

Australian farmers named Supreme winners in the irrigation excellence awards

Tasmanian farmers Rob and Eliza Tole of Cressy have been announced as the Supreme winners of the Zimmatic Trailblazer Sustainable Irrigation Awards.

(Australia) – 3 December 20 Tasmanian farmers Rob and Eliza Tole of Cressy have been announced as the Australian region and Supreme winners of the inaugural Zimmatic Trailblazer Sustainable Irrigation Awards.

Mr Tole is a third generation farmer on “Greenvale” a 560ha property with 350ha irrigated. He and his wife Eliza run an operation which includes lamb production and a cropping rotation of significant variety, including peas, seed potatoes, poppies, grass seed, clover seed, hemp, chicory and pasture.

The Zimmatic Trailblazer Sustainable Irrigation Awards, were created to celebrate excellence and recognise farmers leading the way in responsible irrigation, innovative water management and environmental stewardship. The Awards were open to irrigating farmers in Australia and New Zealand and were assessed on four key components:

- Sustainable irrigation management,
- Irrigation-driven improvements,
- Waterway protection; and
- Environmental stewardship

“We were surprised and honoured to win this award. There are so many farmers around who I look up to and seek advice from who could easily have won it, so for us to be named Supreme winners across Australia and New Zealand was very humbling. Mr Tole said.

“We also acknowledge the dedicated staff within our operations because without their commitment to achieving our goals, these results wouldn’t be possible and we certainly wouldn’t be where we are now.

Head judge for the Awards Ms. Keri Johnston noted that judges were looking for innovation in water management, steps taken to ensure sustainable water use on farm, and an obvious passion for protecting one of our most precious natural resources.

“The Tole’s exemplified all of these attributes both on their own farm and through their work supporting other irrigators. Being on the front foot in adopting new technology and ideas has been pivotal to their success.

Mr. James Craft of Zimmatic ANZ, says that the Awards acknowledge innovative farming operators and reward them for the vital role they play in the primary sector.

“We were extremely impressed by the calibre of applications for the Award and the excellence being practiced by these farmers who are focussed on improving their irrigation and water management,” he said.

“The Awards are an opportunity to help showcase the innovative farming operators who will influence future generations and play a role in strengthening Australia’s success story as global leaders in sustainable and profitable farming. We really look forward to the Awards becoming a regular feature of the agricultural calendar in Australia and New Zealand.

Having worked in various agricultural roles on broadacre, feedlot and intensive industries in Tasmania, WA and NZ and studying at agricultural college, Mr Tole returned to the family farm in 2000. With only a small amount of irrigation in place he started with a clean slate in terms of irrigation layout which has evolved over time to achieve the irrigation operation they have today.

When asked what he believed set him apart from the other finalists Mr Tole said it was a combination of things such as their focus on efficient drainage systems, application of variable rate irrigation and an enthusiasm for technology and innovation. Mr Tole runs his own irrigation contracting business installing surface drainage and leveling for other farmers and he also volunteers for a number of community and industry organisations.

Encouraging other irrigators to enter the Award in future Mr Tole said, “Even though I was hesitant at first myself, I would absolutely encourage other farmers to enter and give it a go as you learn so much about your own operation in the process of applying”

“It is also really important to get the message to urban communities and our customers, that irrigation farmers are managing the water and soil resources really well and this Award helps to do that.

“We also acknowledge Zimmatic for running the Trailblazer Award and the organisations who have supported them such as Precision Agriculture Pty Ltd, Ag Logic Pty Ltd and Society of Precision Agriculture Australia (SPAA) because without them the Award simply couldn’t happen.

We were pleasantly surprised by the prizes that were given to us, not only as the Award winner, but even for being named as finalists – the Award partners were very generous. As the overall winners we have won, among other things, an overseas trip for two to the USA, when international travel

is once again feasible”

In the New Zealand category of the Awards, Ted and Sue Rollinson of mid-Canterbury, NZ took out the honours having impressed judges with their complete conversion of their 380ha flood irrigation system to spray irrigation.

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For information about the Awards: www.irrigationtrailblazer.com

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