

SA Farmer

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AUTUMN 2025



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Welcome to SA Farmer, Autumn 2025 edition

Welcome to the Autumn 2025 edition of the SA Farmer publication.

SA Farmer is produced by the hard-working team at Taylor Group Media, with Riverland and Mallee-based journalists dedicated to finding stories worth telling about the regions' primary producers, business owners and industry experts.

Following a tough 2024 across the agriculture industry, South Australian farmers will be hoping for a more optimistic primary production outlook in 2025.

Riverland and Barossa growers were challenged by a number of tough weather events, while grain producers across the state had to contend with low rainfall throughout the year.

However, these difficulties have

failed to stop the dedication and innovation of Riverland, Mallee and Lower North growers and farmers, and SA Farmer once again provides an illustration of why the agriculture industry continues to be a backbone of the state.

Highlighted in this edition is a well-known date grower's efforts to document decades of research, and a look at the importance of backpacker workers to a Riverland West farm.

The regular Ag News section showcases what is happening in the agricultural industry at a state and national level.

These include in-depth looks at the 2024 wine grape vintage, and the increase of South Australian exports to China. Research into the importance of microbes for soil health is also examined.

A number of industry experts once again give their updates on wine grapes, almonds and citrus at this time of year.

The popular SA Farmer growing guide provides readers with information needed to grow the best autumn fruit and vegetables, while the regular rainfall report gives an insight into how rain levels are comparing at this time of year compared to 2024.

The publication would not be what it is without the added support of advertisers, and the production team behind the scenes.

We hope you enjoy the autumn 2025 edition of SA Farmer and, until next time, keep updated online by visiting the free-to-read website (www.safarmer.com.au).

- The SA Farmer team



Gurra Downs Date Company manager director Dave Reilly has been awarded the 2024 History Council of South Australian Fellowship to assist recording the South Australian history of the date palm.

**COVER PHOTO:
MADISON EASTMOND**

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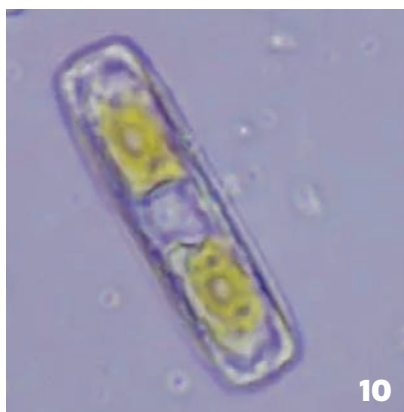
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MARJORIE, 31.07.2024

Bruce & Susan are very hospitable & wonderful hosts. Bruce is good at explaining things &, when dropping off pumpkins for the goats, is a wild driver! He's also a great cook - the biscuit barrels are never empty. When I was there it was choc chip cookies and Anzacs. And pumpkin soup of course, plenty of vegies with the meals. I enjoyed picking up pumpkins and enjoyed being with Susan & Bruce. Thankyou both for my stay & for my takeaway pumpkin, oranges & biscuits!

CA DAT, 13.12.2023

Stayed here for a week. Thanks Bruce & Susan for being my first ever host. The work was comfortable, and the rabbit hunts & night safari were a blast. Too bad the weather was a bit rough so we couldn't see the night sky. Probably ate more cookies than I should :)



Certified organic horticulturist Bruce Armstrong has hosted many backpackers who help him on his property in exchange for accommodation, local cuisine, and sightseeing experiences. PHOTO: Christine Webster

The holiday drawcard of horticulture

WORDS CHRISTINE WEBSTER

RIVERLAND West certified organic horticulturists Bruce and Susan Armstrong are providing backpackers from Australia and overseas the chance to experience life on a block on the Murray River.

For more than 24 years, the couple have hosted dozens of volunteer workers on their property at Taylorville north of Waikerie through the World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms WWOOF) or Workaway programs.

Bruce says they decided to become hosts firstly with WWOOF in the early 2000s when they were having difficulties finding people to help them with their vineyard and harvesting vegetables.



German backpacker Nina Brueckner experienced driving a tractor for the first time at 'Lone Pine Farm' at Taylorville.
PHOTO: Bruce Armstrong



"We were getting so many volunteer workers interested in coming to stay that we had to knock some of them back," he says.

Participants of the volunteer exchange programs, the Armstrongs are part of, assist their hosts for four to six hours per day, in exchange for their food, accommodation, and the opportunity to learn about the towns they visit.

The couple at 'Lone Pine Farm', grow a range of certified organic produce that includes apricots, peaches, nectarines, plums, loquats, citrus, rockmelons, watermelons, zucchinis, squash, pumpkins, and tomatoes.

They are no longer involved in growing certified organic wine grapes and producing wine after taking an exit package from the industry in the mid-2000s.

To become involved in the volunteer exchange programs, the volunteer workers and the

hosts sign up online, and create profiles with information about themselves.

"You post photos of what you grow on your property, and you also inform them of any fun activities they can do in their free time," Bruce says.

"They will be attracted to visit your property if they can have some good Australian experiences."

Volunteer workers will then contact hosts through the WWOOF or Workaway websites if they are interested in staying and helping on their properties.

The Armstrongs give their guests who have come from Australia or overseas a rich experience of life in the Riverland.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4



We were getting so many volunteer workers interested in coming to stay that we had to knock some of them back.

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“We take people out on a kangaroo safari and see all kinds of wildlife that can be found in the area,” Bruce says.

Barn owls, quails, wood ducks, emus, foxes, rabbits and mice are also among the animals that guests see.

“Every night is different,” Bruce says.

“I show them scorpions and if there is a red-back spider around I will show them that,” he says.

“On some days we go canoeing along the Murray River and if we go into town, I show them the Waikerie

Silo Art.

“We sometimes take them camping near Devlin’s Pound and they can experience water skiing or tube rides on the river.”

Bruce says some of the overseas volunteer workers who have stayed at his property have just completed their secondary education and are taking a gap year before starting their university studies.

“They like to get off the beaten track and get the on-farm experience,” he says.

His volunteer workers also have the opportunity to

drive tractors or quad bikes.

Places his overseas visitors have come from include Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, France, Spain, Germany, England, Scotland and Israel.

“Most of the people that do this type of thing are a good class of people, we have only had one bad experience, and this was with an Australian, who must have taken somebody else’s old logbook,” Bruce says.

The Armstrongs have also hosted families with children and guests for up to three months.

His guests, seven years ago, included Dean and Shay Paine and their first child, their daughter, who was then three years old.

The couple were ‘WWOOFERS’ before winning the Channel 9 reality renovation show ‘The Block’ in 2015.

Bruce also enjoys making homemade jam, chocolate chip cookies, and home cooked meals using his fresh certified organic produce, which his visitors love.


The Armstrongs have received rave reviews in their guest book and online from those that have enjoyed their hospitality.

Bruce says hosting guests from all over the world has been a treasured learning experience for them as well, and they keep in touch with many of them after they leave.


“We have had one boy from France who has visited us three times, and one or two others who have come back for a second time,” Bruce says.






Bruce used some of the plums his guest Nina from Germany picked on his Riverland West property to make a plum streusel cake.
PHOTO: Bruce Armstrong




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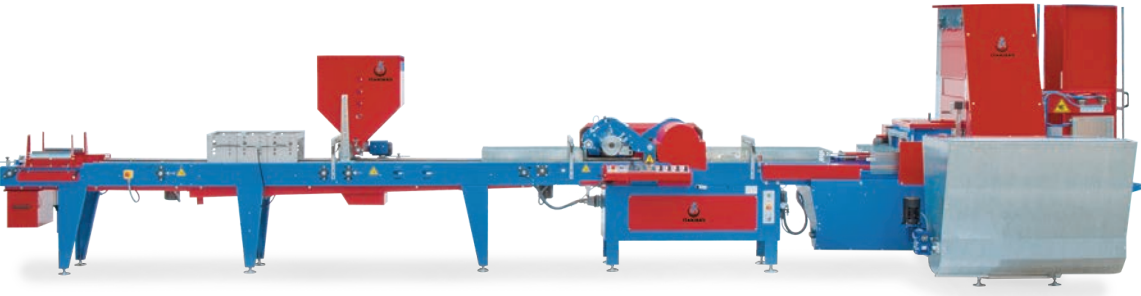





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4



Harvesting produce is a travel delight

WORDS CHRISTINE WEBSTER

GERMAN backpacker Nina Brueckner has been enjoying experiencing Murray River life in the Riverland by taking part in a volunteer workers' exchange program.

As part of the Workaway program she spent a week during January at Bruce and Susan Armstrong's 'Lone Pine Farm' at Taylorville, north of Waikerie.

It is the first time, the 19-year-old who finished school in March last year has left Europe to travel overseas.

Nina told SA Farmer, travelling around Australia and working on rural properties has enabled her to have a break from her usual weekly routine, which often involves working from Monday to Saturday.

At her home at Mainz in Germany she works as a waitress and also teaches sailing and circus performance to children.

Nina arrived in Sydney in August last year and travelled to Gippsland in Victoria, where she had her first Workaway experience, helping property owners at Narracan south of Moe look after 17 goats.

She then visited Wilsons Promontory on the southern tip of Victoria and travelled to Tasmania where she enjoyed mountain climbing before taking a second Workaway posting in the Blue Mountains in New South Wales.

Nina then welcomed in the New Year in Sydney before travelling to South Australia to take up her third Workaway experience with the Armstrongs.

She enjoys discovering new things and being part of the exchange program that involves working four to six hours a day for accommodation, food, and the chance to explore the locations she is visiting.

"It is a nice thing to do, it doesn't cost any money, and I love seeing the real Australia," Nina says.

During her stay with the Armstrongs, she helped pick certified organic watermelons, rockmelons, squash, and zucchini and also packed some of their produce.

"I get to drive the tractor, if we are picking watermelons, and every time we do some weeding, I can take the

quad bike," Nina says.

"I have never had the chance to drive these before or experience farm life," she says.

"It is really great, I love it."

Nina also had the chance to learn about Bruce's classic cars and helped clean his 1969 Ford Mustang Shelby GT500 before meeting his friends from the Mustang Owners Club of SA.

She also had a chance to get close to some Riverland wildlife.

"I saw a scorpion for the first time in my life, that was crazy and a bit scary," she says.

"We went on the Murray River, and I did some canoeing, and I saw heaps of pelicans around me, and flying above me.

"I really enjoyed paddling in this beautiful river surrounded by cliffs,"

Nina says.

She says Bruce who loves to talk, has been an entertaining host and has taught her a lot about the region.

"It is great, you learn a lot of things," Nina says.

"He has lots of 'fun facts' I have learnt a lot about this area, which is really great."

Nina says her time in Australia has helped her grow as a person and she is now more relaxed when her plans unexpectedly change.

She will visit Sydney again before heading to Byron Bay, Queensland, and New Zealand and may return again to see some of her Workaway hosts before leaving Australia.

She plans to be home by June and her ultimate career goal is to become a Maths and Physics teacher.



It is a nice thing to do, it doesn't cost any money, and I love seeing the real Australia.



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Understanding nutrient removal and maximising input efficiency for 2025

AS the dust settles on the 2024 harvest, farmers across the Mallee are diving into their yield data, evaluating how drought and frosty conditions impacted their crops.

With this valuable information in hand, it's the perfect time to assess the nutrient removal caused by grain

or hay production and make informed decisions for the upcoming fertiliser program.

To help with this process, Mallee Sustainable Farming is sharing key takeaways from Sean Mason, of Agronomy Solutions, who recently offered expert advice on nutrient

management following a dry season.

If you're planning for next season and would like to delve deeper into soil health or input strategies, reach out to your local agronomist or join upcoming discussions in the Zoning and Variable Rate Fertiliser Project, supported by the SA Drought

Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub.

Check out the Facebook Live event held with Sean Mason, on 14 November, by visiting the website (www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=924007779128663).





