



## **On Farm Connectivity Program the impetus to adopt new and innovative technology**

For Northern Territory pastoralists, Trudi Oxley and Paul Thomson, the Australian Government's On Farm Connectivity Program has been the catalyst to "decide to invest" in a new and innovative AgTech solution for their expansive beef operation.

Running "Larrakeyah Station" in conjunction with lease country near Katherine, the couple are among the first in The Top End to integrate an automated and portable cattle weighing system, into their pastoral business spanning 45,000 hectares.

Advanced farm technology they see as having positive benefits for their business, made feasible through the On Farm Connectivity Program, which enables farmers to take advantage of connected machinery and sensor technology by offsetting some of the cost.

Running "1,500 breeders, with some trading and supplying live export with feeder cattle", Trudi says they decided to invest in the new technology to gain real-time data on the weight condition of their cattle. Information, she says, that is difficult to readily obtain given the scale of their enterprise and the associated costs of mustering, as well as the wet season which makes parts of the property impassable for months of the year.

Trudi says the need for this remote weighing system came to the fore last dry season when "out-of-season rain in June" spoilt their pasture and saw their cattle not make their weights.

"Had we had the cattle weighing unit, instead of having to do a \$5,000 or \$6,000 helicopter muster, with a 25 kilometre walk in and a 25 kilometre walk back, to be able to just drive in and leave the unit in the paddock and understand that their rate of weight loss was much worse than usual, we could have intervened much earlier and got a very different result five or six months later."

Instead, Trudi says, "we are finding out seven months later that the cattle have not met their target weight to go on a boat", which could see the business having to hold onto their cattle for another 12 months. A prospect, she says, that would have significant ramifications for their cashflow.

Trudi says their ability to capture live weights in real-time will help with planning as a means of early intervention. “Even if it as little as just understanding what it might be doing to your cashflow projections so you can act a little earlier if they are not meeting their weights, without incurring the costs of mustering to do test weighing.”

The cost and labour savings, of which, she says will be “huge”.

While they had a strong business case for procuring the technology, Trudi says the On Farm Connectivity Program was “really the thing that made us decide to invest”.

“Having the On Farm Connectivity Program made us go, ‘look the need is very high’ and by bringing the cost back to something that was a little bit more achievable and in budget – with conditions the way they are – that was the thing that got it over the line for us.

“We were in fairly unprecedented times in the cattle market last year, in terms of our cashflow, but it was a significant enough co-contribution towards the cost of the technology that we felt we could take a risk on the remainder. That it would be worthwhile.”

Encouraging other farmers to take up the On Farm Connectivity Program as a means of sourcing and adopting the right connectivity solutions for their business, Trudi says the 50% rebate also removes some of the risk of trialling new technology.

“Anyone that is in our situation of thinking that something could make a good change to their business can now access that technology without investing the full amount.”

