

# Climate change highlights new needs for farmers

By Kevin Goss  
CEO, Future Farm Industries CRC

Over recent weeks there has been much discussion about Australian agriculture's place in climate change policy. For my part, I've tried to balance the discussion between adaptation and mitigation; emphasising the need for profitable options for farmers facing climatic variability in the short term while the big policy debate on emissions targets and a national emissions trading scheme is settled.

As the CEO of a Research and Development (R&D) organisation dedicated to developing future farming systems, I believe that we are overlooking the important role of productivity improvement as an adaptation strategy in the shorter term.

During the past two years, the debate about climate change has moved on from 'will it happen' to 'what are we going to do about it?' Policy formulation by state and federal governments has largely focused on how to reduce emissions and create carbon trading schemes. These broader policies are critically important, but the path for Australian farmers to follow involves a lot more than their potential participation in an emissions trading scheme.

The interim report from Ross Garnaut's *Climate Change Review* released during

February stated that Australian agriculture will be particularly sensitive to climate change and that adaptation is important if the impact is to be buffered. The report does not divulge how this can be achieved, but instead Professor Garnaut keeps his powder dry promising more detail in his final June report.

More recently, the Prime Minister Kevin Rudd acknowledged that climate change poses significant challenges to Australian agriculture at the ABARE Outlook '08 Conference during March. He even went as far to say that new market opportunities will be created by these challenges. The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Hon. Tony Burke, again placed high priority on agriculture adapting to climate change with the support of the Commonwealth Government's \$130 million *Farming Future Initiative*, including \$15 million for R&D. This is a good start.

## A need for real solutions

To face the challenges presented by climate change, while awaiting a national policy position later this year, farmers need real solutions they can use now. They need to continue to prosper under climatic variability already impacting them while preparing for the future.



ABOVE: Farmers need real solutions to the challenges presented by climate change.

INSET: FFI CRC CEO, Kevin Goss.

The research outcomes of the former CRC Salinity, particularly the strong performance of perennials during drought and erratic summer rainfall, has given Future Farm Industries CRC (FFI CRC) a research program that is well placed to provide many of the adaptation solutions needed by farmers facing a drying climate.

FFI CRC is developing farming systems based on these perennials that are more profitable, more sustainable and now more adaptive. These systems range across livestock production, cropping systems and new woody crops, integrated at the farm and catchment level.



# Riding the train of educational success

**F**FI CRC is gearing up to launch its exciting new national online training portal, *EverTrain*.

Training and easy access to information is essential to the successful adoption of new technologies and research. FFI CRC is committed to assisting the education of industry representatives and CRC clients including researchers, students, extension officers and farmers.

*EverTrain* is an all-encompassing training program designed to allow users to undertake training tailored to suit their specific needs. The program will capture and develop training, delivery and assessment material.

*EverTrain* coordinator Deb Slinger, NSW DPI, said the program will enable the CRC to deliver its training nationally via the internet, while providing users with a local perspective to their learning content.

"For example, a farmer interested in salt land management may log on and download fact sheets on the topic," Deb said. "At the same time he may find out about an interesting workshop on salt-tolerant pastures happening in his area that he can attend."

The online nature provides users with a flexible approach to training, allowing them to log on at a time convenient to them.

*EverTrain* will also be ideal for agribusiness, extension providers and tertiary students looking to complement their theory with an element of practical experience.

"*EverTrain* really will make FFI CRC information accessible to the people who need it most," Deb said. ↘

## ↘ More information

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Such change in Australian agriculture is not new. We need to remind ourselves that farmers have a proud history of innovation and adjusting to change supported by R&D partnerships. Just think of the 'no-till' cropping practice introduced three decades ago. Since then, it has revolutionised crop water-use efficiency which resulted in greater and more reliable yields – especially in average to below average rainfall years.

ABARE reported recently that much of the productivity gain in Australian agriculture can be attributed to improved farm management, crop rotation techniques, and pest and weed control. In future years, sustained productivity growth will be the key to climate change adaptation.

This edition of *Focus on Perennials* provides the latest snap shot of FFI CRC research still focused on profitability, water use and biodiversity, but also now climatic variability. After reading the magazine, it will become apparent that most of the articles, if not all, reinforce my claim that FFI CRC has a unique opportunity to take the lead in creating R&D solutions that will give Australian temperate broadacre agriculture a sustainable and productive future in a drying climate.

I do hope you enjoy reading the latest edition of *Focus on Perennials*. ↘



ABOVE: NSW DPI and FFI CRC staff working closely together to develop an environmental management training package and manual for delivery to regional NRM bodies. (Photo: NSW DPI)