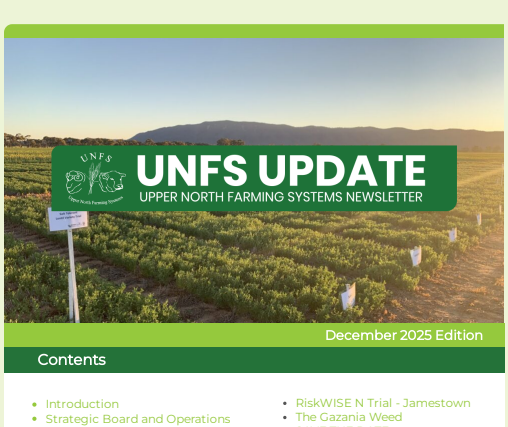

UNFS UPDATE

UPPER NORTH FARMING SYSTEMS NEWSLETTER

December 2025 Edition

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Welcome to the December edition of the UNFS newsletter!

It has been a busy and productive year for UNFS, with numerous events, workshops, and a suite of trials and demonstrations across the region. We hope harvest is progressing well and nearing completion for most growers. Below is a brief snapshot of how the season has unfolded across the Upper North:

West of the Ranges:
Results have been mixed. Broadly speaking, the southern areas entered the season with some stored soil moisture, helping many achieve average or above-average yields. Further north, yields were below average, declining with distance northwards. Quality issues have been common across the district, including high screenings, low test weights, and volunteer wheat in barley contributing to downgrades.

East of the Ranges:
Harvest was late to begin and slow to get going. Quality has been highly variable, with barley in particular showing very high screenings. Yields have ranged from slightly above average in some pockets to well below average further north.
We look forward to analysing the yield data and trial results from our 2025 trial program - especially after the limited insights from last year due to the extremely low rainfall.

We also have several new projects commencing in 2026, so stay tuned for updates on what's ahead.

Wishing you all a **Merry Christmas** and a **Happy New Year**, and hopefully a chance to enjoy some well-earned downtime.

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Strategic Board and Operations Committee

Strategic Board 2025-26

Following our successful **Annual General Meeting** on 24 September, we are pleased to announce the appointment of **Chris Crouch** as the new Chair and **Dave Clarke** as the new Vice Chair of the UNFS Strategic Board. Together, Chris and Dave bring over 14 years of combined experience on the UNFS Operations Committee and Strategic Board.

We thank **Michael Zwar** and **Beth Humphries** for their service as Chair and Vice Chair and acknowledge their dedication and achievements during their time. Both Michael and Beth will continue in integral roles on the Strategic Board.

We also welcome **Ruth Sommerville** back to the Strategic Board. Ruth continues to be an invaluable contributor, offering a wealth of knowledge.

The 10 Strategic Board members will continue to provide leadership and direction to ensure UNFS remains aligned with its responsibilities, long-term goals and Strategic Plan.

Operations Committee 2025-26

We gladly welcome **Mark Blake**, **Holly Crawford**, **Matt Christophersen** and **Kara Heaslip**, along with returning committee members, **Tom Porter** and **Tyson Christophersen**, to our Operations Committee. They join our already dedicated and experienced group of farming, industry and hub representatives. Their input will further strengthen our committee's work, as we continue to work towards our mission of building responsive and resilient farming systems that support profitable and sustainable farms in the Upper North.

We look forward to the contributions of our new members and thank our existing committee for their ongoing commitment and valuable service to UNFS.

Full List of Strategic Board and Operations Committee Members

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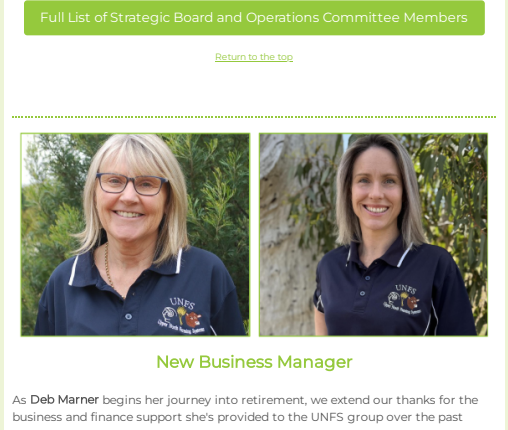

New Business Manager

As **Deb Marner** begins her journey into retirement, we extend our thanks for the business and finance support she's provided to the UNFS group over the past three years. Deb brought energy and enthusiasm to the team, and we all enjoyed her delicious catering at the committee meetings! Wishing you all the best for your future Deb and please keep in touch!

We're pleased to welcome **Natasha (Tash) Hombsch**, who joined the UNFS team in November, as our new **Business Manager**.

Tash, better known as Jo in the Upper North, grew up on a sheep and cattle property in the Flinders Ranges. Together with four years' experience working with a cropping farmer in the Mid North, she has a good understanding of the farming and grazing life.

Tertiary qualified in **Business and Project Management** and with over 16 years of experience in these fields of work, Tash is keen to put her knowledge and skills in finance, administration and project work to use at UNFS.

Tash lives in Clare with her husband and three children. She's excited to be part of the team and looks forward to meeting you soon!

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"TOP OF THE CROP" - SA Grain Industry Awards

Congratulations to all the **2026 SA Grain Industry Awards** nominees! An outstanding group of growers and industry innovators, nominated across six major award categories, to recognise their dedication and contribution to the state's grain sector.

A special mention to two of our UNFS committee members! **Ruth Sommerville** has been named a finalist in the **"Women in Grain Awards"** and **Holly Crawford**, a finalist in the **"Sustainability Award"**. A great achievement, good luck to you both and we hope enjoy the awards night on the 3 February.

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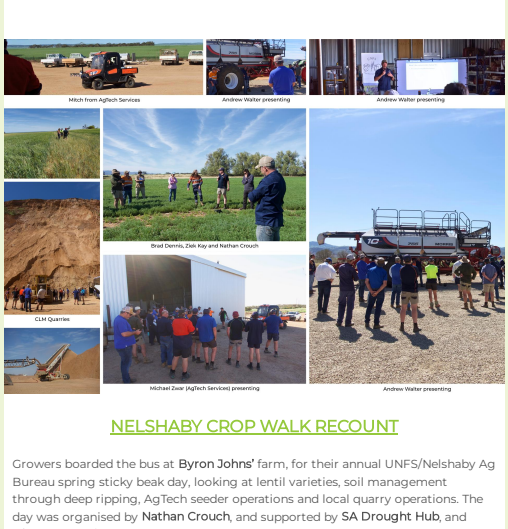
CROP WALKS



NELSHABY CROP WALK RECOUNT

Growers boarded the bus at **Byron Johns'** farm, for their annual UNFS/Nelshaby Ag Bureau spring sticky beak day, looking at lentil varieties, soil management through deep ripping, AgTech seeder operations and local quarry operations. The day was organised by **Nathan Crouch**, and supported by **SA Drought Hub**, and **O'Dea Farm Finance**.

