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# Farmer

AUGUST 2020

RIVERLAND. MALLEE. LOWER NORTH



Dryland farming  
**The way of  
the future**

**Inside**  
Almond in bloom  
Life in a Food Forest  
Pumpkin patch paradise  
Industry experts update



# Welcome to our latest edition of Farmer.

WELCOME to this edition of Farmer, covering the Riverland, Mallee and Lower North.

We have received an overwhelming response from businesses wanting to be in our publication, meaning this Farmer is bigger and better than ever before.

This edition contains 44 jam-packed pages of agricultural news, industry updates, rain and catchment updates, and feature pieces about people living on the land.

Growing up on a farming property myself, I've seen firsthand the blood, sweat and tears that go into running an agricultural property.

From soaring highs when the heavens open and we receive the soaking we desperately seek to the devastating lows when drought hits and it's hard to see a way ahead.

Farmers are resilient, passionate people who go through so much to supply the rest of the country and the world with produce.

And in this edition of Farmer we get to meet some of the people who work so hard to fill our supermarket shelves.

From a humble Barmera pumpkin grower, to an up-and-coming almond farmer from Loxton and a citrus grower from Winkie – our team of journalists have worked hard to deliver stories from a wide cross section of what our regions produce.

Down in the Mallee, we visited a dry-land farmer who said education and technology is where the future of farming lies, and producers with business knowledge will thrive.

While in the Lower North, our journalists spoke to an olive oil producer, who said the advancements over the past few decades have made his job fairly straight-forward. Well as straight-forward as farming can be.

Also, in the Lower North area, we visited the operators of Food Forest,

who admit they do a little bit of everything, with the aim to diversify and offer a point of difference.

This edition of Farmer well and truly showcases the diversity of agricultural production that exists in the Riverland, Mallee and Lower North.

Be sure to check out our industry update on pages 28-30, for an update from people who are truly in the know.

I hope you enjoy this edition of Farmer, and we again thank our valued advertisers that continue to strongly support this publication.

Without that strong support, this bigger-than-ever before edition of Farmer would not be possible.



## Farmer

RIVERLAND. MALLEE. LOWER NORTH

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Nov 24, 2020  
Feb 24, 2021  
May 25, 2021  
Aug 25, 2021

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Pinnaroo grain grower  
Corey Blacksell says modern farmers need good business skills, and to be savvy when it comes to technology.

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# Almond growers set-up for strong season

WORDS JOSH BRINE | PHOTOGRAPHY PETA-MARIE PHILIPPOU

ALMOND orchards across the Riverland have come alive this month as trees across the region bloom and growers bring in bees to begin pollination.

The first flowers began appearing on trees in late-July, marking the start of the almond growing season, before the orchards reach full bloom in mid-August.

Loxton-based almond farmer Waylon Butt predicts he will have a good crop this season.

"I've had a pretty good start because there has been a bit more natural rain," he said.

"I think the trees are set-up pretty well for a good flowering season, which will then hopefully result in a good crop."

Low overnight temperatures over recent weeks are presenting challenges for growers, with frosts presenting a significant risk for almond orchards.

"Frost before flowering is okay to get your chill hours down, but now with the bees in I don't want

any frost because we'll start to get some damage and potentially lose the crop," Mr Butt said.

"For the next few weeks I just want nice warm sunny days so the bees can get out and do their job."

"A little bit of rainfall would be nice. I'd probably lose a day of the bees flying, but it will add a bit of warmth to the ground, which will help keep the frost away."

Mr Butt got into the almond industry when he bought a run-down citrus block in 2014, planting 32 acres of orchard in 2015 before buying a 30-acre mature property in 2018.

He said bee and water security were some of the biggest issues he'd faced since entering the industry.

"The issues are manageable, but I don't see it getting easier," Mr Butt said.

"It's just something that I'm going to have to factor in going forward, especially with the bees and having the security each year to get them in and have the pollination done."

To combat problems with bee security, Mr Butt will plant 30 acres of self-pollinating trees next year and said any future expansion would likely be with self-

pollinators.

"The advantage with self-pollinators is that it is one harvest as opposed to traditional plantings with three varieties and three harvests," he said.

"The downside is that it is only one variety, so if you have a bad year on that variety the whole property is going to suffer."

"Both types have pros and cons, but with how the industry is looking I do think the self-pollinators have more positives than traditional varieties at this stage."

Mr Butt said he was optimistic about next February's harvest.

"Looking at the trees at the moment it does look like they could set a good crop," he said.

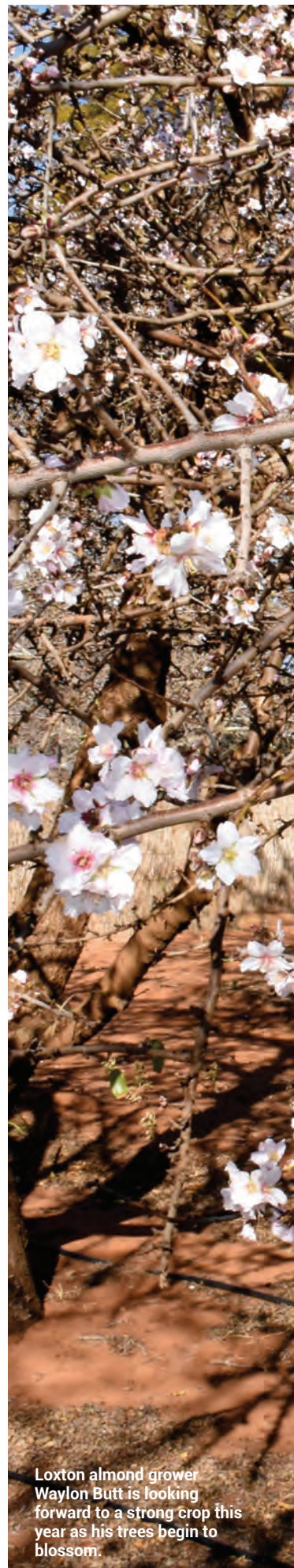
"I started irrigating a couple of weeks ago, I'll go pretty hard with some sprays and start getting some fertiliser into them and keep that going flat out until the end of November or start of December, which is our window to maximise what's on the tree."

"Overall the crop was down a bit last season, so I think I am in for a good crop this season."



“

*I've had a pretty good start because there has been a bit more natural rain*



Loxton almond grower Waylon Butt is looking forward to a strong crop this year as his trees begin to blossom.

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# Almond industry growth leaves apiarists bee-hind

WORDS JOSH BRINE | PHOTOGRAPHY PETA-MARIE PHILIPPOU

SOUTH Australian beekeepers are struggling to keep up with ever-increasing demand from the almond industry in the Riverland and across the state, with apiarists facing many challenges threatening the health of their bees.

The area planted to almonds around Australia has increased 15-fold from 2000 to 2019, with more than 10,000ha of orchards in the Riverland according to the Almond Board of Australia.

Meningie-based beekeeper Bill Brown, whose business, Coorong Apiaries, has supplied 4000 hives for Riverland growers this year, said the beekeeping industry was at a "saturation point".

"There's more beekeepers around in this dry environment to meet the almond growers' demands for extra bees and there's just not the resources here," he said.

"We're getting kicked out of national parks, and we've had bushfires that have burnt out our resources.

"It's at a saturation point – we're needing to feed all this sugar and pollen to our bees to be able to keep them alive.

"South Australia is a big state, but it is a dry state in

the driest country in the world, so there's only a certain small area where we can overwinter our bees.

"Within a 200km radius of us at Meningie, there wouldn't be a patch of scrub bigger than 10 acres that hasn't got a hundred hives of bees on it.

"So, the bees are not getting enough honey to get through winter, so they have to be supplemented, which is very time-consuming and expensive.

"If they are going to keep planting almond trees, we really need to look at the future of how we are going to pollinate them."

Mr Brown also said the use of neonicotinoids and systemic pesticides to coat seeds on farms where bees are kept to overwinter was damaging hive numbers.

"You can't buy seeds now that don't have neonicotinoids or systemics as a seed dressing," he said.

"Any plant, whether it be a weed or a cultivated crop, absorbs the chemical which is what is killing bees worldwide, but especially in Australia.

"We have to get serious about the chemicals, but of course a lot of beekeepers are living in communities where



we rely on farmers to let us put our bees on their properties.

