GM ‘to help supply dryland balance’

WITH 1821ha of sorghum planted between October and mid-December at Billa Billa station, 40km north of Goondiwindi, farmer Tom Woods (pictured) says science and technology have played a vital role in developing dryland crop production.

Chemicals, fertilisers, no-till and double-skip techniques have increased dryland crop productivity but in an age of climate change and lacking grain supplies, genetically modified grain varieties will help find a balance between supply and demand, he says.

Mr Woods, who has practised no-till management for 24 years and has double skipped summer crops for 15 years, says genetically modified grain varieties will take production to a higher, sustainable level in the future as ethanol and biofuel production continues to expand around the world.

“A lot of production is going into ethanol and it’s bitten into the pig and cattle-feeding industries,” Mr Woods says.

“I would hate to see the feedlot industry decimated because it’s a vital part of our cattle and pig industries and marketing of Australian products around the world.

“Genetically modified varieties produce more and that way we can all do better.”

University of Queensland biology professor Jose Botella says genetically modified grain varieties can be used to increase sugar and starch content in the grain which makes it apt for biofuels and ethanol.

“The main problem with the biofuels industry is that prices are going up as more grain is used for biofuels and there is less for food,” Prof Botella says.

“Using biotechnology to produce more biofuels means there is more room to grow grain for human and animal consumption.”

Mr Woods has forward sold 50 percent of the sorghum crop from $250/tonne to $325/tonne.

“I think it’s fantastic grain is making money but fertiliser, machinery and chemicals are all going up too,” Mr Woods says, “We’re all competing for certain commodities and resources.”

Since the mid-1990s the Woods family has gone from a mixed livestock/grain farm to a sole cropping operation growing principally wheat, barley, chickpeas and sorghum.

Mr Woods and his wife Bronwyn have four sons – Angus who manages Billa Billa station, and Andrew, Bruce and Tom junior who manage various enterprises within Woods Grain situated in Goondiwindi. – Story and picture: MARTIN VOLZ.