

Assembly plant boosts Seed Terminator production

BUSINESS

The SA company behind a machine that pulverises weed seeds as grain crops are reaped has set up its own assembly plant in Adelaide's south to ramp up production ahead of this year's harvest.



Seed Terminator produced its first unit in 2016 and has been fine-tuning the product every season since.

Attached to the back of a harvester, there are now 253 of the 800kg units in operation in Australia and 23 in Europe and North America.

Inventor and Kangaroo Island farmer Dr Nick Berry, who was a winner at InDaily's 40 Under 40 Awards this month, founded the company with his uncle Mark Ashenden in 2016.

After initially relying on four contract assembly sites in SA, Seed Terminator appointed Paul Sandercock as CEO last year and set about establishing its own assembly plant.

Ashenden said some of its contract manufacturers were forced to shut down for periods during the coronavirus pandemic last year while others remained open as essential services, causing inconsistency in the assembly process that eventually stagnated production.

He said the ability to assemble and distribute its own units from the one facility in Lonsdale in recent months had streamlined production and would allow up to 200 Seed Terminator units to be produced this year.

"It's an investment for us to hold stock here but it's all under one roof and we've got a key," co-founder and executive director Ashenden said.

The Seed Terminator uses a multi-stage hammer mill to pulverise weed seeds, spreading the sawdust-like debris behind the header.

Tests by the University of Adelaide's Weed Science Research Group have shown a 96 to 100 per cent kill of ryegrass seeds using the machine.



Seed Terminator's Chris Batty works on a new unit in the company's new Lonsdale assembly plant.

Ashenden said supply issues during the coronavirus pandemic had forced it to forward plan its supply chain and source more Australian made parts.

“We ended up taking a punt because a lot of the items we have to order have lead times that blew out to three to seven months,” he said.

“Belts and gearboxes is really all that is coming from overseas now.

“The steel we're sourcing domestically and it's turned into core components off site in SA and we assemble it here.”

Seed Terminator produced its first unit from Lonsdale in April and has grown its workforce from 16 to 34 in the past 12 months.

This figure is dominated by R&D engineers and assembly and warehousing staff but the company is also expanding its sales force to ensure it is not slowed down by border restrictions.

Late last year it bedded down a model to put at least one Seed Terminator employee in WA, NSW and Victoria to ensure the company would have someone on the ground at all times even when interstate borders were shut.

About 20 per cent of sales are fitted to new harvesters with the remainder retrofitted to existing harvesters at farm machinery dealerships around Australia with a lead time of about two-months between taking the order and delivery.

Ashenden said having a sales force on the ground in key grain-producing states gave farmers and dealers greater confidence.

He said 20 units had already been shipped to Western Australia from early orders ahead of this season's harvest, which begins in October, and orders from other states were now also ramping up towards another record year.

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“In the first three months of this year we did half the number that we did in all of last year,” Ashenden said.

“Now the sales are starting to kick up for delivery as soon as possible whereas the forward planners have already got their machines.

“WA is the biggest market and it has the biggest potential for the product as well but NSW, Victoria and South Australia are all fairly similar in market size so for us to be located centrally in Adelaide is perfect for all of those markets and we've got no issues shipping east or west.”

