

A PROMISING SUMMER



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PHOTO: A barley crop in the 'pipe through the bank' field at the IREC Field Station, which will be double cropped with mungbeans this summer. Here we are exploring the opportunities to intensify production and spread risk with a varied rotation.

QUICK TAKE

- The *My digital farm* project will finish soon but it sets up the framework for IREC to involve more growers in a process to better manage their own data and farm records to assist planning and decision-making.
- The months ahead at the field station will see cotton going into a green manure crop and mungbeans and rice double-cropped with barley. The irrigation systems under these crops explore several different layouts.
- A recent member survey has raised new issues for IREC to explore, and reinforced the interest in existing work at the IREC Field Station at Whitton.
- All the work at the field station come from the suggestions of members of IREC—keep the ideas coming!

Irrigation farming is entering a summer full of promise. With a few low allocation years under our belt, farmers are hoping for a wetter season, and spring rainfall much closer to normal. This is indeed how things are shaping up with tremendous rain in the catchment in the first week of August and our long-range weather forecasters predicting more to come.

IREC has been busy working with partners to forge ahead with projects that will deliver value to our members. A recent survey of members was conducted and some of the key areas of interest and issues raised were:

- cover cropping
- irrigation automation and systems demonstration
- innovative rotations with multiple crop benefit
- green/brown manuring—what are the benefits?
- digital farming—can the process be made easier?
- battling the effects of compaction
- deep banding fertiliser, animal manure, lime or gypsum below the plant line.

There were some very good 'blue sky' suggestions that will be looked at over time or when an opportunity presents itself.

Data farming

IREC is currently running a case study project on 'data farming' called *My digital farm*. *My digital farm* covers everything from filing better paddock records to using the machinery in the shed more effectively. To have the ability to pull up a report that is meaningful and add value to our decision-making and planning is one of the many benefits of going down this path.

This case study project is coming to an end with the plan to use the learnings from this project so we can roll out a more streamlined process to a larger group. The dedication shown by participants and the guidance of Anthony Rudd, Managing Director of 'I-Ag', has been an excellent recipe for success. Anthony's knowledge, patience and persistence has been an integral ingredient in getting past 'blockers' that would have historically put an end to any progress.

Efficient automation

At the IREC field station we have been exploring every opportunity to gain efficiencies from our automated irrigation system. Due to having the ability to supply on demand and drain and retain all water that enters the field, the potential to improve the system by marrying up 'new and existing technology' is very exciting. Technology like weather stations, soil moisture probes, channel and dam levels and forecasting tools can contribute to the 'system' for a better outcome.



A view of the field where we will monitor the effects of a green manure crop (made up of vetch, lupins, oats and canola). This trial was set up on the basis of member suggestions.

Cropping projects

We are currently growing a green manure crop made up of vetch, lupins, oats and canola. This will be turned in soon, before planting cotton in October. It is on a bankless channel layout and two-metre beds. The beds will be turned into hills for the cotton.

In the 'pipe through the bank' field, is a crop of barley that we intend to double crop with mungbeans this summer. This is an exciting double crop project that has the potential to explore the opportunities that come with a more varied rotation, in terms of in the field and spreading risk, as commodity and water markets fluctuate. Double cropping and rotations were a key issue that IREC members and the Griffith Irrigation Discussion Group wanted more information on.

We have planted barley on the back of this year's cotton. This block has had cotton for three years running so we are very hopeful that we will get enough water to plant rice straight into the barley stubble after harvest. If this project goes ahead, we will be pushing the boundaries with the delayed permanent water system. The aim is to trial the effectiveness of a 30-day, 40-day and 60-day inundation period in each of the bays on the rice system and to reduce the number of 'black root rot' spores in the soil. Again, we will be pushing the automation system to its limits to ensure the crop gets the water it needs while mitigating the losses. This is historically a high water-use soil type for rice so if we can achieve a tonne of rice per megalitre of water, we will be making progress!

Member ideas in action

These projects are delivering on your expectations—yes you, our members. If you are reading through this article (or edition) and think that a particular field trial was your idea, it probably was! IREC prides itself on staying connected and responsive to our member's needs. Your input is vital.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank our retiring farmer committee member Bernie Walsh. Bernie represented the maize industry on the IREC Executive Committee for eight years and made a valuable contribution. His practical knowledge and ability to put perspective into every discussion will be missed.

Generally, I would like to thank all of the IREC committee for their ongoing contribution and commitment. Also, thanks to both Iva and Hayley who keep things running smoothly, Emma Ayliffe from Summit Ag for her dedication to research and agriculture in general, and our sponsors and partners including Murrumbidgee Irrigation, Coleambally Irrigation, CRDC, GRDC and Deakin University.

Without everyone's support many opportunities would fall through the cracks.

Contact the Chair

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