

GRDC Southern Extension Project

Grain growers are being supported to diversify into pulse crops in non-traditional production areas of Victoria and South Australia through a new Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC) initiative.

The Southern Pulse Extension project is a GRDC investment that aims to provide growers and their advisers with the information and resources they need to make informed decisions and maximise possible production and income potential from pulses.

At the core of the project is the establishment of twelve “Pulse Check” discussion groups across Victoria and South Australia.

The Pulse Check groups will meet at least four times a year over the coming two years to discuss issues relating to pulse crop production, management and marketing. They are focused on a “back to basics” approach to pulse production through practical in-field learning and group discussion.

Each group consists of growers and advisers with varying experience in production of lentils or chickpeas. Those with no or limited experience are particularly encouraged to take advantage of a unique opportunity to learn from more experienced growers in their region and experts in the industry.

Since the commencement of the project, UNFS has hosted three pulse check group workshops, each attended by between 19 and 25 people. Given the diversity of the Upper North region, the meetings are being alternated between the western and eastern sides of the Flinders Ranges. There is value in joining everyone together from across the district to share ideas and knowledge.

So far the meetings have covered a range of topics, including a post-harvest review for the previous season, paddock selection and other sowing considerations, different types of pulse crops and different varieties, pests, weeds, diseases, and pulse markets, including the recent Indian tariffs. The recent post-emergence meeting also took the opportunity to look at a UNFS pulse trial being run on farmer Brendon Johns’ property in Warnertown. The trial is investigating the effects of time of sowing, moisture levels, stubble architecture, and pulse variety.

Feedback from the meetings has been highly positive, with attendees praising the speakers and topics, and those new to pulse crops saying that it was great to attend meetings so that they were not “starting blind.”

UNFS has welcomed the opportunity to be involved in the project. Pulse crops are of significant interest in the area, with many local farmers also considering shifting away from peas and faba beans towards lentils. The pulse check groups are proving to be a great way to help local farmers gain the confidence and skills necessary to adopt new pulse varieties, or to improve on their current practices.

Pulse Check groups will not only provide growers with a competent understanding of best management practice for these crops, but advisers with limited knowledge of pulse crop agronomy will also acquire the skills and knowledge to support pulse crop expansion into new areas.

Much of the information to be delivered to growers and advisers through the Pulse Check groups initiative has been generated out of the GRDC’s Southern Pulse Agronomy program. Southern Pulse Agronomy, led by Agriculture Victoria pulse agronomist Dr Jason Brand, has made a significant

contribution to the rise in pulse production across the southern region. Southern Pulse Agronomy has trial sites spread throughout SA and Victoria, but most of these are located in established pulse production areas. From 2018 new sites will be incorporated in new pulse growing regions and will be incorporated into Pulse Check group activities.

Other groups are facilitated by representatives from farming systems organisations Riverine Plains Inc, Mallee Sustainable Farming, MacKillop Farm Management Group, Birchip Cropping Group, Lower Eyre Agricultural Development Association, and Eyre Peninsula Agricultural Research Foundation, as well as Rural Directions and Ag Excellence Alliance.

A Southern Pulse Extension steering committee, comprising representatives from the GRDC, Pulse Australia, Southern Pulse Agronomy, agribusiness and the adviser community, has been established to guide the initiative.

Steering committee chairman Bill Long, an agricultural consultant and former GRDC Southern Regional Panel member, says the Pulse Check initiative has already been well received by growers considering production of high-value pulse crops.

“Attendances at meetings have been very pleasing, reflecting the demand and need for GRDC investment in a program such as this,” Mr Long said.

“The concept is not a new one – previous Lentil Check programs for example have been very successful in transferring knowledge to growers moving into new crop types – so it’s a formula that we know works.

“I’m confident that the Southern Pulse Extension project will over the next two years deliver tangible results for growers and advisers who are keen to build their knowledge and understanding of the key aspects of lentil and chickpea production.”

Other activities involved in the project include a regional workshop program, leveraging SPA and Validation trials and focusing on areas not currently being serviced by a Pulse Check Group, an agribusiness consultation process, engagement at industry events, review of existing and development of pulse resources available to industry and ongoing communication activities.

Any general enquiries about the Southern Extension Project can be directed to the Project Manager, Pru Cook on 0438 923 258 or at pru.cook@bcg.org.au.





The third pulse check group meeting, held in Warnertown. Photo: UNFS