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# Farmer

AUTUMN 2021

## Multi-million dollar vegetables

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# Welcome to the first edition of Farmer for 2021.

WE have another lift-out jam-packed full of stories and features on growers and producers from the heart of the Mallee and the Riverland to Gawler and its surrounds.

Many growers and businesses are still feeling the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, with export issues, disrupted supply chains and various lockdowns playing havoc on our hard-working producers.

And while we hope the aftermath of the pandemic fades fast in 2021, our local industries were dealt a nasty blow at the start of the year.

Barely moments after celebrating

the end of 2020, news of fruit fly outbreaks in Renmark West, Monash and Barmera began to circulate.

A devastating blow for so many of our industries.

In this edition of Farmer, journalist Hugh Schuitemaker takes a look at the 'fruit-fly affect' and what kind of immediate and long-term consequences the outbreak will have.

We hope local growers are getting the support they need during these tough times.

Also in this edition of Farmer, we again speak to industry experts from the Lower North, Mallee

and Riverland to see where various seasons are at.

We also have a wide array of stories from a Taylorville pig farmer, to a massive potato operation in Parilla, plus a third-generation dryland farmer from Gawler.

Again we must thank businesses for supporting this publication, it is something our entire company has become very proud of and we look forward to it growing more in the future.

**Jane Kuerschner**  
Taylor Group Newspapers  
Special publications editor



## Farmer

RIVERLAND. MALLEE. LOWER NORTH

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**Deirdre Graham**

**Caption**

Fiona (pictured) and Mark Pye started their vegetable growing company with 3000 tonnes of potatoes. They now harvest 120,000 tonnes of potatoes, 40,000 tonnes of carrots, and 50,000 tonnes of onions a year.

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# Forty years and still going strong

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WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY JACK HUDSON

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Third-generation farmer  
Neville Kernich has spent four  
decades on the land at Freeling, and  
he wouldn't have it any other way.









NEVILLE Kernich's grandfather purchased land at Freeling in the 1930s after being originally up at Sutherlands and didn't look back.

His father and his brother were both working on the farm, before his brother moved to Riverton, but his dad stuck around.

"When I left school, I did an apprenticeship as a fitter and machinist down at Mile End, probably six months out of my time, and then I came home to the farm," Neville said.

Neville (pictured) said he had been on the property since 1981 when around 450 hectares were farmed.

He now boasts around 800 hectares.

"We're sneaking along slowly and quietly," Neville said.

"We run mainly broadacre crops; wheat, barley, peas, beans, hay, canola, medic seed.

"The medic seed is exported overseas as well as used in Australia and we've been doing that for about 10-years plus.

"You know where to find me in the summer months."

Neville said running a "self-replacing" Merino sheep flock was also a valuable aspect of the business.

In 2015, Mr Kernich's farm was hit by the Pinery fire, but he considers himself 'fortunate'.

"After Pinery a lot of (new) fences went up and some people who were out of sheep can actually run sheep, as they have some reasonable fences to hold them in," he said.

"When the Pinery fire came through here, we were pretty fortunate in some respects.

"We lost most of our crop, but we only lost a few sheep and a little bit of machinery and buildings were damaged, but some people were devastated by it.

"We lost of most of our fencing, but we've replaced some of it, and some of it is still an ongoing project."

Neville said disaster support group BlazeAid had been a significant help

since the fire.

"I'll always give BlazeAid a flag here because when you don't feel like doing stuff, they come around and they're like 'come on Nev, which fence do you want us to pull down or what do you want us to put up?'

"It's really good, they were orange angels really."

He said the local support to help eachother get back on their feet was admirable.

"They had the Pinery Recovery Centre and that closed down a couple of years after the fires had been," Neville said.

"There was a lot of assistance from government and different organisations."

After arriving back on the farm in 1981, Neville said he's seen plenty of changes and he's also eager to see a fourth generation come through with his son.

"I've got a son, but

he's not home on the farm yet," he said.

"We're working towards him coming here in the future.

"I've seen a lot of changes... when we came home we had a 16-road combine and a 70-horse power tractor, and a 12-foot harvester.

"We didn't have a boom sprayer, there was very little electronics.

"We didn't crop everything because you just couldn't, as machinery has improved and electronics and GPS and different sewing systems.

"You'd spent a lot of time in the tractor because you worked it, you harrowed it and if it became green with soursobs you worked it again and harrowed it then you sew.

"We lost a lot of moisture every time we cultivated on it."

Neville said previous practices had been far more labour intensive.







"All the seeding and fertiliser and the grain were all in bags... we used to lump them off the truck and tip them in the combine," he said.

"I think three bushel bags were 187lb, if I put one of them on my shoulder now, it'd just about flatten me.

"You used to put them on your shoulder and not think anything of it."

But there's one thing which Neville finds the most rewarding aspect of farming.

"When you sow a crop and you see it come up and it looks pretty good and then you get it through to harvest, the most rewarding thing is harvesting it," he said.

"When you're shearing sheep you're harvesting the wool.

"The thing that disappoints me the most is the divide between country and city, they just see the food in the supermarket and don't see how it's produced to get there and that's just very disappointing.

"I don't think they teach you enough of that at school."



**We didn't crop everything  
because you just couldn't...**

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# Outbreak reaching **‘critical’ level** for growers

Fruit fly coverage pages 10–12

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WORDS HUGH SCHUITMAKER  
PHOTOGRAPHY PETA-MARIE PHILIPPOU

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Member for Chaffey Tim Whetstone (left) discussing the impacts of local fruit fly outbreaks – in Renmark West and Monash – for Riverland growers.



We need to keep the outbreaks under control...

RIVERLAND growers inside quarantine zones are beginning to feel economic impacts from ongoing fruit fly outbreaks in the region.

Quarantine zones are currently in effect in Renmark West – following the detection of fruit fly on December 23 and January 15 – and in Monash, after an outbreak was declared on December 30.

Renmark-based Bachra Produce operator Balwinder Kaur – who grows stone fruit and citrus – said the outbreaks posed challenges for local growers wanting to transport fruit interstate.

“The fact is having the fruit fly around makes it very difficult to send fruit interstate, and that’s such an important part of the business,” Mr Kaur said.

“We can treat the fruit, but we can only send it to the local markets in Adelaide, not to Brisbane or Melbourne.

“We need to keep the outbreaks under control, because we’re also going to start citrus harvesting in April and May.

“Hopefully if there’s no more outbreaks we can export our citrus crop this winter.”

Member for Chaffey Tim Whetstone said it was crucial to avoid further Riverland detections as fruit fly generations grew longer due to

cold weather.

“A fear that every Riverlander has had is further detection, and that pushes the lifting of those outbreaks further out into the year,” Mr Whetstone said.

“The concern we all have is the impacts that it will have on the Riverland’s reputation of being fruit fly free, and what it means for commercial growers coming into the new citrus

season.

“Once we go past the warmer months and into the cooler parts of the year, that means the outbreak will drag on further.”

Mr Whetstone said a lack of awareness regarding the risks of fruit fly outbreaks remained among visitors to the Riverland.

“All of the fruit flies, whether it’s Mediterranean from the west into



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# Fruit fly coverage



Adelaide, or the Queensland fruit fly from the east, are all introduced,” he said.

“I think there needs to be much more awareness from travellers and consumers who are introducing fruit into the Riverland.

“It’s putting a \$1.8 billion industry at risk.”

Mr Whetstone hoped developments in agricultural technology would allow for more efficient methods of containing fruit fly outbreaks.

“At the moment there is a high level of support (for growers), and that can be from on-ground baiting or the release of sterile flies” he said.

“Most of the technology that is currently being used is old technology... I think it’s an ideal opportunity to look at AgTech ideas.

“It’s about mechanising the baiting program, (and) using quad bikes and ATVs rather than having a person in orange overalls with a backpack on.”

Mr Whetstone said further clarification regarding what could be done with fruit grown inside quarantine zones was needed for Riverland households.

“There has been quite a high level of confusion,” he said.

“There needs to be a very simple messaging campaign, for people to clearly understand what it means for

them.

“We’re trying to minimise any fruit movement at the moment, so we can get on with providing food to the nation and the world.

“We need to better educate people, so they know the rules and when they are entering or exiting a fruit fly outbreak area.”

Mr Whetstone said it was crucial to prevent further fruit fly outbreaks in order to regain the region’s fruit fly-free status.



**Here in the Riverland we need to be part of the solution...**

“Here in the Riverland we need to be part of the solution, we don’t want to be contributing to the problem,” he said.

