A LEADING role in feeding the world of the future is quickly becoming a reality for many Australian farmers. With the current world population now exceeding 6.7 billion and growing by 6 million a month, food production has become an ever-increasing issue. Kate and Dr Chris Dorahy are determined to ensure that their family farm is taking all the necessary steps to be a part of the solution.

Kate and Chris, along with young son Harry, returned to the Western District two years ago. Kate grew up on the Nareen property, Cloven Hills, which had been purchased by Kate’s parents, John and Mary Porter, in 1977. John and Mary have farmed since the 60s, with John interested in sheep right from the start.

The passion and the experience that Kate and Chris have for, and in, agriculture is a revelation and the couple have the capacity, drive and determination to implement future farming strategies. Professor Penny D Sackett, Chief Scientist for Australia, has written that the need to protect agricultural land and to increase food production has become critical. Sustainability’s biggest threat is loss of bio-diversity, dry land salinity, acid soil and pests and weeds. Farmers, scientists and agricultural authorities are working together on appropriate ways to deal with them.

The unique situation for Kate and Chris is that between them they actually cover nearly all these bases. In addition to the fact that they are obviously both farmers, Chris is also a soil scientist and Kate is an honours student in agricultural economics – it’s a rare combination.

In Sydney, Kate worked for Syngenta, a global company, with a purpose of bringing plant potential to life through science, global reach and commitment to customers. They help to increase crop productivity, protect the environment and improve health and quality of life.

“I was looking at new businesses. I was reviewing what was happening in other countries and seeing what was relevant and then setting it up in Australia. Syngenta was looking for specialist businesses that would complement their other businesses,” Kate said.

“Ultimately this is what we are passionate about – looking at how Australia fits into the rest of the world. We think that Australia is going to have a big role in feeding the world in the future. The challenge is developing and managing risk to ensure we are sustainable.

“Chris is more about the science, looking at sustainability whether it is on farm or off,” she said.

Chris managed a research centre in NSW for the DPI called the Centre for Recycled Organics in Agriculture and after setting up at Cloven Hills, started an off-farm consultancy business called Ableblue.
Feeding the future world

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"This off-farm work is managing consultancy research projects, both in Australia and abroad, looking at sustainable nutrient management in a different context. We are very versatile and have similar issues facing farmers in other countries, but are comparable. We believe it's often not what the farmer does that is important, but how they do it. "They've got tsunamis which are very good at this and obviously much better off than they are, but it's the communication up and down the supply chain to improve the value for money. "So specifically what this means in a different context..." Chris said.

Kate said, "A couple of the projects that we do, "We have been working on overseas have similar issues (as we face) but in different context. The farmer is faced with a lack of capital. We are helping the farmer work through those processes and priorities," Chris said. "One of the projects is looking at the rehabilitation of affected soils in the Philippines. "They've got tsunamis and typhoons and we have droughts. We need to help them think through what the soil needs and what the plants need and match the inputs accordingly. Kate and Chris are running a prime lamb commercial business; they are focussing on lambs but also boosting rams for sustainable lamb production to result in a self-replacing flock. "My parents for the last 33 years have run a prime lamb commercial business and we are fortunate because dad was excellent at breeding cross bred sheep and had very good foresight in what was needed to breed profitable ewes and lambs. That has been the focus – cross-bred sheep and we are basically developing this by adding more measurement and always thinking of how we can build more flexibility to the farming system. This we hope will enable us to continually improve, understand and be confident in our product enabling us to be more discriminating and make better decisions to ride out the ups and downs in markets and climate. "When I left school, I aimed to look at all other industries and see what they did well and think about how we could develop our own business. One thing we still learning is, no matter what business, if we are able to sustain ourselves not only have to create value for ourselves but for our customers and their customer and so on, and this will always be changing. That is why we believe in planning, measuring, monitoring and developing key things where practical financial gains can be made. By being able to do this it also helps you understand and gets you thinking about ways you could change things if seasons, markets and customers require. We believe it’s not recognized that farmers are very good at this and are intuitively doing it all the time. The challenge is to set up a system and down the supply chain to improve the value for money. "So specifically what this means in a different context..." Chris said. Kate said, "We now want to use technology to measure and assist us to target the right inputs with this last year. "We've got tsunamis which are very good at this and obviously much better off than they are, but it's the communication up and down the supply chain to improve the value for money. "So specifically what this means in a different context..." Chris said.