

The benefits of risk mitigation

By GAIL THOMAS

MARCUS Oldham College recently held a forum *Sustainable Management: Linking Production-Markets-Society* as part of the Douglas Boyd Forum Series.

A range of speakers covered various topics from caring for the land and native vegetation to creating definitive branding for marketing a product and value-adding crops with a range of culinary products for the retail sector.

One of the key speakers was Sam Archer from Gundagai in the foothills of the Snowy Mountains in southern NSW, who runs a family property that also serves as a research site for the Australian National University's Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies.

He spoke about running an integrated farm system, provided an overview of where agriculture was at globally and then talked about what he was doing on his own property.

This included practices such as identifying productive areas, fencing according to land class, filling in the food gaps and containment areas when the season gets tight – all underpinned by good research and development.

"We are largely sheep and cattle with a little bit of opportunity cropping," he said.

"Only 25 per cent of our land is arable, the balance is native hill country with 650 millimetre rainfall.

"For me it's about utilising our productive land to produce food and fibre and our marginal land to deliver environmental goods and services. It's about risk mitigation to ensure you can get an adequate return from your farm.

"[It's about] finding a balance between conventional production systems and also incorporating how we manage the environment and giving back to our communities."

Another guest speaker, Graeme Hand, manages a small beef property at Branxholme in south-west Victoria and has a special interest in working with family farms, helping to create profitable and regenerative farm businesses.

"I manage the Native Grass Association as well as a consulting and training business," he said.

"The thing I want farmers to take away from this forum is an ability to trial the principles of what does regenerating land look like and what does the whole of Australia need to look like so we can increase the ecosystem services provided by the environment.

"My throw away line is 'native grasses know a lot about living in Australia'.

"We go for regeneration, and increase that population as it grows throughout time,



■ At the Marcus Oldham Sustainable Management forum last week, Sam Archer spoke about running an integrated farm system at Gundagai, NSW, while Paul Crock explained the environmental credentials behind Gippsland Natural Meats.

plus it's very expensive to plant native grass seeds and they're hard to handle. You can have it fast and expensive, or slow and profitable."

Sam Pincott of Holbrook Paddock Eggs – a family run business near Holbrook in southern NSW – presented one of the three case studies at the forum.

"Over the past five years, we have adapted our management under the holistic management framework and have now incorporated a free-range egg enterprise where the hens rotationally graze, following the sheep and cattle round the property," he said.

"We adapted the enterprise and value-added it and now free range eggs are our main business – initially we went into it as an improvement tool but out of that a business has evolved."

Paul Crock who runs a beef enterprise at Fish Creek is a director of Gippsland Natural Meats – a producer-owned company based in Gippsland producing branded beef under the Gippsland Natural Meats and Enviomeat banners.

"We have a process of environmental credentials underpinning the Enviomeat

brand and what it means to producers and consumers," he said.

"The producers involved with Enviomeat are from Phillip Island and south Gippsland and we all have an environmental system on our farms so we have something that underpins what we actually do, not just making a claim."

The meat is grass-fed, environmentally certified with no artificial hormones and the producers use the Meat Standard Australia (MSA) grading system.

"We have mostly European breeds predominantly Angus and Angus-cross and the group includes small and large producers," Mr Crock said.

"We are people passionate about what we're doing at a farm level and how we bring that through to the consumer – knowing the provenance of where their food comes from is important and we also strive to get a premium price for our product.

"We have a couple of Melbourne butcher outlets along with supplying food service and we are looking into the restaurant industry, trying to develop a brand and also working with chefs."