Metro vs Thunder Lentils
The first stop focused on the Metro and Thunder lentil varieties. Both varieties had come up strongly after the first rain, with around 40-50 ml of follow-up water helping them along. Weed control was front of mind for the group, with metribuzin used successfully, although barley grass was struggling under the program. Imi chemistry seemed to perform better in that regard.

For many in the region, 2025 was the first year growing these lentils, if they had tried at all, with Metro planted at a rate of 40 seeds/m² across 10 hectares to lift plant numbers. On the Eyre Peninsula, yields around 1.3 t/ha were reported. Thunder also showed promise, with growers noting there's currently no replacement variety coming through. Some issues with milk thistle and wheat patches in the paddock where old wheat residues were observed.

Deep Ripping Discussion
Next, the group looked at results from deep ripping trials at Brad Dennis' farm. Despite initial worries about boron and salinity, the full ripped strips showed no negative response. In fact, ripped barley performed just as well as lentils in the same conditions. Non-ripped heavy soils fared worse, reinforcing the benefits of digging deeper to understand what's going on below the surface.

While the practice uses around $30/ha in diesel plus tractor time, many felt it was worthwhile to "run the ripper over as much as possible and see what happens." Depths of 300 mm were generally enough, though in some sandier spots growers pushed to 500 mm but couldn't always reach full depth due to the limitations of the equipment. Weeds were limited to a few areas of capeweed, and there was little sign of non-wetting sand. No chicken litter was applied; this work was more about identifying where ripping made the most difference.

Seeder Technology
The group then travelled Brad Dennis's farm to a look at his new seeder, and the technology that goes with it. Both Brad and Andrew Walter spoke about the set up. Scales on the machine meant no calibration was needed, saving around four hours of set-up time. Sensors monitored torque on each motor, giving early warnings before a potential seizure, while Topcon monitors provided solid feedback. The automatic adjustment of press wheel pressure between clay and sand soils proved particularly useful.

Growers discussed the value of going through local dealers rather than directly to manufacturers for support and highlighted both the advantages and challenges of using onboard cameras in dusty conditions. Variable rate technology (VRT) maps were being used at a 5 m grid scale, enabling individual pump control across the run, a great example of precision ag in action.

CLM Quarry Visit
The day's last session was a visit to the local quarry, where owner and operator Brenton shared the site's history and impressive growth. Originally opened in the 1930s, the quarry has been operating under current ownership since 2019 and now produces around 180,000 tonnes per year, a big jump from 40-60,000 tonnes previously.

The site covers 233 hectares, with 113 ha freehold, and employs six people. Continuous improvements have been made, with new screens, cones and a jaw crusher enhancing production. The team takes pride in the quality of their product, noting they're "very lucky" compared to competitors.
Material is used primarily for road construction, and plans for the future include shaping the site more like a mine and exploring opportunities for road base and bitumen contracts. The visit offered a rare behind-the-scenes look at how local infrastructure materials are sourced and processed.

The day finished off at Byron Johns' shed where the group heard presentations from Stefan Schmitt (RiskWi$e), Michael Zwar from AgTech Services (drone-based weed detection), James Venning (AI, decision making and the numbers that go with it) and Andrew Walter (autonomy and the future of AI).

To complete an already excellent day, Steven Johns had his smoker going for entree, and his pizza oven firing for a delicious dinner.

Thank you to all who attended, and we look forward to seeing you all again next year!

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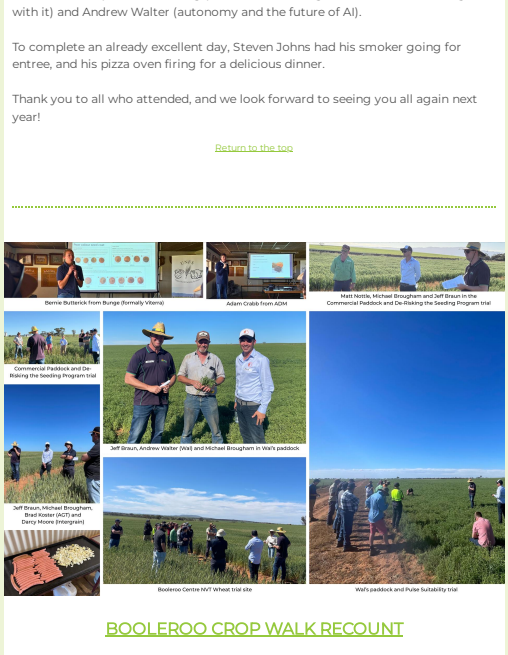

BOOLEROO CROP WALK RECOUNT

The spring Booleroo Crop Walk travelled around key demonstration areas for lentil and wheat performance, as well as soil and stubble management strategies. Agronomists Jeff Braun and Michael Brougham joined us to facilitate the day with valuable additional observations made by attending local agronomists.

Break crop suitability project (SA Drought Hub funded)

The group visited the demonstration site at Wal's farm, which featured Hallmark lentils, following barley in the previous season and two years of wheat before that. Discussion centred on genetic variation and salt tolerance among lentil varieties, particularly:

- **Bolt** and **Highland** – noted for their salt tolerance.
- **Daxa** – a newly released variety generating interest for future trials.

Three main soil zones were observed at the pulse suitability trial site:

- Bottom section: performing reasonably well.
- Middle section: a challenging area, showing poorer growth and structure.
- Top section: poorer soil overall, though it had received pig manure previously.

Soil salinity levels were also measured, with one focus soil recording an EC of 1.2.

Jeff's top 5 tips for growing lentils

- Know your paddock's soil type variability prior to sowing lentils (very low pH, salt, poor structured soil should be avoided).
- Try not to hurt them with herbicides. Early vigour with no growth checks will promote good yields.
- Monitor for grubs weekly during pod fill. Control thresholds are very low.
- Canopy closure fungicide is crucial. Base a disease management package around the variety's resistance to Botrytis Grey Mould.
- Having an air reel for harvesting lighter crops can be the difference between making a profit or loss

Wheat Varieties – NVT Site

The Booleroo walk also visited the NVT site, focusing on variety selection and maturity. Participants discussed whether selection should be based on yield potential or maturity package, with Clarkey noting a preference for earlier-maturing varieties, particularly when moving further north.
Popular varieties included:

- Calibre
- Scepter – widely grown across the district.

While frost risk remains a consideration, late-season heat stress was seen as a greater challenge in most years.

Disease discussions highlighted:

- **Rust** as an occasional issue in wetter seasons.
- **Crown rot** as the top disease concern for most growers.

Growers discussed herbicide use and timing:

- **Tomahawk** was highlighted for minimal residual carryover.
- Scepter timing and positioning remain important for yield optimisation.
- Mick noted that although recent seasons have had late breaks, early sowing opportunities still need to be considered on certain soils.
- **Mohawk**, a quick-developing winter wheat, was mentioned as a good fit for early.

