GROUP PROFILE: Jerdacuttup Topcrop and Pasture Group

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Group Aim:
To share in a better understanding of the local farming systems in the district and improve profitability for all our members.

How was the group formed?
The Jerdacuttup Top Crop and Pasture group evolved from the Jerdacuttup Top Crop group which had their first meeting in October 2001. In 2004, the group merged with the Jerdacuttup Wool Pro group to form the Jerdacuttup Top Crop and Pasture group.

Some of the reasons why the group was originally formed included curiosity (a need to update information/technology), understand rotations, grow better crops and increase productivity, to have consistent production, to better understand trace elements and yield variation, to bring together unbiased information, and to lift the profile of the community.

The Jerdacuttup group believe their area can sometimes be missed in the research world, as it is located 150km from Esperance and 50km from Ravensthorpe. With this in mind, the group have attracted researchers and trial work to the area through external funding applications, and unique production issues.

What is the main focus of the group?
In 2006, the group began a new trial focusing on soil health and biological activity, in collaboration with Margaret Roper from CSIRO. The group is looking at different farming systems (including with/without stock) to see what differences there are to the microbial biomass and then how this might relate to crop yield and profitability.

The focus in 2005 was on soil wetters and nutrition, with other trials including variety trials also being conducted. However, as well as learning, one of the main focuses of the group is for the community to come together in an informal setting to relax and at the same time share information.

Number of members?
There are 18 farm businesses in the group. At any one meeting, there is often about 20 people in attendance.

Membership fees?
Our membership fee is $50 per farm business. Most of this goes towards social activities ie; after every meeting we hold a BBQ.

What makes the group tick?
What really keeps the group ticking along is the social interaction that occurs within the group. Researchers and agronomists remain interested in the group due to the way the group members work together and have clear aims on what they want to achieve. Getting access to professionals gives the group a sense of worth. Getting trial results at the end of the year which relate to their area, is also invaluable.

What trials has the group conducted in the past couple of years?
Each year the group sow 4 or 5 SEPWA wheat and barley variety trials. Canola variety trials are also conducted. In addition to this, trials include the following:

- Sulphur, Potash, Phosphorous, gypsum and lime trials
- Serradella trials (pod vs seed)
- SGSL perennial trials
- Copper and other trace element trials
- Wetter trials, with crop establishment
- Nitrogen sources, rates and time of application
- Annual legumes and other pasture species including tetraploid ryegrasses
- Fungicide trials on cereals
- Soil health and microbial activity on different farming systems
- Rotation trial using prima gland, cadiz, canola, lupins, and peas in strips with wheat in following year to see which is the best break crop

How do you resource the group?
The group has been fortunate to obtain funding through the GRDC Agribusiness Extension Network grants. This is augmented by local agribusiness which give a lot of their time and expertise to the group, as well as support from the Department of Agriculture and the Ravensthorpe Agricultural Initiatives Network (RAIN)
The soil activity work in collaboration with CSIRO is part of the "Soil Health and Precision Agriculture Project" funded by the National Landcare Program. Project Partners include the Jerdacuttup Top Crop and Pasture Group, SCRIPT, RAIN, DAWA, and CSIRO.

How does the group manage succession planning for the group?
The group meets in February or early March each year for their AGM. At this AGM all positions are declared vacant, and so far they haven’t found it difficult to elect office bearers.

What are you current key issues as a group?
- Soil health and nutrition, including key issues of non-wetting soils and management of acidic sand plain soils
- Best pastures for our farming system
- Best farming system and crop rotation for our soils and climate
- How to stay farming with the diminishing returns farmers are experiencing