“It’s critical we continue to treat this issue with a matter of urgency, so we can capitalise on being fruit-fly free and not put more burden on our commercial sector.”

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## Fruit fly coverage

Photo: supplies



# \$13 million for new fruit fly research

INCREASING the effectiveness of responses to fruit fly outbreaks in the Riverland is the aim of a new research initiative.

The Federal Government – and State and Territory Governments – earlier this month announced a combined \$13 million in funding for the Strengthening Australia's Fruit Fly System Research Program.

Minister for Agriculture David Littleproud said the initiative would encourage the development of improved fruit fly management strategies.

"Fruit flies pose a serious threat to Australian horticulture, and some species are capable of infesting a wide range of commercial and native fruits and vegetables costing growers and threatening our exports," Mr Littleproud said.

"This research complements other fruit fly research undertaken by industry and other organisations.

"It will ultimately give growers, landholders and the community a broader range of tools and knowledge to manage fruit flies into the future."

## Protecting the Riverland everyone's responsibility

ENSURING the Riverland horticultural sector remains free of further fruit fly outbreaks is a responsibility for all locals, according to the South Australian Premier.

Two outbreaks of Queensland fruit fly have been declared in Renmark West – on December 23 and January 13 – along with an outbreak in Monash declared on December 30.

Speaking to the Murray Pioneer during a tour of Renmark last month, Premier Steven Marshall said imposing restrictions on fruit being brought from homes to schools was necessary to limit the risk of further outbreaks.

"We're here to express our solidarity with the sector

with regards to the fruit fly issue that is affecting our state," Mr Marshall said.

"We know the pest-free status the Riverland has had for a long period of time is something we want to keep into the future.

"There's a lot of talk in Adelaide about not putting fruit in lunchboxes and not transporting fruit you have on your tree into schools.

"We've got to do everything we can to protect this significant industry and this significant employer."

Mr Marshall said the economic contributions – and employment of locals – from Riverland horticulture was vital for South Australia.

"I'm asking all South Australians to recognise how important the horticulture sector is," he said.

"It's worth \$1.3 billion and is a major employer, so we're asking people to be very vigilant in regards to fruit and fruit fly.

"It's a small price to pay to protect an important industry."



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WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY ERIN WILLIAMS

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The background of the bottom right section is a photograph of a tractor in a field at sunset or sunrise, with a warm, golden glow. Overlaid on this is the RLS agribusiness logo, which consists of the letters 'RLS' in a large, bold, sans-serif font, followed by 'agribusiness' in a smaller, lowercase font. To the right of the text is a green and grey geometric logo. Below the logo, the website address 'www.rls.net.au' is written in a bold, sans-serif font. In the bottom right corner, there is a small logo for 'MFAA APPROVED BROKER' with the text 'COURTESY • INTEGRITY • CARE' underneath.



**A** TAYLORVILLE pig farmer is encouraging locals to make conscious decisions when choosing pork products, following a difficult year in the pig industry globally – not just from COVID-19.

Taylorville-based pig farmer Mark McLean, of Riverhaven, said while the national pork market had suffered last year, it was largely due to Melbourne's 112-day lockdown.

"COVID-19 disrupted the freight globally, while African swine fever (ASF) affected 50 per cent of China's pig herd, resulting in short global pork stocks," Mr McLean said.

"The Melbourne lockdown last year and associated uncertainty around COVID-19 impacted many pig farmers and markets across Australia; there was a real drop in prices for pigs.

"The food service industry represents about 25 per cent in local pork sales, so with that massive drop-off in Melbourne, all of us were affected.

"At the time of the lockdown, the buying price for pigs was reduced by about 30 per cent. It was around Christmas last year that the prices recovered."

“

**Feed is 50 per cent of the cost of running a pig farm...**

ASF is a contagious viral disease affecting domestic and wild pigs that currently has no vaccine and kills 80 per cent of pigs it infects.

In December 2019, the Australian Government announced \$66.6 million to address the threat of ASF, and the disease has not been reported in Australia.

**The Advertiser reported (January 6, 2021) that:**

Australians eat 10.46kg of pork each year

The local pork industry contributes \$5.3 billion to Australia's GDP and employs 35,000 people

About 2800 pig farms operate in Australia

Australia imports \$17 million worth of pork each week

78 per cent of Australians did not know the majority of ham sold in Australia is made from imported ingredients

62 per cent of Australians have become more aware about buying local produce

"Riverhaven sells pigs to a range of buyers across Australia; the buyers, in turn, service markets both nationally, from supermarkets and restaurants to smallgoods and butchers, and across the eastern seaboard as well," Mr McLean said.

comes out of Asia; China is the biggest consumer of pork in the world, and ASF cut China's pork production by about 50 per cent, resulting in national pork shortages which were supplied by other countries, like the US and Europe."

While 2020 proved a difficult year, Mr McLean said agricultural industries were not as seriously impacted as many others.

"As an essential industry, we were fortunate to not be as heavily impacted by COVID-19 as many other industries – we have even put on extra staff this year," he said.

"Feed is 50 per cent of the cost of running a pig farm; (Riverhaven's) grain is sourced from all over SA, and the last season was a really good one for grain farmers.

"We have 1000 breeding sows here at Taylorville and 1000 at Eudunda, and sell about 45,000 pigs per year over the two farms; at any one time, we have 9000 pigs on each farm.

"The pigs we have here are stall-free pigs; the sows are breeding stock that live in groups once inseminated for

socialisation.

"The trouble with free-range pigs in SA is our climate – it's too hot and very vicious on pigs, who can't sweat. So in our pens, we have misters and tunnel fans to keep them cool."

While The Advertiser reported recently that the number of Australians buying imported pork was at \$17 million per week and Australian pork producers were "struggling" ('Pig farms hammered', The Advertiser, January 5, 2021), Mr McLean said it was "not all that surprising".



"Traditionally, ham and bacon is produced from imported pork," he said.

"It's very difficult to find Australian bacon in supermarkets; however, there are some companies that have chosen to use wholly Australian pork which can be seen with the bright pink Australian Pork logo or the bar chart showing it contains more than 90 per cent Australian content. This is great as it supports local jobs, and also provides a fresh local ham and bacon option.

"Australian-raised pork is generally sold fresh at butcher and supermarkets, and in restaurants, while imported pork has to come into the country frozen – it's Australian law.

"So that imported pork is what you will generally buy in the deli section at the supermarket as ham and bacon is manufactured from overseas, frozen pork.

"Frozen pork also loses moisture which affects the prices; local pork will always be more expensive.

"Look for the Australian made label on the packaging – if it's below 90 per cent Australia, you have a higher risk of much more imported pork in the produce."







**William Buck**  
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## Succession planning – keeping families together

When it comes to navigating sensitive and complex issues such as succession planning, it pays to have trusted advisors in your corner who truly understand agricultural business.

William Buck's expert team not only has decades of experience under their belt, but also deep personal roots in the farming sector.

businesses and individuals right across regional SA.

Growing up on a family farm in the Mid North and having her own small farm in the Adelaide Hills, Agribusiness Specialist at William Buck, Paula Liddle, is no stranger to the business issues that farming families face.

"We make it our business to



The firm's agricultural foundations date back 75 years with long-standing relationships forged with many primary producers and regional businesses ever since. It is now one of the strongest agri advisory firms in South Australia and is the largest locally owned accounting and advisory firm in the state.

It's the firm's unrivalled track record and personal understanding of the unique challenges facing rural and agricultural business that makes William Buck the advisors of choice among all family and corporate

understand the unique challenges, risks and opportunities facing each client," says Paula.

"While the industries may differ, it's often the same issues that continue to keep people up at night and succession planning is constantly high on that list.

"Handled well, it can take the business to the next level and create very favourable financial outcomes for the family. Handled poorly and the business and family relationships can be ruined. Our aim is to keep the family unit together."

## A complete solution for agricultural businesses and families

**Navigating the future with the Next Generation**

Managing the transition of the business to the next generation is a common cause of stress among farmers. This can become more problematic as sons and daughters pursue careers away from the farm or move interstate.



William Buck's Agri team works closely with clients to establish a clear plan as early as possible enabling more effective long-term decision making for the farming enterprise and lessening the risk of disputes or disappointment down the track.

