

## **Yuna Farm Improvement Group (www.yfig.org.au)**

### **Background**

Yuna Farm Improvement Group is a grower group, both grains and livestock, based 70km north east of Geraldton, the most north eastern group in the South West Land Division. The group consists of 35 farm business members and 15 businesses from industry. Business income is predominantly from cropping wheat, lupins, canola, barley and lupins in various rotations depending on soil type. The average farm size of the area is in the vicinity of 5000ha with farm sizes ranging from 1500ha to 25000ha. The soil types vary from the lighter Mallee based yellow sandplain suited to a lupin /wheat rotation through to heavier York gum red loams. Average annual rainfall ranges from 350mm in the west to 250 mm on the eastern fringes which equates to 250mm to 180mm of growing season rainfall.

### **History**

Yuna area has always been proactive in improving farming practices due to the necessity to innovate and improve productivity to maintain margins. The Yuna grower group started in 1963 as the Yuna Pasture Improvement Group driven by the need to introduce a pasture legume onto the York gum soils to ensure pasture coverage in the year after crop. The Department of Agriculture established long term Cyprus barrel medic sites on several properties around Yuna and field walks were able to be held as the Holden ute now enabled growers to travel easily to each other's properties. Following this, the successful introduction of WA blue lupins onto the sandplain enabled Yuna farmers to open up the yellow sandplain and commence growing wheat. This shift to increased cropping in the 1970's encouraged the Yuna Pasture Improvement Group to have large field days as grain production became a major profit driver. The 70's also led to the emergence of the Yuna Machinery Field Day, once again driven by relevance and necessity, as agricultural machinery was changing rapidly.

In the mid 1990's the group changed its name to the Yuna Farm Improvement Group as the focus at the time was predominantly cropping with the introduction of furrow sowing, controlled traffic, liming, herbicide resistance and precision agriculture having a major impact on our changing farming practices and the importance of constant innovation at farm level. The continuing success of Yuna Farm Improvement Group has largely been driven by our need to be relevant and flexible in catering for grower's needs at Yuna.

### **Projects, Events and Funding**

Our group relies entirely on the input of our grower members as volunteers, as we have no employed staff. We are proud of representing our growers and the community. YFIG has enjoyed success by sticking to what our growers want and delivering projects with distinction and professionalism.

Our group generates funds by cropping a community block owned by the Catholic Diocese through mainly voluntary labour. Another smaller block is cropped by the Warr family to generate funds for our local Yuna Primary School. The funds generated by the crop are invested back into our community, for example YFIG was the main funder of the new Yuna Community Centre. The community centre now provides function space with excellent connectivity and state of the art technology. In February 2016 we were able to host the 2016 GRDC Regional Research Updates in front of a capacity crowd of 130 attendees.

In 2016 the group also identified the lack of successful establishment of canola in a Roundup Ready system in marginal moisture conditions as a major production risk to our district. This led to the

group sourcing industry funding via a COGGO project for the “Canola Seeding Olympics”, which involved four farmer seeding bars setting up a randomised, replicated paddock size trial. The various seeding bars were investigated for seeding depth accuracy and establishment capacity which involved extensive plant counts and harvest yields. YouTube video of the day can be found at – [https://youtu.be/MvSGf0t\\_1rM](https://youtu.be/MvSGf0t_1rM).

In September 2016 we were awarded the inaugural Grower Group Alliance Group of Excellence Award. This award combined with our success in obtaining eConnected funding from DPIRD to investigate and understand new technologies, tools, apps, big data and connectivity led to the impetus to plan a YFIG technology tour to Queensland in August 2017. The trip heightened our exposure to new technologies, autonomy and robotics in farming highlighting the importance of staying ahead in our businesses.

We have had several successful events in 2017, beginning with a Farm Data Day funded by the eConnected project at the YCC which attracted 40 participants. After a very difficult start to the season we held our post seeding field walk on the 15<sup>th</sup> June with 80 growers and industry representatives attending the drive around the district to look at trials and grower identified issues. This was followed up in August 2017 by the YFIG technology tour to Queensland funded 50% by the 32 participants with the remaining funds coming from DPIRD through the eConnected project and Wayne Parker’s (DPIRD) controlled traffic project funds, YFIG funding (\$20,000) and \$2000 from the Grower Group Alliance. Finally in August it rained so our annual September field day went ahead with 110 attendees on the annual crop tour looking at herbicides, varieties, canola agronomy and an afternoon session on harvest weed seed control covering herbicide options, iHWD, chafflining and header modifications.

## **The Future**

The continuing success of YFIG relies on our group staying relevant and topical to our members. We have limited ourselves to 3 sponsors ie Rabobank, McIntosh and Son and CSBP which does give us more flexibility in choosing issues and topics and enables us to retain relevance. The president and the secretary are also limited to three consecutive years in office which enables us to implement a strong succession plan to keep the group agile and relevant. We are strongly driven by maintaining our profitability through innovation as we farm in a low rainfall cropping environment where margin and economies of scale are of ever increasing importance.



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