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Drought Proofing your farm hot topic at Project Platypus AGM

The last thing you'd expect to hear from a New Zealand farmer is advice on how to drought proof your farm, but that's exactly what the 2010 South Island Farmer of The Year, Doug Avery will be doing at the Project Platypus AGM on Monday the 7th of October.

Doug Avery manages Bonavaree Farm with his family at Grassmere, South Marlborough. The farm has been owned by the Avery family since 1919. The family have received many accolades for their work adapting farm management systems in response to increasingly dry conditions. The success of this innovative work has attracted both national and international attention.

In 1998 successive droughts had Bonavaree Farm and the Avery family unsure of the future. These droughts forced Doug to look for alternatives. "If we hadn't had the severity of drought," Doug explains, "I would never have made the changes I have" Existing farming methods were degrading land and failing to pay the bills. New plants, animals, systems and thinking were employed in an effort to create better outcomes for both family and farm. Today the Avery family has a completely new experience of life as the farm grows from strength to strength.

Every year environmental projects are undertaken and financial performance soars. "No problem is solved from the same consciousness in which it was created." said Mr Avery. His farm is now a robust business that has doubled both its area and its production in the last decade. The key to change has been drought-proofing the property, not with an expensive irrigation system, but with lucerne. "The plant shows you don't have to drain a river to run a profitable farm" said Mr Avery.

Doug's farm at Grassmere in Marlborough is in one of the country's driest zones, with an annual average rainfall of just 500mm.

Doug has started taking his Lucerne management system, and the story of how he transformed his property, to other farmers globally. He enjoys passing on what he has learnt, but cautions that radical change takes courage.

"The change has to come from within. It's the same land and the same climate, but with different thinking applied" said Mr Avery.

Project Platypus Chair Leanne Jackman said the AGM offers more than just the election of office bearers, and that the Management Committee always endeavour to select a guest speaker that will be of interest to local farmers. Landcare group members as well as the general public are all welcome to attend the AGM. The AGM starts at 6.00pm, with light supper provided. To register your attendance, call Project Platypus on 5358 4410.

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Insert Caption 'Doug Avery on his New Zealand property beside a tree Lucerne plantation grown to support bumble bees which in turn pollinate Lucerne for seed'.

End of release

MEDIA CONTACT:

Project Platypus Event Coordinator Bronwyn Bant

0400 593 500 bronwyn@platypus.org.au

www.platypus.org.au