



Murrumbidgee
Irrigation

CASE STUDY

Peter and Erin Draper



Since growing their first rice crop in 1974, Peter Draper has been proactive in modernising his irrigation enterprise and tackling new techniques that aim to grow more product with less water.

Peter and his wife Erin's property is located just outside of Leeton, where the early days of irrigation were labour intensive and farms were broken up into small, irregular shaped paddocks. Having taken advantage of land forming to move to a more efficient layout, the Drapers' business has been supported by automated irrigation and high flow technology. Peter says this provides not only water savings, but also the flexibility to adjust their cropping rotations to maximise profitability.

“This flexibility allows us to change between enterprises quickly. It’s what we have to do now in our businesses to survive. We can’t just sit on the same rotation constantly - we’ve got to be able to adapt and change between whatever the world wants at the time.”

Peter Draper

Their approach to innovation, production excellence and sustainability has seen the Drapers recognised with the 2020 SunRice Farmer of the Year award.

CONTROLLING THE FLOW OF WATER

Peter began the process of land forming and moving to a new layout on their property in the 90s, adopting a whole farm plan focusing on water efficiency, water recycling and sustainability.

By implementing a rollover bank-less irrigation system, he has been able to increase bay sizes significantly, creating longer run lengths for machinery of more than one kilometre. 16 paddocks with 90 bays were converted to four paddocks with 20 bays.

To maximise the benefits of the layout, Peter required a high volume of water to quickly water and drain crops. He worked with MI staff over a 12 month period, to implement a high flow system – replacing two 12 ML/day outlets with one 30 ML/day outlet.

Good draining processes and farming on beds has allowed them to address water logging issues for winter crops.

The move provided efficiencies for both parties, with MI now able to more easily access the outlet in a better location. And more improvements are underway to provide better flow control in other areas of the property.

“We’re working on other outlets at the moment and working with MI to connect farms and paddocks that we never thought was possible when we first started farming.”



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Peter and Erin Draper *(continued)*

A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO FARMING

The Drapers are focused on sustainable summer and winter cropping programs, comprising rice, seed and milling oats, wheat, barley, cotton and trading sheep on an opportunistic basis.

Profitability is a key factor, but they also place high importance on the environment. Peter says a high flow irrigation system means they don't have to use more water on a crop than it needs, ensuring water isn't percolating below the root system.

LONGEVITY IN IRRIGATION FARMING

Peter sees the continual modernisation of MI and its services as critical to the future of irrigation farming in the MIA and is confident that he can fore see a time when ordering water on demand is possible.

"I was once very concerned when I could see other crop systems that were very efficient and I didn't think we could ever get to the same standard because our system was designed in the early 1900s and built with horses. It just looked like a tremendous expense to change it all over to automation. So I'm very pleased that automation has occurred because it just makes farming so much more efficient – as well as saving water because watering quickly is the key to saving water.

It's also allowed an old man to keep irrigation farming because I actually don't even need to carry a shovel anymore for those section we've upgraded!"



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