



## **agri benchmark Cash Crop Conference 2010 – Perth, Australia**

by Janina Krug (vTI)

The **agri benchmark** Cash Crop Conference was held from 9-13 May 2010 at the Vines Resort in Perth, Western Australia, with participants from more than 20 countries.

The conference was officially opened by Yelto Zimmer, coordinator of the Cash Crop network, on Monday morning, followed by a presentation and discussion of key results from the typical farms in selected countries. One of the key findings was that under present price ratios soybeans relative to corn tend to be more profitable on South American farms than in USA, which apparently was the main reason for the strong increase of soybean acreage in South America. The afternoon was dedicated to our new partners and their country presentations, for the first time with rice producing countries in the network.

At the “Australia Day” on Tuesday, delegates were informed on a wide range of topics around arable farming in the hosting country, which exports about 80 % of the agricultural production. Besides challenges in Australian agriculture such as weed resistance and drought, the group also heard that in some years, frost during flowering ( $-2^{\circ}\text{C}$  is enough) damages crops. The fact that growing area steadily disappears due to salinity and the integration of livestock in cropping systems as a risk reduction strategy have been explained by Australian experts and were lively discussed by all **agri benchmark** partners. In the end David Fienberg from CBH, one of Australia’s leading grain handling companies, introduced the business before taking the group to the Grain

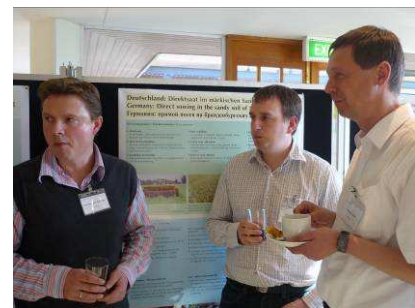




Export Terminal in Kwinana. There the group got a first insight into the efficiencies of grain logistic and transport systems, which lead to only 50 AUD/t handling costs from farmgate to bluewater vessel fob.

Wednesday was the “public day”, on which invited guests from the agribusiness sector, sciences and farms got an insight in **agri benchmark’s** work. The new Russian partner Dmitri Rylko described evolution, status and future perspectives of so-called Agroholdings in Russia. He highlighted the competitive disadvantages caused by high management and monitoring efforts as well as the market and political power of said institutions. Martin Davies from Bulgaria on the other hand explained grain marketing strategies in his country. Additional topics were performance and risks of GM crops in Australia and the difficulties of GM crop production in the EU, as well as selected results from international farm comparisons focussed not only on Australian but also on Ukrainian **agri benchmark** farms, which have been very competitive in 2009 especially in rapeseed and corn production. Last but not least partners uncovered strategic options for rapeseed production under new sustainable criteria for biodiesel.

On the last conference day **agri benchmark** delegates concentrated on the production of sugar to get an impression of the economics of sugar beet production in the EU compared to sugar cane production in Australia. This section turned out to be the initial start-up for a discussion about a global sugar project to analyse production costs and competitiveness of sugar cane and beets compared to alternative crops. The following conference dinner allowed everyone once more to catch up with other members of the “**agri benchmark** family” and to network with people from all over the world.





## agri benchmark Cash Crop Conference 2010 –

### Farm Tour Western Australia

This conference program was completed by the following post conference tour through WA from 14-17 May 2010. Klaus Nehring has been the organizer of this tour.

#### **Friday 14<sup>th</sup> May**

The first stop was the Research Station in Cunderdin, 150 km east of Perth. This station, operated by the University of Western Australia (UWA) and the West Australian No-Till Farmers Association (WANTFA), with a broad span of trials about actual rotational challenges in the Wheatbelt, was an valuable start of an exiting farm tour. Ken Flower illustrated No-till systems, by showing the adequate technique. Because of low rainfall and tight sowing windows, it is important to get the crops in quickly and make the best use of the winter moisture, he explained.