"If we start carrying on about the overuse of certain chemicals, there's the potential that farmers aren't going to support beekeepers."

Mr Brown said allowing more bees onto national parks during winter would help combat some of these problems.

"I think the single biggest thing that could help the bee industry is to open up crown land and national parks so that keepers can have a bigger area they can overwinter their bees on," he said.

"There's a lot of national parks in SA that I'd say at least twice the number of bees could be wintered in."

Almond pollination also presents an increased risk of disease transmission for beekeepers, particularly the bacterial disease American foulbrood (AFB), due to the high concentration of bees in certain areas.

South Australian Apiarist

Association executive Danny Le Feuvre said AFB was a "nasty" disease for bees.

"It's unique because it can sit in honey and stay dormant," he said.

"The bees eat the honey, feed it to the larvae, the bacteria infect the larvae, kill the larvae and then multiply and spread, and when it gets bad enough the hive dies.

"Other bees then come and take the leftover honey and take it to their hive, but when they do that they are also taking the spores.

"The issue with something like almonds is that you are taking hives from all over the state and dropping them all in a condensed area and bringing together hives with different beekeepers, different management and different standards.

"There is a propensity for robbing, which is where bees pick on the weaker hives and steal their honey, but the weak hives are sometimes weaker because of AFB.

"There's no cure. The only way to get rid of it is to destroy or sterilise the equipment, which both kill the bees inside.

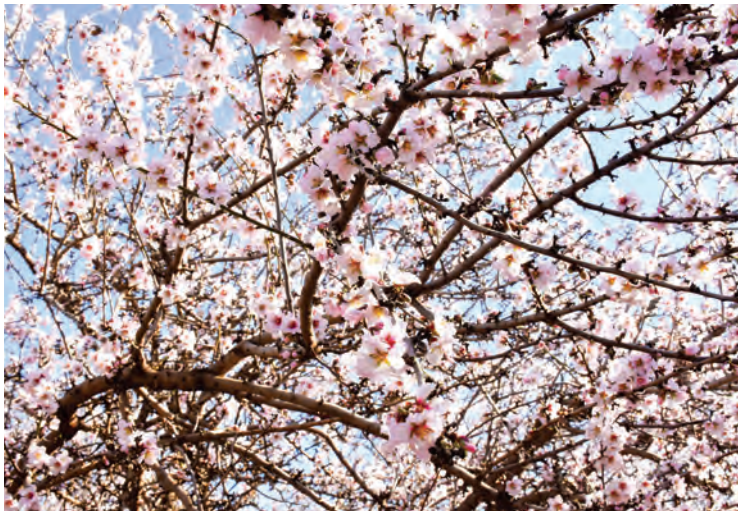
"AFB is the biggest limiting factor for beekeepers going to almonds due to the fear of transmission."

Mr Le Feuvre said the beekeeping industry had developed a national biosecurity code of practice to limit the risk of AFB transmission and provide guidelines for operators to maintain good biosecurity standards.

He said, despite the challenges beekeepers are facing, the industry has been "pretty stable".

"The industry is certainly not in peril," Mr Le Feuvre said.

"The number of commercial beekeepers has been pretty stable, but the challenge is trying to maintain the growth of our industry to match the increasing demand for pollination."



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Annemarie in the Food Forest's kale patch, which they have arranged so multi-coloured bunches can be easily picked.



# Getting lost in the Food Forest

Sustainable farming on the Gawler River's edge

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY SAM BRADBROOK

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Hillier producers Annemarie and Graham Brookman run their farm on permaculture principles.

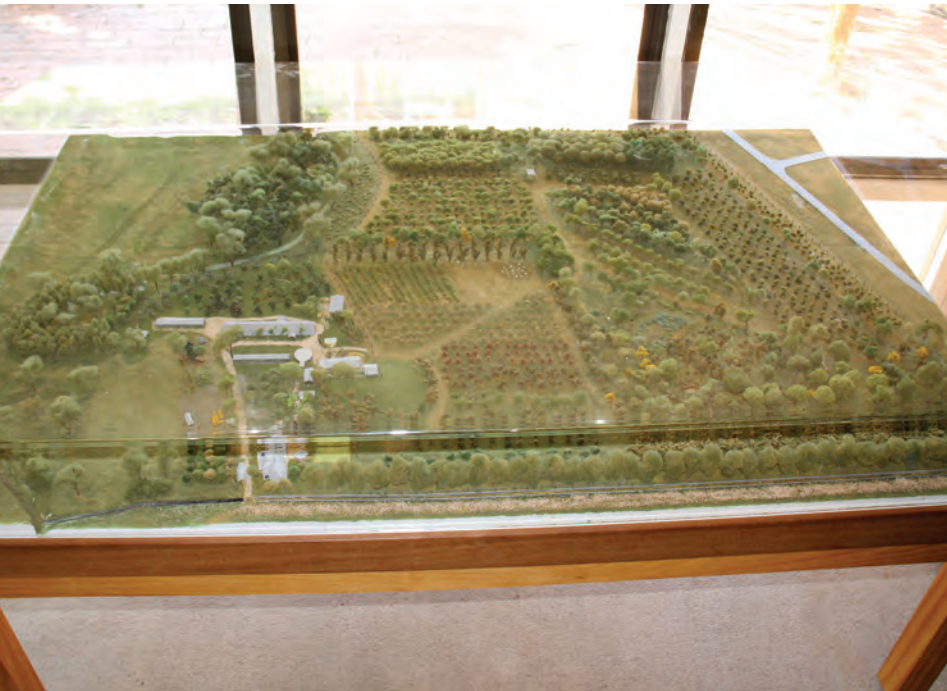


**B**UILDING a diverse and sustainable farm on the banks of the Gawler River has always been a goal of Hillier producers Graham and Annemarie Brookman. The couple own and operate the Food Forest – a certified-organic farm built on one of the oldest cropping areas in Gawler. While most producers along the river are horticulturalists, the Brookman's have made an effort to diversify what they grow, meaning you can find vegetables, cereal crops, a vineyard, pistachios, fruit trees and sheep across the

20ha of land. "It's very bio-diverse," Mr Brookman said. "It has a big scrub-block in the middle which wasn't here when we started. "We're very keen about biodiversity along the Gawler River. The river, our windbreaks and the scrub block make this area very bio-diverse." This push for local biodiversity has resulted in the farm, according to the Brookman's, now being home to almost 90 bird species. The couple operate their farm on the permaculture principle, noting natural changes in the eco-system and using

the information to plan their planting sequences. Permaculture also includes planting diverse crops which make the most of the existing soil, while adding back nutrients which benefit the surrounding produce. Mr Brookman said while serving in Malaysia for the Australian Army, he noted how locals were growing large yields to feed their villages on small, self-sufficient farms. He took the idea back home and got to work recreating it in Gawler. "I saw these villages which were sustainable despite not really being con-

nected to any major towns," he said. "Whilst we'd seen this kind of thing in the tropics, the question was could we see something like that work in South Australia where we usually have big, mechanised farms; low rainfall and very old, unfertile soils. "Permaculture isn't necessarily organic. It promotes sustainability and that's what we were really after. "This has become a life's mission for us to demonstrate that we can, in South Australia, farm sustainably and produce beautiful and clean nutritious food." Mr Brookman studied agriculture, specialising in horticulture, at Roseworthy







This has become a life's mission for us to demonstrate that we can, in South Australia, farm sustainably and produce beautiful and clean nutritious food...

College before becoming a lecturer on the subject.  
 The farm started with growing pistachios to establish some deep-rooted and reliable crop, before expanding its operations to include seasonal food.  
 For the couple, self-sustainability stretches into every part of their life, including their home, which is constructed out of natural materials.  
 The original farmhouse on the property was built in 1840, but they have added an extension constructed from straw bale.  
 The farm usually conducts sustainable growing and building workshops

throughout, but these have been halted by the COVID-19 pandemic.  
 "The educational component was always part of our vision statement," Mrs Brookman said.  
 "We wanted to demonstrate that food can be grown sustainably and that you don't need to be on a farm to live a sustainable lifestyle.  
 "You can take parts of it like (sustainable) architecture or living sustainably as an individual in a house in regards to waste and packaging.  
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Pinnaroo grain grower Corey Blacksell says modern farmers need good business skills, and to be savvy when it comes to technology.



