HOW FINANCIAL VISIBILITY CREATES A CLEAR PATHWAY TO THE FUTURE

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Nathan Soulsby
AGnVET, Henty, NSW

AGRONOMIST CHALLENGE
Nathan Soulsby needed to provide integrated agronomy service to BettaCrop clients, which includes their planning, budgeting, scouting and record keeping.

GROWER CHALLENGE
Rolf Malmo was new to cropping and needed visibility into his financial performance that he could also take to his bank and other service providers.

SOLUTION
Nathan and Rolf decided to both use Agworld to collaborate on daily tasks such as planning, budgeting, scouting, making recommendations, recording actuals and performance reviews.

RESULT
By collaborating on the same platform, record keeping has been simplified. Nathan, Rolf and other service providers now have full visibility into what has been done on the farm and what is planned for the future.
Henty, the birthplace of Australian ag-tech

It seems an unlikely claim to fame for a town of just over one thousand people in Southern New South Wales, but Henty is where the modern header, or combine harvester, was invented by Headlie Taylor in 1914. Over the last 100 years, much has changed, but ag-tech is still just as important to the agricultural sector around Henty now as it was then. Local AGnVET agronomist Nathan Soulsby is part of the BettaCrop program, which offers AGnVET’s growers a suite of integrated agronomy services to help them improve their overall results. Nathan, a veteran agronomist with his roots in Australia’s cotton industry, explains: “BettaCrop is a detailed agronomy package, with Agworld at the heart of it, that can be tailored to a grower. The premise of the program is that it encompasses the whole season, so from planning and budgeting to growing the crop and analyzing the season afterwards; we make sure to guide our growers along the way.”

Local grower Rolf Malmo is one of Nathan’s clients who uses Agworld daily to manage his operation. Rolf explains his reason to adopt Agworld: “I was a dairy farmer for 25 years until I switched to cropping 8 years ago. In dairy farming it is normal to work with very tight margins and having accurate budgets and plans are therefore a must; if you produce 4 million litres of milk for example and you manage to get your cost down by one cent per litre, you’ve just saved yourself $40,000! When I changed from dairying to cropping, I wanted to be able to analyze my farming program similar to how I used to analyze my dairy. And let’s face it, with fairly long seasons for crops such as wheat and canola, just looking at your bank account doesn’t give you a good snapshot of where you are, you need to do better than that if you want to have confidence.”

Farming with data

Within AGnVET Henty, Agworld is positioned right in the centre of the daily activities that take place. Nathan: “We have been putting our growers’ maps in Agworld, so if we have a new agronomist starting, they just open Agworld
on their iPhone or iPad and drive straight to the field and know where they are going. When one of the agronomists makes a recommendation in the field, it’s in Agworld and instantly gets sent to the grower and to our store, so they both know what is going on. This allows the grower to plan spraying activities early and allows us to get the products needed on farm in time. I also send maps to helicopters and planes that help us spray certain fields; having all fields and boundaries in the same place certainly makes my life a lot easier!"

Rolf, who crops around 800 hectares, divided between oats, lucerne, pasture, lupins, wheat, canola and barley, uses Agworld in a lot of facets of his business. Rolf: “Two years ago I thought I didn’t do too well with my barley crop, but when I looked at the actual numbers in Agworld at the end of the season, I found out I actually made a decent profit – which is nice to know! I love dissecting the numbers on my iPad and playing around with them; like comparing different, fields, crops etc. It’s interesting to me and I always learn something new.”

Agronomic challenges

Where most growers can work on standard crop rotations, the soil around Henty tends to have a low pH, which forces growers like Rolf to be a bit more creative: “We put lime on our fields, but we still get an acid choke around 10/20 cm depth – we know we need to put on more lime to get the pH to move from 4.5 to 5.5, but it’s hard to move down the profile; my pH is still 4.2 at 15 cm depth for example. Legumes tend to grow smoothly until they hit that band and then they struggle; because I have previous’ years actuals in Agworld, it’s easy for me to see what we’ve done before to pull the crop through, which makes it easy to replicate these kinds of strategies.”

Although low pH can be a big problem, it’s not the only problem in the Henty area. Nathan: “We have a big ryegrass problem in this area. Mixed cropping and livestock operations tend to manage this quite well, Rolf, for example, has sheep too, and rotating a paddock to pasture just increases the range of options available. When you are able to cut a paddock for hay and use less chemicals for a few years, that is really valuable. We always had a good idea of which profitable strategies we had available, but with Agworld we can really see the numbers per field and how these strategies work out in the long term. We can now retrospectively see: was it worth applying this extra spray? And that, to me, is what agronomy is all about: trialling new things, learning from them, seeing how they stack up against other practices and using best practice moving forward.”

Planning for the future

Looking towards the future, both Nathan and Rolf see distinct advantages in using Agworld. Nathan: “At the start of a season, it gives growers a good snapshot of what their costs are likely to be. Then, at the end of a season, growers can easily see what they’ve actually earned and create a farm performance report. Furthermore, record keeping is getting increasingly more important when you look at the new 2,4-D labels for example. There are some vineyards around here and we are always very careful of course, but record
keeping remains very important. From an AGnVET perspective, once a grower sees Agworld, they really like it and it helps me with customer retention; a win-win the way I see it!*

Rolf sees some other advantages in having a good set of records available: “The first time I gave my Agworld budget and planning report to my bank manager, he was just blown away. Bank managers love it when their clients are prepared, they love Agworld! Last year, for example, I ended up within 10% of my budget, which my bank thought was just terrific; usually, they have no visibility on numbers – that is just not the case with Agworld. In the long term, this information is critical in order to obtain multi-peril crop insurance, for example, the more data you have, the better it is; you really need information to get these kinds of things to happen.”

When it comes to using Agworld and getting the most out of its functionality, Rolf is very clear: “I hate computers, but this has been great. You just evolve and pick things up on the way. I drive into a paddock, convert a recommendation from Nathan into an actual – it’s easy. Actually, it’s a lot easier than pen and paper and it’s safe, all information is always up in the cloud. When I think back to the days that I used pen and paper for my record keeping and budgeting, now I can assess my enterprise by crop, paddock and individual farms. You have so much more control over your destiny with Agworld. I have more visibility in what my agronomist is doing and my bank has more confidence in what I am doing as they see that I can produce what I plan; everyone wins!”

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**IMPROVING PROFITABILITY IN AGRICULTURE**

**WHAT AGWORLD OFFERS YOU**

- Collect data at every level in a structured way.
- Easily share data with anyone important to your organisation.
- Unparalleled insights into your operation.
- Empowers you to make more profitable decisions than your peers.

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