### William Buck's five key tips for a successful succession

- 1. Plan, and plan early**  
Asking yourself the right questions and having a clear understanding of your objectives are the key first steps.
- 2. Understand and embrace family dynamics**  
It's vital that families have a clear decision-making hierarchy, well understood roles and responsibilities and there is clear and regular communication.
- 3. Maintain fairness and equity**  
Careful consideration is required to ensure the allocation of assets is fair and equitable, particularly when non-farm siblings are involved.
- 4. Ensure your plan makes financial sense**  
It's important to consider the structure of the business and the financial implications including future available cashflow for the business and family members, and taxation and transfer costs associated with any assets passed on.
- 5. Objective independent advice**  
An experienced independent adviser can provide business and financial guidance free from the influence of family dynamics.

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# Bright future for Riverland wines

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY JANE KUERSCHNER





A FLEET of small winemakers – like Pam and Tony Barich from Whistling Kite Wines – are helping put the Riverland on the map as a high-quality wine producing region.

Long known as a region that produces wine grapes in bulk, more and more niche and adventurous winemakers are making sure the Riverland is known for so much more when it comes to wine.

Based on the Murray River between Moorook and Loxton at New Residence, Pam and Tony have been busy exploring the world of alternative varieties, and organic and biodynamic practices.

While 99 per cent of grapes grown on the property are sold on to the Yalumba Winery in Angaston, the pair hold onto 10 per cent to make their own line of wine.

Tony purchased the well-established property off of his father in 1976 and along with Pam, and sons Adam (right) and Callan work hard to produce high-quality wine

accident.  
“Our auditor came along to do our regular audit and saw what we were doing.  
“Tony didn’t feel organic was enough, you’re restricted with what you can do with organic farming, so we started going to biodynamic workshops and we started implementing their practices.  
“And the auditor picked up that we were using biodynamic processes and asked if we were going for biodynamic certification.

“When we asked why he said because we qualify.”  
Pam said the aim of biodynamic is to have no outside inputs into production.  
“We look to nature to correct imbalances in the vineyard,” she said.  
“So ideally we would make

“

**We look to nature to correct imbalances in the vineyard...**

grapes.  
And while Tony has always been interested in biodynamic practices, achieving certification was more of a happy coincidence than intentional.  
Pam explained it all came about when they applied for organic certification around two decades ago.  
“We applied for our organic certification in 1997, so we had full certification in 2000,” she said.  
“And biodynamic certification came by

compost, but because the vineyard was set up before we started biodynamic practices we don’t have room to grow green manure and things like that.  
“Tony and Adam make 10 to 12 thousand litres of

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Tony and Pam Barich.

composted teas and they can be made from casuarinas, which grow along the river.

"And casuarinas are very high in silica, so we use a silica spray on the vineyard before a rain event because the silica will toughen the berries to avoid splitting."

Pam said Tony is a reader of all non-fiction, plant-based, farming based books, and has educated himself on the many benefits of using nature to support the vineyard.

Another reason for seeking organic certification and happening upon biodynamic certification was for the marketing benefits.

"It really presents opportunity from a marketing point of view," Tony said.

"We've been using the practices for a very long time but that certification means we can showcase it."

Pam said the organic and biodynamic practices, plus the exploration of alternative varieties helped gain the attention of the Yalumba Winery.

"Yalumba contracted us in 2005 to grow organic fruit for them," she said.

"They established their own organic range from our vineyard.

"They were aware Tony was experimenting with some alternative varieties, like he had small patches of montepulciano, petit verdot, vermentino, and all these different varieties.

"Yalumba's viticulturist was very aware of what was happening in the Riverland with the alternative varieties that were up here, so in 2009 he asked us to help set up the Riverland Alternative Wine Group, along with



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The property is also home to beehives and a patch of lavender, which is harvested for lavender oil.



Our main aim with our label is to bring recognition to the Riverland. There's so much opportunity here. And there's so many small emerging producers here.

919 Wines and other growers."

While Pam and Tony are first and foremost wine grape growers, they said establishing the small winemaker group presented an opportunity to create their own label.

"We saw it as a chance to showcase what the Riverland is capable of and follow our practices through to the bottle," Pam said.

"Our main aim with our label is to bring recognition to the Riverland. There's so much opportunity here.

"And there's so many small emerging producers here.

"So we approached Yalumba and they released certain rows in the vineyard to us so we can make our own wine.

"In 2010 we did our first label and 919 Wines converted their winery to process organic fruit."

Like so many businesses, COVID-19 had an impact on Whistling Kites Wines, but Adam said the bounce back has been positive.

"We were about to do regular hours then COVID hit so that changed everything and we also lost out of Easter trade which is significant for us," he said.

"In saying that we did a few online specials and the local support was amazing.

"As people could come back they did."

The Whistling Kite property, which is situated on a breathtaking bend of the Murray River, is home to 16 hectares of certified organic vineyards.

While the bulk of the property is dedicated to shiraz and viognier, smaller patches of alternative varieties like montepulciano, petit verdot, mencia and vermentino also can be found scattered throughout the block.

"Montepulciano is an example of a variety that is so well suited to this region," Adam said.

"It can really handle anything that's thrown at it and it just makes a good wine.

"Our climate is really well suited to alternative varieties, really well suited to organic practices and growing quality fruit.

"When you have quality fruit, you'll have quality wine."

The family owned and run venture is now looking ahead to the Easter long weekend and getting ready to welcome patrons onto their property to showcase their glorious location and delicious wines.

The trio says "watch this space" because the future of wine in the Riverland is very bright.



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# AUSTRALIAN frost fans

Introducing Ian Mason, Sales Manager for Australian Frost Fans, who has hit the ground running since joining Australian Frost Fans in August. Ian has international sales and marketing experience with an excellent understanding of the ag and produce sectors, including nearly 4 years with Bailey's Fertiliser.

Ian's enjoying being part of the team and has seen the value of Frost Fan™ wind machines used by growers over

the recent spring frosts. "Preventing crop damage and helping your business grow is what gets me out of bed in the morning", says Ian. "Conversely, there's nothing worse than being the 'undertaker' turning up after a frost event where growers have no frost mitigation." Ian has put together a list of reasons to choose Australian Frost Fans and why he believes growers should opt for FrostBoss® machines.



Ian Mason  
Sales Manager  
Australian Frost Fans

## « 10 reasons for choosing Australian Frost Fans »

### 1. FrostBoss® Frost Fans™

are the most popular machine in Australia and New Zealand. FrostBoss® Frost Fans™ have been installed in Australia since the 1990's. Manufactured in New Zealand, the company has a significant research and development programme focused on improving the efficiency and reliability of Frost Fans™. This includes comparative testing and the use of Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD) analysis to understand exactly how our FrostBoss® machines perform.

### 2. Our blades set us apart™

When we set out to design the FrostBoss® composite fan blade we had 3 goals – low noise, excellent coverage and fuel efficiency. FrostBoss® composite fan blades are incredibly strong with an aerodynamic design, which makes the entire blade length from hub to tip produce a uniform wind momentum. This optimises the coverage area at an efficient low engine speed of 1750 – 1800rpm at which the maximum

torque of the engine is generated.

### 3. Bird/vermin proof engine cabinets

The last thing you want is a machine fault caused by rodent damage or an engine fire due to a bird's nest. That's why we designed a lockable engine cabinet to resist birds and rodents.

### 4. Integral fuel tank

FrostBoss® machines feature a 490-litre integral diesel fuel tank. The integral fuel tank provides greater security with a lockable fuel cap and no readily accessible fuel lines.

### 5. FrostWatch™ monitoring

FrostWatch™ monitoring is a 'must' if you don't live on-site or you're running multiple fans. Alarms can be generated in the form of text messages. Frost Fan™ status along with tower temperature, engine rpm, battery status, wind speed and trip hours are sent to your Lancel hosted customer-specific website. By far the majority of our customers specify FrostWatch™ monitoring capability

when they purchase a FrostBoss® Frost Fan™.

### 6. We hold physical stock of machines and parts at all our Service Centres

We don't indent stock. That means shorter lead times for installation and highly responsive after-sales service and support.

### 7. We're wind machine specialists – it's all we do

We are passionate about what we do – providing crop security to help your business grow. As specialists, our livelihoods depend solely on our reputation and wind machine expertise.

### 8. A growing network of Service Centres with specialist service trucks

We have a growing network of Service Centres, each with dedicated and specially equipped service trucks. These trucks provide safe access to top gearboxes and fast, environmentally safe oil changes.

### 9. Frost Fan upgrades

We service and upgrade most makes/models of wind machine – not just FrostBoss® machines. Upgrades and retrofits include the installation of composite blades, centrifugal clutches and Auto-Start™/Stop controllers.

