

HD Duo expanding farm horizons

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THERE is something extremely likeable about the self-deprecating country lads dressed in the same shirts and similar pants.

The pair break into broad grins as they stand up together to shake hands.

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Further conversation reveals the dry sense of humour they share as well as shirts.

The bit of mud splattered on their R.M. Williams boots doesn't hurt their appeal, either.

Then it's down to **business** for new partners, Aydan Morse, 30, and Robert Wade, 27, who represent the future of farming very well.

Young, articulate and energetic, they have not been afraid to **stake** a lot on the new technologies capable of revolutionising farming, if local farmers can afford to capitalise on it. Not that long ago, ageing Coastal farmers struggled with

succession planning as their sons did not want to take over unprofitable family farms.

Aydan and Robert can speak at length on the challenges that farmers face because of the higher cost of farming in Tasmania compared to other places.

The crippling freight factor continues to hurt our island state badly.

But despite these barriers, Aydan says there are still young people in agriculture in Tasmania and his partner nods in agreement.

"We've got confidence in the rural sector in Tasmania because everyone still has to eat," Rob says.

"At some stage it's got to turn.

"Farmers are very optimistic people to keep doing what they do - no one else would.

"You have to be passionate about it or you would do something else; there are more profitable things."

Like other farmers, Morse and Wade have put their money where their mouth is by investing in what is believed to be Tasmania's first specialist precision agriculture dealership at Latrobe - Sprayerbarn Tasmania. Robert says it's the new

technology dragging some young farmers back in the field.

"It's always been tough on the land and it's tougher now than it has ever been in a global marketplace where we have to be competitive, and the people we supply have to be efficient, in a country with very high costs," he says.

"The margins are so thin for farmers who are at the end of the price line, and all we can do is lower our costs and become more efficient using technology.

"You can also make life a lot easier on yourself now. In a physical sense you are not out there moving irrigators by hand or out in tractors with no cabs and it's a much more comfortable environment than it was.

"But you're still logging big hours, there's still a lot of pressure and a lot of guys have high debt."

Rob's belly laugh rings out when he quips that their farm operation is more a partnership with the bank than between him and his father, Nigel.

Aydan and Rob are from hardworking stock and decided it's going to be up to them to buck the trend in this region where people they went to school with feel like they are forced interstate to look for decent paying work.

Braddon has some of the highest youth unemployment figures in the country. Aydan says young people he went to school with reluctantly have gone off to the mines.

"I could rattle off 15 or 20 names of people my age who went to Western Australia and Queensland to work," he says.

"I think it's a short-term option. They don't really want to do it and if the opportunity came up they would come home tomorrow."

Aydan knows that feeling of having to chase work and leave behind family and friends.

Unlike Rob he didn't grow up on a farm but he spent every moment he could on his uncle's farm at Sheffield. On his dad's bush block at Parkham, they ran livestock.

"I was always up on the farm whenever I could," Aydan tells.

"I thought it was the bees knees driving tractors and showing sheep, I was loving it. I wanted to be a livestock agent when I left school."

He did a TAFE course at Burnie on the TAFE farm and got a job working as a farm hand at the Sheffield School Farm for two years.

After the job ended it wasn't easy to find work.

Aydan went with his wife, Alex, while she completed tertiary studies in music therapy in Queensland. Back in North-West Tassie again he worked in ag- dealerships and car dealerships where he met farmers including fourth generation Table Cape

farmer Robert Wade who was into the precision agriculture side.

"I bring the dealership experience and Rob has the practical knowledge. He can go and trial it and get right into the ins and outs," Aydan says.

Robert describes precision ag as the broad term, which goes from using satellite-based GPS systems in tractors through to anything using precision electronic equipment technology in agriculture.

Tech-savvy mainstream farmers who are trying to work sustainably and maximise profits spending only in areas that require it.

This practice allows the farmer to vary the rate of fertiliser across the paddock to the need identified by GPS-guided grid or zone sampling.

Fertiliser that would have been spread in areas that don't need it can be placed in areas that do, optimising its use.

Precision farming practices can reduce the amount of nutrients and crop inputs used while boosting yields and competitiveness through more efficiency.

"It's about rate control," says Rob.

"When you are driving the sprayer or spreader faster the product will go on at the right rate and if you slow down it will cut back.

"It's about doing it smarter and saving input costs."

According to Rob the technology is like second nature to young farmers.

Meantime older farmers like his father, Nigel, are still getting their heads around it.

"My father uses a computer now and we've just introduced him to Gumtree recently," Rob chuckles.

"We've just got him his first smartphone. But he learns quickly and it helps when you've got a son working in the area who is tech- savvy."

Rob Wade considers himself fortunate to have been raised on a farm with the freedom to run wild and get to watch his father make a success.

"I've been in a situation where I've never had to go looking for a job. I'm not qualified to comment on what that's like," Rob says seriously.

"Not everyone has probably had the same upbringing that we've had either - an upbringing that showed them how you can make it happen.

"I think if you have a choice you want to live here and enjoy the Tassie lifestyle but obviously there are fewer employment opportunities than there used to be.

"Our whole motto for ourselves is to: 'Go out there and make it happen'. "We've just got to."

The Wade farm is a number of properties at Table Cape overlooking jawdropping ocean views.

Rob and his two older sisters grew up on a mixed farm with cropping, sheep, cattle and deer.

"I was in the tractor with dad since I was four," Rob tells. "It's in my blood.

"I've seen my mother and father work extremely hard to get where they are and it's been through pure hard work.

"They started with one farm dad bought off his father.

"Dad is over 60 and still works 16-hour days.

"We're running about 800 acres and farming about 1100 acres.

"A normal day offers so much variety. You can be lambing or grading onions or spraying crops until 2 in the morning.

"I've been married since March (to Georgia, curator at the Burnie Regional Gallery) and this is where we want to raise a family.

"We believe there is opportunity here. We also believe you have got to work pretty hard for it and it's worth it."

THE good news is that ideal autumn weather conditions have a lot more Tasmanian farmers reporting a more positive outlook. Just this week Rabobank state manager Greg Bott said their latest confidence survey shows more than a third of Tasmanian

farmers expect conditions to improve over the coming year.

Mr Bott said it reflects what he is seeing on the ground, with farmers generally upbeat.

Confidence was well up among beef producers and dairy continues to be the star with Tasmania's total milk flow increasing 4.3 per cent to a record 790 million litres in the year to date.

About a third of farmers were planning to buy property, increase stock, upgrade machinery or invest in other on-farm capital expenditure. Robert said Tasmanians all needed to stick together more.

"If we work hard and support each other there are still opportunities but we've got to support Tassie more," he said. "It's too easy to buy out of China and we wonder why there are no jobs here."

The lads like Rob's father before them are going to have a crack. "We love it," they say in unison.

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