# GRDC PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

**Legume Leaders – Mark Preston: Using faba beans to help with disease control**

[00:00:05] **Intro** This is a GRDC podcast.

[00:00:12] **Shannon Beattie** Wanting to incorporate more legumes into the rotation, West Cranbrook grower Mark Preston has found faba beans were suited to more soil types on his farm than what lupins had been in the past. He did a lot of research before starting to grow the new crop and has found they fit into the operation relatively seamlessly. Mark is a member of Stirlings to Coast Farmers and is a part of the cohort of Legume Leaders that has been established by the Grower Group Alliance with investment from GRDC. These leaders are sharing their insights on the various legume crops over a seven-part series throughout 2024. Hello there, I'm Shannon Beattie, and in this episode, Mark tells us his secrets to success when incorporating faba beans into the plan.

[00:00:53] **Mark Preston** We farm, yeah, west of Cranbrook. There's myself, my wife and my brother and his wife and my parents are still heavily involved in the farm as well. We grow canola, wheat, barley predominately, and we try and have somewhere in the 10 to 20 per cent legume rotated through our system as well, which helps with organic nitrogen and helps with rhizo and nematodes to help bridge the gap of diseases and things like that.

[00:01:21] **Shannon Beattie** You're going to be our Faba beans expert for this podcast series. So, can you tell me when it is you started growing or experimenting with faba beans on the farm?

[00:01:29] **Mark Preston** So we've only been growing faba beans for a few years, so we haven't been doing them for a long, long time. I've been growing lupins and things like that and peas years ago, and things like that for quite a while. But faba beans, we've only recently become involved in. But we got involved because we wanted to have a legume rotation in our system and found faba beans was a good fit to increase the amount legumes we had because not all soil types were suited for lupins. So, it gave us a lot better ability to put legumes over more of our paddocks.

[00:02:04] **Shannon Beattie** So a bit more flexibility, I guess, was the reasoning behind it. You've been growing them for a few years. How has that process been for you getting them integrated into the farming system?

[00:02:15] **Mark Preston** It has been a good process. Probably have to be very on to diseases and timeliness of spraying. If you see it, spray it as soon as you can, even if you're on another farm, sometimes you can't wait four or five days until you come back. You kind of need to spray them pretty timely. But other than that, the process of getting into them we found very easy and very adaptable to our farming system.

[00:02:37] **Shannon Beattie** Have you faced any challenges getting them involved? I know as much as we want to, you know better our farming systems, it never goes quite as smoothly as what we might like it to, and there's always a few hiccups along the way. So, have you, yeah, faced any major challenges in getting them into the system?

[00:02:52] **Mark Preston** No, we probably did a lot of research, had a lot of people kind of say they had trouble with, you know, seeding him through different types of seeders and things like that. And we probably did a bit of research and try to set ourselves up and just went slow. Had the seeding rates quite high and they're quite a big seed, so just took our time and did it. And we have actually had a pretty good run just because we did a bit of research and took a lot of advice from other growers and just found that that probably paid off a lot for us. So, we've actually had a really, really good run and not many hiccups with them.

[00:03:20] **Shannon Beattie** This whole concept of this Legume Leaders, is for people to be able to lean on you for advice. So, it's nice to hear that in getting them set up, you actually leant on other people. How is that process? I guess learning from other farmers that peer to peer learning, how important is that for you?

[00:03:35] **Mark Preston** Oh, very important between agronomists and to do with Stirlings to Coast, I'm a big part of that. And just other growers in the area that have grown them and things like that, that's a massive tool to have to lean on other people to support us getting into different systems that might not be, you know, you're familiar with and things like that in our system. So yeah, it's a massive part of it, I think.

[00:03:54] **Shannon Beattie** And Mark, was there anyone in particular that you might have relied on when you were getting started? Who really helped you out and explained things as you went?

[00:04:02] **Mark Preston** Yeah, our agronomist definitely has a lot to do with, you know, the planning of our business and things like that and has definitely guided us through, you know, adopting faba beans and things like that in quite a big way, which is Chris Robinson. He's done a great job for us in the past and still present.

[00:04:17] **Shannon Beattie** What benefits have you seen on-farm since you brought them in? Have they done what you wanted them to do?

[00:04:23] **Mark Preston** Yes. We grew them because we were happy with our lupins, but lupins wouldn't handle certain soil types and waterlogged kind of country and things like that. So probably things would get wet for parts of the year, and so they've really fitted increasing the amount of legumes that we can rotate. And where we can put our legumes through our system has been the main advantage, on top of the normal legume benefits, I guess, that we were already experiencing.