Jeff's commentary on wheat varieties

- **Calibre** - high yielding AH conventional wheat. Longer coleoptile and competitive with weeds. Early maturity gives robustness in shorter finishing seasons. Stripe rust and septoria need to be managed
- **Colt** - longer season (photoperiod sensitive) AH conventional wheat suitable for earlier sowings. Great disease resistance package to all three rusts at the time of writing. More traditional maturity like Frame/Yitpi can make the most of a late finish.
- **Mohawk** - moderately quick conventional winter wheat. APW quality. I like this variety as it has early season flexibility e.g. very early break can sow, but still quick enough at the grain fill stage for solid yields. One to have in the silo for the just in case. Reasonable option to throw into the mix for frost risk management.
- Please note: None of the varieties I have listed have Clearfield tolerance. You will need to manage residues with a Clearfield variety e.g. Sunblade CL ;)

De-Risking the seeding program

The group visited the commercial paddock demonstration which has different residual herbicide treatments, wheat varieties, and seeding equipment (hybrid disc vs tyne). With a very late and dry sowing, early observations of the site showed better crop emergence in the strips sown with the hybrid disc. No phytotoxicity was observed across treatments.

Stubble management was a key theme, with strong emphasis on retention:

- Growers discussed the benefits of using stripper fronts and disc seeders to leave maximum residue.
- Research at Hart has shown a 20% yield increase when stubble is retained.

Back at the Booleroo sporting complex, representatives from Bunge/ADM provided context around lentil receival, export logistics, and what growers can expect heading into harvest.

Market discussion highlighted the current imbalance between production and demand:

- Australia produced around 2 million tonnes of lentils this season, against an estimated 1 million tonne demand.
- As one presenter noted, "High prices kill high prices", reflecting current market pressures.

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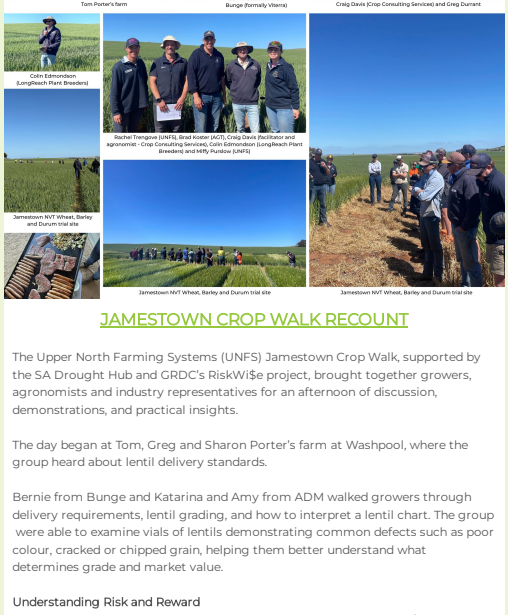

JAMESTOWN CROP WALK RECOUNT

The Upper North Farming Systems (UNFS) Jamestown Crop Walk, supported by the SA Drought Hub and GRDC's RiskWi$e project, brought together growers, agronomists and industry representatives for an afternoon of discussion, demonstrations, and practical insights.

The day began at Tom, Greg and Sharon Porter's farm at Washpool, where the group heard about lentil delivery standards.

Bernie from Bunge and Katarina and Amy from ADM walked growers through delivery requirements, lentil grading, and how to interpret a lentil chart. The group were able to examine vials of lentils demonstrating common defects such as poor colour, cracked or chipped grain, helping them better understand what determines grade and market value.

Understanding Risk and Reward
Next, Craig Davis of Crop Consulting Services introduced the RiskWi$e initiative: a five-year national project funded by GRDC and led by CSIRO. The project explores how growers can make better risk-reward decisions on-farm, from machinery investment and crop choice to soil health and personal decision-making factors such as stress and bias.

Craig's discussion focused on the positives and challenges of growing lentils, highlighting key considerations for paddock selection (soil type, pH, waterlogging, frost, and weed control), agronomy, and storage and handling. Craig also talked about N decisions and N banking data from this year's frost trial site under the RiskWi$e project.

New Cereal Varieties

The group then boarded the bus to the Spalding Wheat and Barley NVT site hosted on Andrew Coote's property, where Colin Edmondson (LongReach Plant Breeders) and Brad Koster (Australian Grain Technologies) joined Craig for a session on barley and wheat varieties.

Several new Imidazolinone-tolerant wheat lines were showcased, including *Soaker, Sunblade CL Plus, Tomahawk CL Plus, Dozer and Razor*, alongside conventional varieties such as *Rio, Brumby, Matador, Dale, Ponsford, Marsh, Reilly, Kingston, Mohawk, Colt, Packer, Mammoth, Shotgun* and *Murray*. Breeding lines under development were also compared against established commercial varieties.
At the barley section of the NVT site, growers examined newer lines such as *Atlantis, Rocket CL, Bigfoot CL, Granite CL, Neo CL, Soldier CL, Ember, Pegasus AX, Titan AX* and *Bunyip IA (CL + CoAXium)*, which were discussed in relation to yield stability and weed control options.

Lentil Agronomy and Break Crop Sustainability

The group then travelled to the Canola NVT and Thunder Lentil paddock on the Sommerville's property at Hacklins Corner, where a detailed "How to Grow Lentils" discussion was had between Craig and Greg Durrant (Huddleston farmer), with input from Damien Sommerville and the present agronomists.

Discussion covered:

- Nutrition: phosphorus, potassium, zinc, and molybdenum.
- Soil type: ideal vs. marginal areas, with talk around pH mapping, acidity at depth and lime incorporation.
- Inoculation: comparing granular versus peat-based rhizobia, and single versus double rates.
- Weed and disease management: strategies for challenging broadleaf weeds and fungicide timing.
- Variety selection: matching lentil type to weed pressure, resistance status, and sowing rate.
- Time of sowing, harvestability, grain handling and storage options, including the role of air reels and different storage systems (silo, shed, grain bags).
- Marketing: when to sell and how to optimise returns.

The group was also introduced to the "Building Resilience – Break Crop Sustainability Across Landscapes" project (nicknamed *Pulse Suitability*), supported by SA Drought Hub, with demonstration paddocks at Punthari (Murray Plains Farming), Ungarra and Lock (Ag Innovation & Research Eyre Peninsula), Spalding, and Melrose (UNFS).

This project aims to improve grower understanding of how different break crops perform across varying landscapes, considering soil type, water-holding capacity and frost risk. By examining establishment, soil testing (deep N), in-crop monitoring, yield, and economic performance, the demonstrations help identify which break crops best reduce risk while maintaining profitability.

At Hacklins Corner, the UNFS demonstration paddock, also supported by SARDI Clare Agronomy, is assessing lentil performance on heavier soil types not typically suited to the crop. Liming has addressed acidity in some areas, though variability in cation exchange capacity and elevated boron, sodicity and salinity persist in heavier flats. September biomass cuts showed around 20% lower growth in these heavier zones, highlighting the impact of subsoil constraints.

