



2016 Ag Excellence Forum Awards Dinner – what did winning the 2015 Award mean for us?

When applying for the 2015 Ag Excellence Sustainable Farming Award, we were asked 4 questions

1. What is the vision for your group?
2. What are the three most important things your group will be doing in the next 3 years
3. How will we form or improve group partnerships
4. What will be the most important challenge moving forward

Looking back over our application – and even when looking through this year's awards applications – the same theme keeps popping up – it is about the people!

All that we do in some way shape or form comes back to the people.

Our vision has changed slightly from last year but it still talks about the people – it goes something like this:

We believe in what we do, this drives us to strive for continuous improvement of the land, how we produce and trade our food.

Agriculture is engrained in our identity and is reflected in our passion and pride for our region, our people and our produce.

We will ensure a vibrant farming future on the Limestone Coast for ours and future generations by becoming renowned for excellence and leading innovation through collaboration.

In our application we highlighted the important things that we will be doing as

- Accurate, reliable trial work
- Relevant R,D & E
- Operating professionally using good governance and timely communication

When answering the forming partnerships question -- for us it was about

- Stronger focus and greater interaction with other groups and people in the industry

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And the Important challenges facing MFMG are much the same as for all of you:

- Accessing funding
- Growing our membership base
- And Management of communication

Knowing how to make the best use of the funds and opportunities presented by being he 2015 winner was discussed at length by our Board and it was decided to promote some of our younger members, who we believed were doing great things.

"Highlighting the innovators in the hope of attracting the attention of those that were taking a bit longer to come around"

We contracted a very good story teller – Tom Dawkins – to write case studies on three outstanding young farmers from across the region - Sam Croser, Chad Makin and Tara Hindson.

Chad

WHEN fifth generation Keith farmer Chad Makin returned to his family property in 2007, consecutive dry seasons were putting unprecedeted pressure on agricultural businesses across the South East and beyond

Chad, who farms alongside his father Kym, believes flexibility goes hand-in-hand in mixed farming operations which are typical of the Tatiara district.

Helping ensure the Makins stay fully up-to-date on innovations which relate to their farm is one of the reasons behind Chad's involvement with the MacKillop Group.

Sam

MILLICENT mixed farmer Sam Croser is excited about the future of agriculture in the South East and optimistic about tackling the challenges that will test his profitability in the years to come.

The cornerstone of his strategy for success is the diversity of his operation, which produces broadacre and irrigated crops, as well as prime lambs and beef cattle.

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Sam says: "As a producer I've got to be at the cutting edge of advances in farming and that means having access to up-to-date research and data which is relevant to our region," Sam said.

"The MFMG really is playing a lone hand in that regard."

Tara Hindson

Tara Hindson (née Hawkins), who works on the property with her grandfather Mac, father Peter and brother James, is leading the charge to implement new farming techniques at Brrippick which enhance the relationship between the livestock and cropping operations, while reducing the farm's reliance on synthetic chemicals and conventional fertilisers.

Tara is one of a growing number of innovative young producers in the region who enjoy the many benefits of MacKillop membership.

Tara believes that :"MFMG membership is very worthwhile. The access we have to up-to-date information and people in the know is wonderful. "The trial work done by the group is just so valuable to local producers because the trials are conducted to suit the unique production systems in our region."

All had great stories to tell and highlight the importance of being involved with the MacKillop Group.

We received some great feedback and it highlighted the need for better written communication and extension, more case studies and good news stories.

To ensure this happens, we have contracted a Communications Officer who spends time documenting some of the great things going on in our region – already we are getting some great feedback and seeing positive results.

An organization such as ours, and I have no doubt all of yours, is only as good as the people leading it – and their ability to encourage others to take part in the journey.

Contracting people with specific skills sets to carry out roles within the group has been an important step in the past 12 months – no longer do we need one or two people to do everything.

In moving forward, the Mackillop Group, is still going to be about:

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But it will also have a much greater focus on remembering – its about the people! It is too easy to get caught up in the day to day tasks and forget to sit back and look at the bigger picture.

Not only is it about who we can attract and who we can influence, it is about looking after those who support us.

For most farmers being involved with a farming group is much more than trials and extension –

- it is about the social interaction
- spending time with like minded people
- being able to discuss problems that are common across the industry that until you meet up with others you believe it maybe unique to you!
- Beer and bbq – the eternal secret to any gathering of farmers.

And in closing – Well done to all who have applied for this year's award on your outstanding applications – as a collective I believe we all add a great deal of value to the agricultural industry both in our regions and across the country.

And no matter the challenges presented – there are many good people who rely on you!