KATE LEDINGHAM AND TIM LEIFELS

"Alice Downs" and "Macquarie", Moree
"Sunnyridge" Bellata NSW

Alice Downs Farms are a well-developed and meticulously presented, successful dryland cotton production enterprise, with a rich Ledingham family history going back three generations.

Tim Leifels has been farming cotton for the Ledinghams of "Alice Downs", east of Moree, for 13 years and is an accomplished Farm Manager with an eye on the future.

Together, Tim and Kate have achieved consistent success with all three dryland properties that comprise a total of 7,956 hectares across "Alice Downs" and "Macquarie", east of Moree, and "Sunnyridge" at Bellata. In 2018/19 1,803 hectares was planted to cotton.

"Alice Downs" is a Cotton Seed Distributor Ambassador and Tim is an enthusiastic long-term trial participant, regularly hosting field days and other industry events on farm.

Driving sustainable farming practices to optimise moisture conservation, soil health and fertility, Tim and Kate are committed to the continual improvement of sustainable farming practices to ensure the success of the farms for generations to come. To achieve this they place significant focus on fallow management and employ a minimum/ zero tillage cropping system with a strong emphasis on stubble retention, moisture conservation and compaction avoidance.

In place is a highly disiplined winter / summer crop rotation program that includes wheat, barley, chickpea, cotton and sorghum. The commitment to maintaining the rotation has led to the ability to plant dryland cotton when many others couldn't. This practice has delivered an average dryland yield of 3.4 bales per hectare and an anticipated 3.7 bales per hectare for the 2018/19 season. The recent change to 2.4 meter rows has resulted in improved potential yield and quality.

A stringent soil testing program enables precision fertilizer application and their highly successful integrated weed and disease management program is underpinned by the application of a Weedit controlled droplet camera on their spray application rig.

For capturing and analysing each area of the "Alice Downs" farming enterprise, Agworld is used for paddock records, crop performance and associated costs while AGDATA Phoenix is used for the accounting function and MyJohnDeere for monitoring machine and crop performance.

Engaging the best possible consultancy is key to the "Alice Farms" operation. Cogan Consultancy play an integral role in the agronomy side of the enterprise. Expert consultancy advice is also used for the marketing of cotton and grain crops. A mixture of platforms are used for selling including forward selling, recaps on ginned bales to SWAPS.

There is an obvious strong and inclusive staff management culture across the "Alice Downs" farming enterprise. Having a great sense of team is something that Kate places significant emphasis on, explaining 'We look after our staff and wouldn't ask them to do a job we wouldn't do ourselves,' which enhances a positive work culture. Kate appreciates the need for guaranteed hours and flexibility. 'If we look after our staff, they look after us.' It's this philosophy that has resulted in "Alice Downs" having an enviable history of long-term employee retention.

Staff training is a constant upskilling process for Tim and Kate, ensuring that all staff attain and maintain their chemical accreditation, fork lift license, quad bike and silo safety training. Equipment is up to date and maintained to the highest standards.

Their work health and safety practices are highly regarded and closely observed by all staff members and all new or casual staff receive one-on-one induction and training.

The meticulous maintenance and presentation regime isn't limited to the fields, it extends to the manner in which machinery, equipment and all built infrastructure and grounds are cared for. It's clear that corners are never cut in any aspect of the "Alice Downs" farming operations. Kate and Tim continue to set an enviable standard of best practice that is sure to deliver them continued success.

BAYER