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### MEDIA RELEASE

An Australian-first initiative, which will put virtual 360-degree agriculture extension videos into the palm of farmers' hands, is being launched in the Mallee this week.

Titled '*Immersive Ag*' this exciting new technology project, being led by Mallee Sustainable Farming (MSF), combats the growing time pressures faced by Australian farmers who can no longer afford to travel hundreds of kilometres to attend on-site field day events.

Project partners providing expertise and funding to make this happen include Frontier Farming Systems and the Mallee Catchment Management Authority with funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Program.

MSF Chair Daniel Linklater said the program would take the Mallee's leading ag science innovations and insights to the world, enabling anyone to access them from their personal mobile device or computer.

"This is one of the most exciting projects we've delivered in our 22-year history," Mr Linklater says.

"It will save broadacre farmers across the Australian Mallee – and in fact all over Australia – a significant amount of time, money and energy and lead to best use of their time.

"There are so many great ways we can use technology to support farming extension now, but the beauty of this project is that we're supporting business outcomes for Mallee farmers by ensuring their precious daylight hours can be spent on their own farms.

"Over the past 10 years, we've seen a 65% drop in the number of local farmers able to attend on-site field days. Feedback directly from the farmers themselves has indicated that it's not the subject matter of the events keeping them away, but simply a matter of time and money.

"We wanted to support these farmers to be able to still gain valuable insights into our extension projects on things like seep management, soil salinity, sandy soil trials, deep ripping, water tables, cropping sustainability and more. Now with they can with *Immersive Ag* – anytime and anywhere."

The 360-degree moving videos have been uploaded to the world's leading video-sharing platform YouTube, making them simple to find and view on any device. And while this type of technology has already been used in overseas markets such as the US and Russia, it is the first time in Australia.

One of the drivers behind *Immersive Ag* was Frontier Farming Systems owner Michael Moodie, who said the initial concept came from seeing what the real estate industry was doing with virtual property tours.

"Technology innovation is an exciting and necessary part of the farming industry's future," Mr Moodie says.

"What we've been able to do here, is find a new way to present information to farmers which offers a rounded experience and suits they interact with social media, by having instant information at our fingertips.

"With the Immersive Ag concept, farmers can work through an interactive field day and simply click on the screen to pull up soil test results or crop monitoring data – all with a better visual understanding of the land they're being delivered on.

“It seems most other global industries are finding ways to get insightful training, education and vital business information delivered via online video and virtual technology, so we thought it was time we tested it ourselves – and the initial feedback has been overwhelmingly positive.”

Mr Moodie knew the virtual field day concept was a huge opportunity for Mallee farmers, so has partnered with MSF Program Manager Tanja Morgan to help lead it into 2020 and beyond.

Mrs Morgan, who has been working in farming extension programs for 20-plus years, said this was one of the best concepts she had seen and believed it could grow into a model that is used by other organisations nationally.

“Typically farmers want to see how things work up-close. They need to understand whether some of the science on soil management can work for their properties, and often a written report and photos simply aren’t enough.

“Historically, farmers also love to see machinery in action at field days. They want to kick the tyres, look at how it’s put together and consider if it’s right for their farming systems.

“*Immersive Ag’s* virtual and 360-degree navigation tools allow them to get underneath and up-close to different parts of the machinery while it’s in action. What farmers have loved so far is that you get vision of machines working from angles that you would even struggle to see walking alongside it in a paddock.

“This early feedback has given us great encouragement to keep producing more videos and expand the virtual field days and trial sites. Further, industry leaders have recognised the potential of this concept and so our next step is to look at how we grow it moving forward.

“The opportunities are endless, and this is just the beginning for virtual field days.”

Mrs Morgan said MSF was currently delivering about 30 projects, many of which would contribute to the growing library of videos, many to be filmed using virtual technology and posted online.

Further, with extra investment MSF is hoping to attract in the coming months, she expects the sophistication will be improved, with better cameras and technology advancing every year.

Anyone can view the library of virtual videos online now, by visiting the Mallee Sustainable Farming website at [www.msfp.org.au](http://www.msfp.org.au). Plus, you can also [subscribe to MSF’s YouTube Channel](#) to get direct alerts as soon as new videos are uploaded and available to view.

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