

Rural Water Use Efficiency Initiative. Horticulture Program.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY, 2003.

This is fourth and final Milestone report for the Horticultural section of the Rural Water Use Efficiency Initiative. Starting in 1999 and funded by the Queensland Government's Department of Natural Resources and Mines, the program successfully achieved its objectives and delivered improvements in irrigation efficiency in the fruit and vegetable industry in Queensland.

The fruit and vegetable section of the RWUE is administered and operated by Queensland Fruit & Vegetable Growers Ltd, and was branded "Water for Profit" at the start of the program for easy recognition. The program has been extremely successful in achieving change in irrigation practices in the major Horticultural regions across the State. The Horticulture program has exceeded its targets of 40% participation of fruit and vegetable growers as well as achieving gains from productivity and water savings equivalent to \$147 million.

AT A GLANCE

As at June, 2003, during the four year program, Water for Profit:

- € Has a high level of recognition in the horticultural industries with over 90% of growers aware of the program and the drive to increase irrigation efficiency.
- € Has had almost 45% of horticultural growers participating in changed irrigation management practice and improvements.
- € Has had over 6000 attendances at activities and workshops, aimed at assisting growers improve irrigation efficiency.
- € Has had almost 1500 individual growers participate in BMP activities.
- € Has assisted over 1400 growers through the Rural Water Use Efficiency, Financial Incentive Scheme.
- € Has generated more than \$162 million of gains in water savings and productivity.
- € Significantly, has returned \$23 in efficiency gains for every \$1 invested in the program by the State Government.
- € Was announced as the winner of the FarmBis Training and Education Category of the Queensland Primary Industry Week Awards in April, 2003.
- € Has produced over eighty information sheets to assist growers improve irrigation efficiency

SUCCESSFUL INITIATIVE

The success of the partnership approach between Queensland Fruit & Vegetable Growers and the Department of Natural Resources and Mines has largely been due to:

- ↓ A grower interactive approach through the industry representative body, Queensland Fruit & Vegetable Growers Ltd, which has given the program flexibility, credibility and a sense of ownership by growers.

- ↓ Field activities backed by a Financial Incentive Scheme
- ↓ A fresh and proactive approach to implementing change on farm.
- ↓ Utilising a number of methods to identify growers' needs that would lead to gains in irrigation efficiency.
- ↓ Employing a variety of relevant extension methods, to assist growers making change.
- ↓ Making good use of existing resources
- ↓ Linkages to other government agencies such as the DPI, EPA and private sector interests
- ↓ Following through the process of change with growers.

Ultimately, growers have had ownership of the changes being made, which has enhanced the activities of the program.

OTHER BENEFITS

In addition to the achievements listed above, there have been other benefits from the program, particularly environmental benefits. Not only is irrigation water being used better, but the off farm impacts of irrigation will ultimately be reduced through improved irrigation efficiency.

The program is a source of technical information. In addition, the program has been able to offer assistance in times of severe drought in many regions during the last year or so. It has also been used by many growers to assist in the transition process of shifting from low input irrigation crops into Horticulture. Antidotal evidence would suggest that there have been employment opportunities created as a result of the program.

Horticulture has gone from a \$850 million dollar industry (Barracrough, 1999) at the start of the program to over \$1.2 billion industry (DPI estimate) for the 2002/2003 year. This was during the period that the RWUE Initiative has made a positive contribution to productivity gains and irrigation efficiency.

CONCLUSION

Water for Profit has made substantial gains for irrigation efficiency in the horticultural industries in Queensland with over \$160 million in water savings and productivity gains. This has given the State Government a return of over \$23 for each dollar that was invested in the horticulture section of the program.

Ultimately Water for Profit has heightened the importance of irrigation efficiency on Horticultural farms, with growers making changes where they otherwise would not have. The Adoption Program (field staff) and the Financial Incentive Scheme have effectively accelerated the rate of change towards better irrigation efficiency.

The program has exceeded its targets, but there is potential for further gains with a continuing program in irrigation efficiency and natural resource management.