

CHAIR'S WELCOME

THE YEAR

2021: the year with the very dry start and at best, a patchy break. It was the year that kept us guessing:

- Do we sow less canola and lentils?*
- Do we sow more wheat or barley?*
- Do we have more fallow?*
- Do we have more livestock?*
- Should we sow hay instead?*
- Will there be a market for it?*
- Will there be a harvest?*

No one knew, particularly in the Mallee, where it looked likely to be a very quick harvest until the last weekend in September when rain breathed life back into crops and put a spring back in our step.

Once again there was a variation in the season across the Mallee-Wimmera region. There was good rainfall south and east of Birchip for most of the year but the west and north struggled at times to achieve rainfall events above double figures until late September–early October.

Frost was also evident in parts of the region and many wheat samples were tested for falling numbers with varying results. Generally, grain quality was good. Many farmers reported a higher proportion of their wheat crop achieving H1 and H2 grades with good test weights.

Late spring rains pushed harvest back but filled grain heads. Grain prices, particularly canola and lentils were up, rewarding those who believed their benefits outweighed their risk. A La Niña declared in late November meant the race was on to get crops off quickly, which added complexity to a harvest that for many, was proving slower than average due to welcomed higher yields.

While grain prices for wheat and barley took a late dip in December and lentil receival sites filled early, putting a stretch on on-farm storage, most farmers would agree that overall, the season finished a lot better than they could have imagined in April.

It turned out not to be the year for hay however the season could have very easily swung the other way. Those with livestock were rewarded with good returns, highlighting the importance of using numerous income streams to offset risk.

COVID IMPLICATIONS FOR OUR BUSINESS

Supply and price of fertiliser, chemicals, machinery parts and new machinery are currently challenges to operating our farming businesses. We will all be working with our suppliers to keep the impact on our farms to a minimum.

LAND PRICES

Another topic which struck me this year was land prices and increasing equity in the value of our businesses. It seemed to also be top-of-mind for many growers as prices rose exponentially over the year as farmers scrambled in an effort not to miss their chance to expand. With such high prices and low interest rates, it is my wish for all involved that we have some good seasons ahead of us.

STAFF

The 2021 BCG research program extended across the Mallee, Wimmera and North Central regions and consisted of approximately 130 research trials. Our main sites were at Watchupga North and South.

Thank you to CEO, Fiona Best and the team for their exceptional contribution to BCG this year and to the senior management team and staff who stepped up while Fiona took family leave.

The flexibility shown in the ability of our employees to adapt to the restrictions placed on the organisation during another year of Covid-19 regulations, is to be commended. High quality videos extending our research and the swift hosting of the Members' Field Day are highlights for me.

In 2021 we farewelled David Whitehand, Phillip Guthrie and Kate Maddern (who took up her Oxford Rhodes Scholarship in October). We welcomed Tariq Gerardi (February), James Taylor (March), Lynden Burns (August) and Jenna Allan (November).

THE BOARD

Kaniva grain grower Jonathan Dyer and Rupanyup cropping and sheep farmer Kayla Weidemann were welcomed to the BCG Board in November. They were each elected for a three-year term.

Board members Caroline Welsh and Alan Bennett stepped down from the board after their long-standing contribution. I'd like to thank Caroline and Alan. They were both important members of our board and we thank them for their time, passion and commitment. They will be missed.

Renewal is also important for a board. I am confident our new board will continue to serve BCG members and the broader industry very well.

OUR MEMBERS AND COLLABORATORS

Thank you to our members who provide ideas via our advisory and research committees and for contributing land for research sites.

I'd also like to thank BCG's investors, collaborators and partners, including organisations in the philanthropic sector, who make our work possible.

I hope 2022 is a prosperous and productive one for you all.



John Ferrier
Chair