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GROUP NEWSPAPERS

Farmer

RIVERLAND. MALLEE. LOWER NORTH

SUMMER 2021



Glenlea Park goes from strength to strength

Page 34

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Welcome to this edition of Farmer.

WELCOME to the latest edition of the Taylor Group's ever-popular Farmer publication.

Once again our team has provided extensive coverage of all the important primary industries throughout the Riverland, Mallee and Lower North areas to showcase how diverse, and economically vital, our regions are.

As we near the end of the year, it's fair to say 2021 has been full of challenges for South Australian primary producers.

The threat of ongoing fruit fly outbreaks carried over from the previous summer, plus Covid-19, continued to present hurdles in terms of labour shortages and the transportation of produce overseas.

This was all combined with continual below-average rainfall throughout spring, however, October and November changed that trend, with two shock hailstorms that devastated key growing and farming areas.

Once again we have used this publication to showcase the way our agriculturalists are persevering through these obstacles, beginning with the still-growing almond industry, which has again seen record-breaking levels of international exports in the 2021-22 year.

We also take a look at a family farm that has transitioned from grapes to a unique crop, and a Gawler-based father and son duo who are supplying more than 150 varieties of native

plants around the state.

Also included in this edition is a recap of the 2021 Brown's Well Crop Competition, which this year marked its 50th anniversary, and another instalment of the detailed Q and A with numerous industry figureheads.

As always, local farmers and growers can find details about all the new technological and mechanical benefits that Riverland, Mallee and Lower North agricultural businesses strive to bring to their customers.

Please enjoy this edition of Farmer and be assured the publication will continue to reach new heights in 2022.

The Farmer team

INSIDE



7 Little to mull over in the move to mulberries



13 Every plant has a story



21 Permedah going nuts for pistachios



34 Industry expert update



38 Our farmers of the future



44 Ag News



Farmer

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Caption

Peter Wallis, of Glenlea Park, is enjoying success this year, selling a number of high-priced rams.

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Publisher

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GROUP NEWSPAPERS



World goes nuts for our almonds

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY JOSH BRINE

THE demand for one of the Riverland's biggest exports continues to grow, as markets in Asia expand and Californian growers deal with the impacts of drought.

After almond exports hit record highs in the previous marketing year, 2021-22 has started strong with exports for each of the first six months so far exceeding their 2020-21 marks, according to the Almond Board of Australia's August export position report.

China continues to rank as the largest export market for Australian almonds, with a 65 per cent increase in tonnage from the same period last year.

Almond Board of Australia CEO Tim Jackson said the industry was currently working through its own "China Plus program", with Australian growers expanding to supply a wide range of markets around the globe.

"China continues to be a lucrative market for the industry and fetches handsome returns due to the free trade agreement and the ongoing tariff measures on Californian almonds," he said.

"The uncertainty around what lies ahead with supplying this market has prompted Australian exporters to spread their risk and focus on a wide range of other markets to reduce any perceived reliance on one key market.

"Imports to India are up 94 per cent on the same time last year and reflect the potential of the

world's biggest almond market.

"Almonds have been promoted as immunity boosters in India during the pandemic and sales of almonds have been at record levels."

Exports to other emerging markets have also increased significantly, with exports to Vietnam doubling to almost 4500 tonnes, and exports to the United Arab Emirates increasing fourfold to almost 2000 tonnes.

Meanwhile, the European market has shrunk slightly, with a 10 per cent dip in exports so far in the 2021-22 marketing year.

Overall, Mr Jackson said worldwide demand for almonds, a crop that contributes more than \$210m to the Riverland economy, was at "historically high levels".

"The world has consumed more almonds in the past 12 months than ever before," he said.

"The plant-based foods phenomenon is reaching every corner of the globe and health benefits of almonds is driving demand."

Despite the continued growth, Mr Jackson said the industry did face challenges with exporting.



CONTINUED ON PAGE 6



Almonds have been promoted as immunity boosters in India during the pandemic and sales of almonds have been at record levels.

2ND AUSTRALIA IS THE EQUAL LARGEST PRODUCER OF ALMONDS IN THE WORLD

"All exporters are experiencing hold-ups in shipments to all markets due to delays in shipping," he said.

"This will be an ongoing issue for the industry as it continues to grow and needs to export more product."

The local almond industry stands to benefit from challenges experienced by growers in California – by far the largest almond-growing region in the world – who faced a lack of rainfall, record high temperatures and low water allocations.

"(Australian) exporters will continue to ship as much as possible and could have kernel in size ranges that are not readily available from the large drought-impacted Californian crop," Mr Jackson said.

"The Australian almond industry has gone from a niche industry that has pitched itself as a counter seasonal supplier to California to a much larger and more credible alternative supply source of almonds to the globe all year round.

"We supply many of the same varieties as the Californian industry and have steadily won the confidence of buyers over the world for our quality and availability."

Mr Jackson said almond prices had undergone a period of volatility and were being impacted by difficulties with shipping internationally.

"(Prices) recovered after hitting the lowest point in more than 10 years but have just softened again as buying activity weakened and shipping availability

made prompt shipments impossible for both Australia and California," he said.

"Shipping will play a key role in market sentiment given the delays in booking a ship and just how long it is taking to deliver product.

"Key selling periods in key markets could be missed unless long-term commitments are made by buyers.

"Weather conditions have also played a large part in market sentiment as California endures ongoing drought conditions and reduced crop expectations.

"Heavy rain in California will feed into a buyer narrative of increased optimism around water availability, but too much rain might be just as bad as not enough in the short term.

"The value of the Australian dollar will also play its part on returns, as many financial pundits had predicted the dollar to be above 80c by this time of year.

"Overall, after a very bleak outlook in the first half of the Australian season, the global supply-demand balance has started to swing back in favour of growers, and returns in 2022 are looking like they could return to long-term averages after a period of potential volatility."



Little to mull over in the move to mulberries

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY ELYSE ARMANINI

FULL STORY PAGES 8-9

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“We will end up, hopefully, producing 50 tonnes of fruit here on our property, and I would hate to handpick that.”

With lush, green trees as far as the eye can see, and dark, sweet, zingy berries that grow undoubtably well in the harsh Riverland climate, there was little to mull over when a local grower changed from wine grapes to mulberries seven years ago.

For Peter Szabo (pictured), viticulturalist by trade and owner of Nockburra Creek Farm, cuttings from one backyard mulberry tree on his Kingston-On-Murray property was all it took to change the entirety of his harvesting business.

In the family's effort to fund a holiday to Queensland by selling mulberries over a decade ago, Mr Szabo realised the fruit's value after selling over \$4000 worth of fruit from the sole tree.

In changing his farm and harvesting process from six acres of chardonnay grapes to 10 acres of mulberries, Mr Szabo said the project was “a

massive experiment”.

“The whole thing from the ground up was very nerve-wracking and I wasn't 100 per cent sure if it was going to work,” he said.

“My wife kept asking me ‘are you sure we can harvest with machines? Are you sure that trellis system is going to work?’

“I said ‘I don't know, we'll give it a go’. It was a bit of a jump into the unknown.”

The “jump” proved successful when Mr Szabo was able to modify his grape harvester to catch the ripe mulberries as they fell.

“We catch all the ripe fruit and a week later we come back and catch all the ripe fruit again,” Mr Szabo said.

“We keep going over and over, with a very light shake, and all the ripe fruit falls off.”

Though the yearly harvest – lasting five picks over a month – can be laborious, Mr Szabo said it is

the only way.

“We will end up, hopefully, producing 50 tonnes of fruit here on our property, and I would hate to handpick that,” he laughed.

Currently, the trees produce between 20 and 25 tonnes of fruit, with the production set to double in size by next year once the younger trees mature.

Normally a “massive tree”, the trellised mulberries needed a pruning system developed by Mr Szabo to get the trees back to bare bones and allow them to be machine harvested year after year.

“We've implemented our specialised pruning program for them ourselves,” Mr Szabo said. “It's completely opposite to a normal vine prune. Once we finish harvesting, we will go through and prune everything off, right back to the branches.

“People go ‘What are you doing? You look like you've killed them’, because we just saw everything off and mulch it all up. That's the only way we can manage it so it fits into the harvester.”



The variety of mulberry grown at Nockburra Creek Farm is hicks fancy – an elongated, black berry with purple juice that stains your fingers – and all 52 rows of trees originated from one backyard tree.

“I took all the cuttings and propagated them myself and planted the four acres (at the top of the property),” Mr Szabo said.

“Then I took cuttings from those four acres and planted six acres down the back. The (backyard) tree just runs off the overflow from the rainwater tank. It gets no irrigation, and no fertiliser, and it crops its head off.

“(Hicks fancy) is a prolific cropper, it has prolific growth, is really well-suited to our region and uses a lot less water than the vines did.”

Operating one of Australia's only commercial mulberry farms can include a bit of pressure, and Mr Szabo said the situation was “a bit of a mixed blessing” as his production levels increased.

“We are at a scale now that we have to be

approaching larger people,” he said.

“With our industry, they have to be willing to take a chance as much as we are. I can grow this easily, it's marketing that's the difficult part.

“We've had to continually market ourselves and push our product. We are finally getting some traction with some bigger people as our production increases.”

Currently, the fruit is packaged into 20kg boxes, frozen as quickly as possible and sent away to various businesses to make juices, purees, gins and wines.

“Looking forward, we're actually looking to do a bit more processing ourselves,” Mr Szabo said.

“It doesn't make much sense to me when I could just puree here, pasteurise, stabilise and put it into whatever packaging fits into their production line.

“We really are targeting manufacturing the mulberry – if we can get rid of some of the packaging and process, we'll do that as well.”