### 10. Return on Investment – ongoing frost insurance

FrostBoss® machines provide affordable and ongoing insurance. 'Mother Nature' is the biggest risk for Australian growers. For most situations, active protection against frost and cold injury provides compelling returns. The FrostBoss® C49 (4-blade) is the most popular wind machine in Australia, protecting a wide range of crops including grapes, citrus, almonds, blueberries, pip fruit, stone fruit and avocado. Run your numbers through the ROI calculator at [www.BossTheFrost.com.au](http://www.BossTheFrost.com.au) and, if you like what you see, give us a call.

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For all your Frost Fan™ requirements give Ian a call on **0448 111 384**.

Ian Mason

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P 1800 797 629

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WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY LIAM PHILLIPS

MICHAEL Costa has been in the almond industry his whole life.

His father, Don, started growing grapes in the 1940s, and kept a small patch of almonds as a side project, before eventually ripping up the grapes in the 1980s to focus entirely on almonds.

Don still works on the farm, as well as their head processing operator Lorry Latella who has been in the role for nearly 40 years, and Michael said it's that level of expertise that separates Costa Brothers from the field.

"Officially Costa Brothers has been around since my brothers and I bought a property up in Swan Reach in 2006 – but we've been doing this for more than 50 years," he said.

"It can be long hours when it's time to work, but it really is a terrific lifestyle.

"We're born and raised in the Adelaide Plains – myself, my father, my brothers and sisters all live within a five-minute walk from each other.

"My dad was so serious about us learning how to do things the right way

that he made us all learn a trade out of high school so we could have experience working for someone other than family – he didn't want us getting any lazy habits just because we owned the place.

"(Mr Latella) is one of the most experienced processors in the entire country, and he's teaching all of our newer employees how it's done – you can't really put a price on that."

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almonds that can be processed going from 300 kilos per hour, to roughly three tonnes per hour, allowing Costa Brothers to produce 6000 tonnes of clean raw product every year.

What was initially a small family operation now employs 40 people in the peak of harvesting season, and while it is possible in the near future to further scale-up the production, there are also incentives in creating a demand for quality.

Having seen the evolution of the Australian almond market, Michael said he is proud of the way Costa Brothers has avoided a lot of the corporatisation of the industry.

“North America is the biggest producer of almonds in the world, and seeing as our seasons operate at different times of the year down in Australia, we’ve started to see a lot of international companies flooding into the country,” he said.

“

**The fact is, almonds  
require a serious  
amount of water**

“I feel like the way they are set up is essentially about quantity instead of quality, but for us we really do take pride in producing some of the most consistently highest graded almonds you can find.

“I do fear in the future that some of the much smaller almond farmers are going to be driven out of business by these big international operations, and it’s likely that eventually a number of factors will force us out into the Riverland full time.”

Michael is bullish about the future of the industry,



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“  
**Officially Costa Brothers has been around since my brothers and I bought a property up in Swan Reach in 2006 – but we’ve been doing this for more than 50 years**



saying it's "definitely trending up", but that long-term solutions regarding water supply is the number-one problem which needs addressing.

"The fact is, almonds require a serious amount of water," he said.

"Water can be very expensive – especially during droughts, which aren't too uncommon in this country – but I think we could figure out how to harness a lot of the water up north that flows directly into the ocean.

"In Europe they are able to pump water through mountains and all kinds of tough terrain – what's stopping us from doing that in Australia?

"To me, it makes a lot of sense to be trying to capture as much water as we can, and if we were ever able to pump that into the base of the Murray River and let it run downstream we could solve a whole range of issues."

For more information about Costa Brothers Hullers & Shellers head to ([www.costabros.com](http://www.costabros.com)).



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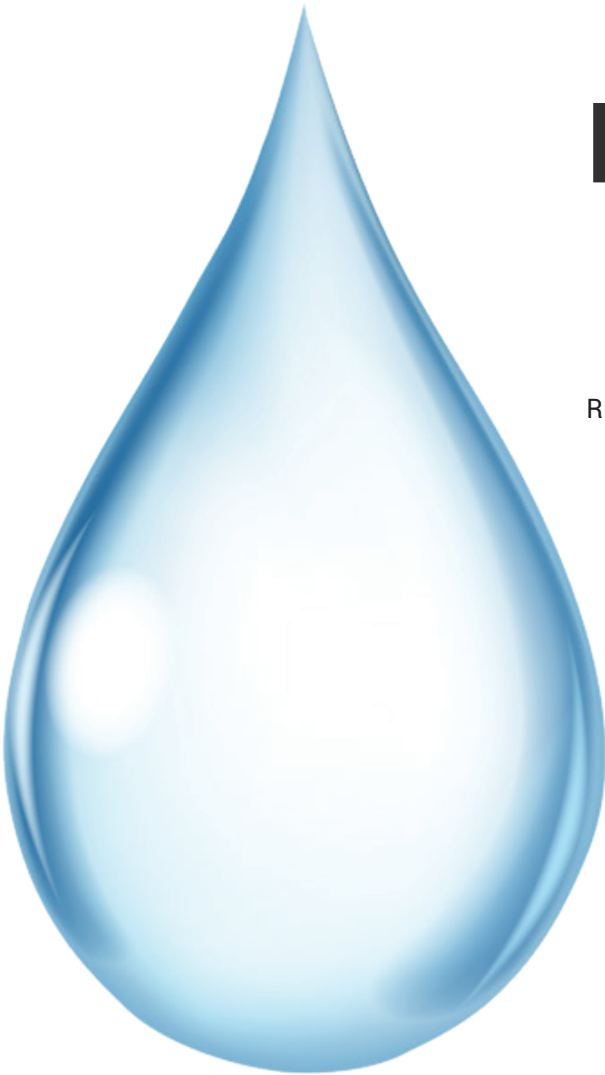
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TS2984-V3





# Rain lacking in January, but storages healthy

RIVERLAND, Mallee and Lower North primary producers will be hoping to avoid a dry year after below-average rainfall to begin 2021.

The Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) recorded 13.4mm of rain in Renmark during January – down from 20.2mm during the month in 2020 – compared to an average of 38.3mm for the month.

A total of 10.4mm

of rain fell in Renmark during December 2020 – compared to an average of 18.2mm for the month – and 6.8mm in November.

BoM also recorded 12.6mm of rain in Loxton during January, compared to an average of 37.2mm for the month and down from 21.3mm at this time last year.

Loxton received 11.1mm of rainfall during November and 9mm in December.

Waikerie saw 9mm of rain during January, compared to an average of 41mm, while the town recorded its driest November since 1999 with a total of just 5.4mm.

Gawler recorded 30.6mm of rain so far this year to sit not far off the

long-term average for January to February of 36.7mm.

Lameroo has seen 24.8mm of rain to begin the year, however this was still below half the total that fell by this time in 2020, while 16.4mm recorded in Gawler was also half the historical January to February average.

Latest reports from the Murray-Darling Basin Authority indicate total active storages had reduced by 106GL to 4177GL, or 51 per cent capacity.

This marked a two per cent decrease since the beginning of January, although is higher than the 30 per cent recorded at this time last year.

## Rain levels

### RENMARK

January total, 2021: 13.4mm  
January to February 2020: 20.2mm  
January to February average: 38.3mm

### LOXTON

January total, 2021: 12.6mm  
January to February 2020: 21.3mm  
January to February average: 37.2mm

### WAIKERIE

January total, 2021: 9mm  
January to February 2020: 27mm  
January to February average: 41mm

### LAMEROO

January total, 2021: 24.8mm  
January to February 2020: 64.2mm  
January to February average: 40.5mm

### GAWLER

January total, 2021: 30.6mm  
January to February 2020: 27.6mm  
January to February average: 36.7mm

## Storage levels

### DARTMOUTH DAM

Current storage: 62%  
This time last month: 62%  
This time last year: 48%

### HUME DAM

Current storage: 57%  
This time last month: 65%  
This time last year: 19%

### LAKE VICTORIA

Current storage: 54%  
This time last month: 63%  
This time last year: 45%

### MENINDEE LAKES

Current storage: 19%  
This time last month: 21%  
This time last year: 0

## Flows into SA

### CURRENT FLOWS

9200ML per day

### THIS TIME LAST MONTH

10,400ML per day

### THIS TIME IN 2019

7900ML per day



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# Growing a vegetable business in the Mallee – a multi-million dollar success story

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY DEIRDRE GRAHAM

MARK and Fiona Pye settled close to Parilla in 1990 after arriving from New Zealand – and have since made themselves a name as one of Australia’s most successful vegetable growers.

They had been awarded a contract to grow French fries for McCains after Mark’s (right) parents sold their vegetable processing plant to the Canadian multinational frozen food company.

