

AUSSIE FARMERS KNOW THEIR DIRT



Brussels sprouts farmer Scott Samwell has returned from an agricultural study tour around the world.

By Laura McCall

Mt Barker farmer Scott Samwell has returned from a global agricultural study tour with a fresh insight into sustainable agriculture.

Mr Samwell is the managing director of his family's business which farms predominately Brussels sprouts, but also cabbage, cauliflower and beef cattle, on properties across the Hills.

He was the recipient of the Nuffield Scholarship for Australian primary producers in 2010 which enabled him to travel to the US, the UK, Canada and throughout Europe over three separate trips last year.

He said the aim of his trips was to look into sustainable agriculture and to see what other Brussels sprout growers were doing globally.

"The idea was to see if there were new ideas or new concepts and to explore some of the alternative ways you could farm on a commercial spectrum that might be different from conventional," he said.

Although he had no "big revelation" while overseas, Mr Samwell said he came across a number of small things which reaffirmed that Australian farmers were on the right track towards a sustainable future.

He said the use of cover crops, where a crop such as oats is planted in the off-season to preserve the nutrients in the

soil, was an example of a popular practice in Australia being promoted in the US.

"We've been doing that ever since we've been farming here but it reinforced for me that it's critical for healthy soil," he said.

However, Mr Samwell said a visit to a farm in Pennsylvania opened his eyes to the use of mixed species cover crops.

Mimics nature

"With our cover crops we traditionally use a single species cover crop, whereas this expert in Pennsylvania used a mix of cover crops, for example beans with grass," he said.

"Thereby you're creating diversity, and that in a way mimics nature.

"We've started trialling that on our

farm." Mr Samwell said Australian farmers were also leading the way in soil testing.

"A lot of (overseas) farms didn't know what was going on in their soil," he said.

"They were testing every second or third year, whereas we test every year.

"And to be intimately aware of what's going on in the soil is essential for really good crop growth."

Mr Samwell said the trip was a "really good growth experience and also a great way to become aware of global agriculture".

"I think what the trip highlighted for me is that sustainable farming is critical for the human race," he said.

"We need to grow things in an effective way, not waste our resources."