



JUSTIFIABLE FARMING SYSTEMS- MY WORD!!

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When the Condobolin based Tomlinson family worked out overlap in the cropping program was costing them \$5.75 an acre, they could see huge potential for savings over their 14,000 ha. Ben Tomlinson, who runs "Eulandool", north west of Condobolin, NSW, with his father, Ted and brother, Finlay, said the figure inspired them to change their cropping program dramatically. Always eager to embrace technology - they had been using GPS for more than six years, they settled on a precision farming system which combined row cropping with the fitting of three BEELINE Navigator Broadacre systems to their two John Deere 9400s and their Case Magnum 8910.

"We worked out we could repay the cost of the system over four years. Immediately, that is a saving of 65 cents an acre but after four years it, would be the whole \$5.75, which would be worth more by then," Mr Tomlinson said.

"Therefore, you can well and truly justify it."

The Tomlinson operation comprises 80 per cent cropping and 20% cattle. This year (2001), they grew 5000ha of wheat which had a 1.7 tonne/ha average; 800 ha of canola with a 0.5 tonne/ha average; 200ha of barley with a three tonne/ha average and 200 ha of field peas which went 1.2 tonne/ha.

They also sow and spray 5000 acres of a neighbouring property under contract and run 500 head of breeding cattle.

"Our satellite images from the GPS used to show a 10% overlap. Since we have been using the BEELINE and a controlled traffic program, we'd be lucky if it was one per cent," Ben said.

With flat country and a continuous cropping program, it was easy for the Tomlinsons to implement the program.

"With big machinery it is so much easier to just work on one set of tracks and have one area of compaction in a paddock.

"We work on a six or seven year rotation of canola, then two wheats, then barley, peas and maybe another wheat. To beat disease, we try to only grow canola every three or four years on the one paddock." Ben said.

"In the years when the paddock is not under crop, we will undersow the last crop with pasture or as grazing oats and then use it for the cattle. Therefore, setting up for controlled traffic has little impact on the livestock side of things."

Having already utilised GPS, the Tomlinsons were comfortable with the BEELINE from the beginning.

"We try and sow around 1500 acres a day during the sowing period. We need to employ staff to do this and we only had to show them the basics of the system and they were ready to go without any hassles at all," Ben said.

"While the GPS was good and it gave us a lot of data on the paddock and how it was yielding, there wasn't much we could do with the information at this stage - machinery just hasn't caught up with it..

"We need to sow quickly and accurately. If you try to adjust your machinery too much to cope



with individual problem areas in a paddock there is greater risk of not doing a good job overall."

Working long days during sowing the Tomlinsons were impressed at the lessened fatigue because of not having to concentrate on the steering - thanks to BEELINE's Steering Assist system, which was fitted to each of the three tractors.

"It certainly meant you could concentrate more on what was happening at the back of the tractor," Ben added.

After one season of utilising precision farming technology, the Tomlinsons are keen to explore it further next year.

"I've got a fair few ideas on different things we can try. I think if you could spread out to metre row spacings for canola you could spray between the rows with Round Up, rather than the more expensive post emergents after the crop has come up," Ben said.

"Also, if you get poor germination of a crop like canola, you could go back and replant between the rows with minimal disturbance to the existing crop."

The Tomlinsons see huge potential for precision farming techniques, embracing technology such as that offered by BEELINE, in the southern farming areas of NSW.

"There are a lot of people watching how we are going and we are happy to be taking on board leading edge technology and showing how it can benefit large cropping operations," Ben added.