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## From new tech to old medicine, Forthside Field Day is ready for return

In the Forthside Research Facility's more than 50-year history, 2020 was the first year a Field Day was not held there since the 1960s.

On November 3, the Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture (TIA) will once again open the gates to Forthside and welcome guests to a bumper day on the farm.

The Forthside Research Facility, based within the major vegetable cropping region of Tasmania's North-West Coast, is an invaluable site for a diverse range of vegetable and allied crop research trials.

Forthside is home to a unique research trial site which has been assessing the impact of rotational cropping systems and winter cover crops on soil health, crop productivity and pest, disease and weed management for more than 15 years.

And, along with the Elliott Dairy Research Facility, Forthside will receive a boost via a \$7.4 million investment from a partnership between the University of Tasmania and the State Government.

The investment will see both Elliott and Forthside converted to Sustainable, Manageable, Accessible Rural Technology (SMART) farms, that will offer researchers, students, growers, and the community a place to work together to solve real-world problems.

The SMART farming technology will be featured on the day, along with presentations on hemp as a forage crop; investigation of herbs used in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) for potential as new crops; and presentations from industry partners, such as FarmPulse, BitWise Agronomy, Simplot, Bayer and Sumich. Additionally, there will be a panel discussion on the practical implementation of on-farm technology.

Dr Marcus Hardie, research fellow in soil science at TIA, who will join the panel discussion, has been working with FarmPulse on the installation of technology at both of TIA's research facilities and said the project is driven by safety.

"Statistically farms are the most dangerous workplaces in Australia," Marcus said.

"And farming is the least digitised locally. Through the SMART tech on-farm, we are providing a situation where farmers can explore options themselves.

"Farmers need a space to kick the tyres and ask themselves: What are they using? What is important? Does it always work? How much is it costing? Has it saved enough labour costs to warrant investment?"

Dr Beth Penrose, a lecturer in pasture science at TIA, will present on her two-year research project exploring hemp as a forage crop - that has used Forthside as a trial site. While Professor Dugald Close, TIA's associate director (global), will discuss herbs used in TCM with potential as new crops.

"This is an exciting opportunity to develop a potential new export sector and further diversify Tasmania's agricultural sector," Dugald said.

"Our two main objectives are to identify herb crops of interest to Chinese markets that match Tasmania's growing conditions, and to develop agronomic production systems and post-harvest processing approaches and techniques for product development."

The information sessions and panel discussion will be followed by lunch and networking, then guests can join tours of the farms

The family friendly day presents an opportunity for industry members to view the research trials, discuss with researchers and industry innovators, and discover the smart technology in use on the farm.

**The Forthside Field Day is on Wednesday, November 3, from 10am-3pm. Register for a ticket here: <https://www.utas.edu.au/tia/events/items/forthside-field-day>**

TIA is a joint venture of the University of Tasmania and the Tasmanian Government.

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