



2018 NATIONAL LANDCARE AWARDS

11 October
Brisbane Convention & Exhibition Centre

Nominee: Tom Robinson, SA

Category: Australian Government Innovation in Agriculture Land Management Award

Tom Robinson's innovative practices have significantly improved soil health and productivity on his 4,000-acre property in Hoyleton. The multi-species companion and cover crops he has planted are improving soil productivity and farm gate returns while reducing farm inputs. As well as his early experience increasing plant diversity, Tom's ability to modify machinery to meet farmer needs has hastened adoption of the dry-land farming system in his region.

Hoyleton's tillage-based farming system had changed to zero-till by 2003, and a stripper header was added in 2010. Adoption of Controlled Traffic Farming began in 2011, while machinery axle widths and working widths were fully synchronised in 2016.

Tom produces both winter and summer cover crops in South Australian dry-land rainfall country. A key factor in establishing diversified crops has been the ability to retain standing stubble, optimising seed placement and crop establishment by using a zero-till disc on 6-inch row spacings. Tom fitted a stripper front on his harvester to maximise the bulk of stubble left standing. This reduces soil temperature over summer, optimises crop establishment by reducing hair pinning, and increases soil moisture by reducing wind speed and evaporation.

Operational and fuel efficiency has been improved via Tom's three-metre permanent wheel tracks, which have reduced the area of paddock compacted by farming machinery. All these practices have increased water infiltration and efficiency.

The farm's ability to maintain soil cover and reduce soil compaction has reduced the risk of soil erosion and water runoff, and increased soil pore space and organic matter content. By increasing the number of weeks that plants are grown, Tom has increased soil fertility and reduced crop nutrient requirements. Increased plant diversity has increased the number of beneficial species, thereby reducing the need for pesticides and pollination services.

Tom has increased his understanding of land management practices through interacting with leading farmers and researchers on five trips to the USA and one to South Africa. He has presented at the No-Till Conference on the Plains in Kansas, the Colorado Conservation Tillage Association, and at the Conservation Agriculture Conference in Cape Town, South Africa. He also works closely with Tim Herrmann from the Department for Environment and Water, to improve his understanding of soil microbiology.

Tom has worked closely with the South Australian No-Till Farmers Association as board member and chair. He also works with Hart Field Site, the Crop Science Society, the Mid North High Rainfall Zone Group and No-Till Farming Victoria to promote the benefits from retaining crop residues, increasing plant diversity, and supporting soil biology. He also hosts third-year agriculture students from Adelaide University on the farm to share his knowledge.

This program is supported by Landcare Australia and the National Landcare Network, through funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Program.





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Landcare is a grassroots movement that harnesses individuals and groups to protect, restore and sustainably manage Australia's natural environment and its productivity. Groups that fall under the Landcare umbrella work on a diverse range of environmental projects and include farmers embracing sustainable farm management and any community group that partakes in volunteer environmental activities. To find out how you can become a Landcare volunteer and for full details on all 2018 National Landcare finalists, visit www.landcareaustralia.org.au

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Web Summary

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Pull-out quote:

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