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**MEDIA RELEASE**

**World Record Holder Reaps Crop, Soil, And Technology Gains**

Record-setting Canterbury arable farmer Eric Watson is seldom happier than in a tractor or combine harvester, especially when he’s chasing new productivity benchmarks.

Eric, from Wakanui near Ashburton, has broken his own Guinness World Record for the highest average wheat yield of 17.398 tonnes per hectare. Working with his wife Maxine, he set the previous record of 16.791 tonnes with feed wheat in 2017. Irrigated wheat yields in New Zealand average about 12 tonnes per hectare.

Eric defines ‘precision farming’ in New Zealand in many ways, particularly in his use of tractor and combine harvest technology. Productivity gains of a few percent across multiple facets of his cropping business add up to the kind of success he has enjoyed with the Guinness records.

Through a combination of operator control and advanced software, like Case IH’s AFS Harvest Command™ system, he leaves little to waste on the deep soils of his coastal property.

“That new automation; it’s quicker than the human. We always think we can beat computers, but you can’t beat that. The command system knows what to do before you even see it on the screen,” he says.

Patented sensors monitor air pressure on the sieves, warning of impending losses and allowing the combine to make adjustments before any grain-loss. “It does work extremely well – it just takes a bit of getting used to and you get a bit bored because you don’t have to do much. You run auto settings and you’ve just got to sit there.”

Every bit of technology plays a part. As a Case IH customer, Eric says it’s a sizeable step ahead on one of his original machines, an old International 1460. A favourite feature in his Case IH Axial-Flow® 250 Series combine is the CVT rotor drive technology that increases efficiency and reduces the chance of crop blockage. When you spend as much time in the seat as Eric, it’s a pleasure not having to get out to unblock it, he says.

Like many arable farmers, Eric uses tracks to maintain soil quality. The use of tracked equipment is not a novel feature but it’s still a good one. “I’ve stuck with tracks for years and I wouldn’t go away from them for cultivation because you get less compaction and you also get less slip.

With the Case IH Quadtrac you might run at 1% but most of the time you’re running at zero. If you’re running a wheeled tractor at 10%, if you’ve run 10 hours then you’ve lost an hour. And you’re also damaging soil structure by smearing it a bit.” Not to mention fuel-burn. “If you’re using 80 litres of fuel an hour and you’ve to cultivate for an extra hour, well, that’s a lot of money.”

All of those efficiency gains add up, right through to the axial flow mechanism in the harvester, which reduces grain-damage. “It’s minute or very small percentages, like with the low cracked grain out of a rotary compared to a conventional machine. The rotary, for our range of crops is far better than the conventional, I reckon.”

Eric enjoys a productivity gain, no matter where it comes from. For his recent wheat record he switched wheat variety and went from solid urea to liquid form to improve spreading.

“That played a big part as well, especially to get that extra 600 kilograms a hectare. When you’re getting up to those high yield figures it’s hard to get a big figure like that.” Ever-modest, Eric quietly admits to being a bit blown away by his latest yield gain. “But you’re always monitoring and trying a few new things, including a different crop as well.”

For the record, his approach to chasing the latest Guinness record was pretty much the same as in 2017. “It was the same field as last time so it’s a pretty good paddock,” he says with a smile.

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**Images:**

1. Eric Watson cab-1.jpg
2. Eric Watson Graeme Moore-1.jpg *Caption: Graeme Moore, Cochranes of Canterbury, Ashburton (left) and Eric Watson*