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# The way of the future

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY DEIRDRE GRAHAM

MALLEE cereal farmer Corey Blacksell, who will be cropping 6500 hectares this year, says modern day farmers, more than ever, need to hone their business skills.

Mr Blacksell concentrates on all types of cereals, and over the past 35 years has seen farms including his own increase in size and revenue.

"I think as farmers we need all those skills that make you successful in every business," he said.

"That doesn't mean you have to know exactly how to run the business to the nth degree, and know everything about it... In agriculture today most people are running an agronomist, and they are probably running a few other specialists like accountants, business management advisers, wealth advisors, all those

sorts of things.

"We need some generic skills, whether it is in agriculture or if you want to run a McDonalds restaurant.

"It is a year to year thing, and with such big turnovers and small margins it gets pretty tight so you must have a good grip on where you are at financially."

Mr Blacksell said not all farmers will be hugely successful.

"I did see some data, and it is pretty aged data now, but there was only seven per cent of farmers turning over more than \$1 million a year, 13 per cent between \$500,000 and \$1 million, while there was something like 40 to 50 per cent who were under \$100,000, which you would consider would probably be border-line hobby farmers," he said.

"Generally if you are in that

\$1 million to \$2 million revenue bracket you are probably pushing towards the top 10 to 15 per cent."

Mr Blacksell said he has seen extensive advancements over the 35 years he has been a farmer.

"Things like increased water efficiency, and the amount of grain we grow from a millimetre of rainfall," he said.

"We are retaining water and eliminating disease, and that is something that has become very big in the Mallee, something that has been driven by the Mallee Sustainable Farming group.

"You give us average rainfall now, and we are probably going to have above average crops, whatever average is."

Mr Blacksell said farmers could also look forward to a technology-driven future.

"In the future, I guess

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machinery is going to get bigger, even though we think it is too big now," he said.

"Machinery will get bigger, farms will get bigger. And then there is some of the technology that we could get, which is green on green technology with sprayers, which is almost here.

"The personality profile of a farmer is they are not broad thinking, they are pretty conservative and channelled – but we have to be prepared to change, whether that be in production systems or even where our capital is directed.

"My view is if we just stay in production agriculture for the next 50 years we might run into trouble."

He said success was not always about scale.

"It goes in cycles, and people keep moving on because they can't gain scale," Mr Blacksell said.

"It is one thing to gain scale, but it is another thing that once you have scale to try to value add.

"We obviously have on farm storage, which is a value add.

"It is about what can we do with our grain, how can we process it, how do we get a boutique or niche market that may allow us to scale up and add to the profitability of the business."

He said the future could include diversification.

"You ask about the changes... maybe farms will be more diversified and move beyond the farm gate," Mr Blacksell said.

"Not everyone will have the desire to do it, but it may well be what some want to do.

"Whether it is hay and processing locally, because there is so much hay being grown locally of top quality.

"Whether it is grain and processing. We have seen small snippets of that now, with some people adding to their grain.

"It is something I have a dream to do, to put us closer to the consumer."

Mr Blacksell took over from his parents in 2008 and has seen nothing but growth.

"In that time alone, area has doubled, our cropping area has pretty much doubled, even a bit more," he said.

"Our areas have doubled but our revenue has probably nearly tripled.

"I think that is pretty true for most. In the past decade to 15 years most would have doubled in scale, and a fair chunk of that is coming from intensification of rotations, so not necessarily more area, just cropping more of their ground yearly.

"Revenue is a natural increase, because grain prices do go up in time. We just think they do not go up fast enough."

“

***It is something I have a***

***dream to do, to put us closer***

***to the consumer.***



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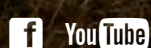
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# Go big or gourd home...

The Barmera farmer living  
the country pumpkin life

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WORDS GIORGINA MCKAY PHOTOGRAPHY PETA-MARIE PHILIPPOU

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HUNDREDS upon hundreds of bulbous, peach-coloured pumpkins are crammed into cardboard boxes by the ton alongside the road. Each barrel looks like it weighs the size of a small elephant, but it is nothing for the trucks rolling up to load them off to their destination. It's moving day for Barmera grower Meta Sindos's butternut pumpkins, and within days they will have found a home on the shelves of Adelaide wholesalers – people Mr Sindos

says he has built a good rapport with over the years.

Meta is a born-and-bred grower, having lived and worked on farms most of his life before taking over properties in Barmera and Loveday. It is hard work most days, but for Meta, it is something he enjoys.

"I just love it, I don't know what it is," he says.

"It's like gardening to be honest but on a slightly larger scale.

"It's hard to explain unless you've grown up on a property and have an understanding (of it)."

A typical day on the farm starts at 5.30am, picking five tons of butternut pumpkins, before packing them into bulk bins. This happens six days a week, with Meta and his son more often than not doing the work themselves. After all is said and done, the pumpkins are then weighed off in bins and sent to the





“

**“It’s a very simple way to grow compared to some of these large-scale properties you see around the area.”**

market. It seems like an impossible feat for most ordinary people, but Meta assures that even the average city slicker could handle the workload of a pumpkin farmer.

“Look, pumpkins are an easy thing to grow – you can grow them yourself,” he explains.

“We plant by machine, we cultivate and we’ll run through two to three times by hand hose, but it’s very minimal.”

“It’s a very simple way to grow compared to some of these large-scale properties you see around the area.”

For Meta, whose pumpkins are his pride and joy, everything has to be top quality for the consumers. He says growing and selling something he would buy himself if he had seen it in the shop is very important, and is one of the reasons why his produce stands out from others.

“I’ve seen pumpkins in stores that just look disgusting, and I think to myself ‘how could they actually sell it?’ and ‘how could the supermarket actually buy it in that state?’” he says.

“You see some that look like they’ve been knocked around, but ours we try to have them as perfect as possible – make them look real presentable.”

However, the pumpkin life is

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not always glass slippers and coaches. Meta says the season was going really well this year and produce was in high demand, but then COVID hit and "took the cream off" of what would have been good revenue.

"It was a very strong demand until COVID-19 hit, and then the price dropped by 50 per cent, which was a bit disappointing but we did make reasonable sort of money out of it," Meta says.

"But when you take into account the price of water this year and just basically you've still got the same costs with freight and everything else added on top, it just took away the cream basically of what would've been a really good season."

And he is not the only one. Meta says other growers in the area, who grow late graze pump-kin and mainly use it for process-ing struggled this year as well, with one processor closing its door completely and another still waiting to re-open post-shutdown.

However, Meta understands you can only control so many sce-narios when it comes to farming, and he still loves being able to just grow food for his community.



LEFT: Meta Sindos and his son Christopher.



## Mass plantings cause concern for Riverland growers

**A** LOCAL grower says he worries about the future of the Murray River and other Riverland growers if mass plantings continue in the region.

Barmera-based pumpkin grower Meta Sindos said large corporates who have brought over templates from California are sucking the Murray dry, causing concerns not only for local growers future in the region, but the longevity of the river.

...something's going to give sooner or later.

"I've been over (to the USA) five years ago and their irrigation and infrastructure makes Murray look like a little creek to give an idea and they're using the same model here," he said.

"I'm born and bred in Barmera and I can't ever recall such huge plantings going every-where, and I don't know where it's going to end."

Mr Sindos said the ramifications of this is seeing the Riverland turn into a mono-culture, where growers are unable to viably keep up with the competition and pump-out produce.

He said if the region continues at this rate, the outcome will not be good for anyone.

"They say the economic scale of proper-ties now – everything's getting huge – and what's happening, the area's developing into mono-culture," he said.

"So I think us smaller growers are needed for more diversity in the area otherwise what you're going to end up with is endless properties with the same variety, whether it's almonds or wine grapes and that's it."

"A lot of these large corporates that are planting these properties up, the money doesn't stay in the area, it strains off to inner cities or back overseas."

"One day it'll unwind and I don't reckon it's going to end well to be honest."

"The river isn't our finer source, some-thing's going to give sooner or later."