Harvesting, Air Reels and Take-Home Messages

The group returned to the Porters' farm to wrap up the day with a harvest, machinery and air-reel (owned by Tom and Greg Porter) session led by Craig, with substantial input from Tom and Greg Porter, and Greg Durrant and Scott Clarke.

Topics included:

- Header setup for maintaining sample quality and throughput.
- Choosing the right front — flex, draper, vario/extended knife, and contour systems.
- Benefits of air reels for improving harvest efficiency and reducing losses in lentils, lupins, barley and beans.
- Storage and handling methods to minimise damage and maintain grain quality.

Craig Davis closed the day by thanking all presenters, contributors, and hosts Tom, Sharon and Greg Porter, before inviting the group to stay for a BBQ tea. He encouraged growers to reflect on three key take-home messages from the day, and to either seek out more information or put one of the new ideas into practice on their own farms.

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Ladies on the Land - First Aid Training

Photos: Rural women and their children at the First Aid training session in Jamestown.

On Thursday, 13 November, **Ladies on the Land (LOTL)** hosted two **first aid** training sessions at the Jamestown RSL Hall. The sessions, delivered by Karyn from **HeadZtoes**, provided participants with essential knowledge and hands-on experience in emergency response skills, with a focus on infants and children. The event was well received by the 30 attendees and offered rural women a valuable opportunity to connect, network and support one another, in a relaxed, social setting.

A special thanks to **Kara Heaslip**, UNFS LOTL Hub Representative, and **Beth Humphris**, UNFS Strategic Board member for organising this informative event, which allowed women in the Upper North to upskill and enhance safety within their families and communities. Thanks also to **UNFS** and **PIRSA** for their support and funding, which made this event possible.

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Pasture Workshop

Photo: Cam Nicholson, Rachel Trengove, Alison Henderson.

In September, farmers joined **Cam Nicholson**, alongside local producers **Alison Henderson** and **Andrew Cootes**, for a practical workshop supporting the current **MLA PDS project** with **UNFS**. The project finishes this year and aims to improve pasture management in the Upper North by demonstrating better pasture options and showing how understanding Food On Offer, feed budgeting and the use of remote-sensing tools can lift livestock productivity.

Alison, who is hosting one of the PDS demonstration sites, compared mixed versus single-species pastures. She is exploring the use of mixed pastures, rotational grazing and containment feeding when needed to achieve greater soil cover and maintain sheep condition year-round.

Andrew's participation in a Grazing for Profit course and involvement with the Mid North Grasslands Group influenced his decision to trial an intensive rotational grazing system. He originally subdivided his non-arable hills country into small 4–5 ha paddocks, but over time it became clear that sheep consistently grazed out the north and west slopes first—highlighting the importance of aspect and the need to adjust fence lines. Several fences have since been moved. To achieve effective cell grazing, he has found he needs around 200 DSE stocking density with long rest periods—essentially exclusion for most of the year. While higher stocking rates haven't been achieved yet for Andrew, the system has delivered better groundcover and a lift in higher-quality native grasses, rather than low-value species such as geranium and nutgrass which tend to dominate under set-stocking. However, the past two very low-rainfall years have pushed the whole system backwards despite good management.

Cam's Key Messages

Pasture Growth
Fertiliser is hugely important for pasture production, but to get maximum value from nutrients, leaf management is critical. As Cam explains, "Fertiliser grows fat leaves, not fast leaves." Leaf emergence is driven by soil and temperature, while leaf "fatness" depends on nutrient availability. Grazing management is also vital to allow plants time to grow adequate leaf area between grazing's. "You are wasting your time if you don't let the leaves grow."

He emphasised the importance of soil testing, given fertiliser is often the biggest cost and can be the limiting factor in pasture productivity. "Designing an optimal grazing system relies on understanding patterns of growth of different species."

Cam noted that the variability or range of pasture growth from year to year is more useful for management decisions than long-term averages: "We need to understand the system we have to set up to manage variability - Get the daily pasture growth rate graph, then build the system around it."

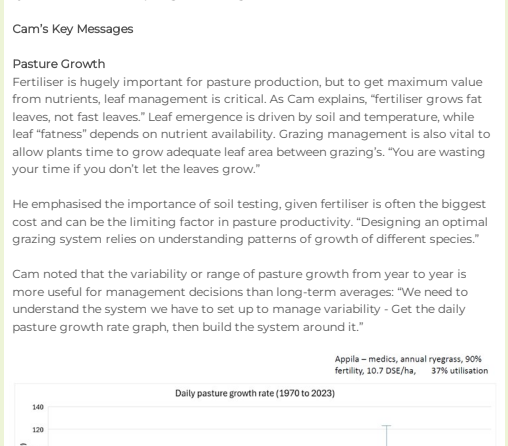

Figure 1. Daily pasture growth rate graph for Appila showing variability.

Grazing Stubbles

Stubbles can play an important role in filling a feed gap in mixed farming systems, but their grazing value has declined due to improved weed control and modern header setups. Cam encouraged growers to assess paddocks before grazing: sheep perform well while grain and green pick (such as crop regrowth and weeds) remain, but once these disappear, livestock quickly lose condition.

60 kg/ha
4
140 kg/ha
5

Photos - stubble feed on offer estimates.

Grazing Crops

Cam sees significant potential for grazing crops—intended to be taken through to grain—in selected paddocks in the Upper North. "It's another piece in the whole farm supply of feed year-round." Grazing crops can also delay crop maturity by 7-10 days, helping shift flowering out of frost-risk periods. Consistent grazing across all plants is essential; uneven grazing leads to uneven maturity, creating harvest challenges.

Cam noted the need to apply an additional 20-30 kg nitrogen to replace removed biomass. He also highlighted examples from WA where large mobs graze crops for 7-10 days before rotating, supported by staggered sowing dates. While not suited to every paddock, Cam sees real opportunity in grazing crops in this region strategically, allocating paddocks with matched sowing dates and winter varieties.

Summary Quotes from Cam

"We really need to think about the whole farming system – it's a very complicated system."

"We manage risk as farmers, so it's really important to understand the volatility and ignore the averages for good decision-making."

"We are constantly compromising certain parts of a grazing system, but the art of a good grazing system is minimising the compromise to maximise production—there are a lot of moving parts."

Photo: Cam Nicholson presenting at the Pasture Workshop.

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TRIAL UPDATES

Drought and climate resilient sheep farms and landscapes tailor-made for low rainfall farming regions

Project Aims

This project is aiming to develop a stable, productive and resilient farming system that will survive in times of drought and in low rainfall areas. This will be achieved through drought tolerant plant species that will increase feed supply and improve ecosystem services and also identifying drought tolerant sheep trough evaluation of genetics in traits such as feed efficiency, higher energy reserves, and greater heat tolerance.