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August to November 1, 2021: 40.2mm
Rainfall to November 2020: 220.4mm
Rainfall to November average: 211mm

LOXTON
August to November 1, 2021: 77.8mm
Rainfall to November 2020: 240.4mm
Rainfall to November average: 239.4mm

WAIKERIE
August to November 1, 2021: 55.1mm
Rainfall to November 2020: 255.4mm
Rainfall to November average: 226.7mm

LAMEROO
August to November 1, 2021: 52.6mm
Rainfall to November 2020: 342.6mm
Rainfall to November average: 284.6mm

GAWLER
August to November 1, 2021: 92.8mm
Rainfall to November 2020: 315.8mm
Rainfall to November average: 357.7mm

Storage levels

DARTMOUTH DAM
Current storage: 82%
This time last month: 79%
This time last year: 60%

HUME DAM
Current storage: 98%
This time last month: 97%
This time last year: 81%

LAKE VICTORIA
Current storage: 96%
This time last month: 92%
This time last year: 95%

MENINDEE LAKES
Current storage: 112%
This time last month: 111%
This time last year: 26%

Flows into SA

CURRENT FLOWS
30,000ML PER DAY

THIS TIME LAST MONTH
27,900ML per day

THIS TIME IN 2020
9,900ML PER DAY



High storages making up for dry winter

NEAR-capacity storage levels continue to provide water security for Riverland growers, however, rainfall levels in the Mallee and Lower North were below average during winter.

The Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) recorded a total of 14.4mm of rain in Renmark throughout August, which increased to 16.8mm for September, however the town had only received 9mm for the whole of October.

This was down on the 23.4mm seen in August of last year – and below the historical average for the month of 25.3mm – with 33.6mm also recorded last September.

BoM also recorded 15mm of rain in Loxton during August, however this rose to a total of 35.4mm for September.

In comparison, Loxton saw 31.3mm in August, and 29.3mm in September, of last year.

Waikerie saw 13.8mm of rain during August, compared with a long-term average of 19.3mm for the month, with 17.3mm falling in September and 24mm during October.

Rainfall figures of 42.2mm in August, 16.8mm in September, and 54.6mm in the first two weeks of October, brought Gawler's total rainfall so far in 2021 to 342.2mm.

This was just above the average rainfall to October of 332.9mm, and an increase on the 304.4mm recorded to the same day in 2020.

Lameroo had recorded 201.6mm of rain for the year so far, marking a sharp drop compared to the 324.6mm seen at the same time last year, and down on the historical average to October of 256.8mm.

Latest reports from the Murray-Darling Basin Authority indicated total active storages had reached 8022GL by the end of October, or 93 per cent capacity.

This marked a 17 per cent increase since the beginning of August, and a 32 per cent increase since the same time last year.

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Every plant has a story

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY BRENDAN SIMPKINS

NESTLED in a small backyard in Gawler South is Fitzy's Natives & Horticulture Services, a passion project-turned-blossoming business.

Father-and-son duo Brett (pictured) and Brayden Fitzpatrick this year decided to go all-in on the project with goals to expand in the not-too-distant future.

Though the Covid-19 pandemic threw-up a number of challenges to many, and the Fitzpatricks were not immune, it also presented an opportunity.

Having lost his job due to the pandemic, Brett had a lot more free time on his hands and decided to push in all his chips on Fitzy's. "I was doing everything from the laptop

and the tablet and I basically wasn't enjoying it anymore," he said.

"I like people and I like plants...Covid-19 hit and it all started getting my mind going 'what am I doing?'."

"I quit that job and then started thinking 'I am going to turn (Fitzy's) into a job', and that's how all this has come around."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14-15

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Working in the horticulture sector for pretty much his whole life, plants are Brett's passion – something that he has instilled in Brayden.

Earlier this year Brayden left Gawler to head north, taking up a role with the Australian Arid Lands Botanic Gardens in Port Augusta West.

Specialising in dry natives, the pair collect cuttings from across South Australia, overseeing the transformation from seeds into fully fledged plants.

From emu bush to lemon myrtle, Sturt Desert rose to quandong, native celery and other bush foods, the Fitzpatricks propagate more than 150 different varieties of native plants between the original Gawler South nursery and Brayden's home in Port Augusta.

While there are plenty of South Australian natives on offer, the Fitzpatricks also grow rare and interstate varieties including, but not limited to, *barbarea australis* (native wintercress), a critically endangered species from Tasmania, and *eucalyptus olida* (strawberry gum plant) found in a restricted area of New South Wales.

One of the most passionate and energetic horticulturalists you are likely to ever meet, Brett can name off the top of his head not only the exact location of where he collected his own clippings, but the native habitat of most of his stock.

“

There is a story behind every plant



“There is a story behind every plant,” Brett says.

The Fitzpatricks sell upwards of 20,000 plants a year from people of all walks of life, from backyard growers to farmers, local councils and experienced chefs.

Brett even recently sold a couple of native frangipanis that will be planted along the Gawler railway line as part of its electrification project.

The Gawler South nursery can hold about 10,000 plants in tube stocks and about another 15,000 at Port Augusta.

While currently restricted to their backyard operations, Brett and Brayden hope to purchase land, ideally around the Gawler Belt area, in order to expand their operations.

Fitzy's Natives can be found at a host of markets around the state, from Saddleworth in the Mid North to Waikerie in the Riverland.

The Gawler South nursery is open for viewing on weekends. For more information, head to Fitzy's Natives and Horticultural Services on Facebook.



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Little venture blooms into big business

ON a 0.8-hectare block at Lyndoch in the Barossa Valley, Rob Ryan and Katie Arena (both pictured) have created a farm that supports their business, nurtures their passions and allows space to realise their dreams.

When the couple first set eyes on the property – in a then-rundown state – three years ago, they knew it was to be their forever home.

However, they had no inkling of how it would quickly develop into the quaint, picturesque, and productive cut-flower operation, Lyndoch's Little Flower Farm, that it is today.

The white farmhouse sits atop a hill, surrounded by lawns and large shady trees, a ranunculus field to the north, dahlias out the front, and another "cutting garden" to the west.

At the centre of it all is the studio – the place where Katie can prepare and package her

flowers for retail or wholesale, or for weddings, and where she has plans to host floristry workshops for the community.

The whole vision for the farm was born from Katie's new-found talent and passion for flower-arranging, back when her business, The Queen's Quarters, offered wedding furniture hire.

"People started asking me if I did flowers," Katie said.

"So I said 'yes' and self-taught myself over that wedding period and then it all just bloomed and took off from there.

"I just loved it and so decided not to hire furniture out anymore and to just keep doing flowers. I was good at it, and the whole marketing side of growing a business is what I enjoy as well."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18



“So I said ‘yes’ and self-taught myself over that wedding period and then it all just bloomed and took off from there.”

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Farmer

The first year the couple were living at Lyndoch, Katie experienced a bumper wedding season, while Rob worked full time as a personal trainer.

"We were just growing a few flowers, and then Covid-19 happened and we had eight months' worth of weddings stop," Katie said.

"We thought 'what are we doing with our life' and we ended up throwing ourselves into the farm."

"Rob grew six dahlia plants and fell in love with growing, and then from me not being able to get certain flowers from the markets we thought we will really give it a go and grow our own."

One of their first projects was erecting the greenhouse, gifted by Katie's uncle, where they trialled their first season of dahlia, and which now house ranunculus and stocks.

They also began developing the cutting garden to the west of the property.

"I am very passionate about helping out other florists, so we are going to hold workshops, where this is the garden they can cut and harvest from," she said.

"I want to create a whole-day experience where they can see the animals, pick their own flowers, have a wine and some lunch and really go home inspired."

Rob, who continues to run an at-home personal training business, while now farming full time, said the process had involved a lot of trial and error and learning off others along the way.

"We spoke to a lot of older people with growing experience, watched YouTube videos, and reached out to other farmers through Instagram," he said.

"I had never picked up a tool, I never even used to mow lawns."

"...I'd like to say it has been one project at a time to get here but really it's been 300 at a time."

This past season the dahlia patch, at the front of the property, was home to 450 dahlias.

This season the couple are growing between

1200 and 1500 dahlia, as well as other varieties.

Katie said they never stopped trying to learn more about how flower farming and floristry practices affect the environment and how they could improve their methods.

"The first year, we weed-matted the whole ground with plastic – we just thought that's what you do, and now we are going to trial pea straw in the rows instead," she said.

"But we also use biodegradable matting that's really good – it's more expensive, but... we learn along the way if we can make those little changes."

"We are honest about it, we don't say we are completely one way or the other, but we are learning."

The couple focus on growing the varieties that are harder to source in South Australia, and said a lot of their success was because of support from the online community, as well as the Barossa community.

"The locals I think appreciate seeing what's going on here and they stop and take photos or talk the animals," Katie said.

"...we just want to create an experience here for people to just relax and have a good time."



