



FOR LIFE

keeping water flowing

LIFEstory

Economic growth flows from pipeline project

By Melissa Pouliot for GWMWater

Wimmera agriculture has always played a vital role in Victoria's and Australia's economy but the longest drought on record during the late 1990s and early 2000s took a significant toll.

Now, with completion of the ground-breaking Northern Mallee and Wimmera Mallee pipelines in March 2010 and drought-breaking rains in late 2010 and early 2011, the region and its agricultural industry are back on their feet.

Although nature dictates the Wimmera-Mallee will continue to experience dry conditions, thanks to a secure piped water supply the region will always have business opportunities, a healthier river system, community growth and welcome dollars.

A new \$14-million wheat and oilseeds research centre at Longerenong Agricultural College is part of the flow of this new growth.

The centre will bring another 20 full-time employees to Longerenong and up to 40 casual employees at busy times of years including harvest. The project will also provide an important hand-on learning base for college students.

Bayer is building seven centres world-wide, citing good soil, climate and agronomic conditions for their Australian site in the Wimmera. And importantly, access to a secure water supply through the pipeline.

Bayer is leasing 75 hectares of the college farm for yield and pathology trials. This summer they completed their first harvest ahead of schedule and will open the new facility on February 12.

Many regional leaders are celebrating the arrival of what looks like a 21st Century spaceship into the middle of a flat paddock – an arrival made possible by the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline.

Among those celebrating is Longerenong-WORKCO chief executive officer John Ackland who says without the pipeline, Bayer would not have chosen the Wimmera.

"A secure water supply is essential to Bayer's international breeding program. They need to guarantee their crops world-wide and an essential part of this is having access to piped, quality water if nature cannot provide."

John says the opportunities the investment presents are for both Longerenong and the broader farming community.

"The opportunities from an investment in our region such as this are fantastic," he says.

John says the project shows how the Wimmera can stand on the world stage in terms of economic development as a result of the pipeline.

"The region is yet to tap into the full potential the pipeline provides and this project is a real live working model that demonstrates this enormous potential, particularly in the agricultural and horticultural sectors."

Longerenong general manager John Goldsmith says the project will benefit students who want to further their agronomic knowledge and skills plus put the Wimmera back on the map as a leading agricultural centre.

"This facility provides students with access to cutting-edge grains research as well as opportunities for casual and full-time employment. It adds tremendous value to the region and consolidates its position as one of the major grain research and development precincts in the nation," John says.

Wimmera Development Association executive director Jo Bourke believes the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline has changed the expectations and culture of the region. She says the Bayer CropScience project shows how the region can lead the way on the world stage.

Jo has witnessed the full circle after around 20 years of involvement with the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline Project dating back to when community leaders started lobbying Federal and State Governments for funding in the late 1990s.

"This is what we were all working for," Jo says. "To have water available for developing the region. This is just the start of seeing some real innovation and confidence through diversification on farms and development of new agribusinesses and industries.

"The pipeline's promise of long-term sustainable water management offers the region's businesses and communities a new future; one with new choices."

The estimated \$688-million Wimmera Mallee Pipeline Project is the region's biggest project for a century. It has replaced 18,000 kilometres of open earthen channel with 9159 kilometres of pressurized pipeline. Construction started in November 2006 and the final pipe was laid on March 30, 2010. The pipeline is saving 103,000 megalitres of water a year and returning 83,000 megalitres of that to the environment and 20,000 megalitres to the community via growth water. This water previous went to waste via evaporation and seepage in channels.

Melissa Pouliot is the author of 'For Life...how we got the water back' – a story about the Wimmera Mallee and Northern Mallee pipelines. The book, developed with funding support from GWMWater, and an accompanying audio version are available to purchase online at www.mpm mediasolutions.com.au or at Redrock Books in Horsham.

