

Tasmanian farm reaps water and labour efficiency with On Farm Connectivity Program

Tasmanian mixed farmer, James Terry has utilised the Federal Government's On Farm Connectivity Program to boost the water and labour efficiencies on his sheep, beef, and cropping enterprise located on the north-west coast.

Growing broccoli for the fresh market as well as cauliflowers, potatoes, peas and beans, James says precision irrigation timing and application are critical, while also ensuring weather conditions are suitable for spraying and spreading.

To address this, James has utilised the On Farm Connectivity Program to invest in an Ag Logic weather station and probe. Technology, he says, that has proved "super valuable" and wouldn't have been implemented at this stage in his business.

"I certainly would have had reservations about it," James says. "The information is not essential, but it is a really, really nice to have.

"And now that I've got it, it is super valuable to have. But I probably would have put it in my planning in the next two years to have got one, if it weren't for the grant."

Accelerating his adoption, James, who purchased the sensor technology in November last year, says he is already reaping the benefits.

"I grew a crop of cauliflowers last year for Simplot processing using the probe and found it extremely useful," he says.

While it is difficult to "put an exact measure" on the water efficiency savings to date, James says there would have been "between 10 and 20 per cent" more water put on the cauliflower crop if "I didn't have a probe in the paddock."

James says the weather station has also improved on-farm labour efficiency by aiding the "decision-making process".

Measuring the "rain, wind, temperature, highs, lows, humidity and the spray delta T", James says access to this "live information" enables him to make "decisions immediately".

"I don't live on the farm, so I am able to see what the weather conditions are on the farm exactly prior to leaving home to go and spray," he says.

"It's the same with rainfall. You know if you need to irrigate or not irrigate, based on how much rain you have had.

"By seeing that information instantaneously, you don't have to decide, 'will I, won't I, or do I need to go there?'. It makes the decision process so much easier."

James, a trailblazer in the AgTech space as founder of Cloud Farming, is developing an innovative robotic transporter for the horticulture industry designed to "support with hand-

picked products and capture data in the process". And credits initiatives like the On Farm Connectivity Program as a way to support farmers with the adoption and transition to new technologies in their business.

"Everything comes back to data, efficiency, and being able to record every step of the process and make every step better," he says.

"But the challenge for a farmer is filtering through what's useful and what's not. And also filtering through to work out which apps, or which technology, to use as there is so much technology out there."

However, with the On Farm Connectivity Program providing a 50 per cent rebate towards the cost of the technology, James says, "it makes a huge difference".

"If you are halving the price of something up to a point, it makes a huge difference".

With plans afoot to invest in remote technology for his pivot irrigators to further boost water efficiency, James is looking to take up the recently-announced second round of the On Farm Connectivity Program.

"I will be able to look at it on my phone and say, 'ok, because it's walking, it is at this GPS location, it is moving at a rate it should'. Whereas if it gets bogged or turned off, you need to know these things rather than turning up the next morning and knowing something hasn't happened the way it should."

Given the cost to upgrade each pivot with this remote connectivity, James says, access to the grant would make it "a feasible proposition".

"To upgrade at the full cost, you would have to do it over time if you had a good year financially," he says. "But you might not do it if you didn't."