Next stop was “Anameka” farm in Tammin, which is a mixed farm enterprise in the low rainfall area of Central Wheatbelt with 13,000 ha arable land, running a cropping program based on cereals and legumes as well as sheep for wool and fat lamb production. Tony emphasized that rainfall is the most critical factor in productivity and gave the group a detailed picture about his farm environment and operations. Of course after 4 days sitting in a conference room everybody got excited by seeing two Airseeders moving in the field.

#### **Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> May**

After a cold night in Hayden the morning started with a guided tour to the granite cliff “Wave Rock”, one of the major tourist attractions in rural WA, 15 meters high and 110 meters long with a spectacular rounded overhang.

Afterwards the bus moved on to Lake Varley. Will Hull and his family settled over to Varley Farms from their family property in Essex, UK two years ago. He is farming the 11,000 ha property with a sophisticated cropping programme in a diversified rotation without livestock. High annual machinery utilisation is remarkable as well as the large and sophisticated on farm storage facilities. Especially Will’s explanations about the development of a machine to support weed management by crushing weed seeds piqued the interest of the whole group.

In the afternoon the bus arrived in Munglinup on the south coast of WA at “Loughrea” farm. Andrew Bott and his family are running an 8,000 ha property in one of the most productive



areas in WA. Thanks to this location the rainfall is more reliable than in the previous regions and the production system is more intensive. The cropping program is based on a canola-wheat-barley rotation without livestock. Unfortunately no seeding operations took place during the visit, because of an exceptional rainfall (140 mm) the day before.

Both farmers underlined their interest in Roundup Ready canola as another useful tool to control grass weeds such as annual ryegrass. They assumed yield increases in canola to be more a result of using the new hybrid system rather than the Roundup Ready trait itself.

### **Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> May**

The morning started with drive through the outback of WA before coming to the high rainfall area of the Frankland river region. The average annual rain fall is between 550–600 mm with most falling during the winter period. Gunwarrie farm is a family owned and operated broad acre business is specialized on the production of grain and straw. Gunwarrie is 8,000 ha in total size of which 6,100 ha is cropped each year in rotation of wheat, barley, canola, lupine and peas. Beside machinery they heavily invested in storage and cleaning capacity to put themselves in the position to blend varying grain quality. Kelly explained that this is one of the success factors in grain marketing and therefore becoming more and more popular on large and professional farms in Australia.

Afterwards the group visited Hyfield farm in Kojonup with 7,866 ha, managed by the Wellard Agri Group. This location has an annual average rainfall of 500-550 mm. Typical crops are canola, wheat, barley and oats. Apart from cropping, livestock production and pasture grazing play a role in this enterprise. Wellard also purchased the Hyfield Poll Merino Stud to continue breeding commercially-focused, large framed, heavy cutting Poll Merino sheep.

