

# MACHINERY & PRODUCTS

## Power harrows lift yields for grain crops

**RON MILLER** and his family milk 700 cows at Athlone, between Drouin and Poowong in central Gippsland, on a 50 unit rotary that was installed 10 years ago at the time of deregulation.

They are big grain feeders for their cows, feeding 10kg per cow, per day of wheat, lupins and canola meal in the milking shed.

But the Athlone property is not well suited to cropping and is really just used for grazing, with "a bit of summer crops to renovate the pastures", as Ron says.

"When we started paying \$400/tonne for grain we decided that we needed to look around for our own grain-growing property."

So, to guarantee feed for their herd, they acquired a 666 hectare cropping property at Cosgrove, just east of Shepparton, about 2½ years ago when the number of cows they were then milking was doubled.

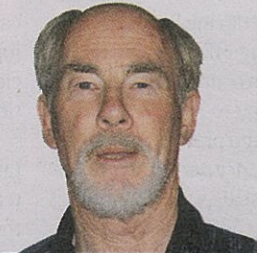
The property was formerly the home of Goulburn Valley Stockfeeds so it came with extensive shedding, lots of silos and even a weighbridge.

It's been a well-planned and successful decision – last year they sowed 600ha down to wheat and averaged four tonnes per hectare.

The Miller dairy enterprise now encompasses 332ha on what were once six different dairy farms.

All of Ron and wife Jan Tina's four sons, Ronnie, Alan, Jonathon and David, work on the dairy.

On the Gippsland property, the Millers had used a Pegoraro three metre power harrow with a pneumatic seeder



**WORKING CLOTHES**  
CHRIS DINGLE



**WHO:**  
Ron Miller  
**WHERE:**  
Athlone  
**WHAT:**  
Pneumatic seeder

mounted on top that they had purchased through Derek Genoni at Gendore Tractors and Machinery in Tooradin.

So last season they took it up to Cosgrove and found that the results were extremely rewarding compared with direct drilled crops.

Alan maintains that an increased yield of three tonnes to the hectare in places is down to using the three metre power harrows.

The Pegoraro brand has now evolved to Alpego, an Italian agricultural machinery company located between Venice and Verona.

When Gendore took along a six metre folding Alpego power harrow and Alpego AS3 plus air seeder combination to this year's Farm World at Warragul, Ron decided that it would



Ron and Alan Miller with the family's Alpego power harrow and Alpego AS3 air seeder.

be a good investment.

The DX-600 TWIN FORCE machine has two rotors mounted on tapered bearings held together by a single support.

This design creates a high clearance under the trough, which in turn guarantees high reliability and performance.

Derek Genoni says this unit was the first six metre Alpego power harrow/ seeder combination in Australia.

Ron had a front linkage

bar fabricated overnight to carry the seed hopper on the front of their New Holland T7040.

The unit was delivered just as everyone in the region was seeding, which was a little later than Ron would have liked but so far they have seeded 600 hectares of wheat and 300 hectares of lupins.

They have grown up to 1800 tonne of grain each year since their move to Cosgrove and this year they sold their excess



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wheat grain to buy in lupins, which accounts for the decision to plant lupins this time.

The Alpego combination is a radical change to the traditional systems used for seeding in the district, and with a very wet year many farmers have had to leave some areas untouched as tractors were getting bogged.

But with the Millers' Alpego sitting on the three point linkage they were able to seed the wettest areas without a hassle.

"In May we did the whole place with the six metre power harrows to level out the tractor tracks, trenches and where the header got bogged," Alan says.

"That's 200 hectares

that we wouldn't have got onto, and other patches that I didn't think I'd get over. It glided over the lot."

They say that the six metre unit has performed exceptionally well, but their New Holland T7040 struggles to lift it when turning at headlands. "It's just not big enough!"

Ron believes that if he replicates the yields from last year in the trial area he will have the unit paid off quickly.

They have used a Semeato drill for the past two seasons and will continue with it in drier years and on the smoother paddocks.

They are in the process of purchasing a further 655 acres in Katandra about ten kilometres away, to assist

with crop rotations.

In 1998 Ron trialled New Holland 4' x 3' large square baler at Athlone making 630 bales at the time and has stuck with New Holland tractors and balers since. He is enthusiastic about the brand.

"We ordered a New Holland 8260 tractor, a 10 large square baler and Tanco large square baler wrapper, and started with all three in 1999.

"We went from taking two months to do our work, to less than a week so we then did a bit of contracting."

The NH1010 makes 11,000 large square bales three years in a row.

"There's been days when I've done 500 bales", Ron says.

They did 6000 bales this year, of which 5000 were silage from mixed pasture. They now concentrate on their own silage, still looking after some neighbours but not as much as they have previously when they had 32 contracting customers.

A New Holland BB5 large square baler joined the fleet four years ago and it was trucked up to Cosgrove a couple of years ago with the idea of baling straw.

"I started at 8pm and finished at 8am, with 6 bales," Ron says.

They now have five New Holland tractors, the two balers and a CR9070 header with a 36' Honeybee front loader.

*Working Clothes* will focus on the performance of a new machine in a paddock each month. Send suggestions to Chris Dingle on 0417 735 001 or email [chris@springbankfarm.com.au](mailto:chris@springbankfarm.com.au)

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