

A career in agriculture is a natural fit

By MOLLIE TRACEY

PROMOTING agriculture to young people drives Brett South, Beaumont, to be such a community-minded and industry-focused farmer.

Agriculture runs through the 27-year-old's veins and his background has exposed him to various facets of the industry from a young age.

Brett grew up on his family's farm at Jerramungup and his parents owned the local farm supplies store.

His grandparents also owned a shearing business.

So it seems only natural that Brett developed a passion for livestock.

"I have always had the drive for farming," Brett said.

"I went to school at the WA College of Agriculture, Narrogin, so I just knew that ag was part of my life."

After he graduated from high school in 2008, Brett undertook a traineeship with Elders as a livestock agent in the South West and he has always had the desire to broaden his horizons and try new things.

When he entered the workforce, Brett's exposure to sheep while growing up steered him to being more interested in cattle.

Then when the opportunity came about to work on a cattle station at Kununurra, he jumped at the opportunity.

For three years Brett relished life on Legune station, of about 300,000 hectares, working in the stock camps for one year and as head stockman for two.

Brett then moved to the Esperance region, where his fiancé Kiara Mickel is from.

He now farms with her parents, Lyndon and Nikki, on their family property.

"I love the area, it is a great farming town and the region has lots of unique farming communities," Brett said.

Since moving to Beaumont four years ago, he has injected himself into the community, being involved in local sporting teams, local grower group South East Premium Wheat Growers Association (SEPWA) and other community groups, including Secret Men's Business which provides the opportunity for men to get off the farm or out of the office and have a beer and yarn once a week.

Although the 2018 harvest had its pitfalls, Brett said he and his in-laws were still pleased with the result.

With no major rainfall events in early August and September, he said the 2018 season had a late start, finishing three to four weeks later than usual.

The farm received 222.8 millimetres of rain throughout the growing



season, with most falling in August and September.

They started seeding canola on April 19 and only received 58mm from April to July, with the farm's average growing season rainfall being 247mm.

Brett said they would still have harvested into January but they had a few good runs, which meant harvest wrapped up on December 30.

Each year the operation usually involves a total crop of about 5200ha with the 2018 season comprising 2212ha of wheat, 673ha of canola, 1265ha of barley, 700ha of peas and for the first time 100ha of lentils.

"We decided to try lentils for the first time because we have been trying to find another break crop," Brett said.

The farm is run on a five-year rotation with wheat for two years and then barley, canola and field peas each for one year.

"We have been trying to find something to suit our secluded rainfall so thought we would give lentils a go, but they didn't go very well because they were put in a paddock with boron (which lentils are highly sensitive to)," he said.

"We have also been growing a bit of vetch to try to get biomass back into the soil and stop wind erosion.

"We plan to plant vetch on lighter soil paddocks where we have trouble with frost and it's a good way to increase nitrogen into the soil."

Brett said harvest was a time to reflect on the year's efforts.

"I love watching the header going through the crop and watching the yield monitor - it's very exciting," he said.

"It's great to look back on all the achievements at harvest.

"It might be hard work with a lot of hours but you can make the most of it if you want to."

Brett believes the future of agriculture is with young people and this prompted him to get involved with AgConnectWA about five years ago and last year he was voted vice president.

"I applied to the committee because I wanted to help make changes and help out with the committee and I thought it would be a good way for me to make a difference



Beaumont farmer, Brett South, 27, is on a mission to expose more young people to agriculture and open their eyes to the opportunities that are available. As vice president of AgConnectWA and having formed a group for young people aligned with SEPWA, Brett is well on the way to achieving his cause.

in the industry," he said.

"It's young people who are going to help us change the industry."

By working with AgConnectWA, Brett hopes to increase support for young people wanting to be involved in agriculture, especially those who do not have a farming background or have limited exposure to the industry.

"I think it all starts with education - there needs to be more in the education system during or after school," he said.

"I want to get more people from outside of the industry more involved and understand agriculture better.

"I want to see if we can get involved with schools to help kids be exposed to and learn about agriculture because a lot of kids in the city don't really know where their food comes from and the processes involved.

"It would be great to teach children these things because that might help with some of the major issues that the industry is having now, such as live export.

"But it can be hard to find people to listen to us because people seem to have opinions about an industry that they don't really know the full story.

"Agriculture is the backbone of Australia and I don't think young people understand how important the industry is for the country.

"We all need to work together to keep it together and keep it going.

"How do we show people that farmers are trying to do good rather than bad things?"

Being part of AgConnectWA has

enabled Brett to network with industry professional and farmers from all areas of WA but he still wanted to further connect with people in his local region.

Last year he teamed up with SEPWA to form SEPWA YAG (Youth in Ag).

"I started this group for young people in the area to come together, talk about agriculture, go on field walks and to field days," Brett said.

"We already have a good, diverse member base so we get lots of ideas from people working in different roles in the industry."

Despite having been formed less than a year ago, SEPWA YAG has already had some exciting moves including 14 young agriculturalists travelling to Vietnam to understand the export grain supply chain.

They had a few days in Perth where they went to some local malting plants and a brewery before they went to Vietnam and toured Internalt's facilities.

"When we were at Internalt we saw Esperance grain in the malting process which was really cool," Brett said.

The group went to Interflour, where they learned what happens to the flour and the Heineken distillery to receive an understanding as to what varieties the market preferred.

"We did a report on the trip which we passed onto SEPWA and soon we will do a review of harvest and our time in Vietnam to help figure out what we can do better," Brett said.

While a major part of the group is

to network and attend and plan events in agriculture, Brett said it also provided an avenue for young people to have a stronger voice.

"At age 27, I suppose I am almost at the end of my young person years and it seems that some older people don't really take young people seriously until they are in their 30s," he said.

"I think it's assumed that we still have a lot to learn, which is fair enough, but when all of us young people get together to ask the same questions and agree with each other, I think we have the right to be heard and this group can help us do that.

"But it's also about being able to socialise and get off the farm because many young people find they don't often leave the farm which I think is really important for health and wellbeing.

"I play football and cricket which is my release from the farm but for those who don't like sports, they might not have a break from the farm or the opportunity to socialise."

There are plenty of young people in WA who share Brett's passion for agriculture but if they also have the same desire to promote the industry to children and young people, it seems likely that the industry is in good hands.

Brett's drive to better the industry is admirable and it will be exciting to see the impact that this young gun - despite him claiming he's approaching the end of his 'young years' - will have on WA agriculture.