The Pye Group has now gone from growing 3000 tonnes of potatoes in its early days to 120,000 tonnes of potatoes, 40,000 tonnes of carrots, and 50,000 tonnes of onions a year.

The business has reached an impressive turnover of \$100 million a year, with its associated farms in both the Mallee and elsewhere covering 40,000 hectares.

“When we moved to Parilla the land was relatively cheap, the soil

was good, and so was the water,” Mrs Pye said.

“Soon after moving to the Mallee we met the Zerella family and started growing for them, and over time bought them out.

“We started with a handful of workers, including some family friends from New Zealand, and now employ almost 400 people.”

Mrs Pye is proud of her global workers, with the firm currently employing people from Afghanistan, India, Korea, Ukraine, England, Germany, Holland, South Africa, New Zealand and Australia.

“Our family motto is to think big and keep it simple,” she said.

“It can be challenging, but it is good. I think we have helped put Parilla on the map.

“The majority of our market – about 90 per cent – is domestic.

“We do export potatoes, carrots and onions throughout the year, mainly exporting onions to Taiwan and Malaysia.”

The Pye Group sells to Woolworths, Coles, Aldi, Foodland, IGA, and other independents.

Mrs Pye said the key to further expansion would be diversification, and innovation.

With that in mind they are investing more than \$35 million on a new potato washing and packing facility, and associated buildings.

With the railways closed, they rely on Collins Transport and Lindsay Transport to move their product to the Eastern seaboard.



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“Building the new wash here in Parilla, closer to the farm sites, will reduce the number of B-doubles we have travelling between the Mallee region and Virginia by 70 each week, reducing greenhouse emissions,” Mrs Pye said.

“With the new shed, we have quite a few families moving to the Mallee region, so we are getting some new transportable homes being delivered in the next few weeks.

“It will be great for the community, for the schools, supermarkets, and everyone around.”

It will also mean more than 40 jobs will become available as the new development is finished.

Jobs will include grading and supervising roles.

Mrs Pye said getting backpackers this year had been a struggle thanks to COVID-19 and its impact.

“At this time of the year, we probably rely on up to 60 or 70 backpackers,” she said.

“We have actually had a few come back from last year, because they do not want to go back home

(where the virus has taken hold).

The new infrastructure is expected to be complete by July, even though a problem with getting technicians from Europe has presented itself.

“They will be out here, but with COVID it will be a challenge,” Mrs Pye said.

That said COVID has had some positive spin-offs over the past year, especially for their low-carb Spud Lite brand.

“COVID-19 was crazy,” Mrs Pye said.

“Sales were incredibly demanding through lockdowns and panic buying, with an overall increase over the past 12 months.

“Spud Lite sales were up 30 per cent, other potatoes up 10 to 15 per cent and carrots and onions both 5 to 10 per cent.

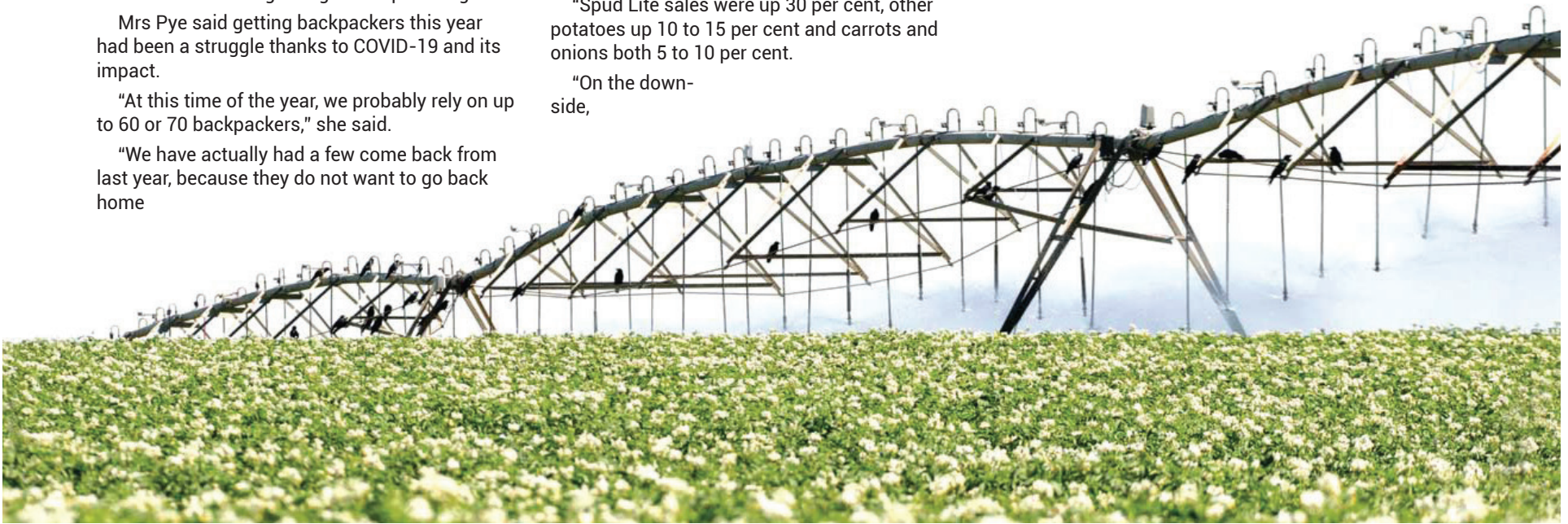
“On the down-side,

obviously sales to restaurants and processors supplying airlines were down, which made up 30 per cent of our sales.

“Spud Lite is going really well for us, people are just loving the taste, and the cheeky benefit of less carbs.

“We are getting a lot of repeat orders, and as people try it, they generally stick with it.”

The scale of the Pye Group enterprise is difficult to describe, and Mrs Pye said the average city dweller would have trouble knowing what it takes to run such a successful agricultural business, and what it takes to deliver produce from farm to plate.





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# Filling a market

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY  
DEIRDRE GRAHAM

ONE year ago, almost to the day, Phillipa and Skeet Lawson launched The Pinnaroo Farmer – a project to mill and market red lentil flour.

Frustrated by high export tariffs, weather damaged lentils, and a daughter who was a fussy eater, the Mallee couple have not looked back.

They now sell the red lentil flour via their Pinnaroo Farmer online shop, at the Pinnaroo bakery, Sunstralis in Lonsdale, and at the Central Markets in Adelaide.

“We wanted to keep growing lentils, but when you receive a tariff like that it makes that decision a bit more challenging,” Phillipa said.

“We just felt frustrated because we really like including lentils in our cropping rotation.

“The second reason for the move was when our district experienced low rainfall and severe frosts. Our export lentils became weather damaged, and therefore cracked during harvest.

“These lentils didn’t make export grade purely based on visual specifications – so we had them tested for their nutritional properties and there was nothing wrong with them.

“We were thinking ‘now what are we going to do with these lentils, we should be eating them, they are a really high-quality food product’.”

Then there was the fussy eater.

“Our daughter, who is a fussy eater, was our last push – we thought we should mill these lentils and put it into our food for extra protein,” Phillipa said.

The Lawsons were helped along the way by the mentorship program Farmers2Founders.

“We applied for that and it was a three-month intensive start-up program specifically designed for



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# with lentil flour



farmers who have an innovative idea," Phillipa said.

"It doesn't have to be a food idea, it could be an app, technology, or altering a farming implement.

"They really helped us navigate



*In the future, we would love it to become more of a regional product...*

as to whether it was viable, whether there was demand – we looked at customer surveys and feedback, and we decided we would give it a go."

Red lentil flour has some enticing properties.

"It is a good source of protein, and

excellent source of fibre," Phillipa said.

"In our lentil flour there are no preservatives or additives, and we have managed to make it gluten free, even though we are on a wheat and

wheat flour. Lentil flour has a lot of protein in it, so it can, if you are not careful, make your cakes heavier and dense.

"It has a soft earthy/nutty taste once cooked.

"Our customers have been quite supportive, and the people who enjoy using it typically like experimenting in the kitchen."

The Lawsons grow between 400 to 500 hectares of red lentils, which is about 25 to 30 per cent of their yearly cropping harvest.

Last year's harvest was significantly better for all their crops, and then India reduced its tariff – an added bonus.

Phillipa said The Pinnaroo Farmer project had its challenges at the beginning.

"I think learning to start the business from scratch, that was very different from farming," she said.

"I find as a farmer we don't typically see the end customer, and we had to really change our headset because everyone talks in kilograms and not tonnes.

