

Technology set to revolutionise farming

Telecommunication networks are critical

DATA

Technology is being touted as the new productivity driver for rural Australia and the amount of research and development in this field is bringing new processes and products to the farm enterprise.

With these innovations come three prime functions - collection of data, analysis of data and management of the data back into the farm enterprise, and here is where a number of farmers have issues.

Large scale data use requires data connections able to deal with significant volumes and parcels of information. In many parts of rural Western Australia, those data connections, or telecommunication networks, have been described as being at third world standard and a major bottleneck for technology adoption going forward.

The South East Premium Wheat Growers' Association (SEPWA) has won funding from COGGO to test the potential application of farm based data wi-fi transmission to allow grain growers to access information and communication tools while in the paddock.

"This pilot will form the on-ground testing of a wider pilot communications project in collaboration with the WA State Government," said project supervisor Nigel Metz.

Discussions are underway between SEPWA and various government entities to trial wi-fi networks linked to optical fibre communication networks which the project hopes will revolutionise data connection speed and coverage across the state.

"In this project, SEPWA will test the farm level data transmission options for reach and reliability across, in particular, the "last-mile" systems," Nigel Metz said.

"The results from this project will be used in developing a pilot information/data network concept aimed at servicing agriculture and rural communities which would be funded by the State Government's R4R program."

The project will liaise with the Departments of Commerce, Agriculture and Food WA and Regional Development (R4R administration), as well as the Esperance Shire Council, the Goldfields Esperance Development Commission and local regional Esperance farm groups.

The technology being tested – particularly point to point wireless transmission – is not new technology; it has been used successfully in several mining and government operations across Australia.

"The challenge is more about ensuring the farm scale needs for viable networks of grain growers becomes the focus for government and a number of its departments," Mr Metz said.

COGGO is a public company formed by West Australian grain growers concerned about the level of resources being allocated to research in the state. It is a general R&D funder providing grants to applicants who can demonstrate innovative ideas that will boost grain farm productivity or benefit grain growers' profitability through projects for geographic, crop specific sectors or the general grains industry. Grain grower members contribute annually to this fund.