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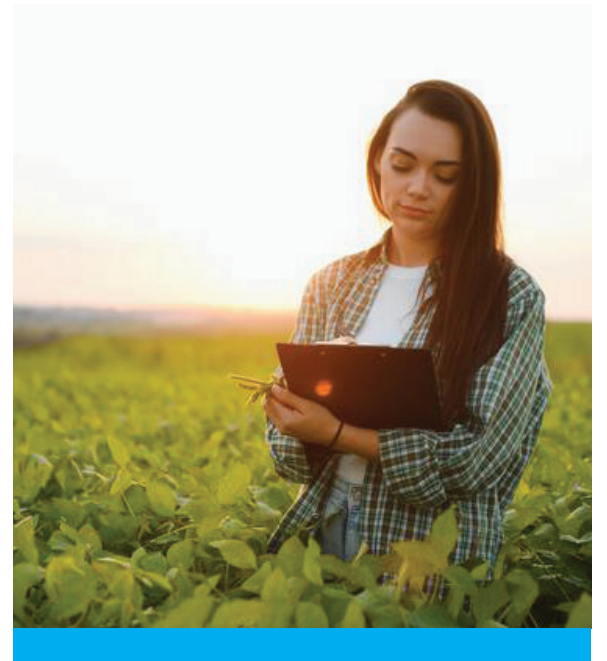
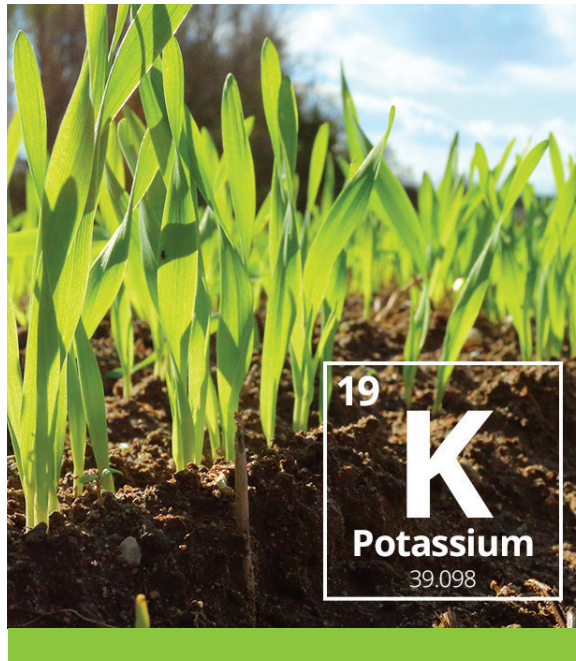
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Nutrient removal: hay vs grain

When crops are cut for hay instead of harvested for grain, the removal of nutrients from the paddock can differ. Understanding these differences is crucial for planning fertiliser budgets for the upcoming season. Here's how major nutrients compare: These are based off averages and will vary across paddocks depending on soil type nutrient stats and 2024 applications.

- **Nitrogen (N):** Nutrient removal for hay is roughly equivalent to grain, with about 20kg of nitrogen removed per tonne.
- **Phosphorus (P):** Hay removal is slightly lower, with about 1.5kg to 2.5kg of phosphorus per tonne (can be lower). Phosphorus is mobile within the plant, concentrating in the grain during harvest, which potentially reduces its removal in hay on a total plant weight basis.
- **Potassium (K):** This is where the major difference lies. With hay, the entire plant is removed, leading to about 20 to 30kg of potassium per tonne being taken from the paddock – significantly more than grain, which typically removes around 6kg to 7kg kilograms per tonne.
- **Sulphur (S):** Like nitrogen, sulphur removal is comparable between hay and grain. Farmers can expect 1.5kg to 2kg of sulphur per tonne of hay.

These figures underline the importance of considering the whole plant removal when budgeting for inputs next season. While hay cutting doesn't remove dramatically higher amounts of nitrogen or sulphur, the higher potassium removal is noteworthy.

Potassium: a hidden concern?

Potassium may not always be top of mind for growers in the Mallee, but Sean highlighted it as a "sleepier issue" worth monitoring. Critical potassium levels vary depending on soil type and texture:

- In sandy soils, potassium levels at or below 50 to 60 milligrams per kilogram are often considered critical.
- In heavier textured loams, higher levels – up to 100 to 150 milligrams per kilogram – may be necessary for optimal crop performance.

Soil testing remains the best way to gauge potassium levels. Keep in mind that potassium movement is influenced by soil characteristics:

So in heavier soils with high cation exchange capacity (CEC), potassium is less mobile and remains closer to the surface. In sandy soils with lower CEC, potassium can leach more easily through the profile, especially after significant rainfall. This would suggest, similar to nitrogen that sampling beyond 0cm to 10cm would be worthwhile to gauge K levels.

Farmers cutting hay on a regular basis should pay close attention to potassium levels, especially in high-production zones where historical nutrient removal may already have depleted subsoil reserves.



Input Planning for 2025

Given the nutrient removal figures are likely to be on the low side for hay and grain in 2024, it is likely less inputs will be required in optimising input efficiency next season:

- **Soil testing:** Start the season with comprehensive soil tests to understand nutrient availability, particularly nitrogen, phosphorous and sulphur levels. Following poor crop yields, savings are likely to be achieved, but it's important to know where.
- **Variable Rate Technology (VRT):** Even if you haven't set up zoning for fertiliser inputs in the past, consider zoning paddocks based on nutrient needs this coming season. This approach allows targeted fertiliser application, reducing costs while ensuring nutrients are applied where they're most needed.
- **Monitor seasonal conditions:** Some nutrients can move down the profile with heavy summer rainfall, particularly in lighter soils. Sampling nutrients down the soil profile can help determine where nutrients are concentrated.

By understanding the unique nutrient dynamics of grain and hay removal, farmers can make informed decisions to balance soil health and maximise productivity. Nutrient budgeting is about replacing what's removed; and about planning for a system that supports sustainable and efficient production in the long term.



Check out the Facebook Live event held with Sean Mason here →

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Olive Grove's new era

WORDS LACHLAN DAND

BEING new to a town is never easy. There's a lot to take in while getting to know your new surroundings, and adapting to the change of environment.

So, when you throw taking over a successful business in one of the most well-known country towns in South Australia to the mix, it can be a full-on recipe.

However, the Milne family have recently taken over the Waikerie Olive Grove, distinguishing themselves as one of Australia's premium olive groves in the process.

The farm is run by brothers Matt and Andrew, along with their wives and children, and Kimberley, the wife of Andrew, said owning the farm has been a whirlwind.

"We bought it about two and a half years ago because we've already got three Battery World stores, so we wanted to try something a bit different outside of the four walls, and then we saw the farm for sale," she said.

"We only harvest once per year which is in early April, and after we do that we fertilise and water waiting for the olives to grow.

"It's all machine operated, so we don't necessarily have to spend as much time out on the farm, which can be helpful.

"We live two and a half hours away from the farm, so we go up there every four days and the watering process generally takes about 18 hours, and we fertilise once a month too."

The change of pace for the Milne family has been significant, while running separate businesses, but Kimberley said she enjoys getting out onto the farm and taking a step back.

"When you go up to the farm it's really nice because you can just switch off and take a step back from the rest of the world and do your thing," she said.

"It's amazing doing it with another part of the family, and we all get along really well which I think you have to do to be successful."



Long term, our vision is to keep growing, keep expanding, and ultimately just get our olive oil out there because it's a good product.

"We alternate on the days we go up to the farm, so there's always someone around the place to be able to keep an eye on things and make sure it all flows smoothly."

The products from Waikerie Olive Grove are available both in-stores and online, with the business combining with local shops to help sell the products to the Waikerie residents.

Stockists of Waikerie Olive Grove include Seaford Gourmet Meats, Nippys and the Waikerie Library and Visitor Centre.

Locals can find the extra virgin olive oil available to purchase, along with further olive oil products.

"I think a lot of people like to try before they buy, which is why we do have some stockists around the place," Ms Milne said.

"Our harvest last year didn't go as planned so we didn't bother opening our farm shop last year because we didn't really have the oil to sell.

"This year, once we have the oil, we'll look to open up our farm shop a little bit more and then people can come and try before they buy.

"A lot of people are very loyal to different brands, so once people have tried it they tend to keep coming back.

"We have a lot of people from Italian and Greek backgrounds that tend to really like our oil too.

"We appreciate working with the town, and there's a few places that all sell the oil, but when we're there we shop local, so there's a sense of us helping them and them helping us."

Waikerie Olive Grove has both a short-term vision, which is about getting through the upcoming harvest, while the long-term vision is about building towards the future.

"Long term, our vision is to keep growing, keep expanding, and

ultimately just get our olive oil out there because it's a good product," Ms Milne said.

"There's no nasties added to it, and there's nothing mixed with it. It's just pure extra virgin olive oil."



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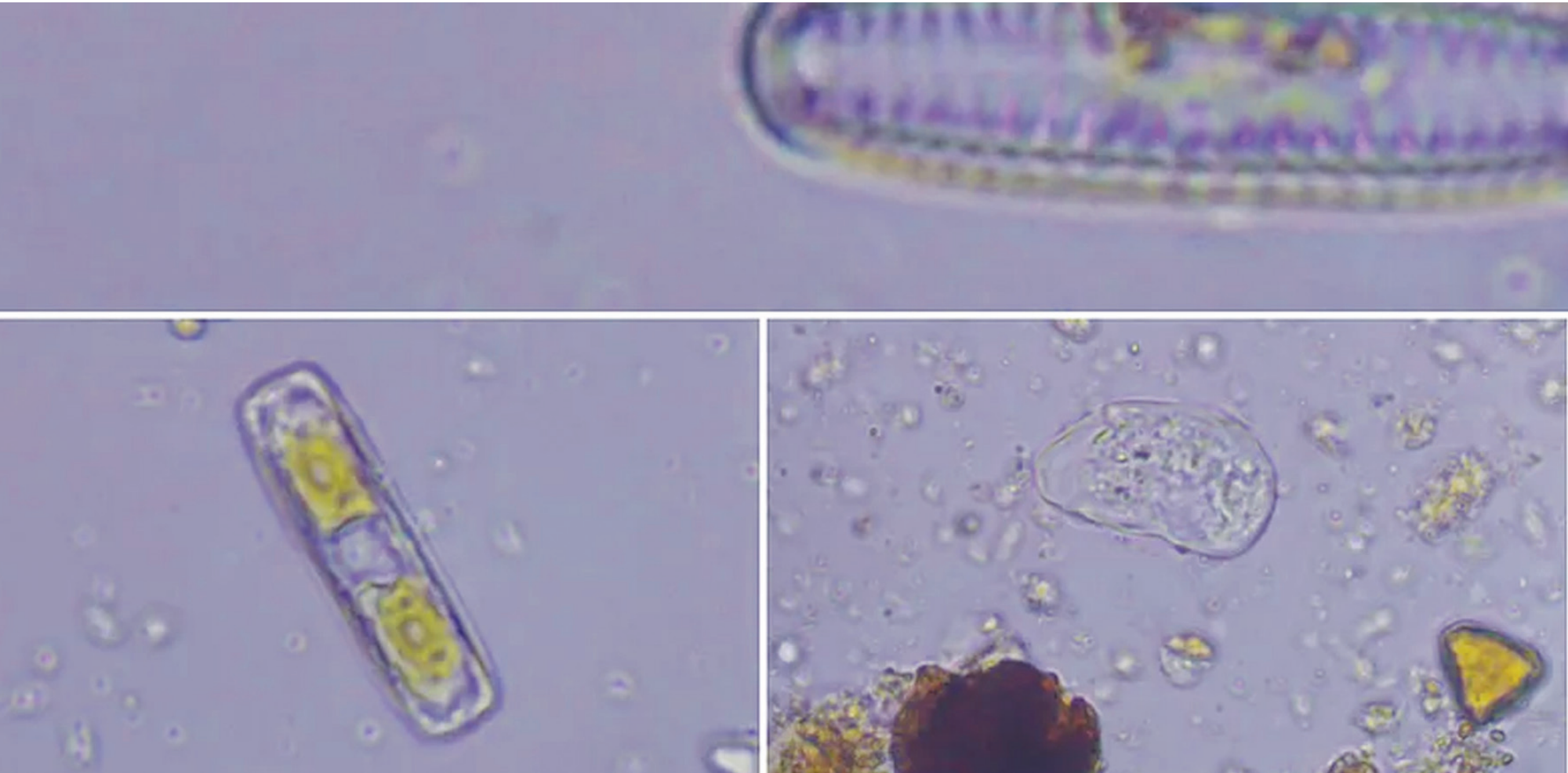
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Soil microbes – farming with your underground livestock for healthy soil

IF you want to grow plants, either on the farm, fruit block, or in the home garden, chances are you have considered your soil and thought about adding something to make the plants grow better.

What if there was something that you could encourage in your soil that is vital for plant and soil health? And its free.

Healthy soil has its own living and breathing ecosystem of microbes, sometimes referred to as soil biology. Soil microbes include bacteria, actinomycetes, fungi, protozoa, and nematodes, and they're the good guys in this story.

These microscopic creatures are naturally occurring, but the population sizes and diversity of species is influenced by many soil characteristics like organic matter levels and soil pH. Microbes are also influenced by what we apply or do to the soil.

So perhaps we should consider soil microbes to be our underground livestock.

Why do you need to look after soil microbes, your underground livestock?