"Our customers are interested

in Australian products and enjoy understanding where their food comes from, so I think there is an opportunity for fellow farmers (to do something similar)."

Phillipa and Skeet promote their red lentil flour on their website – with recipes approved by their children.

"Carrot cake is a big one, and Anzac biscuits," Phillipa said.

"I have managed to tweak it now so that they eat most of the recipes.

"All the ones that we have put up on the website are the ones that the kids eat – anything that the kids don't eat doesn't go up there – they are our food critics."

The couple have a dream to expand their red lentil flour business.

"If we can get this market to work, ideally it would be fantastic to buy lentils off other producers, and provide a new marketing opportunity which doesn't solely rely on the export market," Phillipa said.

"That would be amazing.

"In the future, we would love it to become more of a regional product – and then change the name to Pinnaroo Farmers."



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# Barossa's purple fields

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY ELLOUISE CRAWFORD

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A SWEET familiar, and floral aroma is the first signal you've reached the Lyndoch Lavender Farm.

Then you're hit with the serene purple landscape that attracts thousands of tourists to the area each year; some seek the perfect Instagram photo, others want a try of the famous lavender ice cream, but all seek a sense of 'getting lost' among the rows and rows of lavender bushes.

Mat Allanson (pictured) has been managing the property for just over 20 years, helping his parents Evan and Jill Allanson who established the farm in the early '90s.

"The first plants went in in 91," Mat said.

"My parents had the land and had lots of grape vines, and they were looking to diversify.

Lesley's up to probably 70,000 scones by now...

"They looked at the climate, rainfall, soil, the aspect, all those sorts of things and thought they would try lavender.

"It's native to Mediterranean areas, so Europe and North Africa, and they thought it's a similar climate here, so let's see how it goes."

The first plants went in up by 'the big gum' tree that still stands at a high point on the Hoffnungsthal Road property.

The trial plants grew happily until one day the sheep got to them. So, the next lot were fenced off, then thrived.

"Some of the original plants are still around," Mat said.

"These days we have four acres of lavender and about 70 different varieties."

The main flowering times are from spring to mid-summer but having so many types of lavender has helped ensure a continuation of year-round colour.

A small team harvests the lavender either for its seed or to make essential oils, using an old onsite steam distiller.

The end products are then sold in the gift store, which also sells other product types, such as hand creams, soaps and cooking oils, supplied by fellow Barossa-based businesses which use the farm's lavender oil.

"Lots of people rely on what we do to help them with what they do," Mat said.

"We probably have 60 different products with our label on them."

Once visitors have had a walk around the garden they are directed to the on-site café, which sells a selection of lavender-flavoured culinary treats.

It's here Mat's partner Lesley Montfort, has found her calling.

While she is involved across most parts of the business, Mat said she's great at making the lavender flavoured cakes and scones, which are their most popular food sale.

"Lesley's up to probably 70,000 scones by now," he said.

"They just fly out the door. People love them and they are really good."

Only English lavender is suitably flavoured for eating, with the farm also turning its flowers into mustards and jams, marmalades and honey, and even lollies.

Mat said he is thankful to have enjoyed plenty of visitors at the end of 2020, following a rare four-month shutdown because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Like other local businesses, he is expecting a significant drop in tourists on previous years for the next few months in particular.

However, the team will be taking the opportunity to get more work done on the farm, including the rejuvenation of a lower field to include more winding paths and a selection of lavender varieties to further improve the year-round show of colour.





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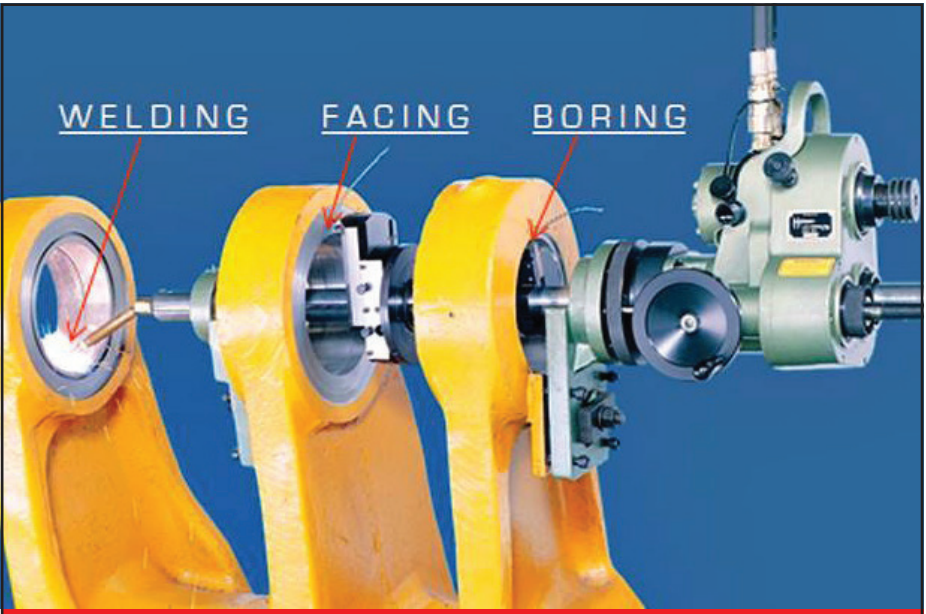
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David and Nathan Gibbs.



# Fourth-generation keeping farming strong

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY PETA-MARIE PHILIPPOU

PASSION and hard work are two of the things fourth-generation dryland farmer David Gibbs continues to persevere to maintain the legacy of his family's Wunkar block.

Mr Gibbs, along with his wife Valerie and son Nathan, grow wheat and barley on a 3860ha block and run more than 1700 sheep.

"The land we've inherited has come from both my family and Val's so the two of us have grown up in the industry," Mr Gibbs said.

"Nathan moved away from home after school to pursue an apprenticeship but since the age of three he had told us he wanted to be a farmer, so he moved back home five years ago.

"Val, Nathan and I work in partnership to grow wheat and barley, care for our sheep and work on the selling and marketing and we make a great team."

Mr Gibbs said harvest was his favourite thing about the industry.

"Seeding usually starts

in April/May but as soon as we're done seeding, we start planning for the next," he said.

"Harvest then takes place in mid-November and once we're done, we deliver to Viterra Loxton, who sell our stock.

"It's a continuous cycle and we have to constantly keep an eye on our crops.

"We look after our crop by using fertiliser but we also hope for rain.

"We only had an average rainfall last year and we grew an above average crop and it was pretty even all over."

Mr Gibbs described dryland farming as "a gamble".

"We're always unsure if this year will be better than the last because it depends on the rain," he said.

"The last year was good but before that it was terrible for three straight years, all due to the drought.

"In my 43 years of farming, it was the worst I've ever seen.

"We've had bad years in the past but never three years in a row.

"We're hoping this harvest is a good one."

Mr Gibbs said he has always enjoyed having sheep on his block.

"We have about 1000 ewes and 700 young ones and they're easy to maintain," he said.

"They graze the paddocks and basically look after themselves.

"We have shearing coming up in six weeks so we'll have someone come here, shear the sheep and send off the wool.

"We've had them forever and it's great to have something on top of dryland farming."





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# Going together like wine and cheese

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY BRENDAN SIMPKINS







WHY dairy?  
It is a question posed to farmer Jamie Nietschke (pictured) who runs a mixed dairy and viticulture farm at Moppa in the northern end of the Barossa Valley.  
Mr Nietschke is a fifth-generation Barossan who took over the day-to-day operations of Nietschke Moppa Estate from his father, John, and consolidated it down to the two distinct enterprises.  
Traditionally, farms in the Barossa Valley have been mixed.  
Under John's guidance the farm previously ran a variety of different enterprises, from apricot trees and sheep to cropping and everything in between.  
Over the years, though, it has slowly been whittled down to the most profitable avenues.  
The vineyards speak for themselves.

But for an area not typically known for dairy production, why go down that avenue?  
"Dairy farming is something you probably wouldn't get into if you didn't grow up with it," Mr Nietschke said.  
"It is what we know and it is the best use of the land that we can see, for the land that has not been suitable for vineyards.  
"In the past beef hasn't been particularly profitable in my eyes, sheep have been a bit up and down, cropping is a bit hit and miss... and so we thought dairy farming seems to be a good fit for us.  
"Although not a traditional dairy area, most of the dairies are down south and where there is higher rainfall, but with our system we have developed, we can produce quite an even flow of milk year round."



