

James Sewell joins the Meridian Agriculture Team



The Meridian Agriculture team is happy to announce the appointment of James Sewell as their new Pasture Agronomy Consultant servicing clients in Victoria and across Australia.

James is a welcome addition to our existing team of Pasture Agronomy Advisors and brings a strong pasture and agronomy background to Meridian Agriculture. Based out of our Yendon Office, James will split his time between developing his family farm and working with Meridian Agriculture. Building on his high level agronomic (plant breeding, trials and pasture establishment) and business management skills, James will gradually become involved in whole farm management consulting as well as project management.

Specifically he can assist with any pasture/livestock agronomic issues.

James holds Bachelor of Agricultural Science (Honours) from La Trobe University, a Master of Science (Plant Breeding) from Lincoln University (NZ) and has completed a Professional Diploma of Agribusiness with Monash University. His personal interests include local football (ex-player and coach) and rusted on Cats supporter. He also enjoys travelling overseas, music, some charity volunteer work and farming.

Prior to joining the Meridian Ag team, James was Australian Research and Development Manager for PGG Wrightson Seeds (Australia) Pty Ltd. Here his primary responsibilities were managing the integration process of the PGW Seeds research and development functions in Australia, including plant breeding activities, trial evaluations and delivery of new products, technologies and innovations through to product development, marketing and sales for the domestic and international markets.

James is already making a great contribution to the team. We look forward to a long and valuable partnership between James and Meridian Ag.

If you'd like to talk to James you can call him on 0403 546 811 or the Yendon office on 03 5341 6100.

Meridian Agriculture Welcomes new Non-Executive Director, Robert Adés

Meridian Agriculture Chairman Jim Shovelton and his fellow Directors, Mike Stephens and Andrew Speirs, have great pleasure in welcoming Robert Ades to the Meridian Agriculture Board.

Robert has an extensive background in Asset Management, Business Administration and Agribusiness. He has served on multiple Boards over 23 years, spanning a range of executive, non-executive and alternate directorships within private, public and trustee companies. His involvement in farming began with his family in the early 1970's and is both personal and professional. He has sat on farm boards for most of the last 16 years, and remains connected personally through variously family members. Robert lives in inner Melbourne but is on a farm somewhere most weeks.

In addition to his agricultural connection Robert has over 30 years executive experience in investment operations, corporate finance, IT applications development, IT infrastructure, legal & compliance, procurement & outsourcing, property management, strategic asset allocation, business strategy, and information management. He also works with Monash University's Graduate School of Business as an Industry Fellow delivering lectures on Funds Management in the Masters of Applied Finance stream.

Robert's professional qualifications include an MBA (Dean's Award for Excellence), a Graduate Diploma in Marketing and Bachelor of Engineering (Industrial & Computing), all from Monash University, and has taught within Monash's MBA and Masters of Finance programs over a number of years. Robert is a Fellow of the Australian Institute of Management, and a Fellow of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.

Robert's private interests include restoring and enjoying classic MG cars, snow skiing, waterskiing and cooking, along with his wife Louise. Robert is currently restoring his third MG, a 1953 ZA Magnette, which is a bit of a passion. Louise enjoys driving the cars too, and they recently did a 4,000km tour to Queensland together in an open touring MGYT.

We look forward to working with Robert who is a great addition to the Meridian Agriculture team.



Are you Making Progress?



Do you know you are making progress towards your breeding objectives when you purchase rams? You might be buying rams which take you in the opposite direction to where you want to go.

One of the big barriers to making informed decisions about ram selection is that it has been difficult to know where your flock sits in relation to the industry and specific studs. This has now changed with the introduction of flock profiling available through the Sheep CRC. This test, which is only available for merinos at this stage, depends on comparing the genetic makeup of your flock with a reference dataset. This data set has been adjusted so that the results can be compared to Australian Sheep Breeding Values (ASBVs).

Blood samples for DNA analysis are taken from 20 randomly selected sheep. The data you get back will provide you with your flock's ASBVs for micron, fleece weight, growth rate and a range of other characteristics, which are compared to the industry average. When selecting rams, you will be able to select animals that have ASBVs better than your flock with confidence that there will be progress towards your objectives. Of course to do this you will need to buy from a stud that can provide ASBVs.

For more information, please visit the Sheep Genetics website – <http://www.sheepgenetics.org.au/Home>

Article by Jim Shovelton

Some Comparisons from Succession Case Studies



Some farming families manage to keep a viable farm in the family for generations and keep the non-farmers in the family happy. Other families don't. The differences are contrasted in the Farm Success Enabling Case Studies. Some of these case studies illustrate a business that continues successfully over multiple generations, some don't continue on in the same way, and some don't continue at all.

The case studies are based on intensive studies of sixteen, family owned, Australian farming businesses, selected from a list of fifty businesses. The studies consider the approaches to succession throughout successive generations. They contrast the attitudes, attributes and actions of people within each business. Eight will continue, while the other eight businesses have been sold, have remained in the family but are no longer viable, or have had significant changes in direction. To protect the privacy of the participants, a letter

of the Greek alphabet has been used for the name of each family.

