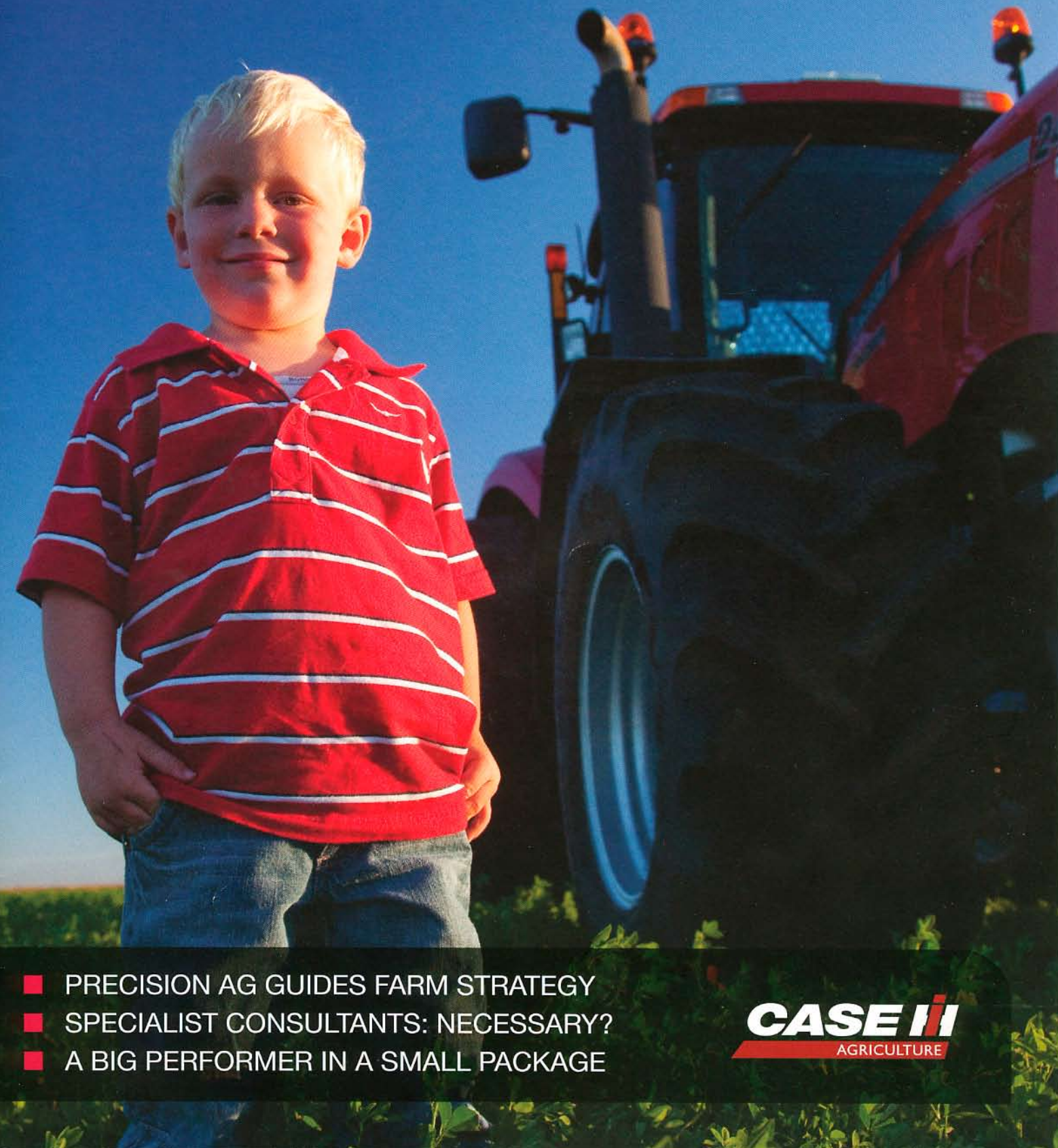


FARMforum

For Farmers & Contractors Who Demand More

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CASE IH
AGRICULTURE



Precision ag guides farm strategy

Paul Messina uses precision ag technology to drive productivity.

Paul and Katie Messina are at the forefront of Western Australia's precision agriculture movement. They plan their strategy carefully, take on board research and development findings, have built-up solid relationships with employees and suppliers, and are now reaping the rewards.

Paul and Katie farm 10,000 hectares at Tenindewa in the mid west of the state and crop around 9,000 hectares of cereal wheat, lupins and canola using techniques that even his Case IH dealer, Steve Purcher from Purcher International in Geraldton, finds innovative.