Microbes have lots of beneficial effects on soil and plants that lead to improved productivity and better-quality produce.

They improve soil structure by producing sticky glue-like substances that help to form soil aggregates and break down organic matter into humus, and they increase soil carbon levels. This leads to improved water infiltration and soil water holding capacity.

They assist in cycling nutrients by breaking down organic matter to supply food for plants. Some microbes can convert atmospheric nitrogen into a plant available source of nitrogen.

Others work on different nutrients, like phosphorus and sulphur, to make them more available to plants.

Some microbes actively support healthy plant growth by supressing disease-causing microorganisms, improving plant disease resistance, and helping plants cope with environmental stresses.

Some fungi have been found to help plants find and access soil moisture reserves.

How do you manage the underground livestock?

Just like managing livestock above ground, these living creatures need some basic requirements to thrive.

What we do can make a very big impact on the health of soil microbiology and correspondingly, on the health of soil.

- ❑ Maintain a diverse range of healthy living plants for as long as possible to encourage a healthy population of soil microbes. Plants and microbes exist in mutually beneficial relationships. Living plants excrete simple sugars from their roots as a product of photosynthesis. Microbes feed off these sugars and in turn make soil nutrients available to the plant.
- ❑ Keep soil covered in the form of living green plants, or mulches and stubble residues, to conserve soil moisture and protect microbes from drying out. They can't survive in hot, dry, sun-baked soils.



A simple test to show soil microbial action. Cotton undies buried for eight weeks and then recovered. Soil microbes eat cotton so less undies means more microbes.

Maintaining microbes
is key to healthy soil
and food growth.
PHOTOS: supplied

- ❑ Avoid tillage or major disturbance of soil. Tilling or digging the soil disturbs soil structure and destroys the living ecosystem of microbes.
- ❑ Avoid applying synthetic chemicals including fertilisers, fungicides and herbicides. These chemicals are toxic to soil microbes. Regular use will cause their gradual decline, leading to a biological desert underground, and you will lose all the benefits of the plant/microbe relationships.
- ❑ Reintroduce grazing livestock of any kind, it could even be chickens. When animals graze plants, it encourages plants to actively grow to replace green material. When plants are doing this, they are also releasing more simple sugars into the soil which favours more microbes. Just make sure that the plants aren't grazed too heavily for too long.

How do you get more underground livestock?

Following the principles above is a great way to increase the microbe activity in your soils. However, some soils have very low soil biology levels naturally, or past management practices have caused their decline.

It may be necessary to introduce microbes to your soil, and there are some simple things that can be done.

- ❑ Add good-quality composts to your soil. Good compost is full of beneficial microbes because they're responsible for turning organic waste into compost.
- ❑ Over larger areas, it can be more effective to spray out compost teas and organic liquid extracts.
- ❑ In addition, it can be beneficial to spray out microbial food sources like a mix of molasses, fish emulsion and kelp extract. This can supercharge those microbes that are present.
- ❑ Putting out soil amendments with humic and fulvic acid in them also provide a beneficial carbon food

source for microbes.

- ❑ Adding biochar inoculated with nutrients and microbes to soil increases soil carbon levels and improves the soil environment for microbes. It's just like a home improvement option. Biochar is like a hotel for microbes.

So if your aim is to build soil health, reduce the cost of and reliance on soil inputs, and increase your soil productivity then you should consider how to provide the best care for your underground livestock.

Microbes are one of the smallest animals on your property but they're probably your most beneficial livestock if managed correctly.

If you would like more information about how to improve the health of your soils and increase your soil biology, you can visit the Murraylands and Riverland Landscape Board soil resources page (www.landscape.sa.gov.au/mr/land-and-farming/soils), or contact soil extension officer Barrie Williams.

**Healthy soil has
its own living
and breathing
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of microbes,
sometimes
referred to as
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AG NEWS



GPSA calls for impact assessments on APVMA reviews

GRAIN Producers South Australia (GPSA) has strongly urged the Federal Government to undertake a comprehensive economic and environmental impact assessment after the release of any future preliminary recommendations by the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) when reviewing agricultural chemicals, such as paraquat and diquat.

The proposed process has been put forward as part of GPSA's submission to the APVMA's review of paraquat and diquat, to ensure any impacts of review decisions can be mitigated by the Federal Government prior to implementation, and without impacting the independence of the national chemical regulator. Economic and environmental impacts are outside of the APVMA's remit.

GPSA chief executive officer Brad Perry said the proposed decision to reduce paraquat and diquat use to ineffective levels will have significant economic and environmental outcomes unable to be considered under the APVMA's remit.

"It's critical that we maintain the independence of the APVMA, but the Federal Government needs access to information relating to the potential impacts from the APVMA's decisions so that it can mitigate them, where possible," he said.

"GPSA's submission highlights that there are currently no viable alternatives to paraquat and diquat and the proposed restrictions will likely see the return of tillage in South Australia – the driest state in the nation – creating significant environmental and economic challenges.

"While GPSA wholeheartedly supports regulatory measures to ensure the safe use of agricultural chemicals, any restrictions must be balanced with the practical needs of grain producers who rely on these products for sustainable farming practices.

"Paraquat and diquat are indispensable tools for South Australian grain producers. These chemicals play a crucial role in weed management, especially in no-till farming systems. A reduction in their use would push growers back towards

more intensive tillage practices, undoing decades of progress in soil conservation, reducing biomass and retained moisture levels.

"We've written to the Federal Agriculture Minister (Julie Collins) and the Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC) urging immediate investment into exploring and accelerating alternatives to paraquat and diquat as the APVMA reviews public submissions on its proposed restrictions to these key farming chemicals."

The APVMA's proposed restrictions on paraquat and diquat have raised significant concerns among South Australian grain producers, particularly in relation to their ability to manage herbicide resistance.

In a survey conducted by GPSA, an overwhelming 96 per cent of respondents indicated that the proposed restrictions on paraquat would have a significant negative impact on their operations. Additionally, 100 per cent of growers surveyed reported no observed impact on wildlife from their use of paraquat and diquat.

Mr Perry highlighted the risk of unintended consequences if restrictions are implemented without fully assessing their impact on the grain industry.

"These chemicals are integral to the double-knock strategy, which is vital for controlling glyphosate-resistant weeds," he said.

"If growers lose access to these tools, they will face increased costs, lower yields, and a return to practices that are detrimental to soil health."

GPSA's submission to the APVMA calls for:

- ❑ Higher-tier risk assessments that reflect local agricultural conditions and usage patterns to ensure balanced regulatory decisions.
- ❑ Extended consultation periods to allow sufficient time for industry feedback and the exploration of viable alternatives.
- ❑ Federal Government involvement to conduct a broader economic and environmental impact study, similar

to previous assessments that have highlighted the critical role of paraquat in Australian agriculture.

"Our growers are committed to sustainable farming and using chemicals responsibly," Mr Perry said.

"We need a regulatory approach that acknowledges their efforts and puts in place measures to ensure these decisions do not jeopardise the viability of grain

production in South Australia." GPSA will continue to work with the APVMA, the Federal Government, and industry partners to ensure that any regulatory changes are based on robust, locally relevant scientific evidence that considers the economic sustainability of South Australia's grain industry.

To read the full GPSA submission to the APVMA, visit the website (www.grainproducerssa.com.au).

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A new era of climate-smart farming trials in SA established

A NEW era of climate-smart farming has arrived for South Australia, in the form of long-term research trials being conducted at Loxton, Lamerook and Karoonda.

These trials will help livestock, cropping and mixed farmers prepare for and respond to future climate challenges, including dry times and droughts through innovative and applied research solutions.

The SA Discovery Farms project, led by Flinders University and delivered by the South Australian Research and Development Institute (SARDI), the research division of the Department of Primary Industries and Regions South Australia (PIRSA) and 40 partners, is an \$8m program investigating innovative and transformational cropping, grazing and mixed farming practices to improve drought resilience.

Funding is from the Australian Government's Future Drought Fund.

The SA Discovery Farms project has brought together 40 research partners in its first year, including farming systems groups, advisers, rural research and development corporations, Landscape Boards, plant breeding companies, researchers and agribusinesses.

Flinders University affiliate Associate Professor, and SARDI agronomy program leader, Rhiannon Schilling, who heads the new program, said a network of long-term research trials have been established throughout 2024 to test applied science and climate-resilient solutions.

"In the first season of the SA Discovery Farms project, we've established four SA Discovery Farms – located at Minnipa Agricultural Centre, Loxton Research Centre, Struan Research Centre and Turretfield



Erin Plews, Lynette Kelly and Zoe Starkey at SA Discovery Farms site at the Minnipa Agricultural Centre. PHOTO: supplied

Research Centre – to test new climate resilience innovations," Dr Schilling said.

"We have also established 35 Innovator Sites on commercial farming properties across SA to directly engage with local farmers and advisers.

"The long-term trial sites have been driven from the ground up with co-design meetings held with farmers, advisers, and researchers."

The co-design process identified four key innovation themes:

- Tailor-made climate smart grain and feed.
- Soil improvement practices to advance soil health.
- Use of precision livestock strategies for healthier livestock.
- Increasing landscape diversification.

Zoe Starkey has been appointed as the long-term trials co-ordinator and brings extensive experience in facilitation and engagement in the

agricultural industry.

As a mixed farmer, Mrs Starkey has first-hand experience in managing a farming operation in dry conditions.

"This project is all about long-term on-ground trialling of innovations. We're testing new climate resilience practices to give farmers the confidence to adopt these practices on their own properties," Mrs Starkey said.

The SA Discovery Farms and Innovator sites link the project to farming systems in pastoral, low, medium, and high-rainfall zones across SA.

"In the first year of the project, we have set up long-term trials investigating soil amelioration and additives, modifying the soil microbiome, virtual fencing, adapting pastures to dry conditions, moisture sensing seeding systems, herbicide safety and efficacy in varying rainfall, as well as using plant genetics to build

resilience," Mrs Starkey said.

"This year we'll also be starting trials that look at landscape hydrology and remnant vegetation monitoring."

Project stakeholders are kept informed through newsletters, social media posts, website content updates, crop walks and presentations.

"Research innovations will align with key seasonal decisions that farmers have to make leading into and out of drought so they can make those decisions based on scientific data and rainfall decile," Mrs Starkey said.

"We also aim to establish and strengthen networks between all our stakeholders to improve the ways we share knowledge and implement drought resilient practices and systems.

"Ultimately, the aim is to increase uptake of drought resilient innovations on-farm to improve economic, environmental and social resilience to drought."



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AG NEWS



GPSA launches Seed Register to help drought-affected growers

MALLEE grain growers struggling with seed supply following the drought challenges of 2024 will now have access to a seed register that aims to put them in contact with growers with available stock.

Grain Producers SA (GPSA) has launched a new initiative to support South Australian grain growers after last year's record-low rainfall prevented many from producing a crop.

As many parts of South Australia face ongoing dry conditions, seed supply has become a significant concern for grain producers trying to maintain operations and plan for the upcoming growing seasons.

In response to concerns about seed supply, GPSA has established a Seed Register to help facilitate connections between those needing seed and those with seed available.

GPSA chief executive officer Brad Perry said the current drought in South Australia has placed significant stress on areas of the farming community, and the challenges are far from over.

"This register will help match those in need with those who have seed to spare, ensuring that our members have the resources they need to continue operations during these challenging times," Mr Perry said.

"A number of grain producers were unable to grow a crop due to the record low rainfall and that means that without a crop this season, securing the right seed is a top priority for 2025. This register is a step toward helping to ease that burden.

"We are encouraging all growers to source seed as early as possible and plan ahead for planting requirements, but also ensure growers check the seed quality before making any purchasing decisions."

The Seed Register is available to South Australian grain producers and GPSA encourages anyone with spare seed to submit a listing.

To make a listing on the Seed Register, visit (www.grainproducerssa.com.au/projects/seed-register).

This register will help match those in need with those who have seed to spare...

Grazing sheep on stubble in dry seasons

AS the Victorian Mallee grain harvest draws to a close, sheep producers will be eyeing off the potential value of grazing their sheep on stubble.

A good rule-of-thumb is that the value of the feed equals the amount of residual grain and green plant growth from sprouted grain and summer weeds.

In drier years, the stems and leaves can be quite nutritious as less energy and protein has ended up in the grain. Windy weather can also cause grain to drop to the ground.

Graze sheep on crop stubble immediately after harvest to gain the most benefit, and look to remove the sheep from the paddock no later than six weeks afterwards.

Paddock size, stocking density, and how much grain and green shoots remain will be factors in your decision. A key indicator will be animals no longer maintaining their weight.