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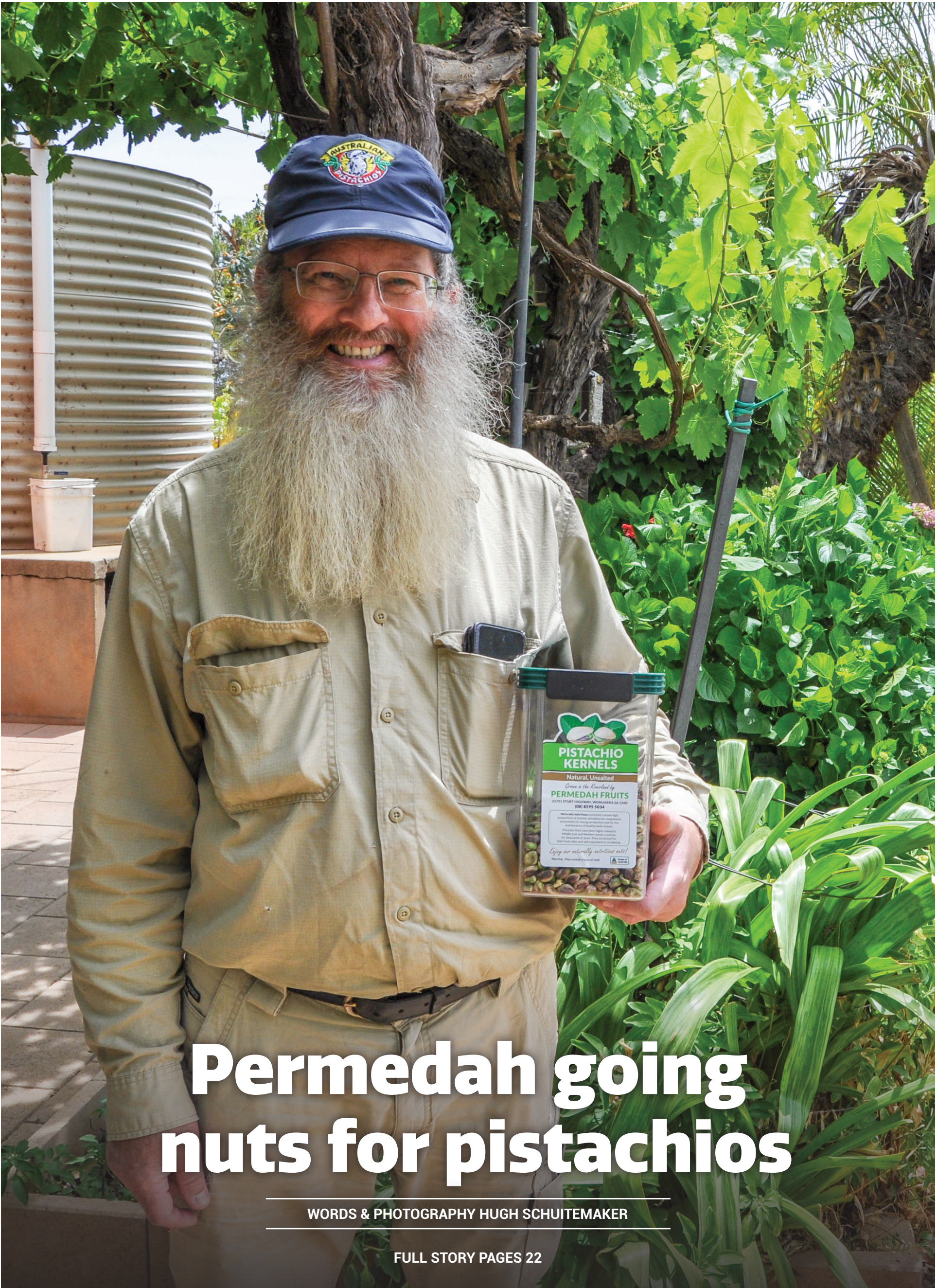
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Permedah going nuts for pistachios

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY HUGH SCHUITEMAKER

FULL STORY PAGES 22

EXPLORING new opportunities in a growing industry is the goal of a local father-and-son team focused on a unique crop.

Third generation Paringa-based growers James (pictured) and Theo Simpfendorfer – who operate Permedah Fruits with their father Martin – have spent the past four decades converting their property into a pistachio farm.

Martin said the property, which formerly produced stone fruit, was initially purchased in 1951 by his father Ernst.

“We put irrigation pipes in, then began watering,” Martin said.

“We started off with vegetables to get a bit of cash flow, then also apricots and peaches that we dried.

“It was a lot more labour intensive everywhere. We grew up through the years with ways to improve things.

“It was my dad’s love of eating fruit which triggered the idea to have an orchard, so he could enjoy fruit year-round.”

James said the pistachio tree – which is native to the Middle East – was ideal to grow in the

Riverland’s warm and dry climate.

“Way back in the early ’70s the CSIRO Merbein did some breeding with overseas pistachio cultivars,” James said.

“They had a big patch with rows of trees they could cross-breed and try out in trials. We got some of the earliest rootstock and budwood from that.

“They were looking for alternative crops to stone fruit that were suitable for this area.

“Pistachios have a very waxy and thin leaf, which means they don’t lose much water in the heat.”

James said annual variations in weather conditions were a primary factor in the overall yield of pistachios.

“In 2019 we aimed at three tonnes per hectare for our older trees, and two tonnes per hectare for our trees that were planted in 2010 to 2012,” he said.

“Conditions weren’t quite favourable, because Renmark is one of the warmer areas in winter. If there’s not enough chill, we need to offset that.

“We had a reasonable harvest... but then last year we had our biggest crop ever for the whole orchard.



“With good fertilising, watering and tree management, we’re managing to get a more stabilised yield.”

James said an increasing demand for pistachios across Australia meant most of his crop was sold within the country.

“Our first crop would have been in the late ’70s or early ’80s, and until the number of growers in Australia increased, all pistachios were imported,” he said.

“In Australia, the demand has always kept increasing and outstripped the local supply.

“There is a good demand for locally grown, because it’s nice and fresh.

“Until only about two years ago Australian grown pistachios were just supplying local, then we had a really good crop and we sold a few to limited markets overseas.

James expected their youngest pistachio trees – planted in 2020 – would start producing nuts in approximately six years.

“There are quite a few new plantings in the ground which will mature,” he said.

“We’ve virtually replanted our 40 acres to pistachios... between us we manage with what we’ve got and keep up with everything.”



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“We do specialize in sheds, not just home sheds, but big farm sheds, and rural sheds,” she said.

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Ultimately, Ms Datsopolous said the pride Alpha Industries takes in its work, and its commitment to using 100 per cent Australian products means there is not much more you can ask for.

“We pride ourselves on only using Australian bluescope steel,” she said.

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We're very service and price orientated...

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Journalist Hugh Schuitemaker spoke with key Riverland, Lower North and Mallee agricultural industry figures to gain an insight into their respective seasons.

WELCOME to the latest instalment of our regular Farmer industry experts Q and A.

Once again myself, with the help of fellow journalist Josh Brine, have been fortunate enough to speak with the leading minds from some of South Australia's most important agricultural industries, from the Riverland's citrus and almond orchards, all the way down to the Barossa Valley's vineyards and Mallala canola fields.

After a long and challenging 18 months, this instalment provides a picture of what long-term impacts Covid-19 restrictions have had on key aspects of business. For farmers and growers the worry of labour shortages, caused by border restrictions, is still hanging overhead, while transporting crops out of South Australia has become an uphill battle, due to increased shipping times and a high demand for container space.

These challenges were only compounded by the October and November hailstorms that struck numerous farms and orchards in our regions.

Our farmers and growers are always planning for the future however, and I hope there is some helpful advice that will support others through these times.

John Lush
Mallala dryland farmer, Adelaide Plains councillor



Did you see any impacts from the hailstorm at the end of October?
We probably dodged the worst of the hail. We had a little bit of hail damage but it wasn't catastrophic, which was dead lucky because just south of us it was really bad.

We had a bit of hail damage and a bit of frost damage, but none of it was catastrophic, so we dodged the worst of it.

Are you confident in the quality of crops this year?
They look pretty good. The yields are going to be really good, and I think the quality will be ok as well. My fingers are crossed.

We haven't got it yet, but with a bit of luck we'll get most of it. The big question mark on everyone's mind is when will summer kick in, and if we'll get a lot of rain and thunderstorms.

We don't know that yet, but we'll hope for the best.

What would be ideal conditions for farmers over the summer?
From now on we wouldn't get any benefit out of rain. It would be detrimental, so we want some nice, calm weather that will ease us into the harvest.

November can be pretty volatile though, so we'll take it one step at a time and see what we get.

Have new varieties led to an increase in yields this season?
It's important to grow new varieties, and we're doing that. We've got a new wheat variety called vixen, and that looks pretty good.

We've got some pioneer canola varieties that are looking pretty good as well. For a good number of years Australia hung back on yield potential with canola, compared to places like Canada.

Now our canola breeders are starting to catch up and give us varieties that are more adapted to Australian conditions.

The conventional varieties they've been breeding are

more locally adapted to South Australian conditions, and they're doing really well. I'm expecting the GM varieties will be another step on top of that, so the potential for canola is looking good. Canada has gone from being a major exporter of canola, to an importer, so that will keep canola prices where they are for a number of years.

Will you expand your use of new varieties next season?
I think we will. We'll certainly be using mostly new varieties, so we'll be surveying all the canola varieties that are available for next year and order them fairly soon.

Are shipping delays due to Covid-19 causing challenges?
The world is pretty unstable at the moment, so it's really hard to get supplies. We've been keeping a lot of fuel on farm now, because we realised there could be a shortfall of fuel at any time.

Most of our fuel arrives on ships just in time, which means if there's a hiccup in the system, then we're only on seven to 10 days' supply of fuel. So that's on a bit of a knife edge.

The other problem we've got is getting supply of fertiliser. It looks like getting fertiliser will be difficult next year, and it will be at a really high price.

Getting new machinery, cars, or utes has been really difficult as well, and container freight has gone through the roof.

Some of our grain that was going out in containers is going to be a lot more expensive at the other end of the shipping line, which will probably have an impact on our markets.

Any advice for farmers heading into the new year?
The take home message is to plan as far ahead as possible. If you think you're going to need something, order it now and not in six months' time.

If you want new varieties, then order them now. If you want fertiliser, you probably should have already bought it and be thinking about where you're going to put it.



Jason Size
Summerfruit Australia board member



What part of the season are we in?
People are flat-out harvesting. It is a very busy time of the year.

Growers are probably managing their labour crews, trying to get the best product they can, managing their markets and looking at all their different market options as well.

If you're in the export business, you're starting to look at moving more export fruit because you're starting to get better sugar in the fruit and bigger fruit as well.

Are growers happy with the volume and quality of fruit?
Generally, crops are tending to be lighter than normal, but are consistent.

It'll probably be a nice crop in terms of management because it won't be too large.

Is overall yield looking like it will be down then?
I think the crop is definitely down on last season.

The quality will depend on the impact of the storms in late October.

Then it's just about making sure we can access good markets and cover the extra costs caused by the fruit fly outbreaks, and also making sure we can get good labour.

Are there any potential labour shortages?
There are. I was in Adelaide this time last year and we just couldn't get labour on the orchards or in the packing sheds.

I'm hoping that's not the case this year but the signs are indicating it may be.

People are on tenterhooks about making

sure they have a good supply of quality labour.

Is fruit fly expected to impact the movement of fruit over the summer?
Given current restrictions growers have in terms of having to apply treatments to move their fruit to certain markets, it will depend on the markets they are trying to target.

A lot of the smaller growers in our region target Adelaide, and it is challenging to get stuff to Adelaide but they are still getting through to there.

We're just making sure we maintain some sort of positivity in the industry to ensure we can get our harvest off without any further interruptions.

What should growers be doing to ensure healthy fruit and trees at this time of year?
Growers are generally just making sure their fertiliser requirements for the crops coming up to harvest are in tune with what they're trying to get – whether that's good sugar or good size or those sorts of things.

