



Connectivity now a reality for Cunnamulla graziers thanks to the On Farm Connectivity Program

The Australian Government's On Farm Connectivity Program is helping farmers like Barbara and Mark Mason, in far-west Queensland, take advantage of digital connectivity technologies by not only providing a rebate for the cost of eligible equipment, but also the installation and training to ensure it is tailored to their business needs.

The Mason's, who manage "Mirage Plains", more than 52,000 hectares south of Cunnamulla, have utilised the On Farm Connectivity Program to boost their water infrastructure capabilities in an area with poor connectivity.

"We have no mobile reception," Barbara explains.

So when looking to upgrade their water infrastructure, Barbara says their technological solutions had to address that. This saw the couple install remote water monitoring technology for their tanks and three rain gauges around the property. As well as, engaging the services of a supplier to connect all their irrigation pivots to Wi-Fi, by creating a Wi-Fi zone on the property totalling 240 hectares.

Barbara says the two water infrastructure upgrades have ensured they can be "a little bit more proactive, rather than reactive" in their approach to managing water efficiency, with data received in real-time via an app.

"Before the water monitoring equipment, you would have a helicopter or plane up mustering and they would say, 'it looks like you have a bit of a water problem out there', so it was a happenstance kind of thing, rather than a dedicated thing," she says.

Whereas with the centre pivots, Barbara says Mark can "now just turn it off on his phone" rather than discovering one has got bogged in the night when they come across it the next morning.

The broader safety implications of installing these connectivity solutions cannot be overstated, she says, in a business that employs four full-time labour units as well as, contract labourers.

"It has definitely made it safer," she says.

“Where the Wi-Fi is, it’s made a huge difference, because we don’t have any mobile service.” Explaining that anyone in the 240-hectare radius can now make calls over Wi-Fi, or if outside the area, pick up enough service to send a text message.

Barbara attributes the Australian Government’s On Farm Connectivity Program as the impetus to implementing the two connectivity solutions in the business. “They had been on my budget wish list for a couple of years, but were always pushed to the bottom as it wasn’t a necessity. But when you get a grant for it, it makes it accessible.”

“Splitting the grant in two”, to access the rebate – with up to \$30,000 available – Barbara says it allowed them to put in “some of the ‘have to’, and some of the ‘want to’ in their application.

“We wanted to put the rain gauges and tank monitoring system in, so we did that bit first and that was really easy,” she says. “And then Mark said, instead of just doing just that, let’s do the tricky stuff, which was the Wi-Fi and something we couldn’t just do, as you need a technical person to do that, so we split our rebate in two.”

A process, she explains as “super easy”. Praising both suppliers, as well as the program itself, for simplifying the application process from the farmer’s end.

Barbara says while the connectivity solutions on “Mirage Plains” are already paying dividends, it will also play a role in lowering their emissions through increased water efficiency, while assisting with the next technological upgrade on the property – the individual electronic identification (eID) of the property’s 10,000 Dorper sheep.

“Where we have put the Wi-Fi in, is also home to the sheeyards, so with this eID coming up we will be able to put in an autodraft with a scanner and run all the data directly through to the cloud. It will all just happen and will be amazing.”