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The farm has expanded over the years from around 90 hectares to more than 400 today, and now the family milks around 250 cows consisting of Holstein, Jersey and Aussie Red and cross breeds.

The herd grazes as much as possible rather than being housed all-year round.

Mr Nietschke said this was more natural and better for the cows' health.

"You can maximise production by confining cows and lot feeding them," he said.

"But this time of year we do full mix, we have a mixing wagon we bought about four or five years ago and that has been a big improvement.

"We feed into troughs in the paddock and we just

keep moving the troughs around and fertilise the paddocks as we go. We still take the cows out to the pastures, rather than confining them and then taking the manure out to the paddock we take the cows out and let them spread it themselves.

"That has been a good thing and helps us to maintain or even increase production during the summer months, whereas we used to drop off in summer compared to spring, but now milk flows pretty even year round."

The produce is sent to two different sources, including Woolworths, where the milk is used for its Farmers Own brand, alongside other producers from the Barossa Valley and the Mid North region.

Mr Nietschke signed with Woolworths on a

rolling, three-year contract at a guaranteed price, which allowed the farmers involved to sell their product directly to the supermarket rather than through a processor.

He said this allowed greater security.

"We knew what we were getting for the next couple of years and you can budget on that," Mr Nietschke said.

"It's really hard in the dairy industry to get that security and guarantee of price."

The other is sent locally to Angaston's Barossa Valley Cheese Company (BVC).

Mr Nietschke has been the sole provider of milk since the very beginning of Victoria McClurg's foray into the cheese making market.

In tribute to the ongoing partnership between the two, BVC's semi-matured cow's milk cheese has been christened the Nietschke Farm Cheese and is only available in store at the Cheesecellar.

A good block of cheese wouldn't be complete at a dinner party without a nice drop to wash it down.

It is much the same on the estate, with vines dotted along the property.

Mr Nietschke has seven different fruit varieties planted; including shiraz, grenache, mataro, gracioano, saperavi, durif and nero d'avla.

Some of the vines are more than 100 years old.

The bulk of Mr Nietschke's fruit is supplied to Penfolds, with the rest of the supply going elsewhere.

Although not a traditional dairy area, most of the dairies are down south and where there is higher rainfall, but with our system we have developed, we can produce quite an even flow of milk year round.

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# AG NEWS

## RIC rates cut to new low

A REDUCTION in interest on agricultural loans is aimed at supporting Riverland, Mallee and Lower North farmers and growers.

The Federal Government earlier this month announced interest rates on loans made through the Regional Investment Corporation (RIC) would fall to a record-low of 1.77 per cent.

Minister for Drought David Littleproud said the announcement followed a regular six-month review of the RIC's concessional interest rate

"We remain committed to providing practical help to rural and regional communities to achieve economic growth and agricultural productivity,"

Minister for Finance Simon Birmingham said the reduced rates would provide "significant" assistance to individual South Australian farmers and agricultural businesses.

"This further rate reduction will put more money in the pockets of our



hardworking farmers, helping to boost their cash-flow and support them to further invest in growing their operations," Mr Birmingham said.

"These loans are all about backing Australian farmers who are doing it tough by helping them to rebound and continue to support regional economies and regional jobs."

## \$500k in funding available for innovative producers

LOCAL farmers, producers and manufacturers are being encouraged to apply for financial support to help them innovate and grow through the Coles Nurture Fund.

Coles has opened a new round of funding to provide grants of up to \$500,000 for small and medium-sized businesses to develop new products, technologies and processes.

Coles CEO Steven Cain said the

Since it was established in 2015, the Coles Nature Fund has awarded more than \$24 million in financial support to over 60 Australian businesses.

National Farmers Federation (NFF) CEO Tony Mahar said Australian farmers are amongst the most innovative in the world.

"For five years the Coles Nurture Fund has recognised and rewarded Aussie farmers who are leading the way in



company wanted to fund projects "which drive innovation to inspire customers or improve sustainability on Aussie farms and production facilities".

"Together we hope to drive differentiation, sustainable practices, extend growing seasons and improve productivity."

Businesses with fewer than 50 full-time employees and turnover of less than \$25 million in annual revenue are eligible to apply.

ingenuity and innovation," he said.

"The fund's focus on sustainability and increased efficiencies is in direct alignment with the NFF's vision to grow Australia's overall farm gate output to \$100 billion by 2030, up from \$60 billion today."

To apply for round nine of the Coles Nurture Fund, visit [www.coles.com.au/nurturefund](http://www.coles.com.au/nurturefund).

Applications close at 4.30pm ACST on Friday, March 19.

## China challenges in 2021 for agribusiness

A REDUCTION in food and wine trade with China is set to be a "watershed" moment for Riverland, Mallee and Lower North primary producers in 2021.

Rabobank – an international agribusiness banking firm – last month released its annual Agribusiness Outlook report, examining the global challenges currently affecting agricultural producers.

Rabobank head of food and agribusiness research – and report lead author – Tim Hunt said a shift in trade with China meant South Australian farmers and growers would need to examine new export markets.

"In a current global environment marked by the pandemic, political tensions and trade wars, demand for food and agri products has remained unexpectedly strong," he said.

"Despite the punitive actions of China on Australian agriculture, high agricultural commodity prices, low interest rates and positive seasonal conditions are underpinning a positive outlook for most farmers in 2020/21."

"Whether China continues to reduce its purchases of Australian food and agri products in coming years – as we think likely – or not... the risks of supplying this market have definitely increased."

"2021 will likely mark a watershed year, in which Australia starts to reduce its reliance on China, voluntarily or otherwise."

However, Mr Hunt said favourable rainfall levels in 2020 would benefit South Australian dryland farmers and horticultural growers this year.

"This (rainfall) is improving broad-acre farm incomes, boosting locally-grown feed and underpinning better water allocations for irrigators," he said.



## Fund to bring drought info to farmers

FARMERS across mainland South Australia will have the choice to grow Genetically Modified (GM) food crops in time for the 2021 grain season with no councils approved to operate as a GM-free area.

The GM moratorium was lifted for mainland South Australia in May this year but councils had a one-off six-month ability to apply to be designated a GM crop cultivation-free area, which 11 of the 68 Local Government Areas chose to do.

The independent GM Crop Advisory Committee assessed all 11 applications on the merits of demonstrating an economic benefit from remaining GM-free and provided advice to the State Government.

Minister for Primary Industries and Regional Development David Basham said outside of Kangaroo Island, there was no substantial evidence to justify any council area remaining GM-free.

"The Marshall Liberal Government has undertaken an exhaustive

consultation process on lifting the GM moratorium and the outcome importantly gives farmers on mainland South Australia the same choice as those across the rest of mainland Australia," Mr Basham said.

"By lifting the GM moratorium everywhere except Kangaroo Island, we are backing our farmers and researchers to grow the state's agriculture sector and create jobs."

"Under the legislation, councils had a once-off six-month opportunity to apply to remain GM free but under the Act passed by Parliament, applications could only be considered on trade and marketing grounds."

The 11 councils who unsuccessfully applied to have local GM moratoriums were, Town of Gawler, Berri Barmera Council, Adelaide Hills Council, Alexandrina Council, Barossa Council, City of Onkaparinga, City of Playford, District Council of Yankalilla, Mount Barker District Council, City of Tea Tree Gully, and City of Victor Harbor.



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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.



**Jason Size**  
Summerfruit Australia  
board member

**Were growers confident in the latest harvest?**  
In terms of quality it was okay. The size could have been better, but that's because we had really good crop sets and generally good yields. But in terms of quality, overall it's been pretty good.

**What stage are trees at for Riverland growers?**  
Some growers still have quite a bit of fruit to

harvest and go to the end of March or early April, but generally the bulk of the season has finished up, or is starting to wind down.

**What factors are most important for tree health at this time of year?**  
Really it's about understanding what the nutrient status is of the tree going into post-harvest. If the tree is ready to come out in spring, that will produce good quality fruit in the spring and summer. Really be prepared to understand your trees in terms of post-harvest fertilising ready for the next spring.

**Low rainfall in January would have been advantageous for growers?**  
You still want relatively dry conditions... it's always ideal.

**Are there still worries regarding labour shortages for this year?**

It depends on how the season progresses in terms of getting the extra labour in from overseas. It depends on vaccine rollouts, border restrictions and movement between the states. There's a whole heap of factors still in play that need to be worked out over the next few months, but hopefully we can get a bit more normality in terms of labour supply coming into the next season.

