Managing data in grass seed production

**Challenge**
Barenbrug, one of Australia’s largest seed companies, used to do a lot of double handling of information and struggled to keep track of all activities performed on each trial. Barenbrug’s agronomists also were not able to access all historical information when they needed it and instead had to go back to their office and work through paper records in order to find the information required.

**Solution**
Barenbrug’s agronomy team trialled a number of different solutions in a variety of settings on their own research facilities as well as the seed production agronomists. After testing and evaluating the different options available in Australia, Barenbrug decided to implement the Agworld Platform across their organisation.

**Result**
By working on the same platform, Barenbrug’s agronomists and other employees at the trial and seed increase facilities at Howlong, NSW and Gatton, QLD now have superior visibility into the exact history of each of the 30+ bays and 50+ different trials. Barenbrug’s seed-increase agronomists, based in Victoria and South Australia, are able to communicate with external partners such as growers and agronomists via Agworld and ensure that accurate records are kept of the growing process at all times.

“We were able to use all our data from Agworld to create a very detailed report to provide recommendations to ensure that 50 tonnes of seed worth over $110,000 would not be rejected – not insignificant in my opinion and a very good reason for both the grower and I to use Agworld!”

Richard Prusa
Agronomist, Barenbrug.
Seed trials and research

Barenbrug (trading for nearly thirty years as Heritage Seeds) is one of Australia’s largest seed companies and is a member of the international Royal Barenbrug Group. Their key products include temperate and tropical pasture varieties, fodder crops, forage cereals, field crops, turf and amenity grasses. Barenbrug’s research and development programs are being conducted at their facilities near Howlong, NSW and Gatton, QLD as well as additional regional sites across Australia.

Ross Palmer is one of Barenbrug’s research agronomists, based in Howlong, NSW, where a team of five people works on research, product development and small scale seed production. “We do small scale seed production here, just to bulk-up 5kg quantities or less into larger quantities that we can take out to our commercial seed growers, but the majority of what we do is variety trials and product development,” Ross explains.

“Basically, we grow all sorts of different varieties in a number of different settings and then measure the outcome in the form of forage yield. The research farm measures 70 hectares, of which 35 hectares are used for research purposes. These 35 hectares are divided up into more than 30+ bays and 50+ trials, so that by itself already explains why we need Agworld to help us keep track of everything that happens here.”

Ross continues: “We are constantly applying fertiliser to these trials just to make sure we capture the maximum genetic potential; keeping track of all nutrients is very important and that is really where Agworld helps us a lot, especially
as we are working in a team of five people. Instead of having to write things down in books where you can never find it again and constantly ask other team members whether something has been done or not, we now all have accurate and up-to-date information with us at all times, wherever we are.”

Seed Production

Once a seed variety has been selected by Barenbrug and a quantity suitable for commercial seed growers has been developed, seed will get produced by growers around the country. Richard Prusa is one of Barenbrug’s seed production agronomists, based in Adelaide, SA, where he contracts around 150 growers per annum to produce seed. “We have many long-term relationships with our seed production growers; it’s a mutually beneficial relationship that helps us get the seed we need and the growers get a guaranteed income through the contracts we offer,” says Richard.

“We guide growers throughout the growing process but we don’t make the actual recommendations, which is done by the local agronomist, so we work together quite closely with both the grower and their agronomist. We do however work together as a team of agronomists within Barenbrug so when I’m away, for example, my colleagues will talk to my growers and check their crops. This is where Agworld plays a big role for us: instead of having to pass on written records or discuss every grower and field at length, they immediately have all relevant information available to them in Agworld and know exactly what my previous observations of specific fields have been. They can see the photos I took last month, what my thoughts were about quality, etc. – all the important data is right there.”

“In order to meet both certification and our own internal quality standards, seed production in Australia has to adhere to a lot of rules and regulations as we have to make sure that our seed is of the highest quality and without contaminants. Agworld is a fantastic tool to track and maintain accurate records of individual seed production stands throughout the lifecycle of the crop. Such information has enabled us to provide crop status information to the grower, their agronomist and even the certification agencies in order to prompt corrective actions. As a result it has minimised the number of paddocks that may otherwise be rejected as a suitable seed production crop.”

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Showing results

A large part of being a seed breeding and production company is showing the results of new varieties and traits to resellers, agronomists and growers so they can anticipate these developments and implement them into their operation. The Howlong facility organises field days at regular intervals, where they welcome between 200 and 300 industry representatives to learn about trials and research. Ross: “All these attendants are looking for information about new
varieties and specific traits; they want to see facts and data surrounding these new varieties so they can judge the value of them in their own specific situation."

“These facts and data are exactly what Agworld offers us. When somebody asks a question about how much fertiliser we’ve applied, I don’t have to go back to my office and look through old books to see exactly what we’ve done. I can just pull Agworld up on the spot and answer their questions right then and there, knowing that what I tell them is 100% correct. To me, this is what Agworld offers a seed company like Barenbrug information on demand. Whether it is between colleagues, to inform agronomists, or to satisfy a request for information from a certification agency; with Agworld we have all our critical data stored on the same platform and available to anyone, whenever they need it. In this day and age, a platform like Agworld is not ‘nice to have’ anymore for us, it’s a ‘must have’.”