



# Chairman's foreword

Welcome to another edition of the IREC *Farmers' Newsletter* and I hope it provides something to improve your business.

Whilst not wanting to become bogged down in the negativity of primary production I would like to take a moment to comment on what appears to be a disturbing trend – the erosion, and lack, of support being provided to primary producers in order for them to be in a position to improve their business. This is particularly evident with the extremely disappointing decision made by the hierarchy of CSIRO to downgrade the Griffith Research Laboratory by removing agricultural production research. At this centre, researchers have been working at the 'coal face' with irrigators in the heart of Australia's irrigation area since the 1920s and recently, they had been making exciting progress on two of our big issues: eliminating stubble burning and water use efficiency. The trend for CSIRO to move away from grounded research to remote computer modelling will not keep us at the forefront of world irrigators.

Likewise, the NSW State Government contribution to agricultural research is also a concern, especially given the state's current budget problems and difficulty providing basic services to dwellers in this state. The erosion of agricultural science talent continues and is exacerbated by research and development corporations investment moving to grower groups and away from government researchers, in a move to avoid increasingly higher overheads included in government agency-initiated funding proposals. Decisions of this ilk place unnecessary pressure on growers who wish to implement best practice operations and add to the strain of being competitive producers.

All this is taking place at a time when our ability to remain profitable is continually under pressure especially with fuel prices impacting directly and indirectly on farm businesses, and water availability again at critical levels. At the time of writing Lachlan and Murray general security allocations were at 0%, Murrumbidgee 18% and in the Goulburn Murray system, the Goulburn, Campaspe and Loddon are on 0%.

In the face of this doom and gloom, irrigators continue to shine.

As Mike Hedditch, of SunRice said in his sponsor's address at the Awards Dinner for this year's IREC Irrigated Farm Competition, "the competition highlights outstanding performers in irrigation but the exciting thing is that the rank and file irrigators are not too far behind the finalists and winner".

John Blackwell, CSIRO Griffith, was MC for the Awards Dinner and commented on irrigation sustainability – "for an inland, high evaporative environment irrigation area, the irrigation valleys of the southern Murray-Darling Basin are performing better than any other irrigation system in the history of the world".

Given the outstanding credentials of irrigation farmers in south eastern Australia, and their potential contribution to national and world economies, it is difficult to reconcile the withdrawal of supporting services in research and extension.

My thanks again to editor Lucy and contributors to this issue – this edition features articles on maize, cotton, soybeans, rice, pulses and silage; it reports on recent research on different irrigation techniques for rice, and presents a review of twenty years of double cropping. In this edition we also meet the finalists of the 2006 IREC Irrigated Farm Competition. Congratulations to all finalists and the overall winners, Tim and Sally Watson of Hillston.

I wish you all well for the coming season and I trust that items published here will in some way help to combat the diminishing support being provided by the traditional government agencies.

Peter Draper  
Chairman, IREC