Fertiliser requirements will depend on the crop being harvested and when it's being harvested. In terms of irrigation, again it depends on the harvesting stage and the maturity of the crop.

It's not just about managing a crop, because you may have dozens of crops in the orchard all at different stages of fertiliser requirements and irrigation.

Growers are looking at the stage of their crop to make sure their irrigation and fertiliser regimes are matching the crop demands to get good sugars and get good size.

What varieties of citrus are currently being harvested in the region, and which will be ready to harvest over the summer?
Most navel varieties are finished now and summer valencias have started. This is the last variety and runs through until February '22.

Are growers confident in the quality, and volume, of fruit at this stage?
The average quality of all citrus has been a challenge, with two large crops in 2020/21 and a cool summer last year resulting in a big crop.

Has there been an increase in demand for any specific varieties this year?
All varieties of Australian citrus are in demand as we grow the best in the world and can supply the northern hemisphere summer.

Pink flesh and easy-peel seedless mandarins are probably the highlight.

Is the number of available seasonal workers in South Australia still a worry for growers heading into 2022?

The Pacific Labour Scheme is running well and we also have the ASEAN work visa entering the first-year trial providing Asian people to ease the worker supply shortage.

What weather conditions would be optimal for Riverland growers over the summer?
Last year's cooler temperatures were good for growing citrus but a bit more rain sent from above would be appreciated as

the best quality water is rain water.

What impacts could fruit fly have on citrus growers this summer?
Worst case we would endure outbreak conditions again, restricting movement of fruit and requiring transport conditions to be met.

We are very hopeful that with all the work done in the last year, we will be on top of this pest by Christmas.

Is the export market still expected to pose challenges next year?
Hopefully the backlog of containers clears soon, as that has been the biggest single challenge this year, with shipping time doubling and a lack of staff in ports to handle freight.

“Hopefully the backlog of containers clears soon, as that has been the biggest single challenge this year, with shipping time doubling and a lack of staff in ports to handle freight.

Our citrus is in demand and we need to get this perishable product through the supply chain efficiently.

What should growers be doing at this time to ensure healthy trees and fruit?
Although it's been a year full of challenges growers need to keep up the good work, prune and give lots of water and fertiliser to grow that good product.



Adrian Hoffmann

Wine Grape Council of South Australia Chair

What impacts did the Barossa see from last month's hailstorm?

It was quite varied, so you've got some areas that were pretty well untouched, with a bit of wind damage and hail damage. But for growers that were hit hard, it's been quite devastating. Some growers have lost more than 50 per cent, which you would say is pretty well a 100 per cent loss.

But they are working around it and a lot of growers are getting creative about how they are managing their vines. Some have gone through and done a bit of shoot thinning, and others have trimmed them back. Others have worked on getting wood for next year... and spur-pruning will bounce back a little quicker.

Different varieties reacted differently as well. Shiraz, which is the mainstay variety of the Barossa, with the slightly longer shoots probably got hit the hardest, while some varieties with shorter shoots fared a little better.

Is there confidence in the quality of vines and buds at this stage?

That's most probably the disappointing thing about the storm, because fruiting and cropping levels were looking really good, and the vines have got really good growth. They started off slow because of the cooler September, but the vines have really taken off now.

It really depends on flowering. I know some of the earlier varieties have started flowering already, and that will give a true indication.

What conditions would be ideal for Barossa growers over the summer?

Just the milder conditions we've been having. A bit of rain here and there won't hurt, but it's just the wind we don't really

need at the moment, or a cold or hot snap. The Mediterranean, sitting around on a Sunday type weather would be ideal.

Would you expect an increase in yield for the next vintage?

I don't think there's an increase on yield. From a supply point of view, I would be encouraging grape growers to communicate with their wineries about potential fruit intake for the next season. That's a big thing to look at.

Through the recent storms in the Barossa there might be a bit of a price adjustment.

Has Covid-19 conditions presented any shipping and transport challenges in the wine industry?

All the ag suppliers are saying growers need to be a bit more organised now. You can't just click your fingers and have something there. There's always lag time on dripper tubing, fertiliser and glyphosate is running in short supply again. Shipping and exporting wine becomes a lot harder, because there's a massive lag time in booking a container... then that container is costing you two, or three times more than it normally does.

As much as we need to export more Australian wine, the logistics of doing that are a lot harder.

How important is it for growers to be planning ahead for next year?

I was one of those growers that did a lot of knee-jerk vineyard management, and that's all gone by the wayside now. You need to be right on top of it. Buy the chemicals now and have it sitting in your shed, so you know it's there when you want it.

Tim Jackson

Almond Board of Australia chief executive officer

What stage of the almond season are we in now and how are crops around the Riverland shaping up?

We have had a fantastic bloom this year with ideal pollination conditions. It has been a great start to the 2022 crop, with ongoing mild conditions across all growing seasons.

Currently the orchards are in the transition phase from nut fill to pit hardening. We appear to be on track

that have the potential to harbour pests and disease like carpophilus beetle and carob moth.

Have you heard of many problems with disease?

We are fortunate to be experiencing an ideal build-up to the new season, but growers are always on the lookout for foliar diseases like rust.

However, all reports are that the ideal spring conditions have led to a relatively trouble-free period.

Any advice for growers?

For those growers planning to redevelop orchards, it is important to liaise closely with their nurseries on tree requirements.

There is a lengthy lead time to tree orders to ensure a high standard of trees are produced in a timely manner and in accordance with the ABA's new Nursery Tree Standards Agreement.

“Temporary water pricing is also at attractive levels and is helping ease the cost of production for many growers.

for the record crop predicted by the industry. The first official crop estimates are due in December.

Temporary water pricing is also at attractive levels and is helping ease the cost of production for many growers.

What are some of the challenges facing growers at this time of year?

Growers are trying to keep up with their foliar spray programs and staying on top of weed management.

It is critical at this time to maintain a high level of orchard hygiene to minimise over-wintering mummy nuts

“The ABA will begin its 2021 budwood harvest program in November to meet nursery demand.

This document can be accessed via the Australian Almonds website.

The ABA will begin its 2021 budwood harvest program in November to meet nursery demand. The program has been critical in ensuring virus-free propagation material is used by nurseries.

AG NEWS

Ag visa one step closer



Farmer confidence up in the (rain)clouds

SOUTH Australian farmer confidence has hit a 10-year high after late-season rains helped to strengthen hopes of an above-average crop for the state.

The latest Rabobank Rural Confidence Survey, released mid-September, found 52 per cent of South Australian farmers – and 82 per cent in the grains sector – expect to generate increased incomes in 2021/22 thanks to changes in seasonal conditions and strong prices for wheat, canola, lentils, lamb and beef.

The boost to farmer income will likely also boost investment across the state's agricultural sector, with almost a third of farmers surveyed showing intention to increase investment in their farm businesses in the next year.

Planned investment areas include on-farm infrastructure, plant/machinery upgrades, new technologies and increased livestock numbers, but grain growers are the ones who show the strongest intentions to expand, with one-in-four thinking of purchasing additional property in the year ahead.

Rabobank regional manager for South Australia, Roger Matthews, said good general rainfall across the state from late June had an impact on the upswing in sentiment as it showed a “significant departure from the past three years where seasonal conditions have been patchy”.

Survey results show farmers have an optimistic view on the next 12 months, with 77 per cent citing seasonal conditions as the reason for the positive outlook.

Early-season projections from the Department of Primary Industries and Regions (PIRSA) tipped the South Australian winter crop to hit 7.6 million tonnes – the second-biggest harvest in

five years.

“The combination of good seasonal conditions and prices is expected to flow into good returns, particularly if spring rains deliver decent yields,” Mr Matthews said.

“With the wheat price still in the \$300s and lentils above \$1000 per tonne, it will set many up.”

While the grain sector holds strong in its expected increase in income, Mr Matthews said confidence has remained strong in beef and sheep producers also.

“It is largely a price story, with record beef prices and the combination of high sheep and improving wool prices driving the positive outlook for 82 per cent and 88 per cent of beef and sheep producers, respectively,” he said.

While 56 per cent of beef producers expect business conditions to improve, only 27 per cent of sheep producers expect improvement, with the majority – 67 per cent – expecting the current conditions to continue.

Mr Matthews said one of the main challenges hanging over the otherwise positive agricultural sector outlook was the availability of labour, especially for the horticultural sector.

“The federal government's recent announcement of the Ag Visa is a welcome step as it is something the industry has pushed for and recognises the importance of agriculture to the economy,” he said.

Apprehensions about labour availability have done little to reduce plans for investment in the sector, with 29 per cent of SA farmers looking to increase investment and a further 65 per cent intending to maintain investment levels over the next 12 months.

THE long-awaited agricultural visa, in development to address workforce shortages, is one step closer to becoming a reality for Riverland businesses.

The Australian Government made required amendments to the Migration Regulations 1994, to enable the new agricultural visa on September 30, but the final plan is still being developed in industry consultation.

Barker MP Tony Pasin said the agriculture visa would create a pathway to permanent residency for workers who will help secure the region's future.

“We promised this visa and here it is,” Mr Pasin said.

“The creation of the ag visa under the Migration Regulations is a landmark moment for the sector and delivers on our promise to have it in place this year.

“The ag visa will be the biggest structural change to the agricultural workforce in our nation's history and producers in Barker are poised to be able to grab the benefits with both hands.”

Workers are expected to arrive under “Phase 1” of the new scheme

in December 2021 and March 2022; however, their arrival will be subject to quarantine arrangements and agreements with states/territories and partner countries.

“Phase 2” will see an increase in employer participation numbers, recruited workers and an expansion of participating countries, from April 2022.

The visa will be structured around demand and supply, and available to skilled, semi-skilled and low-skilled workers across a range of agricultural industries, including the meat-processing, fishery and forestry sectors.

“Worker restrictions have always been a problem, but it has been taken to the next level with Covid-19 and the subsequent international and internal borders,” Mr Pasin said.

“We now have a visa that will give Barker a long-term, reliable workforce for our agricultural industries.”

Under current border restrictions, all incoming workers to Australian states and territories must undertake quarantine, arranged in close consultation with industry, state and territory governments, and individual chief health officers.