The business success is measured against the stated aims of each family. In most of the case studies the family aims are to; ensure sufficient funds to retire, to hand over a viable farm, and to ensure that all members of the family are happy. The aim has been to share the family wealth as near to equally as possible whilst achieving the three previously mentioned aims. In one case, the Rho family, the viability of the farm took precedence over the near equal distribution, and that has been accepted by the family concerned.

The Lambda study demonstrates a successful business growth strategy, with growth achieved while maintaining the enterprise mix. The business is now jointly owned and managed by two brothers, and most of their siblings are joint owners in a portion of the land. There are mechanisms in place to ensure that, if in future, any do want to sell, both a valuation and the timing can be agreed.

Other businesses have growth strategies which have included the development of a bull breeding business (the Iota family), significant off farm investment (the Mu family), brothers working together and building on their individual strengths (the Epsilon family). In the Sigma family brothers aggressively bought land and left it up to the next generation to pay for it. It nearly ended in failure when they borrowed heavily off shore.

Delta and Epsilon had similar histories. In the Delta family, which is continuing, the brothers agreed on the end game and the family split was easy, however in the Epsilon family it was hostile and led to business failure.

Table 1, below, contrasts a series of attributes which were common to businesses that were continuing, with those that are not or are no longer viable (not continuing).

Table 1: Contrasting Attributes of Continuing and Not Continuing Businesses.

Business continuing	Business not continuing
Intelligent leadership	Autocratic, patriarchal behaviour
A history of well thought out succession	Poor history of succession
Progressive farm management	Doing things the way we always did
A focus on the customer	What customer?
The intelligent use of capital	Using capital to support the lifestyle
Preparedness to go into debt and maintain low equity	Totally debt adverse and maintaining lazy capital in the business
Deliberate strategies to encourage stakeholders	A strategy of keeping stakeholders off farm and disengaged
Managing with humility and quietly going about your business	Maintaining your position in the family and society as somebody very important
A determination not to live like peasants	A determination not to look like peasants
A common end game goal	No agreement about the end game

More detail about the differences which enabled success and failure can be found in the next issue. Further information and a copy of the Summary Case Studies is available on the Meridian Agriculture website.

For a set of the full Case Studies (free of charge) please contact Meridian Agriculture on – 03 5341 6100.

The case studies, which form part of a larger study, have been funded by Meridian Agriculture and the MLA Donor Company.

Article by Mike Stephens

Farm Safety over the busy Summer and Festive Period

With harvest, shearing, stock sales and many other activities all happening in this period and many with tight timelines, the general risk of something going wrong on farms increases. Along with this busy time, there are often casual or part time staff, family members home from breaks as well as friends about on farm who may not be fully familiar with the processes occurring nor the safety aspects that you know full well.

Already this year Work Safe has reported that there have been 43 fatalities in the Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing industry, which is higher than the Mining and Construction Industries combined. This further reminds us of the need to take care and ensure that processes are in place on farms.

Some important things to remember include:

- Ensuring that all machinery, equipment and work places are in safe working condition and all guards are in place;
- Ensure employees are fully instructed about safe procedures for guarding, isolation devices and locks. Also make sure that anyone operating any machinery understands how to use the machine;
- Wear the appropriate safety equipment, such as earplugs, eye protection and/or dust masks when required;
- Ensure you look after your general health with regular quality meals and snacks, plenty of sleep and exercise and regular breaks throughout the day;
- Carry enough cool drinking water with you at all times and in all vehicles;
- Fatigue increases the probability of an incident occurring which may cause serious illness, injury or death – implement control strategies including shorter shifts, rotating staff or introducing more regular breaks;
- Check that fire extinguishers and first aid kits are readily available;
- Ensure appropriate supervision for all workers, family members and visitors. Consider that children are curious and may wander or try new things. Know where they are at all times.

An important aspect for farm safety, especially during the busy summer period, is to ensure the safety of visitors on your farm. You have a duty of care to visitors to warn them of any dangers they might be exposed to when visiting your farm. As the occupier of the farm, it is expected that you will, or ought to, know about any dangers which may not be obvious to the visitor. It is your responsibility to pass on this information to your visitors.

Some tips:

- Consider all hazards (dangers) and any risks **before** visitors arrive;
- Set rules for safety;
- Make sure your first aid kit is up-to-date and accessible and people know where it is;
- Remember, what you consider normal may not be normal to your visitors;

Take things slowly; it is less likely for anything to go wrong and more likely for visitors to enjoy the time.

Don't:

- Don't **ever** let people ride in the bucket of a front-end loader (**never**);
- Don't let visitors drive a tractor;
- Don't leave the keys in unattended vehicles, i.e. tractors, trucks, motor bikes, ATVs;
- Don't let people ride in or on trailers, the back of utes, tractors or farm machinery;
- **Don't let anyone under 16 years, or more than one person, on the ATV;**
- Don't let anyone on a motor bike, ATV or horse without wearing a helmet.