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# Rain still to be desired, but storages improving

VARYING rainfall levels across the Riverland, Mallee and Lower North during winter have given primary producers a lot to consider before the end of 2020. The Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) recorded 12.8mm of rain in Renmark during June – compared to an average of 20.8 for the month – and

5.8mm last month, compared to the July average of 20mm. However, 17.2mm of rain had fallen during the first two weeks of August, compared with an historical average of 22.6mm for the month. BoM also recorded 18mm of rain in Loxton during the first two weeks of August, with just 7.2mm falling

throughout the whole of August 2019. Loxton saw a total of 20.2mm of rain between June and July, compared to 43.6mm in the same period last year. Lameroo received 12.2mm of rainfall during the first two weeks in August and 14.2mm last month, although this is

down on the 63.6mm that fell during the same period in 2019. A total of 133.2mm of rain has been recorded for the year so far in Renmark, below to January to August average of 154.7mm. Reports from the Murray-Darling Basin Authority, produced earlier this month,

show total active storage levels (Dartmouth, Hume and Lake Victoria) had reached 48 per cent capacity. This marked a 79GL improvement on the previous fortnight, with storage levels slightly higher than the 45 per cent recorded at the same time in 2019.





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# Quantity low, quality high in 2020 vintage

INCREASING value for premium Riverland wines is helping to offset a drop in total grape crop volumes, according to a new industry report.

Wine Australia earlier this month released the National Vintage Report, with the 2020 harvest producing an estimated value of \$1.07 billion.

The 2020 Australian wine crush totalled 1.52 million tonnes, marking the smallest crop in terms of volume since 2007, although the average

value of grapes increased by 5 per cent.

Wine Australia chief executive officer Andreas Clark said while overall grape crop volume "was down, wine quality was expected to be high".

"This vintage will enable us to continue to meet our targets of value growth in premium wine market segments, although the constrained supply will restrict overall volume growth in the next 12 to 24 months," Mr Clark said.

The Riverland saw only a 4 per cent reduction in grape volumes over the past

year – attributed "to the availability of supplementary water" – compared to other regions which saw 34 per cent drops.

The report found volume of red grape varieties fell 11 per cent – with shiraz making up a total of 25 per cent of the total crush – while white varieties fell 13 per cent.

However, Mr Clark said production of experimental red varieties such as durif – grown by many Riverland wineries – had increased by 9 per cent compared to 2019.

"The increase in average

value for shiraz is far outpacing that for chardonnay, leading to strong demand signals favouring shiraz," he said.

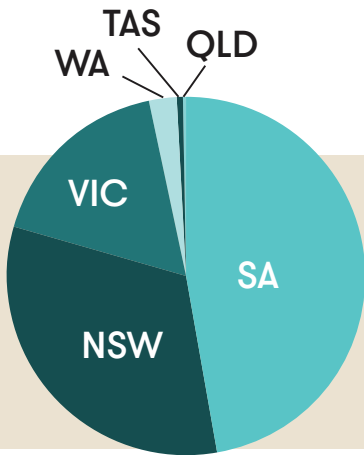
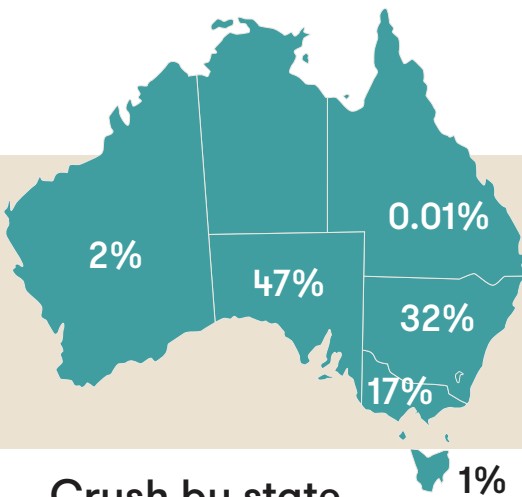
"This is reflected in our exports. The average value of bottled shiraz exports was \$9.21 per litre FOB in 2019 compared with \$4.29 for chardonnay."

The full Wine Australia National Vintage Report 2020 can be downloaded by visiting the website ([www.wineaustralia.com/market-insights/national-vintage-report](http://www.wineaustralia.com/market-insights/national-vintage-report)).



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Crush by state

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MAX Leske and his team of skilled engineers have been supplying custom-made agricultural equipment to farming communities across Australia since 1980.

The family-owned and operated business is celebrating 40 years of service to the farming industry this year and offers a wealth of knowledge in broad acre and intensive farming practices.

Prior to the start of his business, Max spent 12 years working for a local agricultural manufacturing company, W Ahrens & Son, welding as an employee.

The Leske business will hopefully be around for quite a few years yet, with son Michael having a very keen interest. Michael is a fully qualified boiler welder and has been working at the company since December 2014.

Max said he enjoyed any challenges that come with the job.

“We do what our clients are asking for – what the customer wants we will design it and produce a high-quality product,” he said.

“From our extensive premises at Wandel Road in Shea-Oak Log, we are conveniently located to serve customers and transport our equipment across Australia.

“We know that time is money, and over the years we have applied our wealth of manufacturing experience to make our products both efficient and cost-effective.

“Quality is important to any manufacturer. We emphasise quality throughout each step of our manufacturing process. We also strive to be as efficient as possible so we can offer a competitive price to our customers.”

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FOR 40 years Leske Engineering has been an important part of the local community. Proprietor Max says the family business strives to support local when it can. "We support all our local people with their repairs and maintenance and buy locally where possible," he said. "We're here to help with

any of your agricultural equipment needs. "We also work with many respected and dependable suppliers." Max said COVID-19 had failed to slow down business operations. "The season this year has started looking very promising. Due to a lot of silo closures the field bin demand has started to increase," he said.

"If by any chance you are looking to purchase field bins, now is the time to start with ordering, so delays or inability to supply is avoided." Contact us: Phone (08) 8524 9082 Fax (08) 8524 9170 Mobile 0427 807 066 Email: leskeeng@activ8.net.au Website: leskeeng.com.au

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The business primarily manufactures and supplies farm equipment, and does repairs to all kinds of farm machinery – parts worn or broken.

"We have lathes, mill, key broaching sets, radial arm drill with a range of drills up to 2-1/4 inch bit diameter, 2.4 metre x 3mm sheet metal guillotine, 60 tonne x 3 metre brake press, sheet metal rolling machines, hydraulic hose crimping machine, and a range of hose & fittings, silo and field bin transport, to

name a few of the services provided," proprietor Max Leske said.



**If anyone wants specialties made to their plans we will also accommodate that.**

"The equipment and machines manufactured by us are all made to a standard not to a price. "Machines and equipment

manufactured include a range of portable field bins 28 to 55 tonne grain, and we also do 28 tonne fertilizer bins, grain feed and fertilizer silos, chaser or haul out bins, comb trailers, hydraulic folding land rollers, front-end loader attachments: including buckets, hay spikes and forks, roller mills and roller mill mixers, universal sheep/cattle feeders, 2.5 tonne feed out carts for sheep nuts and grain, 10-bag utility tray feed out bins, piggery feed trolleys, and general engineering.

"If anyone wants specialties made to their plans we will also accommodate that."



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# Over 50 years of farming and fertiliser

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY ERIN WILLIAMS

RIVERLAND growers looking to support local and care for their orchards with organic, nutrient-rich foodstuff need look no further than family business Riverhaven, based in Waikerie's across-the-river neighbour Taylorville.

Mark McLean owns and manages Riverhaven – a Taylorville-based enterprise comprising of pig farms, fertiliser operations, citrus fruits, and more.

Years ago, Mark and his father Rob developed a system of breaking down the pig manure and straw into organic compost.

"Composted pig manure fertiliser has numerous benefits, including water savings and increasing beneficial soil pathogens," Mark said.

"My dad started up the pig farm over 50 years ago, and used the manure for a variety crops, including stone fruit, grapes, vegetables and citrus.

"Over the years, as the farm and

operations grew, we developed a system together to break the manure and straw bedding from pig sheds down into high-quality, organic fertiliser.

"The fertiliser is largely purchased by Riverland farmers and it's perfect for the sort of ground we plant in around here; the Riverland region has very sandy soil with not much organic nutrients."

While the family originally used the compost for their own orchards, as the farm and orchards grew, they decided to develop a composting system providing quality fertiliser for sale.

Now, Mark and his team process 5000 cubic metres annually to Riverland and Murray Mallee farms.

"We take a holistic approach to farming including use of compost, to create a sustainable food production system, which is something that's becoming more widespread these days," he said.

"We want to reduce synthetic

fertiliser use, to increase beneficial organisms in our soils, and other customers and farmers also value this process.