Stubble lacks high levels of calcium, but licks and supplements can make up for this. A simple solution is to provide your sheep with limestone, plus 5 per cent salt, to help solve the deficiency.

Trace elements, vitamins, urea and topping up the nutrition shortfall with

pellets and grain such as lupins to increase protein intake will help.

There are some animal health issues to watch out for when grazing sheep on stubble:

- Water belly
- Grain poisoning
- Polioencephalomalacia or thiamine deficiency
- Nitrate and nitrite poisoning from oilseed crops like canola
- Lupinosis from a fungus in lupins that produces a toxin

Sheep are helpful at reducing high stubble load but be careful not to overgraze the paddock and leave at least 50 per cent ground cover to prevent wind erosion and help retain moisture in the paddock.

For further information on grazing sheep on stubble see the following online resources (www.agriculture.vic.gov.au/crops-and-horticulture/grains-pulses-and-cereals/crop-production/general-agronomy/sheep-nutritional-requirements-when-grazing-stubble), and (www.feedinglivestock.vic.gov.au/sheep-resources/sheep-drought-feeding-book/sheep-pdf/).





Backyard chickens are here to stay

CHICKENS have been a mainstay in South Australian backyards for generations.

New research from the University of Adelaide reveals that owners see their chooks as a blend between pet and livestock, plus a trustworthy source of produce.

“Our research indicated that backyard chickens are seen as both companion animals and as a source of food, falling within a hybrid space of human-animal relations,” University of Adelaide’s School of Humanities member, Dr Emily Buddle said.

“They blur the line between what we traditionally call livestock and a companion animal or pet.”

Dr Buddle conducted the study alongside Professor Rachel Ankeny from Wageningen University, Dr Kristen Stevens, from the University of South Australia, and Dr Heather Bray, from the University of Western Australia.

While other backyard traditions such as home dairies and pig-keeping have diminished, the backyard chook has stood the test of time.

Dr Buddle said study provides new insight into the motivations, ethics, and perceptions surrounding backyard chickens in Australia.

“Chickens have been part of Australian backyards for a long time, providing a source of food, once destined for the soup pot, and through the provision of eggs, as well as a way to recycle kitchen scraps,” Dr Buddle said.

Despite this, participants expressed their chooks had distinct personalities and pet-like characteristics, often providing companionship.

Non-vegetarian participants indicated while they eat meat, they definitely would avoid killing or eating their own chickens.

Regardless of the emotional

attachment, chickens are yet receive the same level of care as more traditional companion animals, such as cats and dogs.

“A surprising finding was that, while being loved companions, most participants were unlikely to take their chickens to the vet,” Dr Buddle says.

“They were unable to justify the veterinary cost versus the monetary value of the chicken.”

Based on qualitative interviews with 44 backyard chicken owners in Adelaide, the study revealed that a key motivator for keeping chickens was for their utility.

“Chickens offer an ongoing supply of fresh eggs from a known and trusted source,” Dr Buddle says.

“It was clear to participants that their chickens were ‘definitely free-range,’ avoiding the confusion and controversy associated with Australian free-range egg standards.”

Dr Buddle said previous research from the group has shown people prefer free-range eggs because they are perceived as ‘more natural’, ethical, and safer.

Dr Buddle said research has policy implications for biosecurity and animal welfare, particularly due to the lack of veterinary attention backyard chickens get.

“Despite recent changes in council regulations, food shortages, particularly through the Covid-19 pandemic, and increasing concerns about free-range poultry production standards, there had been no research conducted before this to understand what motivates people to keep chooks in their backyard,” Dr Buddle said.

“Our research has shown the need for greater research in understanding people’s distrust in the food system, particularly with the supermarket duopoly in Australia, and the diverse ways that people navigate these challenges.”



Tagging shoots at Rob Haynes' pistachio orchard, in Waikerie. PHOTOS: supplied

Chill research with Waikerie pistachios

TRIALS at a Waikerie pistachio orchard are helping to inform the industry’s future chill management practices.

The polymer trial for 2024/25 season is being executed in Rob Haynes’ orchard, in Waikerie, to capture the effects of polymer in chill-deprived locations.

Waikerie continues to be low in chill accumulation. It is just 53 dynamic chill portions - a calculation based on hourly temperatures – and only 674 hours less than 7C by 31 August 2024. Tinytag temperature/RH sensors maintained in Rob’s orchard were used for chill calculations.

Polymer was applied in August to September. A total of 240 shoots have

been randomly selected, tagged and given unique numbers for observations on phenology, bud burst and flowering, and yield traits – number of bunches, number and weight of nuts – at harvest. Bud burst started from first week of September and flowering around third week of September.

It is time to record juvenile shoot dieback incidence as it appears in orchards in different locations. Orchards that exhibit juvenile shoot dieback will be visited this year to record details and appropriate orchard management practices for further investigation.

Dr Maha Mahadevan
Research officer
Pistachio Growers Association



Buds on 10 September 2024.



Buds on 2 October 2024.

AG NEWS

Tech Council welcomes investment in farm connectivity

THE Tech Council of Australia welcomes the Federal Government's investment in the On Farm Connectivity Program (OFCP), which assists Riverland and Mallee primary producers to take advantage of digital agribusiness solutions.

Tech Council CEO Damian Kassabgi said facilitating innovation and tech adoption in a critical industry such as agriculture would drive efficiencies that will benefit the wider economy.

"There are exciting advancements and solutions in agtech that can save farmers time and money so they can produce more with less while maintaining the high quality that Australia's agricultural industry is well-known for," he said.

"Great ideas come from everywhere and we want businesses across the nation – whether you're in Surry Hills or Smithton – to have the infrastructure that allows you to uplift your R&D and tech adoption investment.

"By boosting connectivity, we can lift tech adoption across rural and regional Australia, which will contribute to a more resilient and sustainable agricultural sector."

Australia has 2.5 per cent of the world's ag and food tech startups, almost double the country's share of global GDP. Listed Australian tech companies in agtech and food tech grew by 134 between 2016 and 2021 – 3.8 times faster than the average growth

rate across all other tech segments.

"We punch above our weight in ag and food tech and they are fast-growing segments in Australia," Mr Kassabgi said.

"We have the potential to leverage our strengths in tech and agriculture

to be globally competitive in agtech, but increasing investment in R&D and tech adoption is essential to making that happen.

"Setting a tech investment target would help drive coordinated action between government and industry on these kinds of initiatives."



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Info series highlights passion for responsible land stewardship

The passion of grain growers for the responsible stewardship of the land is a clear message farmers are sharing with Riverland and Mallee consumers in a new information series.

The information series, promoted by GrainGrowers, highlights a modern, high-technology approach that allows growers to maximise available growing conditions, delivering high-quality, safe food to consumers, while also protecting the land.

It includes a simple on-farm grower video, reinforced by website information, answering a range of commonly asked questions, and an open invitation to directly speak with a GrainGrowers representative.

GrainGrowers chair Rhys Turton said it was important consumers were presented with a fair and accurate picture of on-farm activities and knew about the revolutionary changes in farming practices over the past 30 to 40 years, including the value of modern

chemicals and increasingly high-technology spraying methods.

Mr Turton said the modern Australian grain industry has dramatically improved its approach to land management and the environment, and continued to invest in research and development to improve industry productivity.

"Our industry consists of people passionate about how they farm, looking to implement the best practices possible to suit their unique environment," he said.

"One area common to all our growers is the farming systems needed to control and kill weeds. Modern chemicals have been instrumental in providing weed control in the most environmentally sustainable way possible.

"Without these modern chemicals, growers would be forced back to interventionist tillage practices that break up the soil surface to destroy

the weeds. This approach burns diesel, causes significant soil and wind erosion, and removes moisture needed to produce a crop."

Mr Turton said chemicals were a vital part of farming and would remain so until researchers and machinery manufacturers were able to identify feasible alternative weed control methods. All chemicals used on Australian farms are highly regulated to ensure they are safe for farm workers, communities and consumers.

"As an industry, we want to share how we use chemicals and also our commitment to using them in the safest and most efficient way possible," Mr Turton said.

"From the moment a chemical arrives on the farm to the moment it is applied, the utmost care and attention is given to maintaining appropriate safety measures to protect not only those handling and applying the chemical, but also the surrounding environment."

Mr Turton said all aspects, ranging from the weather conditions to the type and volume of chemicals, were carefully considered.

"Nowadays good practice is the use of high-tech sprayers and application equipment, placing growers safely in a carbon filtered clean vehicle that allows them to carefully target weeds, minimising volumes required and improving efficiency," he said.

"Anyone not familiar with advances in farm technology would be impressed with the level of technology and how it is being used to deliver environmental outcomes and ensure safe food production."

Mr Turton said consumers could be assured of the quality of Australian products, with every load of grain tested



GrainGrowers chair Rhys Turton is encouraging farmers and consumers to view a new series of information videos highlighting modern approaches to grain growing. PHOTO: supplied



against strict food safety standards.

"Our industry is very proud of how it farms, and the standards applied to everything that leaves our farms," he said.

Mr Turton said he encouraged anyone viewing the video to show it to their family, colleagues and friends.

"I think people will be more than a little surprised at how our industry operates and the level of commitment to environmental stewardship that is inherent in everything we do," he said.

The GrainGrowers information series can be viewed online (www.graingrowers.com.au/grain-growing-today-protecting-the-land-to-feed-australians-and-the-world).

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AG NEWS

Don't forget the benefits of farm laneways

MALLEE primary producers have been reminded of the advantages maintaining a laneway network can have for farming operations.

Farm laneways are a great way to improve farm efficiency and reduce labour requirements. Laneways can also provide a useful refuge area during natural disasters such as flood, fire and drought.

A good laneway system makes moving stock easier, for rotational grazing or routine stock management like drenching or shearing.

Combining a laneway system with a well-designed all-weather road improves accessibility for feeding out and checking stock, or moving plant or equipment, particularly in wet years.

Careful planning and design is needed to get the best out of a laneway system. The laneway system design should consider your operational requirements and opportunities.

Consider the width and turning circle of your equipment, space for a well-built road, room for a few rows of trees and plenty of room for stock.

Making a laneway at least 20m to 25m wide works well for most sheep and cattle properties.

Rounding off tight corners in a laneway/road combination allows for travel at a consistent speed around the farm.

Adding regular gateways and a water

supply can also allow the laneway to be used as another paddock or holding area, benefiting your property when required in emergencies.

Planning and designing a farm laneway can be done using a large air photo or satellite image of your farm.

Create laneways to access as many paddocks as possible, and pick a safe and reliable route across the farm.

Where possible, place laneways on ridgelines to improve drainage and make road construction easier. Laneways can also be used to establish shelterbelts, woodlots or improve biodiversity.

Take care to select species that will benefit the land and allow space to minimise damage to fencing.

Planting trees on the east and south side of your laneway will reduce waterlogging in higher rainfall areas.

For more information, visit the Agriculture Victoria website (www.agriculture.vic.gov.au/farm-management/planning-and-farm-development/navigating-farm-developments-online-tool).

As part of the Victorian Government's \$13.53m drought support package, eligible farmers can apply for on-farm drought infrastructure grants of up to \$5000.

Further information, including how to apply, can be found online (ruralfinance.com.au).



MLA's Sheep Genetics program goes from strength to strength

SOUTH Australia's sheep flock is continuing to experience genetic gain driven by ongoing improvements in the Sheep Genetics program, as revealed in a new report released by Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA).

Genetic progress continued to increase in 2023–24, with an average of 4 per cent genetic gain across the three main analyses: MERINOSELECT, LAMBPLAN And KIDPLAN. This progress is linked directly to improvements in on-farm productivity, profitability and sustainability, with this information detailed further within the Sheep Genetics Annual Outcomes Report for 2023–2024.

MLA manager for sheep genetics Peta Bradley said the increase in genetic gain is a testament to the focus on genetic progress and associated recording.

"Sheep Genetics has continued to work closely with ram producers to increase the number of animals included in the genetic evaluations, while also driving genetic progress," Ms Bradley said.

"An enabler of this genetic gain has been the world-leading evaluations delivered by Sheep Genetics and driven through the research and development of the Animal Genetics and Breeding Unit (AGBU) at the University of New England.

"In addition, the adoption of genomic testing has also reaped rewards for the industry. Genomic testing allows for genetic progress to be made for traits that are hard-to-measure like as eating quality, adult fleece traits and reproduction."

The 2023–24 financial year was another impressive year for genotyping volume, with 250,000 new genotypes being submitted into the database. As of the end of June 2024, the MERINOSELECT evaluation included 4.1 million animals, while LAMBPLAN

terminal and maternal evaluations included 3.9 million and 2.8 million animals, respectively.

