SA Farmer

TAYLOR GROUP MEDIA

WINTER 2025

No stoppin' the Barossa's Dairyman

Page 7

Shaping our ag future

Page 24

Coco & Honey the pick of the bunch

Page 20

KIOTI

2 UNITS LEFT

FLOOR STOCK ONLY

POST HARVEST MADNESS SALE

K9 2400 UTV

24HP

$20,000 EX GST

*#^T&C'S APPLY. PRICE EXCLUDES FREIGHT & PRE-DELIVERY.

$22,000 INC GST

4 YEAR WARRANTY^ | 1.89% P.A. FINANCE^

KIOTI 1 UNIT LEFT

HX1301 CAB

130HP

FREE FRONT END LOADER + GP BUCKET INCLUDED

$90,727 EX GST

*#^T&C'S APPLY. PRICE EXCLUDES FREIGHT & PRE-DELIVERY.

$99,800 INC GST

4 YEAR WARRANTY^ | 1.89% P.A. FINANCE^

YOUR ONE-STOP SHOP FOR ALL YOUR FARMING NEEDS

PH: 8586 6136

MARIA: 0429 699 167 | MECHANIC: 0455 038 686

57 Renmark Ave, Renmark | admin@riverlandagri.com

Riverland AGRI SERVICES

Welcome to SA Farmer, Winter 2025 edition

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

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

This edition has been produced against a challenging time throughout the South Australian primary production sector.

Drought conditions being experienced across the state's regions have been particularly exacerbated since the beginning of 2025, with record-low rainfall totals seen in many areas.

However, as always SA Farmer showcases the stories of creativity and innovative development that keep agriculture going.

Featured in this issue is a Barossa-based family winery producing high-quality shiraz from iconic vines, and the unique livestock and products being made by a Williamstown-based farmer.

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

A select few include in-depth looks at confidence levels within the South Australian agriculture sector this year, and the benefits of environmental watering on wetlands.

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 once again provides readers with information needed to grow the best winter 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 winter 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

INSIDE

Peter Magarey has worked for more than 40 years across Australia, helping wine and citrus growers tackle plant diseases, aiming to help reduce maintenance costs and improve crop yields.

COVER PHOTO: SEBASTIAN CALDERON

SA Farmer

EDITOR
Hugh Schuitemaker

JOURNALISTS
Sebastian Calderon
Bevan Jones
Lachlan Dand
Madison Eastmond

DESIGN
Kirsty Frahn

ADVERTISING
08 8586 8000
ads@murraypioneer.com.au

Glenda Malinovski
Emily Raines
Paul McCormick

PUBLISHER

TAYLOR GROUP MEDIA

Nothing but dry...

WORDS
HUGH SCHUITEMAKER AND SEBASTIAN CALDERON

A SENIOR Riverland agricultural industry figure is among countless South Australian farmers hoping for some decent rainfall to arrive.

Farmers across South Australia have been struggling with drought conditions since the beginning of 2025, with record-low rainfall figures in numerous areas of the state.

Grain Producers SA (GPSA) chair, and Alawoona-based grain farmer, John Gladigau said the current drought had added to cumulative pressure from low rainfall across the past decade.

"The Northern Mallee region had a significant period of drought from 2017-19, from which most producers are still recovering," Mr Gladigau said.

"An above-average 2022 season was the bright spot in the past 10 years, but has been tempered by two poor years since, with no real opportunity for farmers to get back on their feet.

"The Northern Mallee can be a tough farming environment, but local farmers have adapted to be seen as some of the best in the world in a low-rainfall environment.

"Over the past 50 years there have been rolling periods of both fantastic and poor seasons, but the last 10 years has certainly been a time when cumulative droughts and frost have been disheartening."

In the time from 1 January until 2 May, Alawoona had received 22.1mm of rainfall, compared to 44.2mm for the same time period in 2024.

The long-term average for Alawoona's rainfall between 1 January and 2 May is 86.9mm.

Mr Gladigau said challenges posed by drought conditions had forced the area's farmers to maximise their growing efficiency.

"Through adversity many new environmentally sustainable farming practices have come to the fore such as no-till, soil amelioration and targeted use of impacts with precision seeding and spraying," he said.

"This has resulted in quite incredible production from limited rainfall and tight margins."

Mr Gladigau said the low rainfall, combined with high input costs and pressure from financiers, increased the risks for farmers to plant a new crop in 2025.