"I find farmers these days are willing to invest in improving their soil structure while increasing yields and reducing water usage by using products like our compost. Our composting procedure removes any dangerous pathogens, so it's more and more in demand."

Mark vouches for the effectiveness of pig manure fertiliser firsthand as he uses it on his own blocks of citrus and olive orchards.

"With the sandy soil we deal with in the Riverland, the composted pig manure fertiliser improves the soil health," he said.

"We've just put in another 6000 citrus trees following an irrigation upgrade, and currently we're working on a solar panels project to reduce costs.

"The irrigation upgrade has been

Riverhaven Enterprises managing director Mark McLean says the organic composted fertiliser has "numerous benefits" for products grown in the Riverland's sandy soil.

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"Water efficiency has become highly important for farmers out here since about 2008, and we're always wary of when the next drought might hit.

"A good irrigation system can help with efficiencies to get farmers through rough years."

Like many businesses across the region, Riverhaven has been affected by COVID-19; while not forced to close, certain restrictions and procedures added more responsibilities for the workers.

"COVID-19 added an extra 30 per cent more work for us," he said.

"Having staff working in close proximity and trying to ensure business continuity while modifying rosters and

maintain morale has been challenging, but our team has really risen to the challenge, and continues to achieve great results and high productivity on all areas of the farm.

"We're an essential industry so thankfully everyone was able to stay on and work, while we kept in line with the restrictions, but it has definitely made keeping up with operations more difficult.

"But everyone's struggled during this, and one of the great things about living out in the regions is that people are close.

"We help each other out where we can."

To inquire further about Riverhaven pig manure fertiliser, contact riverhaven.office@gmail.com or phone Mark on 0427 138 919.



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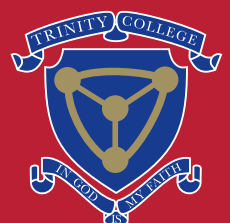
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Ground Prep at Koch Contracting



**Rash Koch**

Koch Contracting operator

**Ian Macrae**

Senior Viticulture Officer at CCW

## Koch Contracting is the contact for ultimate soil

LONG-term use of drip irrigation is being increasingly implicated in the loss of structure of many of the soils of the Riverland and elsewhere in inland Australia.

While intrinsically fertile, the soils of the Mallee are fragile and subject to soil structural degradation under intensive farming practices, including the use of drip irrigation, herbicide weed control and the use of increasingly heavy machinery.

This loss of soil structure and soil health has resulted in:

- increased soil strength and bulk density (compaction),
  - reduced water infiltration rates (water ponding),
  - reduced water use efficiency,
  - reduced ability to leach salt accumulations,
  - reduced availability of air to roots,
  - reduced rates of nutrient uptake,
  - extended periods of waterlogging,
  - increased susceptibility to root rots, and
  - decreased plant health and productivity.
- Trials in a number of

horticultural industries are now looking at the damage caused by our current management practices to soil structure and health, and how best to mitigate the damage while improving the long-term sustainability of production.

In the wine grape industry the CCW Co-operative, in conjunction with Landscapes SA with funding from Landcare, commenced a long-term soil health project in 2018.

The aims of the project are to assess the impact of irrigation and current vineyard management practices on a range of

soil health indicators (physical, chemical and biological), and to evaluate a range of management practices for their capacity to improve soil health and sustainability.

The treatments include:

- ripping,
- application of gypsum,
- application of organic matter to the soil surface and into rip lines
- combinations of ripping, and the application of gypsum and organic matter,
- sowing a range of cover crop species under the vines,

□ sowing mid-row cover crops, including a permanent prostrate salt bush species,
- application of various biological amendments or stimulants, and the
- application of polyacrylamides (polymers).

While these trials are still in the early stages of evaluation, the measurement of a wide range of soil health indicators over the past two years has shown that ripping and the application of organic matter has resulted in significant improvements in water infiltration rates, decreased soil resistance

and bulk density, and an increase in beneficial aerobic microbial activity. These are all indicators of an improvement in soil health.

In recognition of the need for a contract service to assist in improving soil health, Koch Contracting have developed a machine that both rips the soil and incorporates amendments such as organic matter and gypsum deep into the soil profile.

While ripping is a relatively easy operation to undertake, the real challenge has been to deep incorporate enough soil

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# Make it a ripper job with Koch



**Peter Hill**  
Owner of Ridge Hill

RIVERLAND, Mallee and Barossa Valley horticultural producers now have access to advanced soil ripping and loosening equipment.

A new machine is set to increase horticultural yields and efficiency by reducing soil compaction and improving soil health.

Riverland-based horticultural contractor Koch Contracting, along with Norm Hood from Hoods Agrimotive and Colin Stray from Seymour Rural, have developed a new machine that rips the soil and adds organic matter and soil amelioration agents all in one pass of a vineyard or orchard.

Koch Contracting operator Rash Koch said the ripper – developed partly in response to outcomes of the CCW soil health project – is capable of ripping and adding compost and gypsum or fertiliser at the same time.

"It rips down through the vines at any requested depth as deep as 650mm, and also places compost or any kind of fertiliser you want down in behind the tynes," Mr Koch said.

"It was a suggestion by Ian Macrae from CCW that we needed a machine to perform the job, but I needed something that would be suitable as a contractor.

"We got the right pieces to build the machine the way we wanted it and the John Deere tractor, a 7260r, is now narrowed down to 2.2 meters wide.

"It's a tractor that's never been put down the vine row before. It's taken a lot to get this machine to do what is required, because any smaller tractor just can't do it affectively or carry the weight."

Mr Koch said having a larger coulter wheel in front of the ripper tyne on the new machine prevents a build-up of roots and soil in front of the tyne, as seen with other

ripping machines.

"A lot of machines make quite a mess because you get a lot of roots dragging around the tynes, so we needed a large coulter to cut the roots instead of tearing them," he said.

"The coulter is nearly a metre high, so that gives a nice clean cut.

"It's quite a heavy piece of machinery on the back of this tractor and has the ability to hold 3 tonne or 5 cubic metres of product. This helps the coulters to penetrate and cut cleanly, then the ripper tyne comes through and doesn't throw the soil around as much."

Mr Koch said the benefits of ripping vineyards and orchards – best done between May and August – was "like a second wind" for dense and un-aerated soils or sandy soils requiring more organic matter in the soil profile.

"Soils do not all have the same issues, so it's about finding out what soils have what problems and focusing on those areas with specific needs," he said.

Local soil and irrigation agronomist Trevor Sluggett has also assisted in this project.

Mr Sluggett's experience is that compact degraded soils are a major problem in many vineyards and orchards. He believes that equipment such as this unit effectively rips compact soil and places much needed compost and ameliorants into the soil profile, where it is most effective.

Rapid root growth occurs in the loosened nutritious soil, so that the soil is not compact and devoid of roots again.

"It's a big help in areas where the soil is marginal because ripping the ground gets air back in the soil and adding compost gets the microbes working again," Mr Koch said.

Koch Contracting are now the Riverland agent for Worm Hit, a organic fertiliser made

from worm castings that stimulates microbial activity that helps feed the plant.

Mr Koch advised his ripping services were available to horticultural growers in all Riverland areas, plus the Mallee and Barossa Valley regions, while they will also travel interstate.

"It's normally an hourly rate, but a hectare rate can be quoted depending on what is being applied and distance of travel to refill sites," he said.

For further information and inquiries regarding Koch Contracting contact Rash Koch on 0428 839 886 or visit the website ([www.kochcontracting.com.au](http://www.kochcontracting.com.au)).

## health



amendment to make a significant difference to soil health.

This machine has taken two years of development, trial and error and significant expense to get to the point of now being able to offer a commercial contract service to rejuvenate unhealthy soils.

Koch Contracting is to be congratulated for the development of a machine capable of addressing the key requirements for a healthy, productive soil; open and aerated, good drainage and water infiltration, and with sufficient organic matter.



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# INDUSTRY EXPERT UPDATE



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



**John Lush**  
Mallala dryland farmer,  
Adelaide Plains councillor

**How important was the recent rainfall for your crops?**  
We had 20mm out of it which was very

good. We needed it because we only had 10mm in July, so that was very dry, (though) we'll need more rain within 10 days or a fortnight. We were tracking only about 40mm ahead of last year and last year we had just over half our average, and the year before that we only had just over half our average as well. This year was tracking a bit better. It's still below average, but it looks like it might pick up from now on. We're starting to be a bit more optimistic, but we're still not convinced about this year.

