# GRDC VIDEO or PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

**Legume Leaders – Scott Wandel: Growing and marketing lentils**

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

[00:00:12] **Shannon Beattie** When a new variety of lentil came out, that was a bit more boron tolerant, Scott Wandel thought it was time to give the legume a go again. Farming at Mount Ridley near Grass Patch in WA, Scott increased the hectares planted to lentils quickly after their introduction, with the crop now making up about 3000 hectares of his 10,000-hectare operation. Scott is a member of SEPWA, the South East Premium Wheatgrowers Association 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, Scott tells us about how a trip to Horsham in Victoria inspired him to give lentils a go.

[00:01:00] **Scott Wandel** We farm about 10,000 hectares north east of Esperance in Western Australia, 50kms east of Grass Patch, with my wife and I, and four kids.

[00:01:11] **Shannon Beattie** And what do you grow on the farm? What are your main crops?

[00:01:14] **Scott Wandel** Main crops are wheat, barley and lentils mainly now, lentils and field peas. So, a three year rotation, pretty much - wheat, barley, and then the legume or a legume kicks the system off and then wheat and barley follow up and then back into a legume.

[00:01:28] **Shannon Beattie** So when did you guys start growing lentils on the farm then? You are on the podcast to talk about lentils. When did you start growing them?

[00:01:36] **Scott Wandel** It must be nearly eight or nine years ago now. We thought we'd try them again. We have seen them tried around the district a little bits and pieces, but we thought we'd have another crack. A new variety came out of Victoria that was a bit more boron tolerant, so a bit more suitable to our soils. We have a lot of boron in our soils, so we went down that path and started off with 30 or 40 hectares and the next year was 200 hectares and the year after that was about 1500 hectares and now it's about 3000 hectares. It grew pretty quickly once we worked out how to go about it.

[00:02:10] **Shannon Beattie** What was the motivation for wanting to give them a go in the first place?

[00:02:15] **Scott Wandel** The motivation was I went to a trip to Victoria and went into Horsham, which is quite a good area for legumes, and they were getting $1000 a tonne, so it was worth having a crack compared to growing peas at $350, $400 a tonne. Even if we could get half of our pea yields, that would be equivalent gross value. So that's why we sort of had a crack at them and they've done pretty well.

[00:02:37] **Shannon Beattie** And you mentioned before that it went up pretty quickly in terms of hectares planted once you figured out what to do with them. Was that a bit of a learning curve when you first started growing them to figure out where to put them, when to put them, how to grow them?

[00:02:50] **Scott Wandel** Yeah, pretty much. So, we had 30 or 40 hectares in and over a bit of a range of soil types in the block. They were reasonable in some of our soil types, but they're really good on other types. So, we obviously made a few mistakes and a few weed management issues and stuff that we had to work out, but we didn't really know what we're doing. So, once we worked that out, we picked a paddock which we knew was pretty even and would be very suitable for them. So that was 200 hectares and got a bit of the management right, and I haven't looked back since really. Now we know that they're pretty suitable to probably 80 per cent of all our country. So, we'll take the good with the bad with that last 20 per cent sometimes.

[00:03:30] **Shannon Beattie** And what have been the benefits? Now that you do have them sort of up and running and, you know, perfectly fitting into the rotation. What have been the benefits of growing them?

[00:03:39] **Scott Wandel** Well, we've always been legumes, so we've always grown a lot of field peas and vetch. So, we already knew the benefits of legumes in the system. They drive the whole system for the wheat and barley and weed management. The thing with lentils was the value at the other end and the marketing ability of them. The market is pretty big for them. Anybody will buy them at the right price. So, the market's not really limited, if that makes sense. It's just determined on price. So, our weed management was probably slightly better in terms of grass control. Because they're such a short crop, the grass sits up a little bit more and we get a bit better target for it, compared to peas and spray topping a lot more effective. And probably harvestability too, is a little bit easier, a little bit faster with the headers.

[00:04:25] **Shannon Beattie** You mentioned marketing there and that you also grow peas. I'm assuming the marketing and just the selling of lentils is a fair bit easier than what it is with peas?

[00:04:36] **Scott Wandel** Well, it's never easy. That's the number one hurdle for a lot of legumes is the marketing side of things, but the market is very big. Most of it's in the subcontinent into India and Bangladesh, and there's two billion people live there, so they do consume them. It's just a question of price, really. You can always sell them. It's just a question of whether you're happy enough with selling at that price that's on the world market.

[00:05:00] **Shannon Beattie** What have been the issues that you've faced with them over the years, whether it was getting them established or harvesting them? Have there been any problems that you've had to kind of work your way through?

[00:05:11] **Scott Wandel** I would say the major issue we have is chemical carryover from the chemicals that we have been using. Lontrel was a big part of our system early on to control a lot of the flax leaf. So, we were putting that in broadleaf spray to sort of control the broadleaves in the weeds and the flax leaf over the following summer, and that carries over a fair bit. So, I reckon that was a big turning point in us, was actually dropping Lontrel out of the system. And it did actually force us to change our system a little bit, in the fact that we had to do a little bit more targeted summer spraying and stuff because of the flax leaf issue coming through. Once we realised that dropping Lontrel out, SUs we only used them occasionally and really strategically. So yeah, the chemical carry-over into lentils, that's the big hurdle for the agronomic side of things, and keeping that broadleaf weed control in at the same time, that's a hard hurdle to jump sometimes.

