After attending a Soil Biology workshop, central west farmer Malcolm Crockett was keen to try Biological farming. “We could see that conventional agriculture wasn’t working- more fertilisers, chemicals and pests for the same or less yields. After doing some research on biological approaches I decided to trial some products from YLAD on our oats comparing the biological products with our conventional regime over a number of different paddocks and soil types.”We sowed Blackbutt oats at 70 kg/ha and just standard starter fertilizer at 75 kg/ha. To this we added the biological products Nutri-tech Soluble Humates mixed in with the fertilizer, seed dressings of Nutri-tech Bio-N and Bio-P with liquid kelp just prior to sowing. Some site just had the humates, others all four applied.

“Even the local ‘sceptics’ were impressed by the healthy looking growth on the biological blocks.” In a block where we had major problems from mite damage the previous season and would have once sprayed with insecticides before we saw the futility of that practice, the only pressure was on the first two rows at the edge of the paddock. Further in, there was no sign of activity and the crop grew beautifully. We didn’t even need to spray for broadleafs.

We also trialled some foliar sprays using Twin N microbes and Nutri-tech Triple Ten. The triple ten was applied to a grazed crop that had run out of puff. The effect on that was quite interesting- it really evened up the crop. The Twin-N effects were not seen until late in the growing season and produced one of the best results we’ve had out of a ‘problem’ paddock. It yielded the same as a lucerne flat we broken up and sowed conventionally. I really like being able to put out a product that won’t cause problems like urea can if things don’t go right.

“In all circumstances there was a visible, significant difference compared to the control. Where the products were used together in a program the results were even better.” Whilst it was just a rough paddock trial, I estimate the harvest results overall showed an improvement in yield of between 30-40% over the control. I was more than pleased to be getting an extra 0.8 – 1t/ha in a year when conventional fertilizer prices went through the roof, making it a profitable way to increase yields.

The real bonus was the effects of the microbes on the pasture cropped land. The native grasses looked green and lush, so we were fattening lambs on stubble and red grass. The lambs only ate the grass on the control block (it looked stalky and yellow) after they had eaten out the biological side of the paddock.

“I had to see it work on my farm, exceeding my expectations of what could be achieved using biological products. It was a great result and we will be extending the program over the farm’s crops and pastures in the future.”