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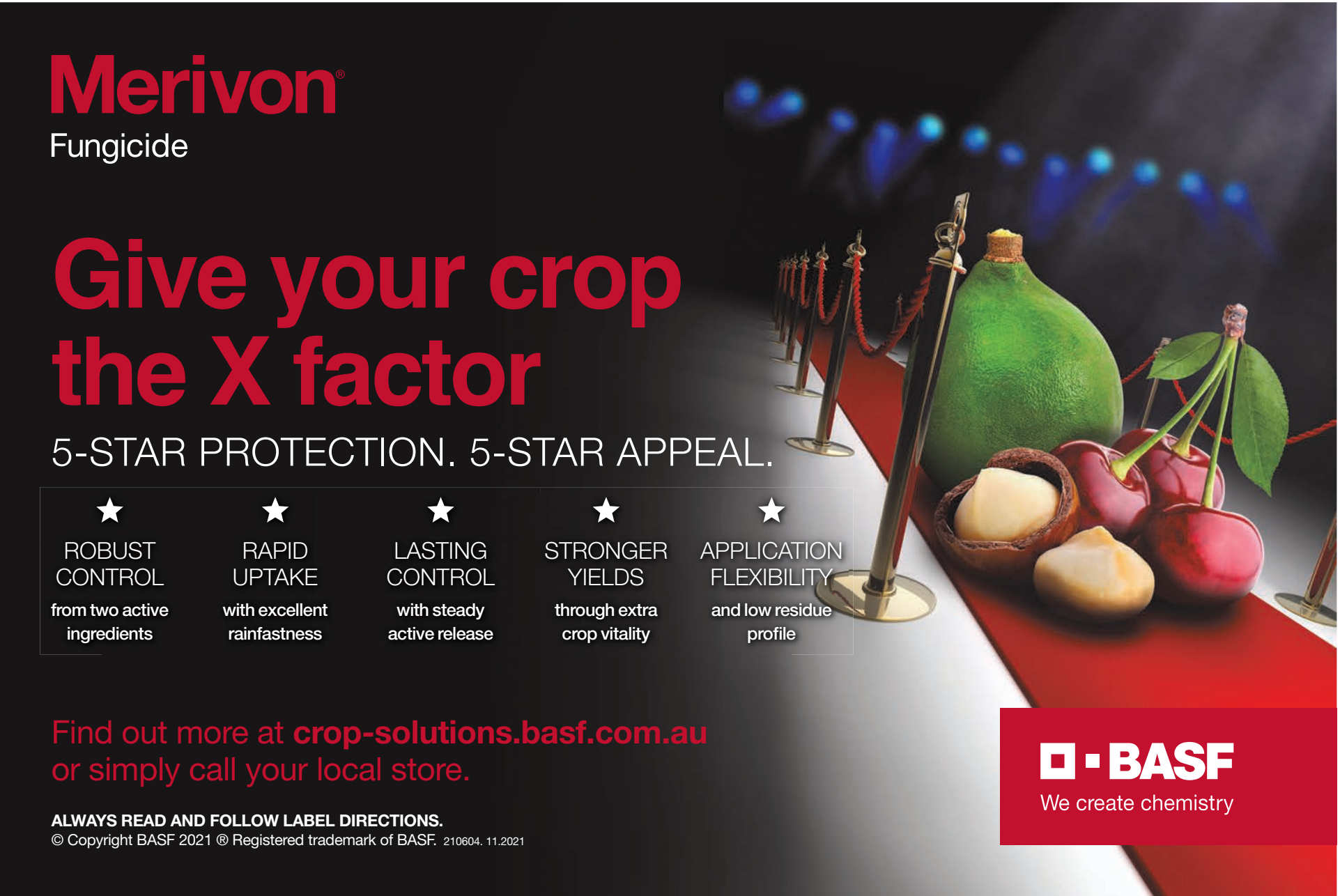


Renaissance of gin in wine heartland

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY LIAM PHILLIPS

FULL STORY PAGES 32-33

Pictured: Sophie Mitic



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BASF
We create chemistry



THE Barossa Valley is famous around the globe for its wine industry – and quite rightly. But as evidenced by Barossa Distilling Company's Gin of the Year win at the 2020 London Sprits Competition, world-class alcohol comes out of the Barossa in many forms.

Barossa Distilling Company founder Neil Bullock said determination to make "a great gin" in the Valley was born in 2016 when a number of winemakers decided they were sick of buying gin while rehydrating in the middle of vintage.

"The Barossa is famous for its conditions being friendly to winemakers and the production of wine, and it's the same for gin," he said.

"This business was born around a concept of being friendly to winemakers – there was a bunch of winemakers who, in the middle of vintage, were rehydrating with riesling and gin and tonic.

"They had unlimited access to riesling, but had to purchase their gin and tonic, which didn't sit with them very well, so they had an idea to make their own.

"The idea was to produce a great gin in the Barossa,

because nobody had produced a gin in the Barossa at that point in time.

"When we saw the space available in Nuriootpa it had been empty for years – no one could find a use for it – and for us, it was the perfect backdrop to what we do.

"Every day we're looking at the history of distilling in the Barossa – those stills have been producing brandy since 1918."

Not coming from a background in the alcohol industry, Mr Bullock said he was proud to still be learning every day, calling the business "unrecognisable" from its early days.

"I had no experience at all in the alcohol business, and that was where I had to make mistakes along the way to learn," he said.

"We're still learning, and we're still making mistakes, but the business is vastly different now from when we started – I would say it's unrecognisable.

"In saying that, the initial product that we put in – the gin itself – is very recognisable.

"We were very lucky to hit the nail on the head with our first try at our contemporary-style London dry gin

– and that's our Generations Gin that we still produce with pretty much the same recipe.

"We've made some botanical tweaks here and there just to get the best out of the flavour, but in terms of the business overall, we now have our own growing and production facility, the team has grown massively, our sales and distribution network has grown massively, and our brand continues to grow."

Since 2016, Mr Bullock said government support for the distillation industry has turned a corner, leading to a boom in the market and a rise in competition.

"Due to an excise that was levied against spirits production back in the day Brandy become a product that was just not viable anymore, so wineries stopped producing it," he said.

"Brandy is a natural product to be produced if you're in the winemaking business – there was a time when almost every winery would have had a still – but that's not the case any more.

"Quite often those stills were for producing spirits and fortifying, but there was a drop off in the interest in fortified wines and brandy.

“

The idea behind building the cellar door came from understanding the value of building that relationship with customers and being able to receive feedback in real time.

"It's now clawing back with the government recognising the value of the distillation industry and spirits producers, and they're now putting in place tax rebates and remissions – and all of a sudden you're seeing wineries big and small getting back into distillation."

While Barossa Distilling Company's Generations Gin is billed as a classically styled gin, the brand has started to earn a reputation for its widening range of products, from "the rosé of gin" with its pink, fruity Budburst Gin, to its London Spirits Competition-winning Barrel Aged brown gin.

Mr Bullock said with the number of distilleries around Australia up to about 250, there was pressure to deliver something different to consumers - but he viewed the competition as purely a positive.

"With this growth in the industry, consumers are looking for something different," he said.

"I think the competition is definitely a case of a rising tide lifting all boats, because there is a massive value in forcing products to be as good as they can possibly be, and realistically in the gin market consumers are looking to try as many gins as possible to contrast and compare.

"Consumers are looking for the best possible flavours and most enjoyable traits, and that's driven our experimentation to constantly keep looking for something that tastes great.

"We have one product we make using high toast French oak chips, which is a tool produced for the

winemaking industry where oak chips are specifically toasted to accentuate the characteristics in a wine.

"I don't know any gin producers here or elsewhere that are using oak chips in quite the same way, and so we get a product different to what everyone else is putting out there."

While Barossa Distilling Company's creations come from the minds of extensively-trained experts, Mr Bullock admitted some major business decisions had come from suggestions made by customers during testings at its cellar door.

"The idea behind building the cellar door came from understanding the value of building that relationship with customers and being able to receive feedback in real time," he said.

"A number of products have been born out of that interaction with customers – our Miss Maple Gin Liqueur, for example.

"That was born out of feedback within the venue where we were serving a particular drink and people said 'I want this in a bottle', so we made a few tweaks and amendments and came up with a bottled version of that particular product.

"In coming months, we'll be releasing a ready-to-drink gin and tonic in a can. There's been considerable consumer demand for really quality gin and tonic in a can, and it isn't as easy as it sounds, so that is one of the next steps we're excited about.

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Turning passion into success

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY DEIRDRE GRAHAM

PETER Wallis (pictured) has always had a passion for sheep breeding, and the success of his Glenlea Park stud near Pinnaroo is testament to that passion.

Two years ago he sold a ram, lovingly named 'Smithy' after Australian cricketer Steve Smith, for \$100,000 at the Adelaide Ram Sale, and in 2021 recorded his most successful year yet at a number of ram sales across the state.

It's been a long time coming.

"Glenlea Park was founded by my dad Glen Wallis in 1964, and I came home to the farm in 1992, and took over the stud in about 1997," Mr Wallis said.

"In the early days we were a Collinsville daughter stud blood line, but when I came home on the farm we employed Bill Walker as a classer and we shifted our genetics a bit

more to some different bloodlines: Charinga, Wallaloo Park and a little bit of Leahcim.

"In the last 10 to 15 years we have been a little bit more of a closed stud, only introducing the odd ram here and there.

"There's been a lot of changes. When I came home, like all the studs around here we were only selling to local farmers - only about 30 to 40 rams a year, and all straight out of the paddock."

When the district's farmers made a push towards continuous cropping, Mr Wallis said it was clear he would have to attract new clients.

"We started shedding 10 to 15 to be able to take them to field days to present them well," he said.

"So we started with 10 to 15 and we

slowly built up to the point that now were are shedding all of our rams, and selling 200.

"Our clients now come from Tasmania, through to Western Australia and everywhere between."

But, back to Smithy.

"Smithy was bred out of a ram that we bred called Glenlea Park 881, and he was out of a very good ewe that is now in our embryo transfer program, a terrific mother," Mr Wallis said.

"I suppose in 2019 it became evident in July that year the we had something a little bit special.

