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Fast data gets answers out on the grapevine



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STANDING in his vineyard with a smartphone in the hand, Merbein dried fruit grower Stephen Bennett takes a 10-second video of a vine post-pruning.

Less than two minutes later, the video has been watched by several growers across Sunraysia, with comments and questions popping in the private message group.

“Myself and a few other Sunraysia dried fruit growers quite often share videos and information about the way we grow our fruit and the different techniques we use on the property,” Mr Bennett said.

“That’s one of the applications of smartphones in viticulture – you can video a particular operation and put it up on the messenger group so other growers can see it and comment.”

In a world more interconnected than ever, smartphones have become an essential tool for gathering data and managing the modern farm.

At the forefront of these changes, Sunraysia growers are gradually becoming “data farmers”.

“We’re managing more and more data and from that, we’re able to manage the property better, make better decisions about fertilisers and irrigation,” Mr Bennett said.

“Producing higher yields is the main driver for using these technologies in the dried fruit industry.”

Developing the future smart farm to facilitate growers’ decision-

making is the mission of NZ agricultural technology company CropLogic.

In a race for technological innovation, the company announced the opening of its south-eastern Australia headquarters in Mildura this week.

Using in-field soil moisture sensors, the CropLogic technology collects real-time information before making it available to growers through an app on their computer and smartphone.

“These tools are very good for farm management of large-scale growers, so they don’t need to drive an hour just to check a field,” CropLogic chief executive officer James Cooper-Jones said.

“If you get the water right and in time it also helps you reduce your input and therefore your costs.

“Data is the future of agriculture, because you can’t manage what you’re not measuring.”

Wargan’s Steven Frasca, a wine grape grower for 25 years, has embraced the digital ag-tech era.

He said more than data gathering, new technologies allowed him to gain time by simplifying farm operations that would have taken hours or even days a decade ago.

“In the past, you had to book irrigation through the computer or the phone at home and you’d have to wait a certain amount of time before it was processed,” he said.

“Now, you can be out in the farm and see the patch of vines need a drink, so you can order and turn the pump on directly on your smartphone.”

CropLogic is not the only corporation capitalising on Sunraysia’s ag-tech industry, with Mildura Regional Development, SproutX and the Victorian Government set to attract more companies as part of the Smart Farm project.

“It’s fantastic to see a high-tech company like CropLogic establishing itself in Mildura because they’ll bring people with these digital skill sets to the area,” Mr Bennett said.

“Hopefully, it’ll plant a seed and the region’s ag-tech industry will grow from that.”



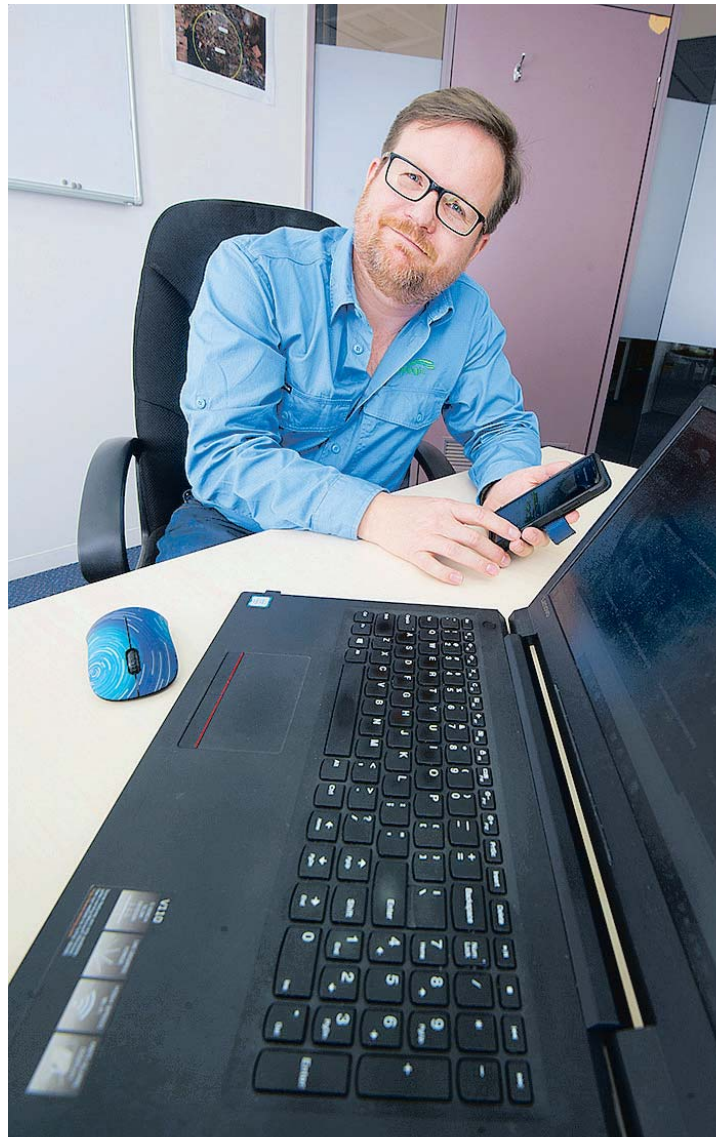
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CropLogic chief executive James Cooper-Jones says digital technology is a cost and time-saver.

Picture: Louise Barker