**What stage are your crops currently at?**  
The canola is flowering and looking

good. The wheat is sort of halfway up to your knees, so it's got potential. If we have a good spring we'll have a good year, as usual, and if we don't have a good spring we won't.

**How important is it for South Australian farmers to begin working with GM crops?**

If the current trend is that we get less than average rainfall, it's critical we have plants that can produce more with less rainfall and GM technology is the only technology that can deliver us drought tolerance, frost tolerance and heat stress tolerance. We're doing it with agronomic activities such as no cultivation, retaining all our stubble on the ground so it goes a bit like a garden with mulch. We believe we've saved half

of what used to evaporate. Out of our 400mm we used to equate 100mm to evaporation and we think we've saved half of that.

If our rainfall is going to drop, what we've done is increase our rainfall by 50mm, so that's critical to the survival of grain production in South Australia. Our yields have increased as a response to that. Since we went to stubble-mulching and zero till, we've increased our yields by probably a tonne per hectare.

**Are you confident the industry will recover from COVID-19 impacts?**

I retain my enthusiasm for the agricultural sector... agriculture is one of (Australia's) success stories. We are world competitive because our work

practices, research and development, and the adoption of new technologies is keeping us in that competitive zone.

**Advice for fellow farmers in the region?**

Put your reliance on science, plant breeding and new technologies. If you adopt those things then you're at the cutting edge of crop production, and that's where you need to be if you're going to survive as a farmer. Don't grow a new wheat variety for any longer than four or five years, because by then there will be a better one. Always be growing the best, new varieties and always be operating with the best, new technologies. We've gotten to the stage now where you walk across our paddocks and don't see any soil. It's 100 per cent ground cover.



**Adrian Hoffman**  
Wine Grape Council SA

**Have you been confident during the current season?**

We're in the process of taking cuttings for new plantings. For the 2020 vintage the quality was outstanding. We only picked basically 40 per cent of the crop, so that's 60 per cent down on what I think a reasonable pull would be in an average (year), but averages are pretty hard to come by at the moment. Most Barossa winemakers are very happy. We saw positive changes in the prices as well, grenache on an average price is over \$2000 per tonne now. Shiraz, which is the main star of the Barossa, has been very positive as well.

**Has the current rainfall been enough?**

I was cautiously optimistic and now the needles probably swinging a bit more toward being a pessimist. I'm normally fairly optimistic, but I suppose how dry it's been in the last four weeks (means) we definitely need a good recharge of moisture in our soil. We're not carrying over very much water from last year, so we really need some strong rains. The long-range forecast looks like it's going to be a wet September and October, but once the vines start growing then you get disease pressures.

**When will vines begin to come out of dormancy?**

Generally we work on the first week of September. The Barossa normally starts off in the south around late August. Most of those early varieties start pushing out a bit of woolly bud. A lot of people are concerned about the level of frost we're having at the moment and how cold those frost events are. As much as it doesn't affect the vines now, we've had a couple of -4C temperatures in the last couple of mornings."

**Challenges this year?**

My concern is COVID and how that is affecting some of the smaller wine producers that don't have a direct route to market. A lot of small winemakers I know struggling on premise have only really clawed back a small portion of their market at this stage. It's tough because we're next to the Adelaide Hills and everyone wants to support that (region)... but it's getting to the stage where nearly all wine producers need that support now in trying to get through the next 12 to 18 months.

**What have been the valuable grape varieties in the region?**

All the parts of the Barossa really focus on those red varieties. Shiraz, grenache and mato are our mainstays, but there is pockets of alternate varieties coming out. Experimenting with them is really good and it gives the consumer in wine varieties that can be made. What I think is really good is to see the resurgence of grenache, mato and those lighter styles of red.

We're very well known for our heavy, dark shiraz, but to create fresh and aromatic styles that can rival Tasmania and Victoria is fantastic as well."

**Advice for fellow growers?**

The wine industry is a long-term game, there's nothing short-term about it. If you're having issues contact your regional organisation... don't think you're doing it alone. You're not alone in this because everyone is going through the same situation. It really is a case of hoping things will turn around and get better, but make sure you stay in touch with those regional organisations that are there to help you.



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**Sean Cole**  
CCW chief  
executive officer

**When will Riverland growers be looking for vines to come out of dormancy?**

In the Riverland, early varieties such as chardonnay typically burst in the first or second week of September. Later varieties such as cab sauv and gordo may burst up to three weeks later.

The date of budburst is not affected to any great extent by seasonal conditions, but can be by the time of pruning, which area the vineyard is located in the Riverland, and even by the aspect of the vineyard.

**What factors are most important for vine health when coming out of dormancy?**

The most important factor for the health of the vine coming out of dormancy is how healthy the vine was when it went into dormancy. All vine growth for the first three to four weeks after budburst relies on carbohydrates and minerals stored in the permanent parts of the vine before dormancy. Good post-harvest vine management is critical to ensuring that these stored reserves are maximised. The more carbohydrates and minerals stored in the vine, the healthier and stronger the early season growth will be, the percentage budburst will be higher, and the potential bunch size will be larger. One other factor that can affect the health and performance of vines after budburst is whether the root system has been kept sufficiently moist during the winter. While the vine and root system are dormant during this time, sufficient moisture is required to ensure root desiccation does not occur.

**Have current rainfall levels been enough to sustain vines through the winter?**

The Riverland has once again had a very dry winter. After a decent autumn break, the rainfall over the past three months has been below average and has not been sufficient to maintain an adequate moisture level in the soil and rootzone. Growers have needed to regularly apply light irrigations throughout the winter to ensure that the roots remain well hydrated during this time.

**Is there any more certainty or confidence around the export market?**

The latest Wine Australia report shows a lot of resilience in Australian wine exports despite the drag effect of COVID-19. The latest report covering the last financial year (ended June 30, 2020) shows a 9 per cent lift in the average price per litre of Australian wine exported to \$3.89 per litre free on board (FOB), the highest since 2004–05. Additionally, the total aggregate dollar value of Australia of exports to all destinations for the same period only slipped 1 per cent in spite of a lower 2019 vintage and COVID-19. This shows that Australia has managed to sell less wine but at a higher per litre price point, which largely compensates for lower vintages experienced.

The same trend is also shown in regard to China, where Australia was down on volume exported (17 per cent for the period) but only slipped back 1 per cent in total value, with exports to China still equating to \$1.2 Billion, followed by the US at \$430 million and the UK at \$383 million.



**John Gladigau**  
Bulla Burra Farms  
executive director

**How important was the recent rainfall for your crops?**

It was very timely – just in the nick of time really. We had between 12 and 17mm right across all of our properties and a gentle soaking rain. That was followed up by another 4 to 6mm (during the week). In some ways the fortunes of the season have taken another turn. We're still in pretty good shape here in the Northern Mallee at the moment, but it's just so dependent on what happens in the next couple of months. We're still walking on a bit of a knife edge, so it's really about the rain continuing for August and September, and what happens with frost. There's still a fair way to go, but we are set up for quite a reasonable season as

long as it keeps on going.

**How long until you would need a similar rainfall event?**

We would be hoping to have as much as we've had in August again before the end of the month. To really set the season up we would like another 30 or 40mm in September really, because we haven't got a huge amount in the sub-soil. We certainly need at least a couple of significant rainfall events in the next four to six weeks I would think.

**Has frost been an ongoing risk through the winter?**

We've had quite a few frosts already this year, but fortunately at this time of year it doesn't do a huge amount of damage other than drying out the ground and inhibiting growth of the crop. The bigger problem is having frost from this point on as the head starts to form and crops enter the flowering stage. If we get significant frost it can basically kill the crop. It's really frosts, especially in September, that can cause us big problems. The more rainfall we have, it does lessen the chance of frost because the ground is damp and it stays warmer.

**How important is the decision for SA farmers to adopt GM crops?**

We believe farmers should have the choice to grow what they would like on their own properties, and having the GM moratorium lifted hopefully gives us the opportunity to do that. It's not just about the crops currently available from a GM perspective, it's the fact it gives researchers the opportunity to look at developing other traits in crops that will give us benefits. Frost could be a significant one of those... even additional drought tolerance or higher water use

efficiency.