"He was probably the best wool sheep that I have ever bred, and he was probably, at that point of time, almost the best meat sheep we had ever bred.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 36



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We sold one for \$29,500, one for \$9500, and one for \$8500.

"To get the combination of the two is very rare.

"A good wool sheep is normally a little bit smaller and finer in the bone (whereas) if you breed good meat sheep it is normally at the expense of the wool."

Mr Wallis said Smithy was almost never put up for sale.

"In other years, we would have kept that ram as a worker for ourselves," he said.

"But we had slowly worked our way up the ram sale catalogue in Adelaide, and we wanted to continue to offer something really good to keep ourselves up there, so it was decided to sell him.

"We keep 50 per cent semen marketing rights on all rams we sell, and we also kept a right to collect from Smithy.

"So we can collect from him anytime for our own use.

"And if we sell any semen from that ram we get 50 per cent of the proceeds, and the purchaser gets 50 per cent."

Mr Wallis said one part of his business' focus had given him the edge.

"I think if there is a trade secret, I think the merino industry as a whole has been guilty of only focusing on 50 per cent of the genetic traits," he said.

"By focusing equally on both sides, you can double your genetic gain, so I think, if there is a secret, that is it.

"We are very strong on the genetics on both sides of the family tree."

Mr Wallis said topping a ram like Smithy would be difficult.

"My focus is on breeding a better sheep, and regardless of price, that is where I get the most satisfaction," Mr Wallis said.

"It was very satisfying to breed Smithy because he was such a good sheep, and how we can top that is to breed a better one.

"That is not going to be that easy, but I don't ever say I can't."

Mr Wallis said while the semen side of stud breeding

was not large, it could still be lucrative.

"If we bred another Smithy, or a ram better than Smithy, we would probably keep him," he said.

"We would display him at various field days and other stud breeders might look at that ram and decide 'we would like to use that in our flock'... so we could offer semen for sale.

"We have a number of semen sires, rams that we have kept, and studs ring us up and order, you know, 50 doses, and pay \$50 per ewe dose for that.

"If you can get a ram that is highly sought after, you can make a lot of money out of semen sales.

"But as a percentage of the industry it is very small, because everyone wants the top one or two rams in Australia."

Mr Wallis said while 2021 had had its challenges, it had become his stud's most successful year yet – despite being unable to attend sales such as the Australian Wool and Sheep Show at Bendigo and the Dubbo sales that were both cancelled due to Covid-19 restrictions.

"We have done things a little bit differently this year," he said.

"We have sold three rams at an online auction plus only forum.

"We sold one for \$29,500, one for \$9500, and one for \$8500.

"They were the rams we were going to take to Dubbo, so that was a bit of an experiment, but I would say it worked.

"All three of those rams were bought and bid on by people who had never seen them, so you get a bit nervous because you don't want to mis-describe them, or lead them to believe they are a better sheep than what they are.

"We offered 165 rams at our August on property sale, and we averaged \$3560, which was a state record for about two weeks until Moorundie had theirs and knocked us off.

"That was terrific as we were worried about it leading up to the event, because we couldn't have any

interstate clients there, but it went very well.

"Our previous best on property average was \$2960, so we beat that by about \$600."

The Adelaide Ram Sales were again a success for Glenlea Park.

"We sold five rams in Adelaide," Mr Wallis said.

"We topped the averages at the Adelaide Ram Sales, selling the top price ram for \$56,000, and we averaged over the five \$21,400."

So what does Mr Wallis look for in a sheep?

"Increasingly I have been looking for constitution," he said.

"As a foremost requirement a sheep has to survive and thrive in paddock conditions, so it has to be good on its feet, and it has to have the ability to do well in difficult conditions.

"Aside from that I think the skin of an animal is really important.

"Its growth rate is determined by its skin... if it has tight and flat skin it can't grow.

"If the skin is not right, it doesn't produce enough wool, and the wool is not good quality.

"When you take into account growth rate, wool quality and quantity, and also fertility – which is also impacted a bit – I think the skin is pretty critical."

Mr Wallis said he feels he is unable to take all the credit for the success of his stud, where currently he mates about 1000 ewes a year, and has about 500 ram lambs.

"The sheep that I was able to start with, Dad had got them to a certain level, and we were probably underexposed in those early years," he said.

"I think we had better sheep than what we were being rewarded for in those times.

"My dad fostered the passion in sheep breeding in me, and without him none of it would have happened.

"And anyone who is in stud breeding would understand that my family, my wife Marianne and two little kids, make a lot of sacrifices, and if they were not prepared to make those sacrifices we would not have achieved what we have achieved in the stud industry."

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Our farmers of the future

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY JACK HUDSON

TRINITY College offers plenty of appealing courses across its multiple campuses in the Gawler-northern suburbs region, but one of the most impressive is its agricultural department.

It is one of very few metropolitan schools that offer an agricultural program that extends from year 9 to 12.

Trinity's senior agricultural science teacher Chad Ramsey said there were opportunities in many different career paths for students.

"We have pretty substantial numbers in all sorts of year levels," he said at Trinity's Evanston South campus, near Gawler.

"They've got the option for doing ag for the entire year in both semesters in year 11 and then obviously for the year 12s; it's for the whole year as well.

"They do agricultural productions, which basically has a mix of animal topics, plant topics, and also some soil and agribusiness topics here and there as well.

"It's a very broad sort of scope.

"I studied agricultural science at University of Adelaide and so I'm trying to help get them set up for that if they want to pursue tertiary studies in the agricultural field."

Working with animals is one significant part of what Trinity offers, but wine and vegetables are other elements that attract students.

Wines made by the school are The Pavilion shiraz, Talking Point cabernet sauvignon, cleanskin rose and a cleanskin chardonnay.

"We've got quite a substantial vineyard," Mr Ramsey said.

"We do quite a bit of winemaking, do quite a bit with livestock.

"We've got garden beds, they grow vegetables and a small orchard as well, so there's plenty of fields to go into."

Beyond the work out in the field, Trinity ag student Nick Kelly has been fascinated by what he and his fellow students learn in the classroom.

"I've taken up ag because I just want to learn more about it," he said.

"We've learned wool typing or like how to breed some characteristics in sheep, wool characteristics,

"It's really good, I reckon.

"It's a good opportunity to learn a new sector of information that you wouldn't be able to do much with anywhere else.

"I'm not really sure of my career, but ag could definitely be a part of it.

"I do biology as well and they go nicely together.

"I could see myself doing ag in the future."

Classmate Ella Bond is another with a keen interest in her farm-based career, but while she's still learning, she's eager on teaching the ag students of the future.

"After studying ag for a couple of years, I really like the idea of becoming an ag teacher because you work with animals but students as well," she said.

"It's quite diverse in what you can do and obviously there's not really many agricultural teachers around, considering most of the places where agriculture is taught are rural.

"I think it's like a good way to enter a career because they're looking for more as it grows."

While Ella is keen on working with students and animals, she prefers the latter.

"It's great working with the animals... they're just fun and cute as well," she said.

"But I do enjoy the theory side as well, because you get to learn a lot of interesting facts about how the Australian economy works and how each different plant grows and the conditions, which is cool."

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From dust to bustling almond farm

WITH 340,000 almond trees planted over 615 hectares, CMV orchard manager Jeremy Miatke (pictured) and his team have plenty to keep them busy all year round.

And it was only five years ago, in 2016, when the property along Stanitzki Road near Loxton was completely bare.

Mr Miatke took up the job in 2016 alongside one other employee to help establish the revolutionary development.

Fast forward to now and the site boasts 17 full-time staff.

"Going from a bare paddock to 340,000 trees that are now coming

into full production is just massive," Mr Miatke said.

"The first plantings were probably as thick as your little finger and going from the trellis system we had, and plastic guards to what we have now, is just a massive change.

"Plus going from just a couple of workers to a full workforce and a developed orchard has just been fantastic.

"It's fantastic for the region and especially Loxton where our workers pay rates or rent, and spend their money there."

While the property near Loxton is in its infancy, CMV Farms is well versed in almond production, with its Lindsay Point site established since 1981.

The initial 6.5 hectares has grown into the 488 hectares.

Mr Miatke said the current season was shaping up to be "excellent".

"For us we've gone through the fruit set stage after the pollination stage... we had a slight nut drop after four weeks, which is usually unpollinated nuts," he said.

"We had a bit come off because of some 50km/h winds but not a huge amount."

Mr Miatke said the focus has now turned to fertigation and watering.

"We're also chasing a bit of extension growth through the trees and setting up for next year's crop just trying to find

the right balance between crop load and extension growth, which can mean adjusting fertilizer budgets if needed" he said.

"Leading up to pit hardening, obviously that's when the trees will turn and use more water, the shells start to solidify and the nut begins to harden.

"Really monitoring a few things like that on the trees are very important for us this time of year."

Mr Miatke also reported no shortage of things happening on the operations side.

"We have a hygiene pass going on, so we're blowing and flailing," he said.

"We'll do the whole property so that should be done in the next week and we'll do another one pass when we've had a bit more rain and wind leading up to harvest."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 43

"We had a bit come off because of some 50km/h winds but not a huge amount."



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380/70R24	125A8/122B	R1	SMARTAGRO
380/85R28	133A8/130B	R1	SMARTAGRO
380/85R30	135A8/132B	R1	SMARTAGRO
420/70R28	133A8/130B	R1	SMARTAGRO
420/85R28	139A8/136B	R1	SMARTAGRO
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“So, it's really waiting for the rain, but if we don't get the rain, we're in with the folio nutrients.”

“Obviously with the reasonable amount of rain we had a few weeks ago now, we had to go and put a fungicide spray on.

“So, it's really waiting for the rain, but if we don't get the rain, we're in with the folio nutrients.

“That's pretty well it... probably the biggest one for us is the irrigation and fertigation at the moment.”

The property's plantings are still in their initial stages, with the trees building up to full production.

“This property will be coming onto its fourth harvest so it's heading towards full production within the next few years,” Mr Miatke said.

“It's starting to level out and we can get some data to follow on from, but this year pollination was fantastic.

“We couldn't have got better weather and leading into the September period.

“So far, the season looks really promising and it's warming up now.

“Soil temp is getting up to about 16C, which is probably a degree warmer than what is has been the last few years.”