"It is exciting to see the launch of the final versions of the MERINOSELECT indexes as part of this year's analysis enhancements implemented earlier in 2024," Ms Bradley said.

"These indexes include new welfare and sustainability traits while still enabling genetic progress for key production traits."

The increase in number of genotypes, rate of genetic progress and number of animals submitted to Sheep Genetics means that sheep producers have access to more animals with Australian Sheep Breeding Values (ASBVs) than ever before, and the merit of these animals is continuing to improve.

Another key highlight for the Sheep Genetics program was the introduction of the Sheep Genetics 'Ewe-niquely Genetics' podcast, launched in April 2024, which debuted in the top 15 science podcasts on Spotify.

The Sheep Genetics team delivered a range of training, workshops and information sessions across the country, reaching more than 1400 direct Sheep Genetics clients and commercial sheep producers.

This engagement through events is focused on tailored communication between breeders, service providers and the Sheep Genetics team.

"Thank you to everyone who contributed to the Sheep Genetics program over the past year. We look forward to working with you as Sheep Genetics celebrates 20 years in 2025," Ms Bradley said.

The full Sheep Genetics Annual Outcomes Report 2023–2024 can be viewed by visiting the website (www.sheepgenetics.org.au/globalassets/sheep-genetics/about-us/annual-report-2023-24.pdf).





Stuart Tait, farmer and Rabobank Executive Development Program (EDP) alumni, and winner of the 2024 Dr John Morris Business Development Prize, with Rabobank regional manager Australia and New Zealand Mark Wiessing. PHOTO: supplied

Programs to provide insights to farming business management

RIVERLAND and Mallee primary producers seeking to increase their skills surrounding business management are encouraged to apply for two major farming programs.

Applications for the 2025 intake of Rabobank's Business Management Programs – the Farm Managers Program (FMP) and the Executive Development Program (EDP) – are now open.

Designed for farmers at various career stages, the two available programs – the Executive Development Program (EDP) for farm business owners or senior managers, and the Farm Managers Program (FMP) for emerging farmers – aim to provide participants with the latest insights in business management.

Announcing the opening of applications for 2025, Rabobank regional manager Australia and New Zealand Mark Wiessing said more than 1400 primary producers from both sides of the Tasman had participated in the Business Management Programs across the past 25 years.

"The programs are incredibly valuable for primary producers as they allow the opportunity to take a step back from the day-to-day operational side of their businesses and spend time developing strategies to help ensure that their operations remain resilient into the future," he said.

"The programs also provide participants with networking opportunities with like-minded primary producers from different sectors across the two countries and, in many cases, relationships started on the programs continue far beyond the completion of the course. Previous participants tell us these ongoing relationships are a key benefit of the course and we help to foster these via our regular Business Management Program alumni events across Australia and New Zealand."

Mr Wiessing said Rabobank's long-term support of the Business Management Programs was aimed at assisting farmers to grow and build resilience.

"In this way, the bank also contributes to strengthening rural communities – with rural and regional communities benefiting from a financially-healthy local agricultural sector," he said.

Mr Wiessing said this year's FMP program – for young and emerging farmers – will be run from 15 to 20 June this year.

"The FMP provides a forum for farmers from across a range of agricultural sectors to find out what is working for them in their farming roles," he said.

"The program will help participants enhance their leadership and operational skills to prepare themselves for future management roles, and includes sessions on topics including communication and influencing skills, conflict management, sustainable farm business planning, financial management and managing people."

Mr Wiessing said the EDP helps participants build strategic planning capabilities and commercial management skills to help drive business growth.

"Key topics covered on the program include formulation and implementation of long-term strategy, applying effective economic rationale to goal setting and decision making, and effective leadership skills," he said.

"Between the first and second modules of the program, participants are also tasked with developing a management project which explores opportunities to make improvements within their own farming operation."

"This element of the program gives participants an opportunity to immediately apply the skills and knowledge from the first EDP module and, over the years, we've had some fantastic ideas outlined in these projects which have resulted in significant positive benefits for our participants' farming businesses."

EDP alumni and winner of the 2024 Dr John Morris Business Development Prize – a trans-Tasman

business prize awarded annually as part of the program – Stuart Tait said the course was exactly what he needed to continue to develop his career and management skills.

"I applied for the (EDP) with the aim of developing a strategic plan for the next 10 to 15 years for our beef-cattle breeding and trading, and dryland winter cropping business, and to learn how to identify and analyse various opportunities which may present themselves," he said.

Mr Tait said the course allowed him to remove himself from the day-to-day workings of the business and to gain an arm's length view of the enterprises and where they are heading.

"The EDP was very well organised and structured, each and every session was well aimed to complete the strategic puzzle for a modern farming business," he said.

"The course provided the tools to really break down the intimidating goal of creating a strategic plan into simple and actionable tasks."

"It was a positive environment to be involved in, with over 30 successful and progressive farmers to learn from."

"I have already recommended the course to several friends and would certainly recommend it to anyone looking to take their farm leadership and management skills to the next level."

With numbers on each course limited to maintain group dynamics, positions on the programs are set to be highly contested, with farmers selected to attend from a wide range of commodities and geographical regions across Australia and New Zealand.

Applications for the FMP and EDP close on Monday 31 March. Further information and applications can be found on the Rabobank website (www.rabobank.com.au/agribusiness/business-management-programs).

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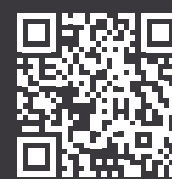
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Wine sector sees signs of adjustment, but red stocks remain high

WORDS HUGH SCHUITEMAKER

STORY ON PAGE 24



A MAJOR industry report shows stocks of Australian red wines – including those produced in the Riverland and Barossa – are beginning to drop, however challenges remain in increasing overseas exports.

Total sales of Australian wine exceeded production for the second year in a row, following successive small vintages, according to the Australian Wine Production, Sales and Inventory Report 2024, recently released by Wine Australia.

Wine production was just over 1 billion litres (116 million, 9L case equivalents), an 8 per cent increase compared with 2022–23, but still the second-smallest reported production in 17 years, and 16 per cent below the 10-year average of 1.24 billion litres.

Wine Australia manager market insights Peter Bailey said the below-average production from the small 2024 vintage was the result of a combination of seasonal factors and economic and market conditions.

“This was another difficult season in many regions, with heavy rainfall and flooding, widespread windy conditions affecting flowering, and dry spring weather leading to cold nights and the potential for frost damage,” Mr Bailey said.



“However, the result has also stemmed from deliberate decisions by grape growers and wine businesses to reduce production or intake, driven by the current economic and market conditions affecting demand for wine.”

The overall increase of 8 per cent, compared with 2022–23, was made up of a 20 per cent increase in white wine production, partly offset by a 2 per cent decrease in red wine production.

This saw white wine’s share of production increase from 46 per cent to 51 per cent – the first time in 12

years the production of white wine has exceeded that of red wine in Australia.

Mr Bailey said this change reflected adjustments made by the sector to counter the oversupply of red wine that had arisen over the past three years.

Sales volume decline despite reopening of China market

The total volume of sales of Australian wine in export and domestic markets was 1.08 billion litres. This was a decrease of 1 per cent compared with 2022–23, with both domestic

and export sales showing very small declines.

Contrary to the change in share of production, white’s share of total sales declined due to 4 per cent growth in red wine exports.

Mr Bailey explained the growth in red wine exports was driven by the re-commencement of exports to mainland China, following the removal of import tariffs in late March 2024. The volume of exports to China grew from 1 million litres to 32 million litres (5 per cent of total wine exports) in the 2023–24 financial year, almost all of which (96 per cent) was red table wine.

However, Mr Bailey cautioned this was likely to represent the re-stocking of Australian wine in the market after a long absence, and may fail to equate to retail sales.

“It will take some time before there is a clearer picture of how Chinese consumers are responding to the increased availability of Australian wine in-market,” he said.

Two consecutive small vintages contribute to reduction in stock overhang

Despite the decline in sales, the below-average production meant sales exceeded production, with the combined shortfall over the past two years being estimated at 155 million litres.

This contributed to a 10 per cent reduction in inventory, as at 30 June 2024, and a corresponding decrease in the stock-to-sales ratio (SSR), which fell by 14 per cent to 1.82. The SSR for white wine fell to below its 10-year average, while the SSR for reds remained 15 per cent above its 10-year average, despite falling by 23 per cent



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over the past two years.

Mr Bailey said the latest data shows stocks moving in the right direction, but only as a result of the small vintages, rather than growth in sales.

“The survey results indicate that stock-to-sales ratios have reduced, and production and sales are closely aligned,” he said.

“However, that is based on the current production levels, which are well below the long-term average.

“Any increase in production is likely to result in stock levels rising again, unless there is a corresponding increase in sales.

“This is a particular concern for reds, where the stock-to-sales ratio is still well above the long-term average.”

Global market conditions remain challenging

Mr Bailey noted the global outlook for Australian wine remains challenging. World wine consumption has continued to decline over the past 12 months and is expected to decline further in the next five years.

“There are no easy solutions for increasing sales,” Mr Bailey said.

“Total global wine imports to China have fallen by two-thirds since 2017, so it is unlikely we would return to our previous level of exports to that market.

“Meanwhile our wine sales to the rest of the world, including Australia, have been under pressure for the past several years as consumption has declined and competition has increased.

“We are unlikely to see a return to our previous average of 1.2 billion litres in the next few years.”

The Australian Wine Production, Sales and Inventory Report 2024 can be downloaded by visiting the website (www.wineaustralia.com/market-insights/australian-wine-production-sales-and-inventory).


“**World wine consumption has continued to decline over the past 12 months and is expected to decline further in the next five years...**”



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Market Insights


Australian wine production, sales and inventory 2023-24


Production Vintage 2024



1.43m  **9%**


TONNES OF GRAPES CRUSHED




1.04b  **8%**


LITRES OF WINE PRODUCED


Sales 2023-24




\$5.7b  **12%**


TOTAL VALUE (AUD)




1.08b  **-0.7%**


LITRES OF WINE




\$2.2b  **17%**


EXPORT VALUE (AUD)




\$3.5b  **9%**


DOMESTIC VALUE (AUD)



619m  **-0.2%**

EXPORT VOLUME (LITRES)

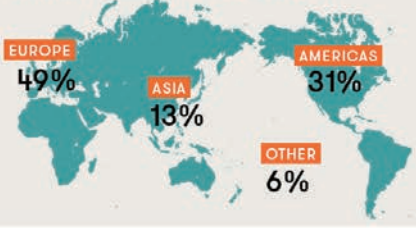


457m  **-1%**

DOMESTIC VOLUME (LITRES)

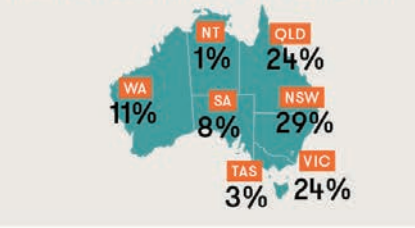
58%

EXPORTED VOLUME (SHARE OF EXPORTS)





42%

DOMESTIC VOLUME (SHARE OF OFF-TRADE SALES)



Inventory 30 June 2024



1.96 billion  **-10%**

LITRES OF WINE

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Gurra Downs Date Company manager director Dave Reilly has been awarded the 2024 History Council of South Australian Fellowship to assist recording the South Australian history of the date palm.



A date with history

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY
MADISON EASTMOND

A RIVERLAND date palm producer will be recording the first history of the species and industry in 2025, following the introduction of the palm to Australian soil to its modern cultivation across the state.

With the support of the prestigious 2024 History Council of South Australian (HCSA) Fellowship, Gurra Downs Date Company manager director Dave Reilly will be putting pen to paper this year to record his more than 20 years of research on the date palm.

Planting his first date palm in the Riverland in 1998, Mr Reilly said “no one had attempted to grow dates commercially in the (region) prior to (The Reilly’s) starting their business”.

"I travelled extensively to remote locations as a young man, read all I could on growing dates, and came across the few articles that exist related to historic plantings," Mr Reilly told The Murray Pioneer.

"I have collected many memoirs over the years (of key figures in the industry), and there are not too many date palms in the country I haven't seen in collating the information I needed to begin Gurra Downs.

"The history was very relevant because it gave us lineage to cultivators that were successful in the far north of the state, which suggested the Riverland region as a (prime location) for the date to thrive.

"The history also gave us an indication of pest pressures of birds, insects, and animals — things that were challenging to date palms.

"I am probably the custodian alone of these stories.

"To win the fellowship is fantastic, because now, we will be able to get these stories on record so there is a legacy of Australia's date industry for those who come next."