Do:

- Make sure your public liability insurance "is extensive and in force";
- Plan the day before your visitors arrive;
- Make the visit fun, for you, your family and your visitors;
- Set safety rules for everyone, including your family;
- At the beginning of the day, perhaps over a 'cuppa':
- explain the rules and the reason for them
- point out where toilets are located
- point out, especially to the children, the issues around water tanks, irrigation channels and dams, vehicle movement, dogs, horses, etc.
- If possible, provide a map of your place with any 'No Go' zones marked;
- Let visitors have a look at the tractor, truck, ATV etc, making sure the keys are removed and front-end loaders' buckets are on the ground;
- If riding motor bikes, horses, etc. check the skill level, make sure they are supervised and wearing a helmet;
- Make sure all chemicals are locked away;
- If you have electric fences, point them out and explain the effects of touching them.

Whilst it is a busy time of year, it is also a very satisfying time of year as the results of the years efforts are being realised. Please take care so you can all celebrate your achievements.

For further information on farm safety talk to your local Advisor or contact Meridian Agriculture on 03 5341 6100.



Article by Andrew Speirs & Alistair Cameron

LCI Program Update

As Program Managers for the MLA Donor Company funded Livestock Consulting Internship (LCI), Meridian Agriculture are delighted to be involved in the development of the future growth of the agriculture industry and driving new entrants and graduates into fulfilling careers. As part of the program, Meridian Agriculture has been working with ten employers and their employees/interns across Australia to enhance and grow their skills as a Livestock Consultant's within the industry. The program has seen strong bonds and networks formed across the nation as well as lifelong friendships to boot. All interns have now commenced their individual red meat industry projects that will add great benefit to the red meat industry right across Australia. We look forward to continuing to work with these interns and their employers in developing our next generation of consultants that will make a positive contribution to our industry.

For more information about the program please give Ben Reeve a call on 03 5341 6100.



Article by Ben Reeve

Watch China

Any Australian who keeps an eye on world affairs should have concerns that the relationship between our major defence partner, the USA, and our major trading partner, China, appears to be becoming increasingly uncomfortable. The reasons for that discomfort and the possible solutions to alleviate it are the province of politicians, not agriculturalists.

But anyone interested in the future of Australian agriculture should keep an eye on another aspect of our relationship with China. As well as being one of our major customers, China could, if it chose, become a major competitor. Table 1 shows the difference in production in 1,000,000 tons of some major commodities. Although China is still a major importer of food the scale of its production would enable it to be disruptive and target markets now supplied by countries which were irritating it.

Table 1: Difference in production in 1,000,000 tons of major commodities

Commodity	Australia	China
Wheat	25	126
Beef	2	7
Milk	10	43
Sheep meat	.7	2.2

China is starting to export and could have a greater capacity to increase production than we do.

Further, while in many areas our potential to increase production

is limited, there is greater scope in China if the reports to 19th Party Conference are accurate.

The following points are important:

- Winter wheat yield has reached 355 kilograms per mu, 5.32 tonne/ha (15 mu/ha i.e. 1 mu is 0.0667 ha) – 60 percent higher than world average;
- Improvements to breeding including:
 - Adoption of genomics and gene editing techniques;
 - Approval of over 100 new wheat varieties, six of which are now cultivated on over 10 million mu annually (670,000ha);
 - Adoption of new varieties and irrigation techniques reducing water use by two to three times in water-scarce areas of north China.
 - Zero growth targets in pesticide and fertiliser will continue to be a top priority;
- Technical breakthroughs on utilisation of livestock waste are improving environmental impacts:
 - Livestock manure utilisation rate now above 60 percent;
 - Crop straw utilisation rate now above 80 percent;

Sciences' President noted progress since the 18th Party Congress including:

- Increased contribution rate of agricultural technology;
- Mechanized tillage, seeding and harvesting rate now exceeds 65 percent;
- Over 96 percent of crops planted are now 'improved' varieties;
- Independent innovation capacity, original innovation and basic research;
- Quality of key varieties like 'super rice';
- Naming potatoes as a staple crop:
 - 3D printing foods with potato flour;
- Adoption of new facilities and technologies such as indoor and vertical farming;
- Improvements to key laboratory systems including:
 - 42 new comprehensive national labs;
 - 300 new specialized or regional-level labs;
 - 270 new research stations.

The key message is that whilst Australia doesn't see China as being of major relevance as a purchaser of our agricultural exports, it could become a competitive exporter into markets which we see as ours.

It also highlights the need for Australia to continue to fund agricultural research and development at the highest level possible.

Watch China!

Meridian Agriculture is indebted to Michael Pointer for uncovering the report on the party Congress.

Article by Mike Stephens

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