The team out at CMV aims to harvest at the beginning of February each year.

“We start early February because we always shake a little bit green and we do have some younger trees,” Jeremy said.

“With our system of how we harvest by removing all product from the orchard and drying it in the open, which is conditioning it at the same time and reduces drying time allows us to shake a little bit greener.”

Mr Miatke said that sustainability and water consciousness were emerging factors in growing and

producing almonds.

“How we use our water is a big thing on the radar at the moment,” he said.

“We all have, including myself, dig sticks, so I probably do 10 to 20 up to 50 digs a week, depending on what we have on and the irrigation guys will do double that.

“Then we correlate all that data for a weekly meeting to see where we're at with moistures and see where we can back off and not push any past the root zones and we just monitor that daily.

“That's the biggest thing is to make sure we're not wasting any water and giving the trees what they need.

“And same with fertiliser. We don't want to be throwing fertiliser out for no reason so we're constantly doing leaf and soil (analysis) to see if we are on target for fertiliser inputs for the year.”

Mr Miatke said other almond producers in the industry were also prioritising sustainable practices.

“I think going back through the drought in the early 2000s, people probably woke up a bit to water usage and got a bit smarter when it comes to water,” he said.

“We're all drip irrigation too, so we monitor our water usage very closely

“At the moment our hulls get used for cattle feed, which is pretty sustainable and going back into the environment in a different way.

“I think we will look at ways we can bring them back into the orchard in some sort of mulch way.

“So, I think we are looking into things like that and it will become part of the future.”

- Supplied by the Almond Board of Australia

CMV goes medium density

A MAJOR Riverland almond-growing company has delved into the world of medium-density plantings after undergoing trials at its original property. CMV Farms, near Loxton, is home to 340,000 almond trees planted over 615 hectares.

CMV Farms director Ryan Norton said the new orchard - which was established in 2016 and is known as Fielke's Orchard - was planted as medium density following promising replant trials at its Lindsay Point orchard after observing what was happening with many other tree crops.

“We trialled several planting densities during the replant process and considered the one chosen for the Fielke orchard to be a good compromise,” Mr Norton said.

“For CMV, the key advantages of denser plantings were the lure of achieving higher yields

and associated cash flow in the early development stage.

“There are some additional costs such as actual nursery tree costs, planting and training costs compared to traditional spaced orchards but in our experience the early yields and returns outweigh these and any additional input costs.

“Other capital costs and development expenses remain almost identical.”

Mr Norton said medium-density plantings require a different management approach to traditional spaced plantings.

“We accept there will be management problems especially around sunlight and in orchard drying of almonds as the orchard ages and we are yet to fully understand how can best manage these issues,” he said.

“We are commencing strict canopy management

from a much earlier stage in the orchard age than normal and aiming for a smaller tree but with more leaf area to capture sunlight.

“We are not anticipating major yield advantages as the orchard matures compared to traditional spacings.”

Mr Norton said the new approach was an opportunity for CMV staff to experiment with new practices and see what works.

“CMV Farms managers have always been encouraged to think outside the square and challenge convention,” he said.

“The Fielke's orchard is an example of putting into play learnings from our Lindsay Point orchard and looking at other forms of horticulture. So far, so good.”

- Supplied by the Almond Board of Australia



Record year smashes production value

TWO good years for South Australian farmers has increased optimism in the Riverland region, with pandemic-defying farmers skyrocketing the Australian agricultural sector to \$73 billion.

Barker MP, Tony Pasin, said regional farmers have been “quietly going about their business producing the best food and fibre in the world” during the pandemic.

“We’ve got all our ducks in a row for a record year,” Mr Pasin said.

“Not only are we looking at a bumper harvest for winter crop, but there are also higher prices and greater demand for oilseeds and grains.

“We are also seeing real confidence in the meat sector with herd rebuilding and re-stocking gathering pace, as well as seeing string export demand for wool and dairy.”

Mr Pasin said the horticultural production value was forecast to reach a high of \$12.4 billion in 2021-22, with prices of fruit and vegetables set to remain high due to labour shortages and increased household demand.

However, Mr Pasin said it is not all “smooth sailing” as Covid-19 continues to challenge international trade.

“We have listened to concerns about labour shortages and we are progressing the Agricultural



“AUSTRALIANS BACKED OUR FARMERS DURING THE TOUGH YEARS OF DROUGHT, WE ARE NOW SEEING THOSE VERY FARMERS HELP THE AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITY AND AUSTRALIAN ECONOMY THROUGH AND BEYOND THE PANDEMIC.”



Mexican feathergrass, resembling a large feather when clumped together, is an invasive plant species requiring immediate reporting if detected in South Australia. PHOTO: PIRSA

Ag pest detected in SA backyard

A REMINDER to all South Australians to be on the lookout for invasive plant species has been issued after the detection of a pest plant in an Adelaide backyard in October.

Mexican feathergrass was detected at a Myrtle Bank house, thanks to members of the public reporting possible sightings to the state government, leading to investigation and removal of the invasive pest.

Mexican feathergrass – accidentally introduced in Australia due to mislabelling as an ornamental plant – is a category 1-declared plant under the Landscape South Australia Act 2019, meaning property owners must report any sighting of the plant to a local landscape board.

Minister for Primary Industries and Regional Development, David Basham, said the plant owner’s co-operation helped to ensure the protection of native grasslands and agricultural pastures.

“With each plant potentially producing 70,000 to 100,000 seeds per year which can be dispersed by wind, rain and animals, Mexican feathergrass presents a significant threat to South Australia’s landscape,” Mr Basham said.

“The plant can cause health and welfare issues, with seed heads prone to stick into the nose, lips and eyes of grazing livestock, and if eaten, the plant can form into indigestible balls in the pit of the stomachs of cattle, sheep and goats.

“Mexican feathergrass is a hardy, drought resilient species and represents a significant environmental threat, being resistant to control by grazing and forming into dense stands which prevent native plants or pasture from establishing.

“The ongoing potential threat for Mexican feathergrass to become established in the broader landscape means the prompt reporting of any sightings is vital.”

Any suspected sighting of the plant should be reported immediately to a local landscape board.



WITH EACH PLANT POTENTIALLY PRODUCING 70,000 TO 100,000 SEEDS PER YEAR WHICH CAN BE DISPERSED BY WIND, RAIN AND ANIMALS, MEXICAN FEATHERGRASS PRESENTS A SIGNIFICANT THREAT TO SOUTH AUSTRALIA’S LANDSCAPE,” MR BASHAM SAID.

Wine safety video \$60,000 remake

AN old wine safety video will be remade to ensure safety best practice in South Australian vineyards, wineries and cellar doors is upheld.

The state government is behind the \$60,000 funding support, announced in October, to update the existing 11-year-old version of the South Australian Wine Industry Association’s (SAWIA) safety induction video.

Minister for Primary Industries and Regional Development, David Basham, said a lot had changed since the current video was released in 2010.

“It is fitting that during National Safe Work Month, the Marshall Liberal Government is providing support to the wine industry to help make their working environment safer,” Mr Basham said.

“Good safety means good business and for our \$1.98 billion wine industry it is vital safety systems meet the latest in safety standards given the type of machinery, tools and operations involved in wine making and grape growing.

“As more technology comes to hand and safety regulations get refined and changed, keeping up with best practice methods can be challenging.

“By assisting SAWIA to produce this new up to date video it will not only be a useful training tool for the industry but will help to ensure employees, contractors and visitors are kept safe.”

SAWIA chief executive Brian Smedley welcomed the funding for the project and said the existing video required updating and enhancement.

“Following a review by our Work Health and Safety Committee, we became aware the existing video contains out of date terminology, while some of the hazard controls depicted don’t reflect current industry best practice,” Mr Smedley said.

“It also does not include advice in relation to managing or considering fatigue risks, working in extreme weather or provide guidance and assistance in relation to mental health in the workplace.

“While our current training video is still widely used by the industry for inducting new and existing employees, a new resource which takes a broader perspective, including mental health, will assist the industry in making further safety improvements, to benefit both business and workers.”



SOUTH AUSTRALIAN WINE INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION INC.



Funding to build drought resource network

A PROJECT set to ensure Mallee farmers are better prepared for future droughts, through the sharing of online resources, has recently received funding.

Mallee Sustainable Farming was last month awarded a \$44,290 grant – under round one of the federal government’s Future Drought Fund’s Networks to Build Drought Resilience program – to create an online network of resources relating to the management of soil health “before, during and after” drought conditions.

Minister for Agriculture, David Littleproud, said the project would increase knowledge sharing between local farmers and help further build drought resilience.

“Building drought resilience on a local level benefits the entire Australian agriculture sector,” Mr Littleproud said.

“The stronger individual communities are, the more robust our industry becomes as a result.

“These are just a few of the projects underway to boost community connectedness and help local communities better prepare for drought.”

Further information regarding projects funded under round one of the Networks to Build Drought Resilience program can be found by visiting the website (<https://bit.ly/3DF9Aj2>).

Drought hubs to be expanded

THE expansion of an Adelaide-based research hub – supported by work in the Riverland – is aimed at improving agricultural practices and increasing the region’s drought resilience.

The federal government last month announced a further \$20m in funding for the eight Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs located across the country.

Minister for Agriculture David Littleproud said the expansion would allow the hubs to develop “regionally focused and responsive innovation and adoption strategies” for the agriculture sector.

“This investment is the next phase in the evolution of the Drought Hubs from being just drought focused to being focused on innovation more broadly,” Mr Littleproud said.

“These hubs are key to unlocking the potential of the agricultural innovation system, enabling people to collaborate and deliver regionally targeted productivity gains.

“The hubs will further build connections between researchers, technology developers, investors, producers and agribusinesses to drive innovation and digital technology uptake across industry and the supply-chain.

“We will continue to provide the right conditions and help the agricultural sector to modernise, improve, innovate and grow.”

The South Australian hub – located at the University of Adelaide’s Roseworthy Campus – is supported by a node at the Loxton Research Centre.

Mr Littleproud said the hubs would also continue providing access to “innovative technologies and practices” that improved resiliency against drought conditions.

“The hubs already provide an important physical platform for stakeholders from across the agricultural innovation system to come together and translate research and knowledge to make real impact on the ground,” he said.