[00:06:06] **Shannon Beattie** How did you find, I guess, managing that from a herbicide management point of view and just getting the timing of your sprays right as you were trying to figure out what herbicides to use and what not to use?

[00:06:18] **Scott Wandel** It's just a bit of trial and error with the agro and having that always in the back of your mind not to use anything with carryover more than anything. So, we used a lot less stuff that has carryover. So, in our broadleaf control, in our cereals, we just changed the way we were doing that a little bit, in the fact that we're used to just chucking a little bit of SU just because it gives you a bit of residual carryover. But once we knew we had lentils in the system, we had to really think about that differently, try a few different things and just use different products, really. There's plenty on the market, it's just a matter of changing the way you used to do things.

[00:06:52] **Shannon Beattie** Do you have any advice that you would give to other growers who are thinking of giving lentils a go in terms of how to get them started, whether or not they're the right fit? Any tips that you can give?

[00:07:04] **Scott Wandel** The main tip would be that chemical carry over. I get the feeling, speaking to other growers saying they tried lentils, they're rubbish, they haven't sort of performed. And lentils, they're not a low pH country, so they want that five and a half plus pH. So that needs to be right, which rules out a fair bit of WA unfortunately. But now with farming practices and liming and that, there would be country that would be getting more suitable. Just speaking to other growers saying I have failed, and it might be going back to have a look at how much SUs you put on or you know, how much carryover you've got in your soil from chemicals. Because it is a bit of a mind change on how you actually do control broadleaf weeds the year prior, and even sometimes two years prior. Lontrel rule does get tied up on an existing stubble fair bit, so it can still come out two years later.

[00:07:56] **Shannon Beattie** And how about from a harvest point of view, are they easy enough to get off and get into the bin?

[00:08:01] **Scott Wandel** Yeah, you're still harvesting on the ground and flex fronts. Like any legume, they're not as easy as canola, but we have flex fronts on our headers, obviously for harvesting on the ground, and all the paddocks are rolled to push the rocks in the ground so that they're out the why. We did have to go and invest in aerials to actually help the harvest. That was a bit of a cost to go forward. Aerials actually help big time for harvesting lentils. If you go to Canada and speak to some of the people who actually use contractors all the time, that they won't let an existing header in without an aerial on to harvest their lentils. That was sort of where I got that train of thought. And yeah, they definitely make at least 100, if not 200 kilos difference in the front because we do get a fair few losses over our knife. Similar to lupins, I guess, they sort of sit on the knife and then sort of just don't keep moving, whereas that's where the aerials come in and they sort of just keep it moving off the knife and straight into the header front.

[00:09:00] **Shannon Beattie** And this Legume Leaders program that this podcast is all about. Do you think when it comes to growing legume crops, sort of learning from other growers and their experiences is really beneficial?

[00:09:12] **Scott Wandel** Most definitely, yeah. We're always trying new things and trying different things and speaking to other growers about how to do it. Legumes have been quite a big part in the Esperance district here. So, we have a little bit unique soils to the rest of West Australia. So there's been a fair bit of work done. There is a lot of faba beans grown, a lot of vetch grown for pastures and grain obviously too, and quite a bit of peas grown as a mainstay still. So, they're sort of constantly competing against canola for hectares really until you get down onto the sandplain proper, true sandplain country, whereas canola sort of just unbeatable in that realm, if that makes sense. But growers are always down there looking for legumes that can help them out with the nitrogen side of things and weed control.

[00:09:58] **Shannon Beattie** So in that case, if other growers around WA or particularly in that Esperance region, want to pick your brain about growing lentils, you're happy for them to get in touch and see what you've got to say.

[00:10:10] **Scott Wandel** Yeah, most definitely. They won't be the first one to call, I can guarantee you that. So, a few people have tried and yeah, I've done a fair bit with the vetch in the past and I know there's been a bit of a swing in the Great Southern for rather than wait for their clovers to come through, a lot of growers are just sowing vetch now as pastures. That sort of come about a little bit from the Esperance zone and pushing that side of things. So now everyone's sort of geared up with machinery and it's not that huge of a cost to go and scratch in a paddock of vetch or two before the even break in the season and just forget about it. And that seems to come through better than the clovers. And obviously the Clovers are still they're complementary. But yeah, for pastures and stuff like that, we're finding a lot of growers are just sowing vetch as their pasture crop now.

[00:10:54] **Shannon Beattie** Scott, thank you so much for coming onto the podcast and sharing your lentil wisdom with everyone.

[00:11:00] **Scott Wandel** No worries.

[00:11:06] **Shannon Beattie** That was Mount Ridley grower Scott Wandel, who is a member of SEPWA, talking about lentils as part of the seven-part Legume Leader series. This series is an extension of a GRDC investment titled “Closing the Economic Yield Gap of Grain Legumes in 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.