"The recent annual (GPSA) survey identified input costs of fertiliser, chemical and fuel as being their biggest issues as they move into the new season," he said.

"Coming off a drought year and with very little subsoil moisture, farmers are very nervous about expending huge amounts of money planting the new crop without the security of moisture in the bank.

"The other financial pressures are related to higher interest rates and the timeframes financiers are taking to assess the needs of farmers, and their willingness to extend finance off the back of a couple of poor seasons."

Mr Gladigau said industry bodies would continue working with the State Government to ensure farmers are supported through drought challenges.

"(GPSA) have worked closely with the state government in proposing options to assist farmers," he said.

"We are pleased that a lot of the suggestions we put forward were included in the recent drought package, but we are concerned that the eligibility criteria may mean some farmers who need assistance the most may slip through the gaps, and the timeframes for delivery will just frustrate people.

"We will continue to keep working with the Minister (for Primary Industries Clare Scriven) and State Government, to ensure the assistance reaches where it is most needed."

Rain levels

RENMARK

1 February to 25 April 2025: 8.6mm
Rainfall to 25 April 2025: 16.6mm
Rainfall to 25 April 2024: 48.4mm

LOXTON

1 February to 25 April 2025: 8.6mm
Rainfall to 25 April 2025: 15.9mm
Rainfall to 25 April 2024: 44.2mm

WAIKERIE

1 February to 25 April 2025: 1.3mm
Rainfall to 25 April 2025: 9.3mm
Rainfall to 25 April 2024: 50.4mm

LAMEROO

1 February to 25 April 2025: 10.6mm
Rainfall to 25 April 2025: 15.2mm
Rainfall to 25 April 2024: 28.6mm

GAWLER

1 February to 25 April 2025: 11mm
Rainfall to 25 April 2025: 13.2mm
Rainfall to 25 April 2024: 27.6mm

Storages (as at 25 April)

MENINDEE LAKES:
34 per cent full

DARTMOUTH:
78 per cent full

HUME:
23 per cent full

LAKE VICTORIA:
33 per cent full

FLOWS INTO SA: 7,500ML/day

Weathering the wine crisis: A Riverland perspective with Jeff McDonald

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY SEBASTIAN CALDERON

Growers are taking a lot of risks, but the current red flags within the industry have created a lot of emotion...

Jeff McDonald is the senior manager at Riverland Lending Business, which has been financially helping businesses across the region to reach their goals and needs through budget planning and restructuring.

AUSTRALIA'S grape growers have been facing serious financial headwinds the last couple of years, but currently there are paths forward for those willing to adapt. Jeff McDonald, of Riverland Lending Services, believes that innovation, financial restructuring, and regional co-operation will be key to navigating the current crisis. He shared important steps growers can take, and why collaboration across the industry is more critical than ever.

As South Australia's Riverland region grapples with falling grape prices, rising input costs, and limited market access, many vineyard operators are facing unprecedented financial strain. Mr McDonald has seen first hand the mounting pressure on local growers and he discussed the economic realities behind the crisis, the difficult decisions many farmers are being forced to make, and what the future may hold for one of Australia's most productive wine regions.

"You've got growers that are generational and they are having a hard time, but they are not doing anything wrong," Mr McDonald said.

"They are passionate about what they do, and they do the best they can, but they are fearful as well.

"Growers are taking a lot of risks, but the current red flags within the industry have created a lot of emotion, especially since everyone is in a different financial position.

"You have all kinds of perspectives, from a financial point of view, different ages, and if I go back to when I grew up, there's literally nothing that an irrigation property in the Riverland did in the 1980s, when I was young, that is still being done now, simply because the world moves.

"The whole area over many, many years has evolved in all these different crop types, at different times, based on world demand and world supply.

"Some of them move slowly, so if I if you take that fullness of time and say, where are we today?"

Mr McDonald said the current financial position of most growers, gives them an opportunity to think back, and also to plan ahead.

"Where are we going to be in another 50 years? Where were we 50 years ago? We're going to keep changing, and in reality, it all comes down to the choices we make about the changing environment around us.

"There's no doubt that if we produce less grapes in the world, there will be a point where supply will meet demand, but the question is how long will that take and how much money will be lost, or how much are they losing now to be able to get there?

"Everyone wants to hang on for another year, but the reality is that we are not the only ones affected, it is happening all around the world, and some industries might be oversupplying, and it can hurt growers and industries as a whole."

