPWA Harvest Review and AGM last month which focused on “investing in our future”.

The day kicked off with a hearty breakfast of bacon, eggs and pastries kindly sponsored by Intergrain and provided barley breeder, David Moody the chance to discuss the place of new varieties like La Trobe and Flinders.

Following a brief AGM, local Farm and General agronomist Greg Warren discussed what happened throughout the 2014 growing season including major issues with conical snails and sclerotinia in canola. He also shared some of his personal requests to growers for them to understand their soil plant available water (PAW), increase PAW and profit, increase water use in waterlogged soils, implement non-chemical grass control methods and keep monitoring rotations and calculate net returns.

Luke Marquis, another local agronomist, shared information on grain varieties for the coming season and the importance of local data when selecting which varieties to grow. He did mention the varieties to keep an eye on include RAC 2182 (Mace type) and RAC 2069 (Yipti type) for the Lakes/ Mt Madden area.

DAFWA's Ben Curtis spoke about avoiding death by falling numbers following the significant amount of rain that fell over harvest in the Esperance Port Zone. Munglinup and Ravensthorpe areas appeared to suffer more from delivery data. Ben said farmers need to pick a wheat variety that holds us to wet weather and manage it well. He also raised concern about Mace (a mid-season variety) and if it is sown early then farmers run the risk of it flowering early and it receives lots of rain – falling numbers could be a problem.

Alice Butler and Nigel Metz from SEPWA provided an update some of the projects SEPWA is currently involved in including the blue gum reality, DIY PA, following fallow and CTF Nitrogen dynamics. For further information, head to the SEPWA webpage www.sepwa.org.au.

Farmers were also given an update on where we sit in the world grain market and the background to grain pricing by Rabobank's Andrew Tasker. CBH Groups, Jason Craig followed and spoke about Esperance grain and its markets. He discussed high moisture management of barley stacks, CBH's preferred barley varieties, wheat protein and moisture levels.

Well respected media professional, Paul Murray delved into “communications and the urban-rural divide”. He said that things have changed now with social media compared to the old traditional forms of media and unfortunately it is the loudest who is heard not those who have the best argument and a good example is the recent debacle over live cattle exports to Indonesia. It was a rare win for people power but cost cattle producers millions and further fractured the relationship between farmers and the new urban class who have adopted a European greens style ideology. Paul believes farmers need to find a new way to communicate through active political participation, persistence and getting their message out in the media.

Steve Tilbrook, Mt Madden farmer and Deputy Chair of the Grains Industry Association of WA (GIWA) spoke about COGGO and presented SEPWA with an electronic cheque for the Farm Scale Wi-Fi project.

Nuffield scholar and local farmer, Chris Reichstein presented his Nuffield story following travels to Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, New Zealand and America. He studied “how farmers learn” and looked into different approaches to extension.

Condingup farmer, Andrew Fowler also shared his recent participation in the Rabobank Global Farmers Masterclass which brought 37 farmers from across the world together on the east coast of Australia. Together they stimulated each other and explored the future for farmers in feeding the growing population and their changing diets. Andrew said it has reinforced that farming in the Esperance region is as good as it gets and given him confidence in what they are doing, especially given other farmers experiences throughout the world.

The harvest debrief was presented by CBH Group’s Mick Daw who reflected on the past harvest in which the Esperance Port Zone received 1.85 million tonnes, 119% of the estimate and the second biggest harvest ever for the region behind 2014. The September rain did create some havoc with the introduction of new services and falling numbers testing. Interestingly the EPZ reported a higher average wheat protein of 12% (above Kwinana and Albany which was 10-11%) and the canola oil was the lowest in the state at 44%.

The day finished on a high with keynote speaker, Mark McKeon who highlighted the importance of developing and maintaining a good work-life balance and encouraged growers to take time to recover from the stress of peak periods such as seeding and harvest. Mark discussed how to create more time, with his basic strategy to self-invest and achieve more. His strategy of breaking your life down into go-zones, slow zones and no-zones gives your body time to overcome stress but also gives a structure for productive work periods. He said by programming in even one or two go-zones a week can help you get ahead of the game, this will then help you better deal with and recover from stressful situations when they arise. As well as having go-zones Mark also highlighted that a critical aspect of recovering from stress is to set time aside to do what you love.

Participants then headed off to the “slow zone” and enjoyed a catch up over drinks kindly sponsored by Plumgrove.

The SEPWA Harvest Review and AGM was sponsored by the Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC) with support from the Grower Group Alliance and Partners in Grain who sponsored the keynote speaker.

Horizon Power???