

Bulla Burra Farms



Bulla Burra
Collaborative Farming
Australia

Champion:

John Gladigau and Robin Schaefer

Collaborating since:

2009

Industry:

Cropping

Location:

Northern Murray Mallee:
Loxton & Alawoona, South
Australia

Size:

10,000 hectares, with 4900ha
owned, 5100ha leased and
share-farmed

Average annual

rainfall: 275 millimetres,
175mm growing season

Soil types:

sand
over sandy loam, clay loam

Soil pH: 7



Bulla Burra Farms is a collaborative family farm formed in 2009 by the joining of two family farms owned by the Gladigau and Schaefer families in the Alawoona / Loxton region of South Australia. Since that time, it has expanded to be producing wheat, barley, canola, chickpeas, lupins, lentils, field peas and canola on 11,000 ha of owned, leased and share farmed land. John Gladigau is considered to be the king of collaboration and between 2016-2018 was a founding member of Farming Together's Industry Advisory Group.

Success Story: *The Benefits*

- A solid return on investment e.g., in average yield seasons, the collaborative business has returned an extra \$100K in gross margin gains.
- New economies of scale, particularly with improved machine efficiency. Access to most efficient and up-to-date machinery to improve farming practices.
- Improved farm management decisions based on a corporate structure that is designed for transparency and accountability.
- Flexibility in their farm operations and personal lives - they receive a commercial wage and four weeks annual leave -promoting work/life balance and family time.



The Catalyst for Change

- Increased cost of production.
- From his traditional 2000ha ordinary farm, John started questioning the possibilities for the future: how to create efficiencies and economies of scale.
- John considered collaboration as a way to ignite the future of sharing
- Through a Nuffield scholarship, John investigated collaborative business structures across the globe.
- Being close friends, John, Robin and their wives, decided to join farms.

The Opportunities

- To form a company structure: an operations company that leases the land owned by the two families, (and land owned by others) and purchases/owns its equipment.
- To develop a more profitable and sustainable cropping operation that preserves the integrity and heritage of two distinct family farms.

The Challenges

- Lack of knowledge and understanding about different business structures and opportunities for collaboration.
- Not having effective financial records to assist with future planning and predicting.
- Ineffective communication and interested members having different priorities.
- Thinking you have to be involved in all facets of business operation.

The Enablers

- Focus on the principles of collaboration, not just on the business model by being professional,

transparent and accountable. The model can then be adapted to suit the needs of each group.

- Start with a blank sheet of paper and ask your collaborators: what is the ideal farm? What does it look like?
- Create a culture where all employees are equally respected based on the quality of work they do, not what
- they do. At Bulla Burra, all employees are encouraged to consider that they "are all owners". Employees who are proud of their work and feel appreciated, will go above and beyond.
- Enable each person to focus on their strengths and therefore enact authentic collaboration and growth. Farmers can focus on growing and others can work other parts of the supply chain.

"Running your own farm you have to be a jack of all trades and a master of none, whereas concentrating on areas where you have the most skill and passion helps push our farm productivity and profitability forward."

Robin Schaefer



Hot tips!

- Start from the ground up: what do you want to achieve?
- Crunch the numbers first: what do you need to make a profitable business?

Future Looking

- Find collaborators: Talk to others in the region and or in your industry to locate those who share a similar vision and value with the goal to develop a collaborative business structure together?
- Explore the possibilities: get informed and get creative. What could the future of your business look like?
- Know your strength: Be confident in your passion and area/s of strength. Focus on bringing this expertise to the arrangement to improve efficiency.