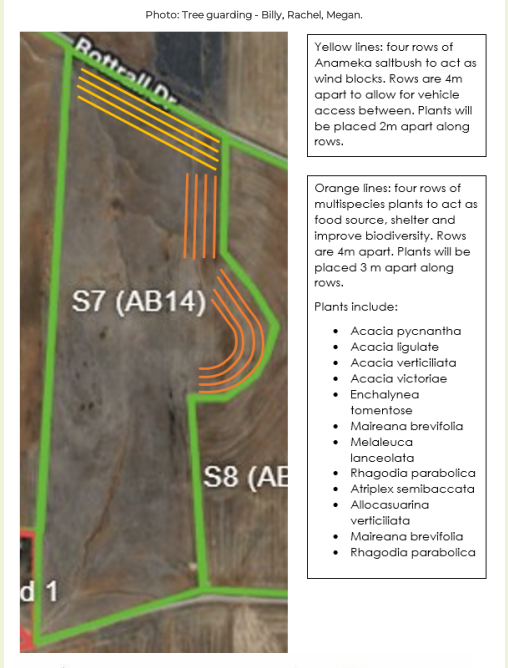
Project Update

Planting has begun at the University of Adelaide Roseworthy Campus site, and two regional sites in Lameroo and Caltowie. At the Caltowie site we planted four rows of Anameka saltbush on the northern side of a paddock to predominantly act as wind blocks but also provide an alternative food source. We also planted four rows of multispecies plants to act as food source, shelter and improve biodiversity (as seen below on the paddock map). Tree guards were placed around new plants to provide protection.

Next Steps

In 2026 we will plant more saltbush along the southern border of the paddock at Caltowie and also pick another paddock to plant in. Temperature data on sheep will be collected through vaginal temperature sensors placed in CIDR-shaped moulds that will be programmed to record a temperature every 20 mins. Reproductive performance data of the sheep will also be collected to find any correlations between temperature status and reproduction.
Further work with planting, genetic analysis, temperature status, and reproductive performance will continue to be collected at the Roseworthy Campus and additional regional sites.

Photo: Tree guarding - Billy, Rachel, Megan.



Yellow lines: four rows of Anameka saltbush to act as wind blocks. Rows are 4m apart to allow for vehicle access between. Plants will be placed 2m apart along rows.

Orange lines: four rows of multispecies plants to act as food source, shelter and improve biodiversity. Rows are 4m apart. Plants will be placed 3 m apart along rows.

Plants include:

- Acacia pycnantha
- Acacia ligulate
- Acacia verticillata
- Acacia victoriae
- Enchylaena tomentose
- Maireana brevifolia
- Melaleuca lanceolata
- Rhagodia parabolica
- Atriplex semibaccata
- Allocasuarina verticillata
- Maireana brevifolia
- Rhagodia parabolica

Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
Future Drought Fund

This project received funding from the Australian Government's Future Drought Fund.

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Frost Update

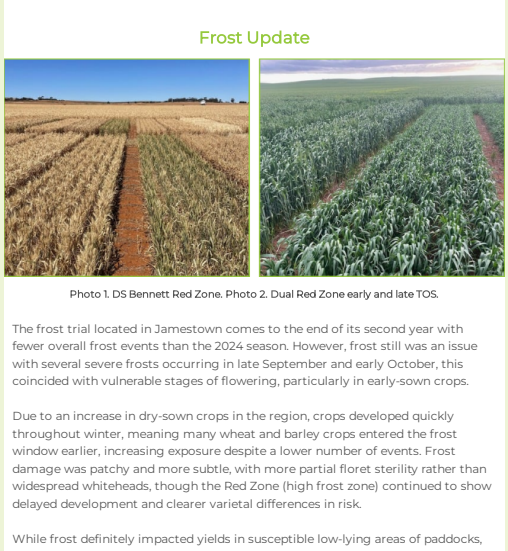

Photo 1. DS Bennett Red Zone. Photo 2. Dual Red Zone early and late TOS.

The frost trial located in Jamestown comes to the end of its second year with fewer overall frost events than the 2024 season. However, frost still was an issue with several severe frosts occurring in late September and early October, this coincided with vulnerable stages of flowering, particularly in early-sown crops.

Due to an increase in dry-sown crops in the region, crops developed quickly throughout winter, meaning many wheat and barley crops entered the frost window earlier, increasing exposure despite a lower number of events. Frost damage was patchy and more subtle, with more partial floret sterility rather than widespread whiteheads, though the Red Zone (high frost zone) continued to show delayed development and clearer varietal differences in risk.

While frost definitely impacted yields in susceptible low-lying areas of paddocks, the impact across the region appears to be more moderate than severe, helped by a relatively kind spring to allow compensation in tillering in many crops.

Key points Green Zone (low frost risk) vs Red Zone (high frost risk) at Jamestown:

Growth scoring on the frost trial in 2025 allowed some key takeaways for the season.

In the Green Zone:

- All varieties developed more rapidly with more separation between their maturity types.
- Calibre and Rockstar were good fits due to reduced frost exposure and strong yield potential.
- Later types such as Bale and Archer may be better suited to earlier sowing windows to avoid late-finish penalties.

In the Red Zone:

- Early developing wheats (Calibre) moved into stem elongation and heading too early for a frost exposed site, increasing risk.
- Bale and Rockstar consistently showed later growth staging meaning they have better frost avoidance.
- Commodus barley behaved like a mid-season type given its usual early tendency, reducing frost exposure.
- Archer oats were reliably late and proved a safe variety.

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RiskWISE N Trial at Jamestown

The RiskWise project is a 5 year National Risk Management Initiative funded by the Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC) and led by CSIRO. The initiative aims to improve the risk-reward outcomes for Australian grain growers by developing an improved understanding of on-farm decision-making processes and providing insights to help growers manage risk and optimize rewards.

As part of this project, UNFS has a nitrogen trial located within the frost trial at Jamestown. The trials aim is to understand how canopy size and crop development interact with frost risk. Different N rates and plant populations change numerous factors such as crop canopy closure, how tall the canopy gets and when it reaches the most frost-sensitive stages. High N and/or density generally drive bigger, earlier canopies and faster development, increasing exposure to frost in low lying flats. Lower N/densities can delay development and reduce biomass, potentially reducing frost damage, but may also limit yield where frost pressure is low.

The combinations of N rates and plant densities across contrasting frost zones allowed us to identify combinations that balance yield potential with frost risk. The aim is to help growers understand which combinations create canopies that are too big, too early in frost prone areas, and which ones safely moderate growth, allowing growers to tailor inputs to the frost landscape of each paddock.

The plant densities were: 200 plants/m2 (approx 90-110kg/ha) and 80 plants/m2 (40kg/ha) with N rates of 50, 100, 200 and 300 kg/ha applied at approximately GS30 in 2024.

The trial was tested the following year, post harvest to look at changes in mineral N. Most of the mineral N remained in the 0-10cm layer across all treatments. Residual N was consistently higher in the frost prone Red Zone, compared with the Green Zone, particularly at the 200-300 kg N/ha. This could indicate reduced plant uptake due to cooler conditions, smaller canopies or frost damage. In the Green Zone, there was stronger N use efficiency especially at 100kg N/ha, showing more crop uptake of the N and less left behind in the soil. This could be warmer soils, better drainage (higher elevation of the Green Zone), and generally stronger plant growth, meaning the canopy developed earlier and more vigorously. The red zone showed patterns of more N left unused at harvest due to smaller canopies, slower development and reduced N uptake throughout the season.