Mr McDonald believes industry needs have to be confronted with honesty, and for many growers, the instinct to persevere, to keep going one more season hoping for a turnaround, is both admirable and, at times, dangerous.

Without structural changes or a clear market correction, he warns, this cycle of oversupply and under-pricing could continue indefinitely. The challenge now is to recognise when persistence turns into vulnerability — and to start exploring viable strategies that offer a path forward, rather than just survival.

"I suppose everyone has some choices, people who aren't completely all-in financially and still have a bit of room to move — you really hope they start making different decisions, for their own mental health as much as anything" Mr McDonald said.

"That might even mean staying with grapes, just approaching things differently.

"You can change the varieties that aren't selling, and move them over to varieties that can be pushed onto new markets. I know it can be difficult, takes money and time, but we have done that as a wine industry all the time.

"If someone decides to walk away, another one will go into the market, and while not immediately, they can plant something else. It can work for one industry, but it might fail with another, that is change.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

Jeff McDonald of Riverland Lending Services believes South Australia's wine industry can adapt and rebuild, as growers explore new strategies to navigate rising costs and shifting markets.

Mr McDonald said planning to take losses for years to come is, indeed a plan, but keeping still in the same situation would fail to generate successful results.

"Passionate growers may have a tendency of overreacting when someone does things in a different manner, and we understand that, because they are so passionate about their work, but in some cases, that is the actual limitation that prevents change, keeping them from sitting back and saying, what can I do?" he said.

"I'll often ask, what are you doing about it? What do you want to do? The common reply is the lack of financial resources, but I tend to insist on the fact that if you're losing money now and you've got nothing to work with, chances are you'll lose money again next year. If you don't have the resources now, you're on track to have even less — maybe nothing — down the line.

"If things haven't changed in the last three years, they're unlikely to turn around on their own in the next five. That's why I've been encouraging growers to act early — I was having these conversations years ago, even when prices started dropping and many blamed the tariffs, but the real issue runs deeper, and recognising that sooner gives you the chance to plan, adapt, and take control of your future."

Mr McDonald explains one of the key misconceptions was the overemphasis on tariffs as the root cause of collapsing demand. While trade restrictions played a role, the deeper issue was a dramatic shift in consumer behaviour.

"In China, wine is a social drink — and with two years of strict lockdowns, consumption basically stopped," he said.

"Now, even as restrictions have eased, the economic environment has changed, and that demand just hasn't returned to previous levels.

The problem, he adds, is that growers continued to produce for a market that no longer exists at the same scale.

"The signs were all there and as prices tumbled — from $700 to $500, then $300, even $100 — I was having these conversations with growers, saying, 'we can see where this is going.' It was all unfolding in the middle of Covid, and yet many were still hoping it would turn itself around."

Looking ahead, Mr McDonald's greatest concern isn't just low grape prices — it's also water.

"Some growers have been selling water just to stay afloat," he said.

"But with things drying out, the price of temporary water has already jumped — from around $50/ML last year to over $200 this year."

If the region fails to see rain soon, he warns, prices could skyrocket further, pricing wine growers out entirely.

"You've got almond growers who can afford to pay $500/ML for water and most vineyard operators simply can't compete with that.

"As the industry faces rising costs and falling returns, the time for difficult but proactive decisions is now."

"Just because it didn't work for you, doesn't mean it's not going to work for as someone else.

"I have enormous compassion for the pain that a lot of wine grape growers are taking on, and I would argue that they're not necessarily looking at their other options.

"I've shown people, including farmers of anything, that they have different options, which means they don't have to stick to wine if it's not working out."

Mr McDonald often refers to a simple but powerful framework when talking with growers: being above the line, versus below the line.

Below the line, he explains, is where blame, denial, and excuses live, and are easy places to go when things feel out of control. Above the line is about ownership, accountability, and responsibility.

"It's a bit like a grieving process," he said, reflecting on conversations he has had with farmers across different commodities.

"People go through stages — frustration, blame, denial. One day it's the wineries, the next it's world markets, even the weather or politics. But at some point, to move forward, you have to stop looking outward and start focusing on what you can control.

"Everyone has done it, we will drop down there, and we come up with excuses to make ourselves feel better that it wasn't our fault.

"That's our natural behaviour when there's fear, anxiety and stress, but the same question comes back, what are you doing about it?"

No stoppin' the Barossa's Dairyman

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY BEVAN JONES

STORY ON PAGE 8

Michael Wohlstadt is operator of the award-winning Dairyman Barossa, based near Lyndoch.