"Paul is always driving us in new directions. He is constantly researching new ideas and techniques, and planning his

equipment purchases and farm layouts to ensure he is operating as efficiently as possible," said Steve.

"Paul is always driving us in new directions"

"It was Paul's requirement for a loan GPS base station years ago that really opened our eyes to what could be done with the technology and now 95 per cent of my customers are going down the precision ag path," said Steve.

Paul explains how the Messinas took up precision agriculture.

"Back in 1995 my cousins and I decided that tramlining, where you reduce soil compaction and impact on paddocks by driving on the same fixed lines, was the way of

the future. For tramlining to work best, you have to pick a common size for your equipment centre spacings – we chose 36 metres, so we could work in multiples of that. In our longest paddocks we can now do three kilometre parallel runs before you have to turn around so you don't waste time cornering."

Paul has an impressive fleet of Case IH machines, last year alone buying three new Axial-Flow combines, two 7120s and an 8120, and two Steiger 535 model tractors. He also uses four Case IH AFS Pro 600 monitors, the portable monitors that can be used to record data and guide equipment, in his farm vehicles, even fitting a monitor in his ute to do soil analysis and boundary mapping.

Paul bought his first Case IH machine in the 1990s and has continually upgraded both harvesters and tractors – by 2009 he had bought more than 50 different machines through Purcher International. He believes that this type of loyalty is key to his success.

"I can't stress enough that loyalty is vital in this business – though sadly, it's a quality that has been lost during our generation. My decision to buy Case IH equipment isn't based purely on economics but on a sound business platform of service and support – we value the way our dealer Steve Purcher helps us in our endeavours."

"I can't stress enough that loyalty is vital in this business"

Paul and Katie are also supported by loyal employees such as Farm Manager David Paradella, and Senior Farmhand Calvin Skinner. Paul says that their dedication and readiness to take on new concepts is essential to the farm's success.

"David and Calvin are my friends as well as my employees. I believe if you develop a family environment they will always be there for you. We couldn't have done half the things we wanted to without their support."

Paul and Katie also need up to six seasonal employees during peak times. In the past, much time was spent explaining not only the mechanical side of the machines, but also how the software worked. But things have now changed and they believe that the Case IH AFS Pro 600 monitors are responsible for last year's increase in efficiency.

"During last year's harvest I tried to fully utilise what AFS Pro 600 software offers – employees could drive into any paddock and the software recognised which paddock

they were in and projected the harvesting tramlines ahead. The screen is very easy to use and even the seasonal employees were able to master the software quickly, enabling them to focus on the most important part of harvest – which is achieving a good sample."

Farm profitability also benefits from the data gathered by the AFS Pro 600 monitors.

"We have made massive gains in productivity since getting good data – we have four distinct soil types and now that we have reliable yield and soil data, we can do variable rate applications with all our machines to save on fertilisers and sprays."

"Seeding in 2010 is the next challenge for us as we will be deepbanding Flexi-N below the seed. The Pro 600 monitor will be controlling all three functions

– steering, granular and liquid fertiliser applications. This is all very new as other systems usually only drive two of the three, but achieving variable rate liquid in the mix is giving us even greater flexibility."

Paul studied accountancy after his stint at boarding school in Perth and, although he worked as a CPA for several years, his decision to come back to work on the family farm was consciously made.

"I think if you apply yourself to farming and plan properly, the rewards are certainly there – accountancy wasn't for me, but farming definitely is. As a CPA I might have a better understanding of the financial information than someone else, but any trade or profession that you have will help you in this job – all types of learning and experience is valuable and can give you an edge."



(From left) Calvin Skinner, Paul Messina and David Paradella make a tight team.



Positive message for young farmers

At 38 it might seem that Paul is himself a young farmer, but he would like to see the next generation of farmers, like his children Bayley 10, Blake 8 and Hayden 6, continuing to raise the bar with even more innovative techniques and methods.

"I worry that young farmers are only hearing gloom and doom – there will always be challenges and you always have to deal with the unknown – but if you maintain a positive outlook and plan well, the younger generation should be reassured that it will average out in the long-term."

"There's been a lot thrown at farmers in recent years – huge fluctuations with the Australian dollar and its effect on grain marketing and input costs, a mining boom that created a labour shortage, and even insect and pest plagues."

Despite these challenges, Paul is convinced there is much to look forward to and even greater gains to be made.

"Precision ag is one exciting area of development but I think there will always be new developments and new ideas – farming can deliver a great career for a young person who wants to take it seriously."