### **Monday 17<sup>th</sup> May**

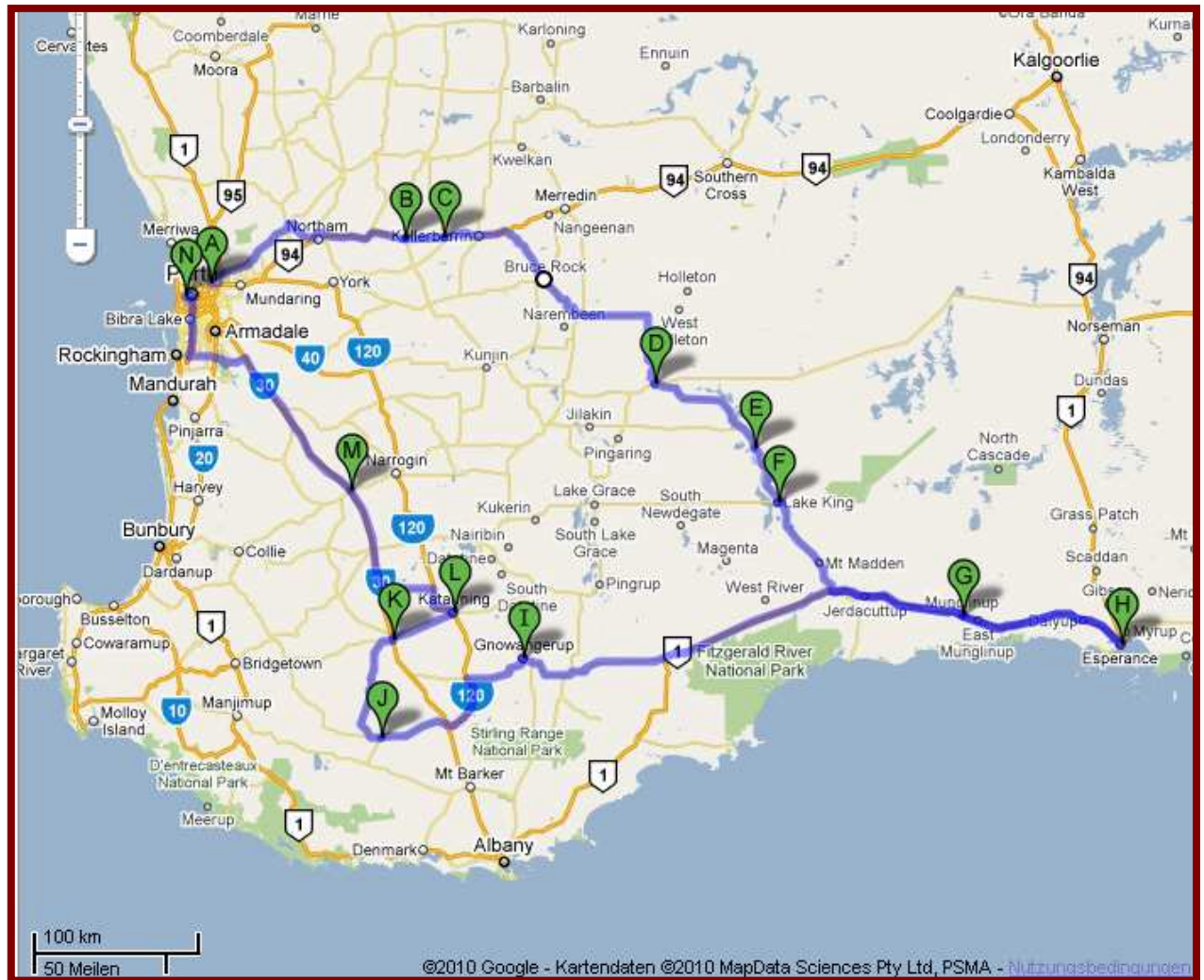
In the morning a visit at CLAAS Harvest Centre in Katanning was scheduled before heading back to a Farewell BBQ from the Canola Breeders Western Australia at the UWA Field Station.

Canola Breeders represents a unique private partnership between growers, GRDC and the UWA, linked to international plant breeding and commercial expertise (NPZ). Canola Breeders operates commercially and competitively to develop canola varieties that add value to the production chain and are the varieties of choice for growers in WA, in other regions of Australia and in suitable environments internationally.





## Map: Farm tour Western Australia, 2010



**A Swan Valley**

**B Cunderdin** WANTFA Research Station

**C Tammin** “Anameka” farm visit, lunch

**D Hyden** motel, dinner, “Wave Rock”

**E Lake Varley** “Varley Farms” farm visit

**F Lake King** lunch

**G Munglinup** “Loughrea” farm visit

**H Esperance** beach, motel, dinner

**I Gnowangerup** lunch

**J Frankland** “Gunwarrie” farm visit

**K Kojonup** “Hyfield” farm visit

**L Katanning** motel, “CLAAS Harvest Centre”

**M Williams** Williams Woolshed

**N Shenton Park** UWA Field Station