The annual HCSA Fellowship aims to foster the researching and writing of South Australian history, with the winner receiving \$2000 as well as support accessing the State Library of South Australia (SLSA) collection and the opportunity to share their research with a keynote lecture.

Judge and SLSA team leader of research and discovery David Brooks said Mr Reilly's project was able "to tell a surprising and engrossing story about South Australia's multicultural history while also examining the state's agricultural and environmental histories that proved most compelling".

Throughout the project, Mr Reilly will explore the date palm from when it first entered Australia in the 1800s from Muslim cameleers, with chapters on its relationship with the Overland Telegraph, the Ghan railway, Mound Springs, Great Artesian Basin, indigenous lands, and outback cattle stations, while also engaging with figures such as botanist Baron Ferdinand von Mueller, the Chaffey Brothers, industrialist Essington Lewis, and Reverend John Flynn.

Having spent the past 26 years expanding date palm operations, importing over 40 cultivars, becoming a registered research and development site, and quickly making Gurra Downs the date palm experts of Australia, Mr Rielly said he hopes to provide the historical account with "a catalogue of cultivars that have entered the area (from) white settlement to the year of 2025".

Mr Reilly has spent the past 26 years expanding date palm operations, importing over 40 cultivars, becoming a registered research and development site, and quickly making Gurra Downs the date palm experts of Australia.

"We have distributed date palms now to more than 400 farmers around the country," he said.

"While we are commercial fruit growers first, and make the plant material available to other growers, such a network allows us to evaluate the tree for performance and climate suitability.

"Research and development are an ongoing project, but by accounting for all the cultivars, it will become a resource for the future and a current agricultural history of South Australia and beyond."

With the recent heat of the past summer, Mr Reilly said writing the account is being balanced with the picking operations at Gurra Downs.

"The past three summers haven't been very hot," he said.

"We need hot and dry, and while there have been a few thunder storms, overall this season has been really good for us.

"I can't wait to just sit down and get all the (historical) information out of my system, but at the moment we're picking flat out."



To win the fellowship is fantastic, because now, we will be able to get these stories on record so there is a legacy of Australia's date industry for those who come next.



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Rain levels

RENMARK

1 November 2024 to 22 January 2025: 78.4mm

Rainfall to 22 January 2025: 8mm

Rainfall to 22 January 2024: 41.4mm

LOXTON

1 November 2024 to 22 January 2025: 57.8mm

Rainfall to 22 January 2025: 7.4mm

Rainfall to 22 January 2024: 21.5mm

WAIKERIE

1 November 2024 to 22 January 2025: 57.6mm

Rainfall to 22 January 2025: 8mm

Rainfall to 22 January 2024: 19mm

LAMEROO

1 November 2024 to 22 January 2025: 34.4mm

Rainfall to 22 January 2025: 4.6mm

Rainfall to 22 January 2024: 21.2mm

Storages

(as at 22 January)

MENINDEE LAKES:
50 per cent full

DARTMOUTH:
88 per cent full

HUME:
49 per cent full

LAKE VICTORIA:
85 per cent full

FLOWS INTO SA:
8,500ML/day

INDUSTRY EXPERT UPDATE

Editor Hugh Schuitemaker spoke with key agricultural industry figures to gain an insight into their respective seasons.



Tim Jackson

Almond Board of Australia chief executive officer

Has the 2025 almond harvest started in the Riverland?

The almond harvest is underway and will gain momentum in the coming weeks. Growers will be looking for dry conditions, so they can get their crop off in a timely manner without too many delays. Dry conditions will also enable more inshell almonds to be produced for our premium markets in China and India.

How are the quantity, and quality of almonds looking for 2025?

Almond quality appears to be good. Despite the Riverland and other major almond growing regions experiencing frosty conditions in September, the national crop is estimated to be the second or third highest on record. 2024 was a record year, with the crop 39 per cent higher than 2023. Trees generally find it hard to back up with successive bumper crops but there are a lot of new orchards coming into extra production this year.

Are you confident there will be high yields for Riverland growers?

Yields in the Riverland generally rate among some of the best in the industry given the consistent weather conditions, but the frosts in September will have an impact on some orchards.

Have summer weather conditions impacted the almond crop at all?

Some growers have indicated they may start harvest slightly earlier than usual.

How are export markets looking?

Australian almonds exports continue to be cleared at a record rate amid an ongoing strengthening of global pricing. The industry's Australian marketers and processors have shipped more product in nine months than they have in any previous full 12-month season. Sales volumes over the last nine months for Australian product in key markets have scaled new levels, with China leading the way. Volumes into China are up 123 per cent on the same time last year, while industry attempts to broaden the almond consumption in South-East Asia appears to be gaining traction with volume jumps in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore.

The Australia-China free trade agreement continues to drive demand and has resulted in Aussie almonds gaining a majority of market share. Based on shipping data and including Californian almond shipments via Vietnam since the start of the Australian selling season in March 2024, Australia has sold 69,964 tonnes (March to November) compared to the Californian combined China-Vietnam figure (March to December) of 49,752 tonnes. China has evolved as a destination of choice for the industry and the uncertainty around a potential trade war between the US and China in 2025 appears to have further fuelled this demand among buyers. India has imported the same amount of Australian almonds as last year for nine months and combined with China, the two prime markets now represented just over 70 per cent of all almond exports. The nine-month total sales volume for the season of 143,921 tonnes suggests that most processors will have extremely low

carry-in inventory for 2025 season given the overall crop estimate for the season sits at 153,500 tonne.

Are growers concerned about current water buyback initiatives?

There are ongoing concerns around the availability of short term water and its price as these buybacks gain momentum.

What will be the key to a successful 2024 for growers?

Global pricing continues to improve and it looks like growers in be getting better returns in 2025 than they have done for the past two or three years. A low US exchange rate also benefits our growers when their almonds are sold overseas.

What are the key factors for tree health at this time of year?

At this time, the tree has done its job, so it is about preparing for next year with a post-harvest fertigation program before the tree goes into dormancy. Another critical thing at this time of the year is to ensure crops are stored correctly. Once harvested, almonds can be stockpiled on farms for up to six months before they are taken to a processor for hulling and shelling. Growers need to monitor their stockpiles frequently for pest insects and to ensure that condensation isn't accumulating. Orchard hygiene is also important at this time of the year and growers should attempt to remove any almonds that remain on their trees after harvest, as these can provide carry over inoculum for hull rot and provide over wintering sites for pests.



Tim Grieger

Summerfruit SA executive manager

Were Riverland growers confident in the quality of fruit harvested this season?

The season began well with good fruit quality in colour, flavour and size. The heavy rain event toward the end of November caused significant damage and loss to fruit varieties at or nearing harvest. That rain event has even caused marking to fruit harvested during December and January.

Was there any significant increase or decrease compared to the previous year?

Production volumes were generally up on the previous year, with good fruit set and size.

What impact did summer weather conditions have on the development of fruit?

The Riverland climate is renowned for growing quality fruit. This summer has generally been ideal for growing quality fruit, with only a few very hot days.

Are Federal water buyback initiatives a concern for Riverland growers?

There is concern of the impact on the irrigation communities as a whole; in that it can affect the viability and sustainability of the irrigation distribution bodies like RIT and CIT. The flow on affect of that is likely to cause an increase in the cost of irrigation water distribution; which, of course, then it affects growers directly.

Have input costs been a challenge heading into this harvest?

Input costs are always a challenge; and ever increasing. Growers have very little to no control on these costs,

and can only manage them within the framework of their business structure, in the hope that returns will be sufficient to cover those costs.

Are stone fruit growers confident fruit fly will be eradicated from the region in 2025?

We have seen little to no further detections in the Waikerie, Swan Reach and Loxton areas. We are constantly vigilant for possible re-incursions in these areas; something we want to vigorously guard against.

Renmark and Cooltong sections remain a concern, but I am confident that the fruit fly teams are using all the tools available to them to get those areas on track with other outbreak areas.

How have exports to key overseas markets been heading into 2025?

Exports to Asian markets have been difficult, due to impacts of the current China economy.

What should growers be doing to ensure tree health at this stage?

The main focus is on keeping soil moisture levels at an optimum to ensure that trees do not become stressed during hot conditions, especially those still to be harvested. It is also a good time to check on tree nutrient levels and plan nutrient and fertiliser applications for the coming year.

Mark Doecke

Citrus SA chair

What varieties of citrus are being harvested at the moment?

Citrus is on the last variety with only a few Valencias being picked for the local market, and the majority is juice fruit.

Were summer weather conditions beneficial for the growth of citrus?

This seasons spring/ summer is more like a normal Riverland season with average summer temperatures and seasonal conditions. Growth of the 2025 crop looks good as a result.

How was the overall volume of fruit harvested for 2024? Was this an increase on the previous year?

Volume of fruit in 2024 was up on previous years, with a good tonnage from established orchards and increasing volumes from young plantings.

Are Riverland growers confident fruit fly will be eradicated inside the next 12 months?

Over 70 per cent of Riverland areas have been free from fruit fly for over 18 months, with some areas free

for over two years. Renmark is the sticking point where most flies are currently detected. Sterile flies have been very successful in eradicating wild flies in areas where they have been used. I'm very confident the end is in sight.

Are exports to Asia and other key markets continuing to increase?

Yes, all markets demand for South Australian Citrus continue to grow. We are very blessed to be in a position of a positive outlook.

Are there any major challenges growers are facing at the moment?

Only minor challenges at the moment and most of them are fairly easily addressed.

What factors are most important for tree and fruit health at the moment?

Tree health is important and in summer the first thing to focus on is water, water, water. The best way to get a tree through the stress of hot days is keep the water up to them. Then nutrition, especially potassium, and trace elements at this time of the year. Also some growers use sunscreen products to reduce heat stress.





Strong return to mainland China offsets declines in other markets...

Australian wine exports exceed \$2.5bn in 2024

THE South Australian wine industry is benefitting from a return in exports to China, however volumes of wine sent to other key destinations have dropped.

In the 12 months ending December 2024, Australian wine exports increased by 34 per cent in value to

\$2.55bn, and by 7 per cent in volume to 649 million litres, according to Wine Australia's recently released Export Report.

The increase in value was a result of high levels of shipments to mainland China between April and December

2024, after tariffs on Australian bottled wine were removed at the end of March 2024. In those nine months, 83 million litres of wine, worth \$902m, have been exported to mainland China. The average value of exports to mainland China for the 12 months

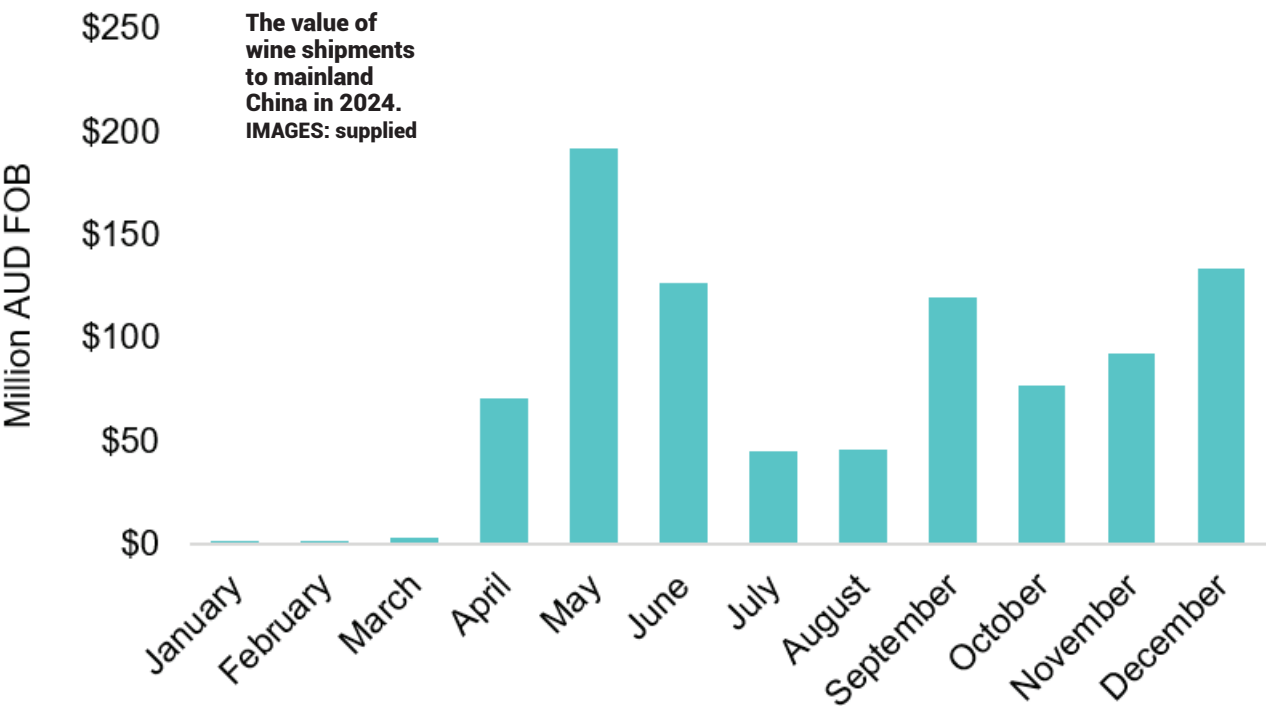
ended December 2024 was \$10.79/L, contributing to a 24 per cent increase in the average value of total packaged exports, to \$9.35/L – a record value.

