



Focus on Future Farm Industries

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Welcome to the first edition of *Focus on Perennials*, your quarterly newsletter highlighting research and innovation in sustainable farming systems for southern Australia.

The Future Farm Industries Cooperative Research Centre (FFI CRC) is proudly committed to publishing *Focus* and to building on the track record of its past sponsors the CRC for Plant-based Management of Dryland Salinity, the CRC for Landscape Environments and Mineral Exploration (LEME), and the National Dryland Salinity Program.

Why *Focus on Perennials*?

Throughout 42 editions of *Focus* we have seen a shift in strategies for dryland salinity management. It is now clear that actions to reverse salinity have had limited impact: for most farmers there are not yet profitable options for salinity prevention, and in many situations the scale of salinity threat is not great.

These strategies were developed from the proposition that the re-introduction of perennial plants to mimic the highly efficient water-use of the original native vegetation would 'turn dryland salinity around'. Despite notable successes: on individual farms as reported in *SALT Magazine*, in the Denmark

River in WA, and Barr Creek in Victoria, there are too few such examples.

On the other hand, there is a bright future for perennial plants in dryland farming systems because of their water-use characteristics. Research by CRC Salinity showed their potential to be productive, adaptable to seasonal variability and drought, and to fit into catchment strategies that have biodiversity, groundcover and water quality outcomes. Such is our confidence that we have applied to register 'Profitable Perennials' as a FFI CRC brand trademark.

Profitable Perennials™ are pasture and forage species and cultivars that will improve the profitability and sustainability of livestock enterprises and cropping systems, and new short-cycle woody crops that are integrated with cropping and grazing. FFI CRC's goal is adoption of new or improved perennial cultivars on 7.4 million hectares, or about 15 per cent of our target zone (average annual rainfall less than 800 mm).

Outstanding examples of research and innovation in Profitable Perennials™ are projects such as *EverGraze* and *Enrich* which are featured in this edition of *Focus*.

What about salinity?

FFI CRC will continue CRC Salinity's work on the profitable management of salt affected land. Thanks to the successful *Sustainable Grazing on Saline Lands (SGSL)* project, along with the work of groups such as the Saltland Pastures Association, many farmers have now adopted a profitable saltland grazing system. However our vision is that this will be extended to 350,000 ha.

For farmers who can make full use of this system, we will continue to work on improved salt-tolerant plants, better understanding of the dietary requirements of stock, and a national system for saltland classification to better inform farmers' choices.

For cropping farmers, the already promising work on salt- and waterlogging-tolerant wheat will continue, with an adoption target of 500,000 ha. Importantly, earthworks options including raised beds and drainage will be incorporated in FFI CRC's research program.

Salinity impacts on water resources and biodiversity will be evaluated, and risk management decision tools will be developed for natural resources managers.

FFI CRC will cooperate with farmers and groups committed to salinity management by establishing a National Saltland Service. So much knowledge and experience exists that the time is right to create one highly accessible network.

Profitable Perennials™ now

FFI CRC started operations 1 July 2007, and for the next 12 months is managing continuing projects from CRC Salinity while developing the new suite of projects for 2008–09. At the same time we will implement a 'harvest and delivery' strategy for the perennials, farming systems and decision tools. For example we have highlighted five new or under-used clusters of perennial plant cultivars for different parts of Australia, and five cropping and grazing systems that will increase profitability and sustainability.

To the 6000 readers of the new *Focus on Perennials*, welcome to the world of the Future Farm Industries CRC, who together with our many partners, will continue the tradition of profiling progress in research and innovation for Profitable Perennials™. 🌱



The Hon. Julie Bishop, staff and researchers celebrate the launch of Future Farm Industries CRC on July 9 2007.