

Yass Valley wool grower selected for national Climate Champion program

Farmers from across Australia have joined forces to help their neighbours better manage risks associated with climate and weather variation.

Yass Valley wool grower, John Ive is one of just over 30 farmers recruited by the national Climate Champion program. John's job is to communicate research about new technologies and practices for dealing with climate variability and climate change to other farmers in the Yass region and beyond.

This innovative program, launched at the end of March 2010, gives farmers an opportunity to help improve communication between scientists and farmers about managing climate risk in their local areas and for their specific commodities.

John assisted by wife Robyn and family run a specialist ultrafine wool enterprise in the Yass Valley area between Yass and Canberra.

John joined the Climate Champion program because he is interested in sharing knowledge with other motivated farmers and learning from others better ways to adapt his own farming practices to an increasingly variable climate.

The program, which is being run by Managing Climate Variability program, Grains Research & Development Corporation, and Meat & Livestock Australia, is funded by Australia's major research and development corporations.

"This exciting initiative gives us an opportunity to help raise awareness and discussions within farming communities about new innovations for managing variable climate conditions such as declining and more erratic rainfall which combined with increasing temperatures is leading to reduced soil moisture and consequently uncertainty over future pasture production prospects," John says.

"I'm participating in the Climate Champion program because climate and weather are the biggest constraints to realising on-farm production potential and the more one understands these drivers the better one is placed to make informed decisions and minimise risk exposure and uncertainty. The program offers the opportunity to interact with like-minded farmers both locally and in other regions and will provide a valuable link between farmers like ourselves and the research and resource agencies with responsibilities in climate issues."

Participants in the Climate Champion program will have direct access to the latest climate-related research findings, allowing them to influence the development of new climate risk management tools and technologies and run trials on their own farms. Through their own networks, they will share information about the research with other farmers, along with their own experiences of adopting different tools and practices.

The 34 farmers who have signed up for the program are from across Australia and represent most of the country's agricultural commodities including grains, meat, wool, sugar, dairy, horticulture, grapes and wine, farm forestry and honey. The participants are all interested in managing risks associated with climate and weather to improve productivity on their farms.

Farmer and Chair of Managing Climate Variability, Ian McClelland, says the program reflects research findings that most farmers gain new knowledge and adopt new practices through interaction with their peers, rather than directly with scientists.

"Farmers value the knowledge and experience of other farmers more than from anyone else, including advice provided by agricultural consultants and researchers," Mr McClelland says.

For more information on the Climate Champion program see the website at www.climatechampions.net.au. For tools and information to help farmers make decisions about their farm business see www.climatekelpie.com.au.

To find out more about the Climate Champion program please contact John Ive (talaheni@webone.com.au).