Wine Australia market insights manager Peter Bailey said “while there has been month-to-month volatility in the value of shipments to mainland China in the period since tariffs were removed, the performance is nonetheless very positive”.

“However, Chinese wine consumption is much lower than it was before the import tariffs were imposed, so it will take more time before it becomes clear what the ‘new normal’ level of exports to mainland China will be, after this initial re-stocking period,” Mr Bailey said.

“Continued growth is not assured, and it is still important to focus on market diversification in a challenging global business environment.”

Outside of the unique circumstances relating to exports to mainland China, global alcohol consumption is facing numerous headwinds, and this is impacting the results to other markets. In many established wine markets consumption is declining due to health and wellness concerns and the rising cost of living. This has contributed



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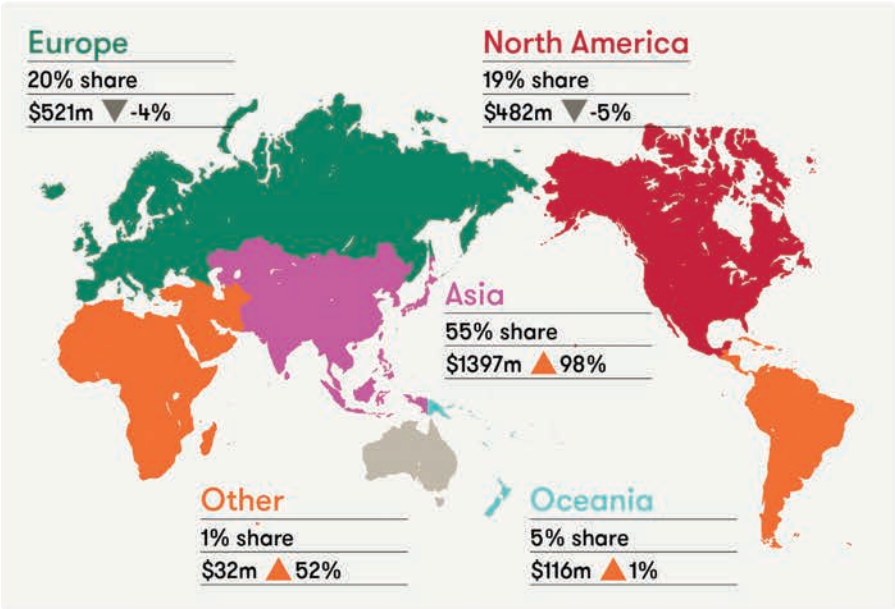
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Export Report

1 January 2024 to 31 December 2024

Total value	\$2.55b	▲ 34%
Total volume	649m litres	▲ 7%
Average value	\$3.93/litre	▲ 26%



Top 5 export destinations (value)		
🇨🇳	Mainland China	\$907m ▲ ++
🇬🇧	United Kingdom	\$352m ▼ -3%
🇺🇸	United States	\$325m ▼ -10%
🇭🇰	Hong Kong	\$171m ▼ -42%
🇨🇦	Canada	\$156m ▲ 9%

Top 5 export varieties (litres)		
🍷	Shiraz	175m ▲ 25%
🍷	Chardonnay	137m ▼ -8%
🍷	Cabernet Sauvignon	101m ▲ 15%
🍷	Pinot Gris/Grigio	41m ▼ -14%
🍷	Merlot	40m ▲ 2%

58%
of wine produced is exported

119
export destinations

1,788
active exporters

21,596
different products exported

16.6 million
glasses of Australian wine enjoyed overseas each day

to a global oversupply of wine and increased competition in already strained supply chains. Australian wine exports to the rest of the world declined by 13 per cent in value, to \$1.64bn, and 7 per cent in volume, to 565 million litres, during the 12 months to December 2024.

The decline in value was largely driven by Hong Kong, after a large increase in shipments to this destination at the end of 2023, likely driven by some Australian exporters anticipating the removal of import tariffs in mainland China in early 2024. A decline in unpackaged wine exports to the United States after a period of heightened exports further contributed to the volume decline.

Exports to North America declined by 5 per cent to \$482m, driven by the United States, with growth in exports to Canada offsetting some of the decline.

There were mixed results by destinations in Europe. The value of shipments to the region declined by 4 per cent to \$521m, with exports to the United Kingdom, Germany, Denmark, and the Netherlands declining. Meanwhile, exports to Sweden, Belgium, Finland, Ireland, and Poland increased in value.

Outside of mainland China, most other Asian destinations declined in exports during the 12 months to December 2024, although the long-term growth rate in value for the region (excluding mainland China) was still positive, at 4 per cent per year in the last five years.

The top five destinations by value were:

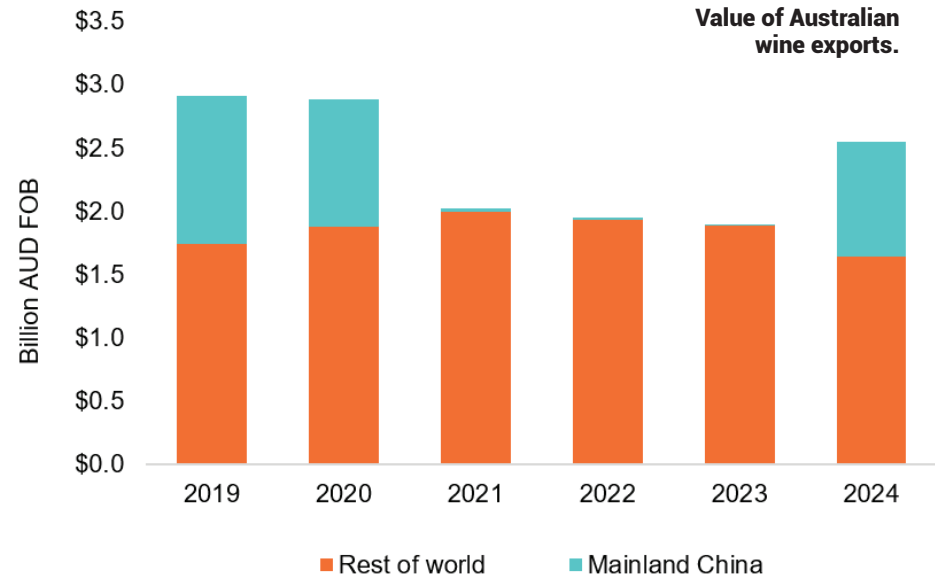
- ❑ Mainland China (up \$898m to \$907m).
- ❑ UK (down \$9m to \$352m).
- ❑ US (down \$38m to \$325m).
- ❑ Hong Kong (down \$125m to \$171m).
- ❑ Canada (up \$13m to \$15m).

The top five destinations by volume were:

- ❑ UK (down 8 million litres to 212 million litres).
- ❑ US (down 28 million litres to 106 million litres).
- ❑ Mainland China (up 83 million litres to 84 million litres).
- ❑ Canada (down 7 million litres to 66 million litres).
- ❑ New Zealand (down 2 million litres to 27 million litres).

The increase in exports to mainland China has also impacted on red wine's share of exports, as 93 per cent of exports to China are red in colour. In the 12 months ending December 2024 the volume share of red and rosé wine increased from 54 per cent to 60 per cent.

Meanwhile, white wine lost share – moving from 46 to 40 per cent of volume as Australia's top white wine destinations declined in exports. Consequently, the top three varieties in red wines – shiraz, cabernet sauvignon, and merlot – all increased in volume shipped, while the top three varieties in white wines – chardonnay, pinot gris/grigio, and sauvignon blanc – all declined.



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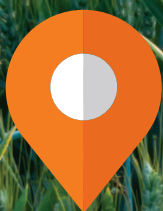
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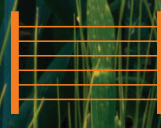
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Gazania wars: Things you need to know about tackling a persistent weed





There's no silver bullet for gazania control. Alongside chemical options, mechanical removal and vigilant monitoring are essential.

TRIALS being conducted in Loxton are helping to inform the ongoing management strategies of a weed found across the Mallee.

Gazania is no longer just a roadside problem for farmers – this resilient invader is making its way into cropping paddocks, and posing significant challenges for farmers across the Southern region.

Thanks to research funded by the Grains Research and Development Corporation and led by at La Trobe University senior lecturer in weed science Ali Bajwa growers now have hope for practical solutions.

Here are the top five things you need to know about Gazanias and the ongoing fight against their spread:

1

Gazanias are built for survival

Gazanias are incredibly hardy and prolific seed producers. Originally from South Africa, they have adapted well to Australia's inland conditions, making



them drought-tolerant and difficult to control. Their thick, waxy leaves hinder herbicide absorption, and their ability to reproduce through both seeds and underground rhizomes ensures their persistence.

2

Gazanias thrive in tough conditions

Drought seasons provide an advantage for Gazanias. Their ability to shut down growth and conserve resources allows them to survive harsh conditions, and be ready to bounce back when the season turns favourable. Farmers need to be vigilant during these times, as dry conditions reduce chemical effectiveness.

3

Early Results Show Promise

The project includes glasshouse experiments at La Trobe and field trials in Loxton and Arno Bay, comparing chemical control options for inland and coastal populations. A wide range of chemistries is being evaluated for burndown/post-emergent control at this stage.

Early results show that high rates of glyphosate in combination with Group 14 herbicides, such as Sharpen (active ingredient: saflufenacil) or Voraxor (active ingredients: saflufenacil + trifludimoxazin) provide complete (100 per cent) control of gazania plants with up to 12 leaves under glasshouse conditions. These treatments have also provided effective (>90%) control so far under field conditions in Loxton.

The use of right adjuvants is also critical in improving herbicide uptake and efficacy against a tough weed like gazania. For example, 1 per cent Hasten did the trick for these treatments.

4

Timing Is Everything

Dr. Bajwa's research highlights that timing is critical for effective management. Herbicide efficacy drops by up to 50 per cent once the plant exceeds the 10 to 12 leaf stage. Early intervention, targeting young plants (2 to 4 leaf stage), is the best approach to keep these weeds under control.

5

Managing gazanias requires a multi-pronged approach

There's no silver bullet for gazania control. Alongside chemical options, mechanical removal and vigilant monitoring are essential. Farmers with optical sprayers where higher rates of herbicide can be applied to spot spray Gazanias are more likely to be able to achieve efficient control, especially in summer months when this species tend to thrive. However, further research is required to develop integrated weed management (IWM) strategies for gazania.



A gazania control trial being conducted in Loxton. PHOTOS: Ali Bajwa



RaboResearch general manager Australia and New Zealand Stefan Vogel.

SA agriculture “well placed to master the year ahead”

SOUTH Australia's agricultural sector is well placed for the year ahead – despite expected rising global geopolitical tensions, an underperforming Asian economy resulting in low consumer confidence and a volatile energy market – Rabobank says in its newly-released annual outlook.

In its flagship Australia Agribusiness Outlook 2025, the agribusiness banking

specialist says, “major agricultural sectors look set to once again move confidently into the coming year”, albeit with some challenges ahead.

The report says prices of livestock commodities are expected to “fare well” in 2025, and grain prices also hold upside potential. This is reflected in a forecast rise in the RaboResearch Australia Commodity Price Index for 2025, however, prices of most

agricultural commodities are not expected to reach the highs or lows seen over the past three years.

The report, by the bank's RaboResearch arm, noted soil moisture in many regions is lower than 12 months ago.

“Most cropping and dairy areas... are too dry, although many of the country's sheep and cattle areas received rains over the past two months, supporting feed availability,” the report said.

were expected for farm inputs – such as fertilisers and plant protection chemicals – but there is some “upside price risk”, while crude oil prices were likely to come off their recent five-month high.

The expected easing of the official cash rate (OCR) by the Reserve Bank of Australia this year would also be welcome relief for the sector, Mr Vogel said, with Rabobank now forecasting a likelihood of three 0.25 basis point reductions, from as early as February.