[00:04:48] **Shannon Beattie** And talk me through those legume benefits. I mean, particularly with the faba beans, but just in general on the farm, what do you find in terms of, you know, nitrogen fixation and then those other benefits that are the main reason people tend to grow their legumes?

[00:05:00] **Mark Preston** I guess the nitrogen benefits, it's great having, you know, either be able to put less on, but most time we put the same amount on and end up with a better yield for having that organic nitrogen in the soil. That's been a big thing for us. But then also the breaking the cycle of root diseases and things like that has also been a very good tool for us as well that we've seen, you know, big benefits through some of our paddocks that you just had a few question marks on performance, and it seems to really help that going forward. And that organic nitrogen seems to also help a little bit on wet years and things like that.

[00:05:32] **Shannon Beattie** We were talking about the challenges earlier, Mark, and you said that they really weren't any, which is fantastic to hear. Have there been any issues with marketing at all? I know that that is sometimes a reason why growers don't implement pulses and legumes on-farm. How have you found that marketing process?

[00:05:49] **Mark Preston** Probably difficult. We probably use some of them on our farm and sold them to local growers for stock feed and things like that, which is, I guess, more of a niche market. So that has been challenging. They are difficult to market. There are people looking at options to market them better. And you talk a lot of people, would you grow them? And a lot of the reason they're not is because of marketing and that kind of things, which makes it difficult. But I think more people would be into them if the markets are a bit more stable and the pricing could be a bit more stable as well.

[00:06:20] **Shannon Beattie** Would you say that marketing side of things is something that you would really like to see improved for legumes, pulses, but particularly faba beans?

[00:06:28] **Mark Preston** Yes, definitely. To increase our ability to sell them into different markets would definitely help stabilise the market and increase the amount of growers. I think that would be interested in getting into them and things like that.

[00:06:39] **Shannon Beattie** What advice would you give to other growers who are thinking of giving them a go? You've gone through this process relatively recently, so feel like you're in a good spot to be able to give us some advice. So yeah. What would you tell growers who are thinking of giving them a go but not sure where to start?

[00:06:53] **Mark Preston** I guess just get good advice. Whether it's your agronomist or other people in the area that have done it, and you rely on them reasonably heavily to help you through the process and, you know, just reach out to other people you heard doing it, is to me, very good advice.

[00:07:09] **Shannon Beattie** And are you happy for people to lean on you, Mark? That's the whole point of this Legume Leaders concept. So, can people pick up the phone and give you a call and pick your brain on faba beans?

[00:07:17] **Mark Preston** Yeah, I'm definitely happy for my knowledge to go elsewhere. Not saying it's the most in-depth compared to other people, but I'm definitely happy to help people through.

[00:07:25] **Shannon Beattie** And if you could give just one key piece of advice, something that growers might not think of automatically when it comes to growing faba beans, but something that you've learned that you wish you had of known a little bit earlier, what would that thing be?

[00:07:39] **Mark Preston** They are a finicky kind of crop, but you do need to just keep an eye on them and watch them go, mainly for the disease at certain times of the year and certain weather events, making sure you've got the chemical on before rain and things like that, watching the disease with them would be my biggest advice.

[00:07:54] **Shannon Beattie** Just touching on that disease factor for one moment. You did mention at the beginning that that was kind of a reason why you brought faba beans in, was to ease that disease pressure with, you know, your rhizo and things. Has that helped having that rotation there?

[00:08:07] **Mark Preston** I guess faba beans have its own category of mainly chocolate spot and things like that, which it's not affecting in any other crops. So that's something we've really had to watch an eye on. But it really does help disease pressure in other cereal crops as well. We've noticed massive improvements with that.

[00:08:21] **Shannon Beattie** Is anything else you want to add at all, Mark, that we haven't covered that you think might be important for other growers to know about growing faba beans.

[00:08:27] **Mark Preston** They do like a good season and that do survive well with waterlogged feet and things like that. So, they're definitely suited to wetter parts of the farms and things like that, which is definitely a benefit for where we are in the south west anyway.

[00:08:39] **Shannon Beattie** Well, thank you so much for joining me on the podcast and teaching all of our listeners of what you know about faba beans.

[00:08:46] **Mark Preston** Thanks very much.

[00:08:52] **Shannon Beattie** That was Cranbrook grower Mark Preston, who is a member of Stirlings to Coast Farmers talking about faba beans as part of the seven-part Legume Leaders series. This series is an extension of a GRDC investment titled 'Closing the Economic Yield Gap of Grain Legumes in a WA'. Bios on the Legume Leaders and their contact details can be found on the GGA website. More information on this topic can also be found in the description box of this podcast, or online at grdc.com.au. I'm Shannon Beattie and this has been a GRDC podcast. Thanks for listening.