While the moratorium has been in place in South Australia, we didn't have the opportunity to even look at those, which has put South Australia behind. We are quite a unique grain growing region, so you can't just pick things up from other areas and bring them here.

**How are things looking in terms of exports?**

There's been an enormous amount of work that's happened behind the scenes... and there's plenty of our industry groups working really hard to place that grain into other markets.

The tariff issue with China has highlighted to us the need to have a diversity of export destinations. We had a fair percentage directed towards China. They will drop that tariff in time and in some ways they may have done us a favour long-term, because when we come out of it we will have a much better spread of where our crops will go. We've managed to develop a number of new markets in the last two or three months and if we can consolidate those moving forward, it will make our industry much stronger. You can't become reliant on a huge customer like that, especially when you're pushing a commodity product into a huge market. You suddenly realise it can disappear overnight, so that makes you keener to create more markets in other places.

**Any advice for fellow farmers in the region?**

After the last three really poor years, it's nice to be going into spring with a bit of confidence behind us and still seeing significant potential. With the current environment we're in, it's a positive thing for us to be able to go out and do what we do best and hopefully capitalise for the whole region.

***"We're still walking on a bit of a knife edge, so it's really about the rain continuing for August and September, and what happens with frost".***



**Mark Doecke**  
Citrus SA chair

**Which varieties of citrus are still being harvested in the Riverland?**

Harvest continues in the Riverland with the usual challenges. Mid-season varieties are finished and we are currently harvesting tango, afourer and sumo mandarins along with late navels and blood oranges.

**Are current rainfall levels enough to sustain growers until the end of the season?**

Any rain fall is welcome at most times of the year. Inflows into the Murray-Darling system are continuing and irrigators are in a better position than this time last year. I'm confident we will soon be at 100 per cent allocation.

**Is there any more certainty for growers**

**regarding export markets?**

Export markets are good, with the only difference being we are exporting to a mix of markets. People everywhere appreciate the health benefits of citrus, especially in the current COVID-19 scare.

**Are there any other challenges growers are currently facing?**

This year we have had our fair share of cold nights with below zero occurring at times. Growers have a challenge to mitigate potential frost damage by using methods including frost fans, overhead water, netting or molasses.

With labour availability tight, growers also need to be in constant contact with their contractor to discuss picking programs.

**Any advice for Riverland growers at this time?**

Riverland citrus growers can be satisfied with the quality they have achieved again this year. Keep up the good work.

***"Any rain fall is welcome at most times of the year."***

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## Jed Puckridge Nutrien Ag Solutions wool area manager

### Is there confidence among wool producers right now?

I wouldn't say there's confidence (because) it has been a very tumultuous time during the COVID-19 period. We've got a few things playing at field at the moment. Demand is a big issue as consumer confidence really has dropped away globally, and that's in all fields not just wool. Wool has taken a big hit with prices coming off as dramatically as they have over the last two months. Demand has taken a big hit there and retail orders into the mills are now drying up. As consumer confidence drops away people aren't worried about buying new garments. They're certainly worried about just making do with what they have.

### What challenges are wool producers facing at the moment?

On the supply front, (in 2018) we hit record highs and a lot of growers have been hanging onto wool trying to get to those levels again, but they really have started to drop away quite dramatically. In Australia as an estimate, we would have somewhere around 200,000 to 250,000 bales sitting in warehouses and on farm, and we're about to go into a whole new shearing season. Going forward there may be an oversupply for the demand available in the short term, but as we see with any global financial downturn, we see potential to still get rid of that supply as things open up and get back to normal. Another factor is the quality that is out there. We're not too sure at this stage if we've seen an end to

the drought, but certainly we're seeing better styles of wool come in. High-yielding type wools we'll probably see this season, with better tensile strength. The test results will be better and that surely has to have an effect on the micron price averages heading into the new season.

### Has the COVID-19 emergency affected wool exports?

The big question is consumer confidence. When it boils down to it, it's whether people are buying and purchasing or not. It depends on the restrictions, with the second wave, into individual countries. We're seeing India now at quite reduced rates, but China is still definitely the one purchasing a huge percentage of the Australian wool clip. In the last two months consecutively somewhere around 92 to 93 per cent of the Australian wool clip has been going China's way, so they've got a huge monopoly going on there. **Any advice for wool producers?** We've been pretty lucky really, (because) we've had a whole generation that basically buy a new garment every time they walk out their front door. I'm sure once we get back to a so-called normal, we could potentially see that generation get back to that situation. The wool industry is more of a high-end market... it is an expensive product to buy in garment form, but it does last a long time with good care. These levels we're at now are still reasonable. If you look at a 10 or 30-year average, these are very good levels still. It's just a long way from the peak two years ago. Input costs have certainly risen and we really need to be seeing (current) levels or above to be sustainable.



## Tim Grieger Summerfruit SA executive officer

### When would growers be looking at trees to come out of dormancy?

Early varieties would have started coming out of dormancy toward the end of June and they would now be setting fruit, but that's the very early varieties that would

probably be harvested mid to late October.

Then there's other varieties that are much later of course and some are just coming out of dormancy now. Apricots are a variety which comes out of dormancy later and that will happen over the next week or so.

### What factors are most important for trees during the budding stages?

There's a range of things that affect the quality of fruit, as there always is with growing produce like this. Depending on the variety, chill factor is a consideration because some require high chill and others lower chill.

This year I think varieties that require higher chill will benefit from the cold winter we've had and that will help them set fruit. In terms of fruit quality, that depends on factors such as nutrition and the water irrigation regime... but growers are pretty

much on top of those things. It's the things we can't control, such as the seasonal chill factor, that are a challenge.

### How important has recent rainfall been for growers?

Growers rely on irrigation and not rainfall, although rainfall is always beneficial. It really is a matter of supplementing the irrigation regime that is required for growers' orchards. Rainfall is always welcome and it helps refresh the tree, while also supplementing our growing requirements. Allocations are a different question, although inflows are still happening into the catchments and we would anticipate by the time we get to the end of September, we'll be looking at 100 per cent.

### Any advice for growers?

Growers will be well aware of what's required to manage their orchards in the best way, and to work towards achieving the best outcome they can for the season.

# Wine exporters opportunity emerges



**T**HE Federal Government is uncorking another \$1 million in funding to support smaller to medium wine producers showcase their premium drops around the world.

Minister for Agriculture David Littleproud recently released guidelines for a second round of the Wine Export Grant – part of the \$50 million Export and Regional Wine Support Package.

"Whether it's a Barossa Valley shiraz, a King Valley prosecco or a Hunter Valley semillon, the world loves a good Aussie drop," Mr Littleproud said.

"These grants

will help our smaller to medium-sized wine producers access the lucrative world wine market by promoting the Aussie product internationally as some of the safest, most sustainable and highest quality wine in the world.

"In these uncertain economic times, it's important industry and the Australian Government work together to seize these opportunities and help drive our COVID-19 recovery.

"Our wine producers large or small are major contributors to Team Australia and the Government recognises the pandemic has made promotional activities more challenging.

"The Wine Export Grant is helping eligible producers meet the costs associated with marketing their products with reimbursements of up to \$25,000."

Wine Australia chief execu-

tive officer Andreas Clark said it was pleasing to be able to offer the grant to wine exporters.

"Round 1 of the Wine Export Grants helped 135 wine producers to deliver promotional activities in China and the USA in 2018-19," he said.

"The grant guidelines for this new round have been expanded, so that new and existing exporters can seek out opportunities and secure distribution in any international market."

The grants are open for applications until May 1, 2021, or until the funds are exhausted, whichever comes first.

Application details and guidelines for the Wine Export Grants are available on Wine Australia's website: [wineaustralia.com/whats-happening/export-and-regional-wine-support-package/grants](http://wineaustralia.com/whats-happening/export-and-regional-wine-support-package/grants).

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# Local citrus growers still

WORDS  
HUGH SCHUITEMAKER  
PHOTOGRAPHY  
PETA-MARIE PHILIPPOU

**C**ONFIDENCE in the quality of fruit and alternative export markets has kept Riverland citrus producers feeling positive in the face of COVID-19.

Growers across the region have been forced to contend with uncertainty surrounding the transport of exports – due to coronavirus restrictions – and visas for holiday workers during this year's harvest.

Winkie Heights operator Stuart Andrew – based near Loxton – said recent frost conditions across the Riverland had done little harm to the quality of his harvested fruit.

