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Course leads families to water

Written by Colin Taylor

A little bit of information can go a long way. Just ask Dan and Kaylene Wood, who own 380ha at Eurack, near Beeac – or David and Rahel Bunge, from Konongwootong North near Coleraine Victoria. Both couples have rebuilt their water supply options with help from experts and some sound farm planning.

Dan and Kaylene live on a property farmed by Dan's family for 110 years. They produce cereal crops, fat lambs and vealers from F1 cows and Dan does some hay contracting on the side. The couple have two children – James, 16, and Kathryn, 13 – who help on the farm out of school hours. For Dan and Kaylene, that critical information arrived through a Department of Primary Industries FarmPlan21 course they took at Irrewarra two years ago.

Introduced to the iFarm farm – mapping software, the couple were able to plot where their water pipes should go and where to dig a new dam. "That was the best program we've ever done," Kaylene said. "It's the one we got the most out of and the one we still utilise. "Last summer, we had a lot of wet spots, so we created another computer overlay and worked out where the best place was for a dam. "When we started we had just two dams and relied predominately on bores, but in the dry years all but two of the bores went dry. "In 2004, we'd put in town water – without that, we would have had to spend a lot of time chasing water." Kaylene said the way they managed their farm water supply was critical. "We've had 14 or 15 very dry years here," she said.



Testing the water: David Bunge checks one of his two Airwell pumps

"There are six bores on the place, but only two work and one of them is salty. "We're quite low-lying, so if we leave water lying in a paddock we get a salt problem. "We've extended one dam, but nothing's going to help until God decides to release a bit of the rain. "We have to do more with catching rain water when it comes. "We have more dams to put in, but as Dan says, it's a very expensive hole to dig if it's not going to rain. "We still need to install more drainage to fill a new dam, fence it off from the stock, then reticulate it up to the farmyard, from where it will be gravity-fed to all the paddocks on the home block."

In the Western District, David and Rahel Bunge tell a slightly different story. The Bunges own the 1000ha Mawarra at Konongwootong North Victoria, plus a 1200ha block near Nhill, running 2500 composite ewes and 400 Angus breeders and planting up to 200ha to a rotation of canola, wheat, barley, oats and new pastures.

Before 2005, the family relied on small dams and creeks and two bores. “We added up our consumption – animals, fire needs, spraying and household – then looked at what our water supply actually was,” David said. “A lot of farmers would get a nasty surprise if they sat down and did a water balance sheet- they would find they were significantly in deficit if they had experienced a run of a few dry years. “Here at Konongwootong we have one extremely good bore, which could water the whole place, a 50-megalitre dam and other, smaller dams. “With rotational grazing, we’re running up to 500 animals on a single water trough, so you need flow rates capable of handling that. “The other farm had good water supply, but a poor reticulation system.”



Off Peak Power: David Bunge with his Airwell compressor which powers his pumps on off peak electricity

David recently completed a FarmPlan21 course in Hamilton Victoria and found the farm – mapping section invaluable. He also turned to consultant Robert Fishburn, from Airwell Pumps in Hamilton. “Using an expert like Robert to measure flow rates, distances, water pumps and pressures and gravity effects, was most worthwhile,” David said.

The Bunges’ northern block has no electricity, so uses a solar powered system. The home farm has two pumps from Airwell – one on a dam and one in the bore, which deliver water to several storage tanks, ranging in capacity from 22,000 to 118,000 litres. Water can be gravity – fed from each of the tanks or the whole system can be switched to pressure. “We have two major systems, but it’s only a matter of changing taps and we can water the farm completely from one system or the other and move water from one to the other – all on off-peak electricity rates,” David said.



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