Report lead author, RaboResearch general manager Australia and New Zealand Stefan Vogel, said the weather forecast for the next three months “painted a similar picture, that hopefully can still be offset if rains arrive during the growing season”.

Mr Vogel said the recently-harvested winter grain crop had “notably exceeded that of last year”, although soil moisture levels in South Australia need to be watched for the upcoming season's planting.

“The global economic outlook for 2025 in many regions of the world is subdued and Australia's GDP growth recovery to 2.3 per cent in 2025 is almost an exception, as major economies like the US, 2.0 per cent growth versus 2.7 per cent in 2024, and China, at 4.7 per cent, down from 4.8 per cent, are expected to struggle, which hurts consumer confidence and demand in those regions,” he said.

The bank expects the Australian dollar to remain weak, near 60c USD, which benefits Australian exports, but makes imports more expensive. Australia's tight labour market is also expected to soften further slightly.





Commodity price outlook

RaboResearch's Rural Commodity Price Index is expected to rise above the 10-year average in 2025, amid anticipated positive price developments for key sectors and solid production volumes.

Mr Vogel said price dynamics are likely to vary per sector.

"The beef price outlook is one of modest optimism, given fundamentals leave some room for minor upside movement," he said.

"RaboResearch hold the view that in 2025 we may see stronger demand from feedlots for feeder cattle. The other positive factor for the sector is that we anticipate higher live export volumes in 2025."

Mr Vogel said for grains, there are also some signs of positivity on the horizon.

"What should help provide support for wheat prices in 2025 is falling global stock levels," he said.

"In addition, the world's-largest wheat exporter, Russia, is unlikely to have large volumes to export in the second half of this year, contrary to the past two seasons.

"Global canola stocks are also being pressured, however improving soybean stocks, which are raising price competition within the vegetable oil sector, will likely prevent upside."

Mr Vogel said for dairy commodity markets RaboResearch anticipates upside in 2025.

"China's dairy import volumes appear likely to improve marginally in comparison to 2024, as its domestic production volumes are anticipated to contract," he said.

"A weaker AUD should also be beneficial for exports in 2025."



Geopolitics and shipping

"Geopolitics and shipping are to remain areas of concern for Australia's agricultural sector," Mr Vogel said.

"Trump 2.0 and his return as US president is expected to keep markets volatile. Threatened trade duties, if imposed, are likely to be met with retaliation and agri-commodities might not be immune.

"And the question remains – will US beef imports, a key destination for Australia, face duties?"

Mr Vogel said the Middle East tensions, including the re-routing of ships away from Red Sea piracy attacks, are likely to remain factors of volatility in 2025 as the recently-imposed ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas war and the halt in Houthi attacks on vessels could end without significant notice.

"And the war in Ukraine can still impact grain markets if Russia is able to progress further west and limit Ukraine's grain exports," he said.



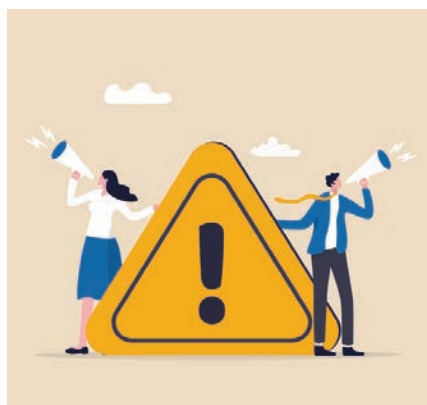
Farm inputs

Farm input prices globally, both for fertilisers and plant protection products, are forecast to move sideways to slightly higher, the report said.

Global urea and phosphate prices in Australian dollar terms have moved upwards from their Q2 2024 lows and, as Australia imports most of its fertilisers, the weaker AUD was a key driver in this move

"Looking into 2025 we don't expect very big price swings but see more upside than downside price risk and costs on Australian farms are expected to remain still well above the levels seen before Covid," Mr Vogel said.

"Geopolitics and a potential escalation of conflicts can result in big energy price swings and also affect freight costs, which would also impact the cost of those products in Australia," Mr Vogel said. "Our global crude oil price outlook calls for Brent to drop below USD 70/bbl as we expect an oversupply, while the early 2025 price rally is heavily driven by fear of escalation in the Middle East."



Biosecurity

The bank expects biosecurity will remain key and the recent foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) outbreak in Germany, the first in almost 40 years, shows the importance of controlling incidents and conveying confidence to trade partners, as "the likes of the UK and South Korea quickly limited their livestock or livestock products trade with Germany".



Meeting the challenges facing Australia's food supply chain

A MAJOR report has found the food supply chain workforce to be essential, but facing challenges, including issues specific to regional, rural and remote Australia and the availability of accessible education and training.

The Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) report, *An Essential Ingredient – The Food Supply Chain Workforce*, makes 41 recommendations in relation to the workforce needs of Australia's food production, manufacturing, transport and distribution industries and identifies key opportunities to improve outcomes for students, workers and employers. It also looks at the critical role of Australia's veterinary and biosecurity workforces.

JSA commissioner Professor Barney Glover highlighted the report makes clear the importance of regions in supporting the food supply chain workforce.

"The food supply chain is one of the largest employers in regional, rural and remote Australia and covers an incredibly diverse mix of industries, locations and workforce needs," Prof Glover said.

"With 85 per cent of food

production workers located in regional areas, it's important that we continue to support this workforce through housing availability and access to essential services such as childcare and healthcare."

JSA has recommended the elevation of food to a national priority in workforce policy and a clearer vision for Australia's food security and exports.

"Recognising food as a national priority strengthens the food supply chain workforce and its interactions with the national skills system," Prof Glover said.

"Our study demonstrates the importance of developing and supporting work-based learning, such as apprenticeships and traineeships.

"Within higher education, there's potential for deeper partnerships, particularly for research pathways.

"This means that we need to make sure that young people are supported to study in regional areas, where so many food supply chain jobs are located."

The *An Essential Ingredient – The Food Supply Chain Workforce* report is available by visiting the website (jobsandskills.gov.au).

Recognising food as a national priority strengthens the food supply chain workforce and its interactions with the national skills system.



SA Farmer autumn gardening guide

AUTUMN'S the ideal time of year to plant because air temperatures have cooled, soil temperatures are still warm and hopefully there's been some rainfall to increase soil moisture.

First consider the state of your soil, because this is the time to undertake any soil improvements, such as mixing in soil conditioners, prior to planting. When the soil is warm and moist, new plantings will establish good root growth before slowing down in winter.

You'll see benefits again in early spring, when the plant – which has had time to establish – puts on wonderful new growth ahead of next summer's heat.

Autumn's also a good time to begin transplanting any shrubs or trees, and to make new plants from cuttings.

Take 10cm cuttings from hardwood herbs such as rosemary and bay or natives such as banksias and grevilleas. Remove the lower leaves, dip cuttings into hormone powder and pot in small containers of premium potting mix. Keep just moist and shelter from strong wind and sun.

There are lots of plants that you can sow in autumn, including cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, Asian greens, lettuce, rocket, silverbeet and spinach, plus sweet peas and Australian wildflowers.

It's time to top up the mulch on your veggie patches, herb gardens and ornamental beds, but it's best to do this after watering. It's also time to reward your garden with an organic seaweed fertiliser and rockdust to increase trace minerals.

As conditions are mild through autumn, crops are often easier to grow and the fresh harvests just as rewarding. Once you choose which veggies to plant in autumn, you can grow from seed if you're patient, or plant seedlings for a head start.

When planting, always follow the recommendations on the packet or label for correct spacing between plants to give them enough room to grow. To keep the harvests coming over a longer period and avoid a glut of produce all at once, make several small plantings two to three weeks apart.

Veggies grow best in rich, fertile soil in full sun with protection from cold winds. Keep plants growing vigorously with regular watering – especially if the weather is warm or dry – and liquid fertiliser applied every 7 to 10 days.



BEETROOT

Directly sow seeds in early autumn to harvest in 10-12 weeks. Keep plants growing strongly for a tasty crop. Harvest when beetroot is a good size. The top of the root will be visible on the soil's surface.

POSITION	SOW DEPTH	GERMINATION	PLANT SPACE	HARVEST
Full sun	2cm	10-14 days	25cm	10-12 wks



BROAD BEANS

Direct sow in autumn and winter for crops in 18-20 weeks. Broad beans need support and can be planted in blocks or against a frame. Flowering and fruit formation may be delayed by cold or frosty weather. Pick small pods to eat whole as a green bean, or wait until the pods are larger to eat the contents.

POSITION	SOW DEPTH	GERMINATION	PLANT SPACE	HARVEST
Full sun	5cm	7-14 days	30cm	18-20 wks



RADISHES

These are fast-growing veggies to plant in autumn. Direct sow during autumn and spring and pick the tiny red radishes in just 6-8 weeks. Left too long, or allowed to become stressed, the roots become more peppery in flavour.

POSITION	SOW DEPTH	GERMINATION	PLANT SPACE	HARVEST
Full sun	6mm	5-8 days	5-10cm	6-8 wks



KALE

Plant seedlings in autumn and begin harvesting leaves when the plant is well-established, around 7 to 8 weeks from planting. There are many kale varieties available, so select your favourite or opt for a mixed punnet.

POSITION	SOW DEPTH	GERMINATION	PLANT SPACE	HARVEST
Full sun	1cm	5-8 days	30cm	7-8 wks



ONION/LEEK/
SPRING ONION

All members of the onion family grow well through winter from autumn plantings. Onions can be harvested in around 24-32 weeks, but spring onions and leeks are ready much sooner in just 8-12 weeks.

POSITION	SOW DEPTH	GERMINATION	PLANT SPACE	HARVEST
Full sun	6-50mm	10-25 days	15-30cm	8-32 wks



PEAS AND
SNOW PEAS

Peas are a very rewarding crop to grow in autumn and winter with harvests extending in to spring. Tall growers need support, or grow bush varieties. Harvest when pods are well formed, or for a faster crop grow snow peas.

POSITION	SOW DEPTH	GERMINATION	PLANT SPACE	HARVEST
Full sun	3-5cm	7-10 days	10cm	9-11 wks

OTHER FAVOURITES TO PLANT IN AUTUMN INCLUDE:

Potato	Cauliflower	Eggplant	Pak choy	Pumpkin	Spinach
Capsicum	Celery	Lettuce	Parsley	Rocket	Sweet potato
Carrot	Chives	Oregano	Parsnip	Rockmelon	Tomatoes

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AG NEWS

Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder Dr Simon Banks told delegates at the Murray–Darling Basin Authority's River Reflections conference that while significant progress has been made thanks to water for the environment, there is still an urgent need to keep going and do more.

CEWH welcomes Murray–Darling Basin Authority's constraints roadmap

THE relaxation of Murray-Darling Basin constraints is key to maintaining the sustainability of Riverland environmental health, according to a senior water management figure.

The Murray–Darling Basin Authority recently released its Constraints Relaxation Implementation Roadmap, aimed to assist Basin states to identify, develop, and implement measures to relax constraints to the delivery of water for the environment.

Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder (CEWH) Simon Banks said the roadmap would encourage co-operation between Basin states.

"I welcome the Murray–Darling Basin Authority's Constraints Relaxation Implementation Roadmap released today," Mr Banks said.

"This is a significant step towards governments progressing what is needed to achieve the best outcomes with water for the environment.

"Relaxing constraints in the

Basin is vitally important to achieve sustained improvement in the health of the Basin's floodplains and wetlands.

"This Roadmap means all relevant stakeholders can work towards removing some of the obstacles to get water for the environment to where it's needed. We are seeking progress not perfection, and the release of this Roadmap gives direction and momentum to this important piece of the complex but critical work needed to implement the Basin Plan."

Mr Banks said "while we have achieved incredible results from Commonwealth environmental water to date, delivery challenges and constraints still significantly limit the ability to connect rivers and floodplains in several valleys. These include... the Mid, and Lower–Murray.

"In some cases, even delivering elevated in-channel environmental flows are restricted," he said.

"This is because constraints, including physical structures like

bridges and roads, but also river rules, limit how much water can be delivered in-channel. This further reduces the extent to which we can improve the health of floodplains.

"As a result of constraints, the frequency and duration of environmental water requirements for many wetlands and floodplains are not met.

"The lack of connection between rivers and their floodplains also reduces food for, and limits the movement of, aquatic species, and increases the risk of hypoxic events that can be harmful to the environment. Progress can be made by taking early steps, which will enhance our results for water for the environment."

Mr Banks said rule changes to enable held environmental water protected in the northern Basin to pass through Menindee Lakes to the southern Basin would support improved connectivity to maximise the results we can get from the Commonwealth's environmental water.

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