Further information regarding the Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs can be found by visiting the website (<https://bit.ly/2ZUCKWo>).





Locals provide feedback for drought tools

RIVERLAND and Mallee primary producers recently provided feedback to assist the design of new drought resilience resources.

An online workshop was held last month to examine the opinions of Riverland and Mallee farmers on the Federal Government's development of a Climate Services for Agriculture digital platform, and a Drought Resilience Self-Assessment Tool.

Minister for Agriculture David Littleproud said the programs were aimed at providing "accessible and practical information to help farmers prepare for and adapt to climate change".

"Our farmers have a proud history and a wealth of local climate knowledge so it's important we tap into their ideas," Mr Littleproud said.

"The workshops (were) an opportunity to have a conversation about how these tools can support farmers in planning for drought.

"They (explored) how the tools present future climate information and link to other resources to support decision-making over the short and longer term."

It is understood further regular workshops and other opportunities to engage in the design and development of the digital tools are planned for the two regions.

For further information, or to register interest for future engagement opportunities, contact (DroughtResilience@agriculture.gov.au).

Consultation open for national biosecurity strategy

RIVERLAND community members are being asked to make consultation submissions to help develop Australia's first national biosecurity strategy.

Member for Barker Tony Pasin said he hoped the consultation would highlight the need for national co-ordination on the issue of fruit fly in the Riverland.

"Strong and efficient biosecurity is even more important as we, and the rest of the world, respond to emerging challenges and recover our economy post-Covid," Mr Pasin said.

"The rising complexity of Australia's biosecurity environment requires new and innovative approaches for handling biosecurity into the future. As the Riverland continues to hurt from fruit fly outbreaks I want to see a nationally coordinated strategy in place to protect our nationally important pest free region.

"A national biosecurity strategy will link our ambition and collective efforts to strengthen our biosecurity system, in order to protect our environment, economy and way of life.

"Your input will help shape the early development of the strategy and subsequent engagement."

A consultation draft of the strategy is expected in early 2022.

Public submissions for the first phase can be lodged online (haveyoursay.awe.gov.au) until Friday November 26, at 5pm.

New video shows declining Murray-Darling health

A NEW video taking a deep-dive into the Murray-Darling Basin river system and its future survival was released in November.

Conservation SA, in partnership with River Lakes and Coorong Action Group, and Lifeblood Alliance, use the 10-minute YouTube video to explore the declining health of the river system and the ongoing struggle to make it healthy once more.

Stories from those who rely on a healthy river, including fishers, farmers and Traditional Owners are also included in the video, which is hoped to help people better understand the complexities of the basin system.

Conservation SA chief executive, Craig Wilkins, said upstream states have talked about the Coorong and Murray Mouth region and "thought it was time the facts were put on the table".

"The Murray Mouth is a very special part of our state, which came very close to collapse during the Millennium Drought," Mr Wilkins said.

"We never want to see that happen again. The Murray Mouth region is the canary in the coalmine for the entire Murray Darling Basin so protecting her is essential.

"From the Murray Mouth to the heart of the Darling, Conservation SA has always been committed to fighting for the health of our rivers."

River Lakes and Coorong Action Group member, Janette Brooks, said the Basin plan target to keep the system healthy was based around ensuring the mouth stayed open nine out of 10 years.

"The unfortunate reality is that since 2015, 7.7 million cubic metres has been dredged, with dredging continuing 24 hours a day 7 days a week," she said.

"The video features Traditional Owners, ecologists, fishers and farmers that all want to see a healthy Murray Darling into the future."

Healthy Rivers campaigner, Kate McBride, said she had seen firsthand what happens to communities at the bottom of the river.

"This video takes you on a journey, from the heartbreak of the Millennium Drought, through to today, but what's clear is more needs to be done," she said.

"There is a reason they say rivers die from the mouth up, everyone that cares about a healthy and productive basin need to pay attention to what happening, particularly at the Murray mouth."

To watch the video visit YouTube (<https://youtu.be/H1sTXv14Hgg>)

WE NEVER WANT TO SEE THAT HAPPEN AGAIN. THE MURRAY MOUTH REGION IS THE CANARY IN THE COALMINE FOR THE ENTIRE MURRAY DARLING BASIN SO PROTECTING HER IS ESSENTIAL.

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Is water-saving tech actually saving water?

AN international team of scientists, including experts from the University of Adelaide, warn that reliance on modern irrigation technologies to save water is a “zombie idea”, an idea that persists despite evidence against it.

In a paper in Environmental Research Letters, the research team reviewed more than 200 supporting articles and found technology adoption as a water-saving method to improve irrigation efficiency is ineffective, and could worsen water scarcity.

University of Adelaide’s Centre for Global Food and Resources associate professor and co-author, Adam Loch, said the cause was due to water “savings” per hectare being put back into production.

“It’s an idea that sounds logical, but a hard look at the data shows just the opposite,” Mr Loch said.

“Water-use efficiency investments can actually increase local water

consumption and contribute to aquifer depletion.

“We’ve known this for decades, but despite such knowledge this idea persists and flourishes.”

The paper suggests that the “zombie idea” of modern technology (e.g. drip-irrigation) saving water consumption persists thanks to key stakeholders such as those that sell the equipment, politicians who prefer populist solutions, and donor organisations wanting easily investable options.

“It may be easy for some of these groups to champion water-use efficiency, but they don’t have to carry the can when it fails to deliver real savings long-term,” Mr Loch said.

“We need to spread the word that modernisation and other subsidised investments in irrigation aren’t the silver bullet to conserving water and sustaining our agricultural production systems into the future.”



A plan for future water-saving interventions was included in the team’s research, including proper accounting, and measuring for accurate savings, of water use, engaging in engineers, and informing downstream

users of how they will be affected.

“Finally, being ready to implement these changes during the next shock (e.g. drought), when stakeholders will be less resistant to change, may finally put this zombie idea to rest,” Mr Loch said.



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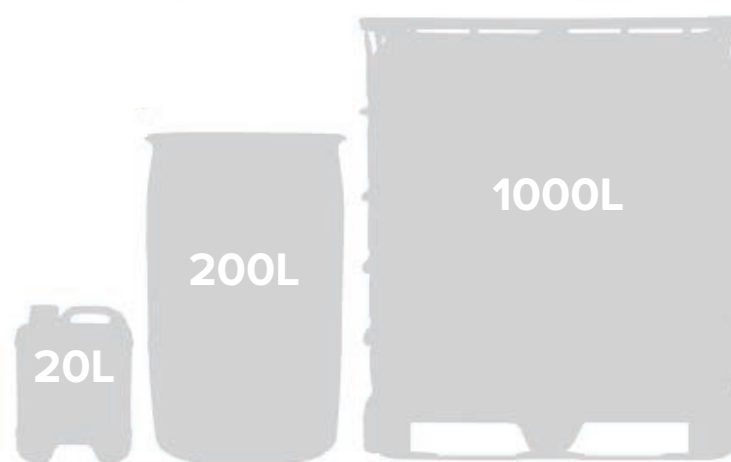
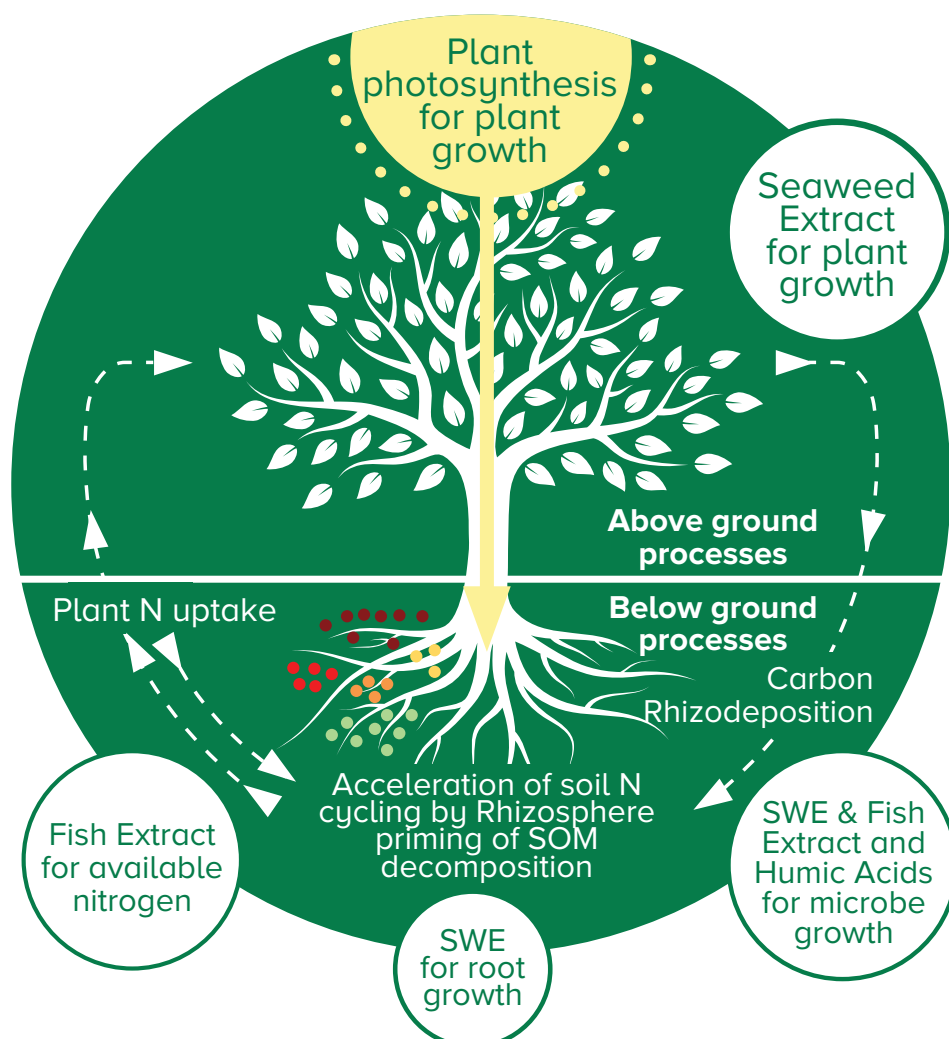
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