**Any advice for Riverland growers?**  
Just make sure to know where your trees are at for the coming dormancy period.



**Brendan Sidhu**  
Australian Nut Industry  
Council chairman

**How close to harvest time for almonds are we?**  
Most growers should be starting to think about harvest, and are probably starting to shake a few of the first varieties... it will be a slow start up, which is a good opportunity to check all our machines and make sure they are operating. I would think we would be fully into harvest by (the end of February).

**Are you confident there will be high yields for Riverland growers?**  
Certainly every orchard I've seen looks like

they've got a good crop, so I think the yields will definitely be better than last year – which was a very good year itself anyway.

**Have January rainfall levels been enough for growers at this time of year?**  
We prefer not seeing rain at this time of year, as all that does is fire up disease and particularly hull rot. Traditionally autumn, winter and spring is when the rains come, so hopefully we'll have a good winter rainfall to fill the catchment and get good water numbers for next year.

**How are export markets looking?**  
We're well and truly sold. We have to export nearly 70 to 80 per cent of what we produce, so export markets are looking pretty good. Prices are pretty soft, but with soft prices you build markets and that's what we're seeing happen. It's creating demand, it's just a matter of when that demand will pay more. We're expecting the 2021 crop returns won't be as good as 2020, and there's no surprises there, although (higher yields) will hopefully offset some of that. The real key is the Australian dollar with exports, and if that comes back a bit we'll be better off.

**What will be the keys to a successful 2021 for growers?**  
As long as it stays dry during harvest so we can get the crop off without getting mould or diseases is probably the key.

**Any advice for Riverland growers?**  
Just try and stay safe and be careful during the harvest.



**Adrian Hoffman**  
Wine Grape Council SA

**Are Barossa growers confident ahead of the vintage?**  
The harvest is looking quite good. Most growers will get close to an average crop and there's just a few doing it tough, where they've got a lack of water, plus the wind and the heat in late November. But in general, I think yield and quality will both be good. It will be a good, average crop. We've really only had the two heat events in January, but we've had some nice cool weather as well. That means good flavour development all the way through and good tannin development on the fruit as well. The warm days and cool evenings mean we've had very little disease pressure because of the

lack of rainfall. That comes with the small berries, and with those small berries you're going to get better colour, better tannins and a better all-round composition to the wine.

**Have low rainfall levels in January been beneficial for growers?**  
A lot of people would have liked a bit more rainfall, but at this stage everything's looking good coming into the season.

**Are this year's grape prices presenting any challenges for growers?**  
At the top end and mid-range I think pricing has been quite solid. Grenache and mataro prices have strengthened a little and there's solid demand for all varieties at this stage, regardless of what's happening in China. I'm getting a lot of phone calls still from winemakers looking for that grenache and mataro.

**Do you expect demand for experimental varieties to keep increasing this year?**  
They've always been grown in some form in the Barossa and I prefer to call them boutique varietals. We've seen a strong return for those traditional boutique varietals, and then you increase demand for some of the new varieties they are bringing in from overseas. You start looking at some of the heritage clones they've released through SARDI, and that's strengthening demand for diversity in the winery.

**Any advice for local growers?**  
Keep on communicating with your wineries. The more I talk to different winemakers, vintage logistics is going to be a really hot topic this year. Make sure you keep on communicating with your winery, so when your fruit is ready to go, you can get it off in a timely manner.





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

**How did the recent harvest go?**  
We finished our harvest just before Christmas (and) it went much better than the previous two years. We returned to a more normal year, as we nearly got average rainfall and our crops were good for an average year. So it was a good, average year overall.

**How have rainfall levels been to start the year?**  
We've had very little rain and it's been very patchy. We had 10mm here the other day and just up the road we had 1mm, but then if you went 5km toward Mallala they had more than 20mm. We don't actually want rain at this time of year as all it does is promote weeds and then it costs us money to go and spray them. We're quite happy for it to be dry in January and February.

**Will you be sowing GM crop varieties this year?**  
We usually start sowing from the middle of April onwards. For the first time in my lifetime we can plant GM crops, after lobbying to be able to plant GM for years. We'll use them as another tool in our toolbox. We're not going to sow wall-to-wall GM, but where selected paddocks need a Round Up ready canola, we'll be happy to use that as another tool.

**Are there still challenges regarding the export market?**

We've got 1100 or 1200 tonnes of beans in the shed and we're waiting for the market to recover before we sell them. Lentils still have some issues with India having trade restrictions... although lentil prices weren't too bad and we were able to sell them straight off the header. Canola prices have been quite good and the demand for canola is very good, and I guess wheat prices were adequate.

**Will you be sowing any new varieties this year?**  
We'll be using a new variety of canola when we switch to GM, and we always try and look at all the new wheat varieties each year. Some of the new varieties have advantages over what we grow, so we look at new varieties every year and evaluate them.

**What key factors would make 2021 a successful year?**  
Number one is rainfall, and number two is good prices. We'll be looking at grain production in the Black Sea, Russia and Argentina areas. They are some of our major competitors, so we'll be looking at their production and what sort of weather they're getting. We probably won't be growing barley... certainly there's no incentives to grow barley at the moment. We're looking at all the research the Grain Research Development Council (GRDC) is doing and when you look at those efforts, there's some good stuff in the pipeline. It looks like we might get some drought and frost-tolerant varieties sometime in the near future and that's something we're monitoring closely. There's some quiet things happening within the grain industry that are very positive. It's not just the GM crops, there's new wheat and canola varieties, and the issues we're having with China will probably renew our efforts to find new markets. Going through this COVID experience has made us realise we can't be dependent on one country and you need a multi-faceted approach to exports.

**Any advice for fellow farmers?**  
Have a major focus on what the GRDC is doing. They're having a really good look at some of the seeding technology, the time of sowing and fertiliser regimes. It seems we think we know it all, and then some new information comes out. Our technological understanding of soil science and fertiliser strategies is growing all the time, and there's always something new to learn and try on your own property.



**Sean Cole**  
CCW chief executive officer

**Are Riverland growers confident in grape quality ahead of the vintage?**  
Quality should be good as we have experienced a relatively mild season.

**How will recent fruit fly outbreaks in the region effect the harvest?**  
From a grape-growing perspective harvest will proceed normally. There has been an

increased requirement in regard to paperwork related to the movement of wine grapes, but all in all the Riverland grape growing industry is fortunate compared to the more onerous requirements placed on other crops, such as stone fruit. The majority (if not all) of the receiving wineries understand what is required and have taken the necessary steps ensure the vintage and associated paperwork flows as smoothly as possible.

**Which grape varieties are looking most profitable this season?**  
This year white varieties such as chardonnay are likely to be more profitable on average due to the price ratio change between red grapes white grapes.

**Are there still challenges surrounding exports this year?**  
With the exception of China, other markets namely the US, UK and Europe are beginning to ramp up their interest, which is typical at this time of year. Australia will fill demand gaps into other markets as other countries rotate to fill demand into China left open as a result of the recent Chinese tariff measure on Australian wine.

**Any advice for Riverland growers?**  
(We) wish all growers a safe and prosperous harvest. CCW is there to assist members throughout the vintage, so if you are a member and require assistance please do not hesitate to contract CCW.



**Mark Doecke**  
Citrus SA chair

**What stage of the citrus season are we now in?**  
Early varieties of mandarin start around the first week in April. Other varieties are busy sizing for the main season, opening in early May and through to Spring

**Are growers confident in recent rainfall?**  
Growers are more relaxed than this time last year with water availability. Dam levels are good for this time of year and water prices remain relatively low compared to last year.

**Are potential labour shortages still a worry in the region?**  
Labour supply is probably the biggest issue facing the industry this year. Backpacker labour has dried up, Australians aren't interested in coming to the regions for any jobs – horticulture or otherwise – despite generous Government initiatives. There is a big push to express interest in Pacific Island programs to give the administration process time to allow these workers into Australia for the harvest in 2021. We don't agree with unions when they state that overseas workers take Australian jobs. There are very few Australians who want horticulture jobs.

**How have fruit fly outbreaks in the region impacted growers?**  
The current fruit fly outbreaks have the potential to impact returns to growers if extra protocols are needed to move fruit interstate and overseas. Some markets may require cold treatment to accept our fruit.

**Was there still a healthy export market following the last harvest?**  
Demand for Australian citrus is good and volumes and markets are expanding. South Australian citrus is especially in demand as we work hard to maintain our Fruit Fly freedom.

**Any advice for Riverland growers at this time?**  
Continue the good work. Growers know there will always be hurdles (and) this year it's fruit fly and labour, but SA growers always step up to the challenge.



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