

Rob Houghton

Whitton, NSW

Robert Houghton's family has been involved with irrigation since the 1930s when his family drew the farm in a soldier settlement scheme.

Since then the irrigation system has been thoroughly modernised involving a complete overhaul of the original bed layout and the implementation of a fully automated system. The farm business includes broadacre cotton and cereal production and rice when water is available.

The approach Rob has taken to irrigation is constantly evolving and he now thinks about irrigation in totally different way to 20, or even 10 years ago. "What I feel is exciting is that we can now make quite small step changes to the way we do things to deliver significant gains because there is so much capacity in the technology we use on-farm.

Using water more effectively

Whilst improvements in productivity and profitability have come about through a combination of improved technology in soil monitoring, bed layout, infrastructure and weather monitoring; automation of the irrigation system is a major contributor.

In order achieve further efficiency gains, the Houghton family recently implemented on farm improvements and an upgrade to high flow delivery systems, moving from five outlets each with a maximum capacity of 12 ML/day to two outlets but that can each deliver 30 ML/day. Such an upgrade of on-farm systems could only work if matched by high flow MI outlets to deliver the volume of water required.

The ability to apply water in higher flow rates serves the plant better by being able to control water on to the millimetre, and then ensure good drainage, providing exactly the amount of water it needs, when it needs it. Not only does this offer productivity gains, it also improves environmental outcomes and maximises efficiency of water use.

"This is a game changer in terms of the water efficiency and productivity of the irrigation operations and we could only make this change because MI has been supportive." - Robert Houghton



Environmental benefits

The move to automation in our irrigation systems has had positive impact on our land use and the type of machinery we use. The Houghton family takes a holistic approach to improving systems and seeks to manage irrigation activities so that they don't contribute to negative environmental outcomes.

For instance salinity has moved from being a major concern a decade ago to not really being an issue now due to a number of factors including in part, improved irrigation practices. Other aspects of management, such as developing native vegetation corridors to improve on farm biodiversity and careful crop rotations also support a sustainable approach to farming.

The future

Rob is excited that, with the infrastructure already in place, there is still scope to achieve significant efficiencies with relatively little capital expenditure. Now when he sees an opportunity to improve efficiency, he is more likely to just need to talk to the IT people managing his scheduling platform to make some minor updates to technologies such as automated irrigation systems to help him address the issue.



No longer does he need to turn to earth works or major infrastructure upgrades. In the relatively near future Rob sees that having telemetry in the field will give rise to the opportunity for him to capture real time data and really drill down to use it as decision support tool, refining irrigation management even further.

thinking and attitudes are flexible and ready to adapt new ideas and technology."

"The big investments in infrastructure and equipment are giving way to much lower cost changes in both technology and our way of working and thinking. The challenge is to make sure our

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Staying ahead of the game, using our modernised system to drive efficient operations and enable our region to grow in a time of less water.