These differences between zones highlights how frost risk directly alters nutrient use efficiency and canopy development across the paddock.

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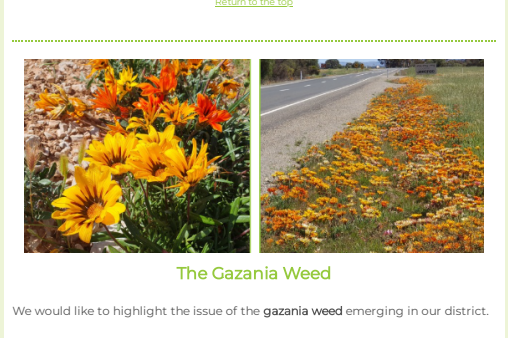

The Gazania Weed

We would like to highlight the issue of the **gazania weed** emerging in our district.

It is well known that gazania has become a major problem in other parts of the state, and is causing huge issues, being difficult and expensive to kill on a broadacre scale. If some action was taken now in our region, it would be possible to halt the spread and get it under control. But if it continues unchecked, then it will soon get out of hand. If everyone does their bit and gets rid of any outbreaks they see, we may be able to stop it. If you notice any gazania weeds along the roads of townships or in parklands, make sure you report it to your local council and Landscape SA.

As gazania has proven to be difficult to control, it would be advisable to seek advice from an experienced agronomist regarding choice of chemicals and rates, as regular spray mixes used for other weeds may not be effective.

If you would like to see some examples, it's currently rather visible in its blooming phase. Places to have a look are around the townships of Orroroo and Black Rock, or alternatively if you would like to discuss further let us know and we can put you in contact with one of our board members who will be happy to tell you more about it.

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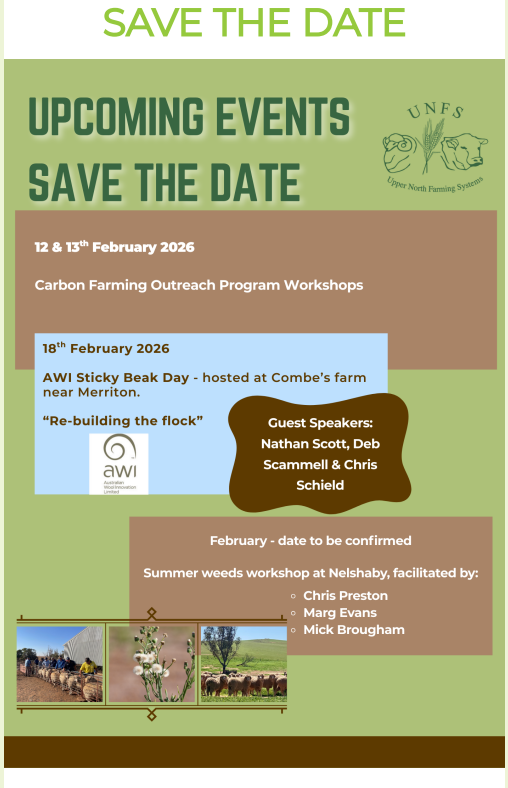
SAVE THE DATE



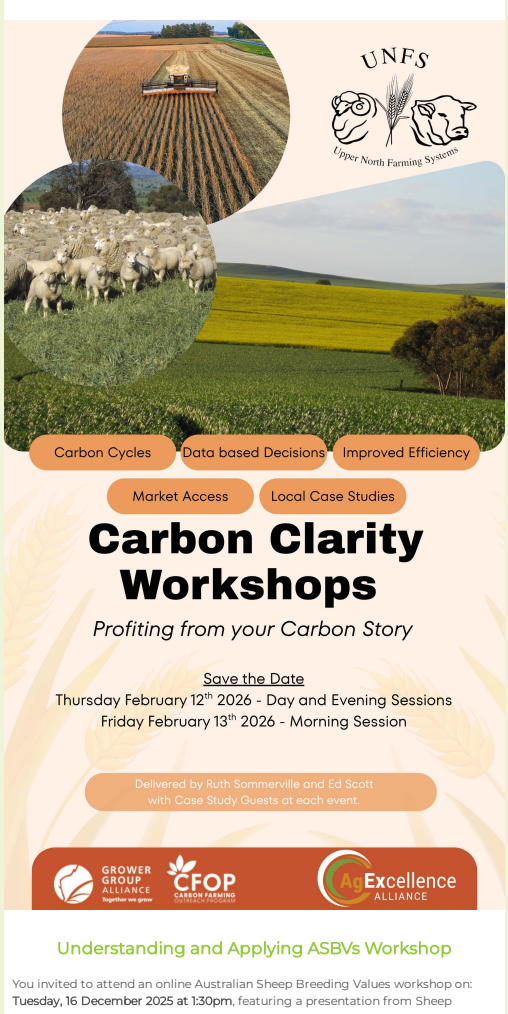
UPCOMING EVENTS
SAVE THE DATE

12 & 13th February 2026
Carbon Farming Outreach Program Workshops

18th February 2026
AWI Sticky Beak Day - hosted at Combe's farm near Merriton.
"Re-building the flock"

Guest Speakers:
Nathan Scott, Deb Scammell & Chris Schield

February - date to be confirmed
Summer weeds workshop at Nelshaby, facilitated by:
- Chris Preston
- Marg Evans
- Mick Brougham



Carbon Cycles
Data based Decisions
Improved Efficiency
Market Access
Local Case Studies

Carbon Clarity Workshops

Profiting from your Carbon Story

Save the Date
Thursday February 12th 2026 - Day and Evening Sessions
Friday February 13th 2026 - Morning Session

Delivered by Ruth Sommerville and Ed Scott
with Case Study Guests at each event

Grower Group Alliance
CFOP Carbon Farming Outreach Program
AgExcellence Alliance

Understanding and Applying ASBVs Workshop

You invited to attend an online Australian Sheep Breeding Values workshop on: **Tuesday, 16 December 2025 at 1:30pm**, featuring a presentation from Sheep Genetics. This session is designed to support producers in building a clear, practical understanding of Australian Sheep Breeding Values (ASBVs) and how to incorporate them into breeding and selection decisions.

The workshop will cover:
Introduction to ASBVs – what they are and why they matter
An overview from Sheep Genetics on how ASBVs are generated, the science behind them, and their role in driving long-term genetic improvement and on-farm profitability.
How to interpret ASBV data – key traits and indexes
Guidance on reading ASBV figures, understanding trait accuracies, and interpreting indexes relevant to a range of production goals, including growth, wool, reproduction, and eating quality.
Using ASBVs in ram selection – practical examples
Practical demonstrations of how ASBVs can inform and improve ram selection, with examples linking breeding objectives to ASBV profiles.
Next steps – tools and resources available
An outline of digital tools, reference materials, and support services—many provided through Sheep Genetics—that can assist you in applying ASBVs more effectively within your breeding program.

