



## Media Release

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### **Innovation Grants awarded to water savvy agriculture ideas**

A new Grower Group Alliance (GGA) led program has awarded small grants of over \$22,000 split between three Western Australian farmers committed to improving water use and efficiency.

The 'Emerge Program' (the Program) initiative is funded and co-designed by Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), Australia's national science agency, through its Drought Resilience Mission.

The pilot round has brought together recipients, GGA, CSIRO, AgTech consultants and highly regarded entrepreneurs. The cohort has already explored research, industry, and customer challenges and solutions, as well as pathways to entry for growers into innovation.

The Program aims to develop ideas to help WA farmers and the agri-food sector adapt to hotter, more variable climates and build greater resilience in more frequent dry periods or droughts. The Program is designed to help producer recipients forge a pathway into the innovation ecosystem.

GGA CEO Rikki Foss said the Program was timely as growers across the state are already facing the challenges of greater climate variability.

"This program empowers those who are affected to bring their ideas to the forefront and be part of the solution for all WA growers," she said.

GGA's Innovation Manager Dr Jo Wisdom said she was thrilled with the diversity of projects being explored in the pilot round of the Program.

"There is elegance in simplicity," she said.

"Growers solving the problems that matter to them is the defining factor of this program."

Grantees Jay Elliott (Pinjarra), and Ben Johnston (Margaret River) have each received funding to develop a product to assist farmers with water supply in drier years in livestock and viticulture, respectively.

They are joined by Nyabing grower Ben Hoblely who is exploring a farming practice to support decision making and increase yield and quality in hotter, drier seasons.

Ms Elliott said the Program gave her and fellow recipients invaluable insights to mobilise their ideas.

"The Program is a good opportunity to see parts of the process and get assistance where you wouldn't normally have assistance," she said.

"Having access to people that understand the process is a huge advantage.



“It’s encouraging to know that the program will aid with the process, knowing where to go, how to go about speaking with groups who are doing the research, and understanding the process that’s usually kept under wraps,” she said.

Fellow recipient Ben Johnston said the first meeting was everything he had hoped for.

“As an innovator of ideas and products there can be a lot of obstacles when trying to get things off the ground” he said.

“It is hard to reckon with when you are inspired to solve problems, but the pathways needed to do this are unclear.

“The Program is an exciting opportunity to sit with others who have travelled the journey, understand the challenges, and are happy to share their experiences,” he said.

Fellow recipient Ben Hopley said the Program was a catalyst to change the status quo.

“Growers and agronomists who are more and more time-poor are opting for simpler solutions,” he said.

“Often times growers tend to recipe farm, prophylactically going about their applications.

“My agronomists and I have spoken about changing this for some time, but we have needed support in doing so.

“The Emerge Program gives us access to expertise we otherwise would not have, which is a huge motivation to put something in place.”

CSIRO Drought Resilience Mission lead, Dr Graham Bonnett, said the program was designed to attract innovators with ideas in the initial stages of development.

“The program aims to guide and mentor farmers as their ideas are progressed,” Dr Bonnett said.

“It’s pleasing to see the first recipients start the program and for CSIRO to be part of the mentoring process.”

Mentorship with relevant experts will commence in the coming weeks. Emerge innovators will then have the opportunity to provide feedback to CSIRO and GGA to inform the future rounds of the Program.

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## Contact

Kaelen Ruland | Communications Officer – Grower Group Alliance

kaelen.ruland@gga.org.au

0456 799 104