

ZIMMATIC
BY LINDSAY
TRAILBLAZER
Sustainable Irrigation Awards

The Zimmatic Trailblazer Sustainable Irrigation Awards recognise and celebrate farmers who are at the forefront when it comes to responsible irrigation, innovative water management and environmental stewardship. This year's entries spanned across Australia, ranging in farm and irrigation types.

The 2022 Zimmatic Supreme Award winner is Simon Burgess of Vacluse Agricultural Company, Conara, Tasmania, who operates a mixed cropping and livestock property farming cereals, faba beans, poppies, potatoes, seed crops and fodder for livestock. Vacluse is based in the Northern Midlands of Tasmania, totalling 4448ha, including 2151ha under centre pivot irrigation and 447ha under hard hose traveller irrigation.

Simon has shown himself to be a Trailblazer with an extremely well-considered approach to the design of the entire irrigation system, taking into account water supply, soils, farm type, topography, enterprises, environment and people



Simon Burgess, Supreme Award winner

The judging panel was particularly impressed by Simon's application of technology to improve the efficiencies and capacity of the property, and by how much remains under native vegetation without lessening the productive area of the operation. "Simon's deep understanding, paired with a very collaborative approach to working with technology partners and advisers, supported strategic decision-making in terms of irrigation infrastructure and technology."

On receiving the honour, Mr. Burgess said, "It is quite humbling and an absolute honour to be awarded the Supreme Winner of the Trailblazer awards. I was absolutely stoked to be a finalist let alone win the top award! You are only ever as good as the people around you. This Award is a testament to the hard work,

attention to detail and passion of the team at Vacluse Agricultural Company over the last seven years.

"In agriculture, our people and soils are our primary assets, but without the ability to add water in a timely and effective way you have nothing. Getting water onto the crop is one thing, but managing that water and understanding where it is going is absolutely vital."



Jaco Pauer, Sustainable Irrigation Management Award winner

Earning the Sustainable Irrigation Management Award is Jaco Pauer of the Pye Group, Parilla, South Australia, whose horticulture property farms potatoes, carrots and onions as well as managing livestock, export hay and dryland cropping.

The judging panel commented, "We particularly noted Jaco's attention to improving all aspects of irrigation practices, and his application of simple yet extremely innovative solutions to challenges.

We were extremely impressed by Jaco's exceptional aptitude in ensuring the correct amount of water is applied to all areas of each pivot even in the face of challenging levels of variability. This has undoubtedly resulted in a dramatic improvement in the value of production of the farm with a 26 percent uplift in the yield of premium grade produce."

Jaco noted that it has been a privilege to be considered as finalist for the Awards. "I would like to thank Zimmatic and all the other sponsors involved, it was wonderful to have the opportunity to showcase the Pye Group and Zerella Fresh's Zimmatic Variable Rate Irrigation systems which we believe give us the edge to grow the best quality potatoes, onions and carrots."

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The Lamb Weston Stewardship & Community Award winner is Darrell Fiddler of DeBortoli Wines, Bilbul, New South Wales, farming seasonal rice and other summer crops and wheat/barley in winter. Darrell's commitment to research and innovation, especially in relation to growing aerobic rice, stood out, as did his collaboration with research programs that benefit the entire industry.



Darrell Fiddler, Lamb Weston Stewardship & Community Award winner

The judging panel noted, "Darrell has maintained significant areas to support native vegetation and an ethos of incorporating these into the design and operation of the farm operations. His openness to inviting not only researchers, but the community, school groups and industry onto the property and sharing his knowledge so openly were key factors in Darrell being awarded this accolade."

Darrell expressed gratitude, noting, "We were humbled to even be nominated for the Trailblazer Awards. To receive recognition for the way we farm to improve biodiversity is wonderful because it has always been front and centre of our daily farming practices and the designing of farm layouts."

All entries were assessed by a panel of irrigation and industry professionals who reviewed the submissions against the four judging categories. Dr. Pat Hulme, head judge, said that the judging panel had a very difficult time separating the finalists and felt that all three truly are trailblazers in their industry.

"Congratulations to Simon as the holder of the Zimmatic Supreme Award and to Darrell and Jaco who are very worthy winners of the two category awards."

"We were extremely impressed by the calibre of applications for the awards and the excellence being practiced by these farmers, who are focused on improving

their irrigation and water management," he said.

James Craft of Zimmatic ANZ said they were delighted with the growth of the awards in Australia in only the second time it has been offered, and proud to be able to recognise the outstanding winners of 2022.

"The Awards are an opportunity to help showcase the innovative farming operators who will influence future generations and help to bolster even further Australia's success story as global leaders in sustainable and profitable farming.

It's also important to note that without the support of our sponsors we would be unable to deliver an awards program like this. We are proud to have been working with our principal partner Lamb Weston along with Sustainable Soils Management, AGnVET, Food & Fibre Gippsland and the Irrigation Research & Extension Committee, who are partners in delivering this award."

In commenting on the awards, Lamb Weston's Simone Anderson, Vice President and General Manager Oceania said, "On behalf of Lamb Weston, it's my pleasure to sincerely congratulate Simon as the Supreme Winner. I am also excited that Darrell, as winner of the Lamb Weston Stewardship & Community Award, and Jaco who took out the Sustainable Irrigation Management Award, also were such extraordinary contenders for the awards.

It is so heartening to see such commitment to not just delivering excellence in production and water management, but also to being open to innovation and to sharing knowledge with other producers and the wider community.

This well-deserved recognition celebrates innovation, productivity and environmental stewardship, and each winner in their own way is providing inspiration and new ideas for others."

For information about the Awards: www.irrigationtrailblazer.com