This workshop will include the premier of the Networks latest short film about how members have used ASBVs to enhance the genetic performance of their flock and made more informed, data-driven decisions.

Registration Link

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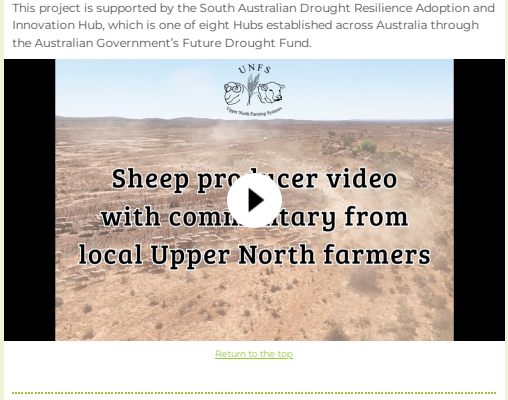
Sheep Producer Video

With the dry conditions in the 2025 season, the Upper North region has seen sheep producers respond with a wide range of decisions. Upper North Farming Systems have interviewed two farmers in the Upper North region, and captured the different strategies they've each used to manage their flocks through the drought conditions of 2025.

Shannon Donogue, based at Jamestown, from Australian Wool Innovation (AWI) has kindly provided some footage to support this video.

This project is supported by the South Australian Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub, which is one of eight Hubs established across Australia through the Australian Government's Future Drought Fund.



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Sheep Lice

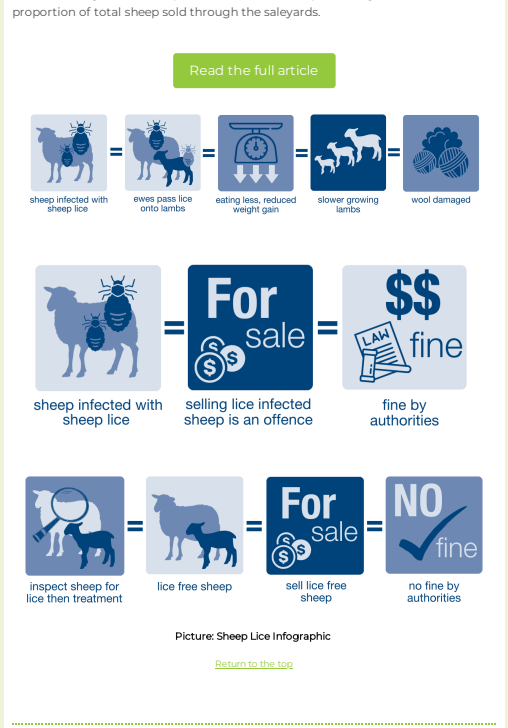
AWI Extension SA - Author: Deb Scammell

Sheep lice are a frequent and challenging issue for producers. The sheep body louse (Bovicola ovis) is responsible for most infestations in Australian sheep.

As indicated through breeders advice provided by PIRSA Animal Health staff, there has been an increasing prevalence over the past three years with increases in lice detections particularly prevalent in wool-shedding breeds.

In the 2024–25 financial year, 43% of all lice detections in SA sheeplands involved wool-shedding breeds—despite these breeds not representing that same proportion of total sheep sold through the saleyards.

Read the full article


sheep infected with sheep lice
ewes pass lice onto lambs
eating less, reduced weight gain
slower growing lambs
wool damaged
sheep infected with sheep lice
For sale
selling lice infected sheep is an offence
$$ fine
fine by authorities
inspect sheep for lice then treatment
lice free sheep
For sale
sell lice free sheep
NO fine
no fine by authorities

Picture: Sheep lice infographic

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Is Grazing Putting Your Ewes' Fertility at Risk?

AWI Extension SA - Author: Deb Scammell

If you are grazing **medic** or **lucerne pastures** prior to joining, it is worth double checking the **coumestrol** levels to ensure it's not going to have an impact on **ewe fertility**.

Coumestrol is a compound that has phyto-oestrogenic properties which means it can bind to oestrogen receptors, interfering with the ewe's natural oestrus. This can cause a wide range of fertility issues in ewes including suppression of oestrus, suppression or delayed ovulation, lower ovulation rate, and in some cases an increase in embryo losses and abortion. This all means you're likely to have reduced conception over joining or potential embryo losses and abortions post-joining if ewes have been exposed to high levels of coumestrol during the pre-joining period or over joining.

Read the full article

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Toni Bastian - Mind Australia

Meet Toni Bastian, a Counsellor with Mind Australia, who works in the Drought Mental Health Support program, offering counselling for people living in regional areas, affected by drought.

Toni lives on a farm near Booleroo Centre and has called the region home for over 32 years. She knows first-hand the challenges of rural life and understands the devastating effects drought can have on farmers, families, local businesses and communities.

As an experienced counsellor, Toni provides a safe and confidential space where you can have a chat; whether it's to de-brief and offload worries or stress, talk through grief, loss, or personal concerns, or looking for support to strengthen your mental health resilience and wellbeing.
There's no referral required. No cost to you. You can reach out as often or as little as you need.

Toni can provide alternative counsellors, if you prefer to talk to someone outside your region.

Toni can travel to meet you in person, arrange a safe and private location, or connect via phone or teleconference—whatever works best for you. You can reach Toni directly on 0417 526 690.

Further information from Mind Australia;
https://www.mindaustralia.org.au/news/mind-supporting-people-impacted-drought-south-australia

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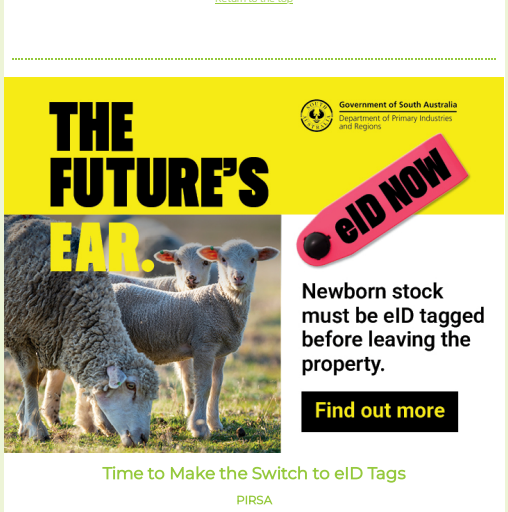

THE FUTURE'S EAR.

Government of South Australia
Department of Primary Industries and Regions

eID NOW

Newborn stock must be eID tagged before leaving the property.

Find out more

Time to Make the Switch to eID Tags

PIRSA

Electronic identification (eID) tags accredited by the National Livestock Identification System (NLIS) will be required for all sheep and farmed goats moving off property from 1 January 2027.

Right now, eID is only needed for sheep and goats born from 2025 onwards before they leave their property of birth.

To help with the change and aid drought-impacted farmers, the State Government's $73 million drought package has supported extension of the eID tag discount scheme until 30 June 2027.