"So far it's been a surprisingly good harvest, both in terms of quantity and quality," Mr Andrew said.

"There's been a surprisingly healthy demand both domestically and internationally, given the extent of the devastation from the Chinese issue.

"We've had good, strong domestic markets and strong international demand."

Mr Andrew – who supplies fruit to Venus Citrus – said sweet varieties of orange and mandarin had been popular this year.

"It's been particularly good for



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# bursting with confidence



Winkie Heights operator  
Stuart Andrew



the mandarin varieties," Mr Andrew said.

"It's been a very positive (harvest) and there's good demand for the fruit export-wise and domestically."

Venus Citrus marketing manager Helen Aggeletos said increased exports to other international and domestic destinations have compensated for uncertainty surrounding the Chinese market.

"Some markets have slowed down and others have picked up," she said.

"The balance has shifted a little bit as to the percentage of where we used to pack for.

"But there's other markets that have come up and they're taking what other markets have dropped back in.

"It's probably not what we expected initially. We didn't know what to expect in this situation with the economy."

# Kev Gray

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# Farmer



Mrs Aggeletos said a recent focus on the health benefits of citrus – prompted by the COVID-19 outbreak – had increased demand for the fruit.

“We started a promotion domestically with Vitamin C pouch bags... they’ve really taken off now,” she said.

## “ Overall we’re quite thankful

“It seems to be in the last couple weeks there’s been a big uptake in them and I think the health benefits have played a major role in it.”

Mrs Aggeletos said continued demand for citrus fruits meant she was confident the Riverland industry would quickly recover from the impacts of COVID-19.

“In the climate we’re in at the moment and with everything that’s going on, I can say we’re pretty lucky in the fact production of citrus has not been affected,” she said.

“Overall we’re quite thankful. With citrus the benefit is there, it helps boost your immune system and (contains) Vitamin C.”



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AGT head of science and business development Tristan Coram with wheat being grown and developed in the Roseworthy glasshouses

# Local hands in high-fibre wheat development

## French toast

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY ELLOUISE CRAWFORD

RESEARCHERS at Roseworthy are helping to develop a high-fibre wheat variety that will eventually see new high-fibre bread, pizza, and other related products sold on Australian supermarket shelves.

Australian Grain Technologies (AGT), which has its brand-new Southern Crop Breeding Centre based at Roseworthy, recently finalised a long-term exclusive breeding partnership deal with Arista Cereals.

Arista – a joint venture between the CSIRO and French farmer-led co-operative Limagrain – holds the patent to a high-fibre wheat variety already used in a range of products in the United States, including tortillas, pasta and pizza bases.

AGT head of science and business development Tristan Coram said AGT is applying its industry-leading breeding capabilities to produce locally adapted Australian varieties.

"We've been testing and breeding high fibre wheat for

about the last seven years... and in that time period we have been doing field trials to test the performance of different lines in different regions of Australia," he said.

"We've also been testing the quality, so how it performs in end uses.

"More recently, over the last one to two years, we have actually scaled up and produced seed of the first variety that contains the high-fibre wheat trait."

This year, AGT is looking to produce 100-150 tonnes of the wheat, currently growing in New South Wales, to be made available to milling companies for market development.

"It's a new thing so those companies will be focussing on where the best opportunity to put high-fibre wheat is – which products or which ingredient, where the demand is in local markets and then build that up," he said.

"It's taken a long time to get here and now we are really at this tipping point of turning this

into a commercial reality."

The wheat's high-fibre content has been achieved through conventional breeding to ensure more resistant starch than traditional wheat.

Mr Coram said the 'all in one' nature of the high-fibre wheat means end products will differ to existing wheat-based 'high-fibre', or 'good source of fibre' products, that currently use a corn-derived additive.

"I think for everyone at AGT who has played a part in making this happen, it's something they are excited about because it's something special and unique, it is consumer-focussed, and it is around health," he said.

"...We are trying really hard to make it work because I think in the future there will probably be more products like this that are specifically targeted to the changing demands of consumers."

It is anticipated the first sales of grain for food applications will start in 2021.

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# Five generations



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Rotary Club past-president Steve Barilla says after growing up and enduring gruelling manual labour on his family's traditional olive farm, he never thought it would grab him the way it has today.

"I hated it," he said.

"I said 'mum, dad, when I grow up I don't want to see a bloody olive, I'll buy my olive oil from the shop'.

"I don't know what happened – a bolt of lightning must've come out of the sky and said 'mate, you're growing olives'."

Mr Barilla, of Barilla Olive Oil, now has a grove of 2500 trees, which can produce between 90-100 tonnes of olive oil in a calendar year.

He said with the way the process has evolved since his beginnings, he can now enjoy the lifestyle of living on his farm without the kind of manual labour the practice traditionally demanded.

"My family has been doing this for at least four generations before me, all the way back to our roots in southern Italy, and what I've got here is my own little piece of paradise," he said.

"When I was young there were hardly any mechanisms, it was more hard

labour in pruning, growing, watering and processing – all that has changed in the past 20 years.

"Because of that, you appreciate it more using machinery because I know what it's like to do it by hand... it was lunacy to do that kind of work, but being able to produce something, give it to a customer and be rewarded with gratitude was something I always valued."

These days, with the process more streamlined, it can be broken down into four components – growing, harvesting, extraction and bottling.

Barilla Olive Oil uses a type of olive called Frantoio, originating from Tuscany, and shares a name with the Italian word for an olive oil processing factory.

When the olives are ready for harvest, Mr Barilla uses a special ride-on machine he had imported from Italy that can do up to 500 trees in a day.

From there, the fruit is put into either a super-press with filtering mats, or the more modern method of centrifuges and decanters to extract the oil.

Once the process is complete, it is bottled, from as little as 250ml to 20-litre drums for restaurants, both in Australia and overseas.

With so many generations of knowledge, Barilla Olive Oil also provides a consultancy service to new or existing farmers who may have inherited or bought a farm with an olive grove, and are not sure



Steve Barilla with his family-branded olive oil standing amongst the 2500 trees on the Barilla Olive Oil farm.



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# of olive oil



“

**My family has been doing  
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exactly how to manage it.  
“We do get a lot of calls from people that buy a small farm and it’s got an olive grove on it, and they’ve got no idea what to do,” Mr Barilla said.  
“We assist them in guiding them in what they have to do to prune the trees, right through to the point of harvesting.  
“Recently there was a large winery in Paracombe, and a guy bought the property with an olive grove on it, so he

rang us and he wasn’t sure whether to pull it out or not. After talking to us he decided to keep it, and now they use all the oil as a supplement to their winery and its customers.”  
Mr Barilla has three kids – a lawyer, an architect and a university student – and said while it’s possible the Barilla Olive Oil farm may have a future in a different, nearby location, he is confident its legacy will continue through the next generations.

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY  
LIAM PHILLIPS



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## First hemp seed exports completed

EXPORTS of hemp seed taking place for the first time are aimed at helping South Australian farmers enter a global market that could be worth more than US\$40 billion within five years.

The Federal Government recently completed the first successful export of hemp seeds to New Zealand, permitted under legislation initially passed in

2018.

Minister for Agriculture, Drought and Emergency Management David Littleproud said it was vital to take advantage of increasing global demand for hemp and medicinal cannabis products.

"The Australian Government wants our agricultural industries to be able to capitalise on

the opportunities that flow from growth in our regions and globally," Mr Littleproud said.

"To help us achieve this, we need to ensure that we have appropriate regulatory settings to enable exports to grow and in turn to help drive productivity and increase returns at the farm gate.

"The new legislation removes unnecessary

regulatory barriers and will support better access to international markets for the emerging hemp and medicinal cannabis industries.

"Hemp product exports which may be better supported under the new legislation include seeds, raw hemp and hemp food products, such as de-hulled hemp seeds and health powders containing

hemp."

Mr Littleproud said entering the medicinal cannabis industry – estimated to be worth US\$44 billion globally by 2024 – would benefit South Australian farmers, workers and businesses.

"For Australian farmers, reliable access to overseas markets means increased profitability and certainty for

further investment in their properties and people," he said.

"For the Australian economy, it means more jobs, more exports, and higher incomes in a competitive and profitable agricultural sector.

"For Australians, it means stronger regional communities and a more prosperous and productive Australia."



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