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Caulfields on track

By KATE DOWLER

IF YOU want to see what three brothers can do when they set their minds to it, look no further than Harrow's Bruce, Mark and Dean Caulfield.

The brothers are a great example of seizing opportunities and working hard to get ahead.

When blue gum companies bought up large tracts of land in the Western District in the late 1990s, they took much productive farmland out of grazing and broadacre cropping.

While this has had a raft of negative impacts, in the case of the Caulfield family it has also provided a chance for expansion.

The brothers sold their 1000ha farm at Dorodong, near Penola on the Victorian-South Australian border, and bought a 1700ha property, Glenburnie, at Harrow, which they believed had better soils and productivity potential.

The only problem was although Glenburnie was largely cleared, it was also covered in tree stumps — an obvious barrier to pasture renovation and cropping. So the brothers set to the tough, laborious task of de-stumping a few paddocks, year by year. Using heavy machinery they worked with typical bushman's grit and determination and now have less than a quarter

of the property left to develop.

After a paddock is de-stumped, it is cultivated, sown to crops for generally three years — mostly to reduce the weed burden — and then sown to a permanent pasture mix of phalaris and clover. Some of the heavy soiled paddocks will be regularly cropped.

Next on the list for the brothers is building a network of laneways throughout the farm to simplify and speed up stock management.

Glenburnie has an annual rainfall of 500mm and its soil types range from loamy sands to duplex types.

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The Caulfields have a strong livestock background but are now expanding into cropping, including some share farming, in part to help pay for their investment in machinery.

On the livestock side of the business, they are slowly increasing their stocking rates as paddocks are developed and pastures re-sown.

They now run more than 4000 ewes.

Of these, 2000 are Corriedales, half of them mated

to Corriedales and half to East Friesian-Coopworth composite sires.

The other 2000 ewes are East Friesian-Coopworth composites, 50 per cent of which are mated back to composites and the remainder to Poll Dorset sires for prime lambs.

Lambs are generally sold over-the-hooks.

The brothers also run almost 300 cattle, predominantly Murray Greys calving in both spring and autumn.

Heifers and first-calvers are mated back to Murray

Greys while all older cows are joined to Charolais bulls.

These Charolais-cross calves are sold through the Naracoorte saleyards at 10 months in January, weighing 400-450kg.

The straight-bred Murray Grey steers are sold at the same time, weighing about 350-400kg.

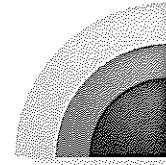
Bruce said last year was the first time they used terminal sires since moving properties because they wanted to build up their cow herd.

With crops, the brothers

generally sow a canola variety first followed by wheat, oats or triticale.

Last year for the first time they sowed two Roundup Ready canola varieties as part of a trial to determine which variety would best suit their conditions and help them tackle weeds.

The results convinced them to go with GT Mustang Roundup Ready canola, which will also enable them to sow earlier in the season and knock down the weed burden faster.



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The GT Mustang yielded 1.92 tonnes/ha while the other variety, Hyola 502, yielded 1.8 tonnes/ha.

Mark said the main weeds they had to tackle were ryegrass, capeweed, Patersons curse and dock.

"We want to get the paddocks as clean and weed-free during the cropping phase so there is a low weed seed bank when we sow them down to pasture," Mark said.

In the trial only one spray of Roundup was required.

"It just cleaned everything up," he said.

Mark said he would like to sow GT Mustang earlier this year and not have to wait for weed germination before spraying and sowing.

"It is a good way for us to get in and open up new country faster than what we would be able to otherwise," he said.

While the Roundup Ready canola is more expensive to purchase, Mark said savings were made by spraying less and in efficiency of moving on to

seeding faster.

The brothers have been converting about 50ha of stump-ridden pasture country into cropping each year.

Dean said the long-term aim was to have about 90 per cent of the farm sown to phalaris-based pasture.

"We'll continue to crop a few paddocks and are doing some share farming too this year, and maybe some summer cropping from time to time," Dean said.

Preparing the paddocks with a Roundup Ready

canola, followed by a cereal or two, the brothers hope the pastures will last at least a decade before they have to be renovated.

"Things are looking OK so far this season," Dean said.

"Soon we'll be sowing the crops, so we're hoping for a good year which will help, and then longer term, keep de-stumping what is left, and put in all the laneways.

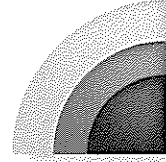
"Hopefully we can continue to lift stocking rates too."



Family affair:

Bruce, Mark and Dean Caulfield are turning their attention towards creating a laneway system to help with stock management, which includes running about 300 Murray Greys.





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Blood, sweat and tears: Mark, Bruce and Dean Caulfield on their 170ha farm at Harrow, which they have been de-slumping over several years to expand its cropping potential