NLIS-accredited tags can be purchased at a 47.5 cent discount, based on the year-of-birth colour; white (2025); orange (2026); and light green (2027).

If you're buying tags outside the allocated year-of-birth colours, a rebate is available until 30 June 2027. Applications can be made to the Department of Primary Industries and Regions (PIRSA).

There's also a rebate on eligible scanning equipment open until 30 June 2026 for producers, schools and ag shows to help cover the cost of gear needed to meet NLIS reporting requirements.

Handy eID tips for sheep and goat owners:

- eID applies to all sheep and farmed goats, no matter how many you have - even if they're kept as pets.
- Tags are species-specific, so make sure you're using the right ones for sheep or goats.
- The NLIS year-of-birth colour system is voluntary in SA.
- Animals must have only one electronic tag when moving off property – remove any non-accredited tags before they go.
- If you receive eID-tagged animals, don't forget to record their individual movements on the NLIS database.

For more info, resources and support to help you make the switch, visit:
pir.sa.gov.au/eid-producers

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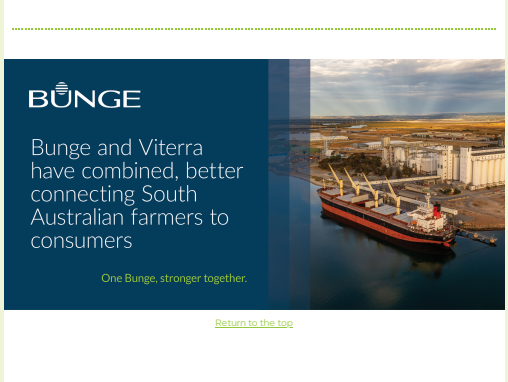

BUNGE

Bunge and Viterra have combined, better connecting South Australian farmers to consumers

One Bunge, stronger together.

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Creating a Pathway for Your Next Gen

Pinion Advisory

It is inspiring to see farming families working together with shared goals. When it works well, this model is hard to beat. The family unit are aligned, committed and motivated to work together and see the business succeed.

Below are some of the key success factors that I think can assist to keep multi-generational business together.

The first key is to be clear on vision and goals for the business. Asking everyone "where do you see this business in ten years". This means working together as a family to map out what the long term looks like, what the farm will be doing and who will be involved. Having everyone in the family develop and support this plan is essential. An important outcome here is understanding the needs and desires of each family member, as everyone is at a different stage of life.

Once the vison is defined, the second success factor is ensuring clarity. Work as a family to discuss and gain clarity around people, operations, finance and succession. Discuss areas such as roles and responsibilities, key timing of and standards for operations, when each person will enter and/or exit the business and how family members will be paid. From here the whole family will know the "rules of the game" and can work together successfully.

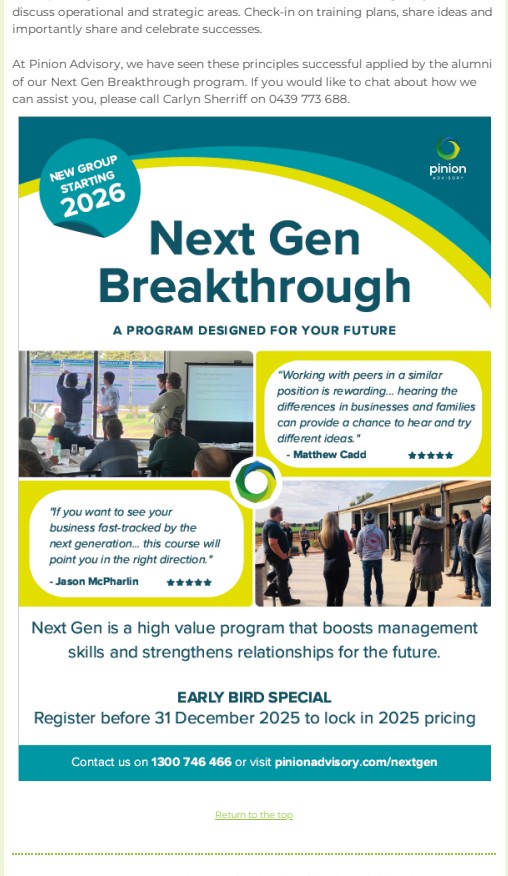
These conversations will take a little work and are best tackled over a few meetings. You might choose to use an external person to assist.

Another key success factor is prioritising specific development of the next gen. Work together to identify the skill sets required to be the manager of your farm. Then set aside time to explain, demonstrate, observe and debrief these skills as the opportunities present. One example of this working well is allowing the next gen to lead a key operation such as seeding or harvest. Provide them the base knowledge and skills then let them have a go as the lead. You will provide support and give feedback on what they can improve.

One final point is that the culture of supporting this change will have a big impact. Families that regularly use phrases such as "we don't do things like that around here"
shutdown the ability for the next gen to learn and develop. It is important to create a safe space to try new ideas and learn. This may mean trying something that you tried a decade ago and that is okay. Try using phrases like "how do you think we might tackle this" or "that's interesting, what do we need to do to make this work for our farm". These will allow the next gen to build their knowledge and learn from their experiences.

Underpinning all of this is solid communication. Make time to regularly meet to discuss operational and strategic areas. Check-in on training plans, share ideas and importantly share and celebrate successes.

At Pinion Advisory, we have seen these principles successful applied by the alumni of our Next Gen Breakthrough program. If you would like to chat about how we can assist you, please call Carlyn Sherriff on 0439 773 688.



NEW GROUP STARTING 2026

pinion

Next Gen Breakthrough

A PROGRAM DESIGNED FOR YOUR FUTURE

"Working with peers in a similar position is rewarding... hearing the differences in businesses and families can provide a chance to hear and try different ideas."
- Matthew Cadd ★★★★★

"If you want to see your business fast-tracked by the next generation... this course will point you in the right direction."
- Jason McPharlin ★★★★★

Next Gen is a high value program that boosts management skills and strengthens relationships for the future.

EARLY BIRD SPECIAL
Register before 31 December 2025 to lock in 2025 pricing

Contact us on 1300 746 466 or visit pinionadvisory.com.au/nextgen

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Formed in 2001, the Upper North Farming Systems (UNFS) Group conducts research trials and provides extension and networking opportunities for farmers, agronomists, researchers and primary industry.

The UNFS Group covers a large geographical area in the Upper North Region of South Australia. The region is bordered to the north and east by the pastoral zones and extends south to the higher rainfall zones and encompasses the towns of Booleroo Centre, Crystal Brook, Hallet, Jamestown, Laura, Peterborough, Nelshaby, Orroroo and Wilmington.

The group aims to undertake regular events for its members and the broader agricultural community in the region including workshops, crop walks and Hub events. The feature event on the calendar is the annual member's expo. In 2025 this will be a Grain Automate Expo held at Melrose Showgrounds and delivered by SPAA and UNFS.

UNFS
Upper North Farming Systems

Unsubscribe