ON an 80-acre property near Lyndoch, in the southern Barossa Valley, you will find The Dairyman Barossa, a business that is out of this world and unlike most seen in the state.

The award-winning operation is run by Michael Wohlstadt, a passionate farmer who has a diverse range of livestock and produce on his property that is sold to different restaurants and businesses around SA and interstate.

They produce buttercream and buttermilk, free-range pork fed by Jersey milk and grain, oyster mushrooms, milk veal, and will soon be making Italian cheese as well.

If this isn't impressive enough, they also have exclusive self-contained farm accommodation – The Dairyman's Cottage, and The Chaff House, which date back to the 1840s – and vineyards on the property as well.

Mr Wohlstadt grew up in Gladstone, in the Mid North, and then moved to Elizabeth, which was where he attended primary school.

He always wanted to be a farmer and although his family avoided encouraging him to do it, he developed an interest from what he described as his second family.

"My parents came from Berlin after the war, and the first place they lived was Gladstone in the Mid North," he said.

"Family farmers were very welcoming to migrants and I always wanted to be a farmer – (which was) actively discouraged by my parents, and grandparents, in particular.

"My grandfather was a bookkeeper, who thought banking would be a much better choice.

"My parents were the first managers of what is now Lyndoch Hill, previously the Barossa Motel, so I grew up in hospitality, but there was a dairy farm across the road and so that is where I always ended up after school.

"They were like a second family to me."

Mr Wohlstadt said it was a challenge getting into farming, and he had to work his local government job, which made for very-long hours.

"Getting into farming was very tough, I was 23, interest rates were 18 per cent and bridging finance was 22 per cent," he said.

"It's hard to believe that I have now been on this property for 45 years and turn 68 this year, but I still work 70-hour weeks.

"The landholding was originally just sheep only and no vineyard, but with my main interest being milking cows I built the dairy from scratch, and focused on the vineyard when I took a 10-year break from the dairy side of things."

Mr Wohlstadt has over 80 free-range heritage Berkshire and Tamworth pigs that are fed with Jersey cow milk and local grain that he mills. He said it was most likely the only milk-fed pig herd in the country.

"It's the way it used to be, on mixed farms, it used to be that people would have a small herd and everything sort of emerged from subsistence farming, and then they'd have a bit of surplus and sell it off and there were small cash crops," he said.

"One of those things that emerged was to have a small dairy herd and you'd separate the milk on the farm for cream, sell it, typically to Golden North, and what would you do with the skim milk?

"The pigs absolutely love it and they are waiting for the milk to be poured on the grain, and they find it delicious and enjoy it.

"Pork used to have a great flavour and it's drifted away from that, and some of the bacon you eat can be really dry and lacking flavour. So I took a punt to see if I could establish a point of difference with the crushed grain too and it worked wonders.

"With the heritage breeds, as the meat cooks the fat keeps the meat moist, so it doesn't lose the flavour and doesn't go dry and tough.

"It has led to customers saying they've never tasted bacon or sausages like that, and quite important restaurants in the city and Barossa Valley are purchasers of the meat and/or the whole range of products."

Mr Wohlstadt's produce can be found at different restaurants around metropolitan Adelaide including Arkhe, at Norwood, Salopian Inn, at McLaren Vale, The Oval Restaurant, and Jolley's Boathouse.

It is also found at Lucia's, and Smelly Cheese, at the Adelaide Central Market. It can also be found in the Barossa Valley at different cellar doors, and Hentley's Farm.

He also sells his farm's products at the Barossa Farmers Market and Adelaide Showground Farmers Market, and said that customers who bought his products were looking for something different to mainstream food.

Mr Wohlstadt said another good thing about The Dairyman Barossa was being able to avoid having to travel long distances to transport produce.

"Our road miles are very low, for example we have a butcher in Kapunda that we work with and our hay and grain is only 5km away that we feed our cows," he said.

Mr Wohlstadt supplies outlets across Adelaide with premium pork from his milk-fed Berkshire and Tamworth pig herds.

Getting into farming was very tough, I was 23, interest rates were 18 per cent and bridging finance was 22 per cent.

"This is unlike other produce that ends up in the supermarket from factories and goes through several different processes and it loses its freshness.

"If you want to guarantee consistency you need highly managed industrial processes and detecting differences between seasons is important.

"It is actually important to notice a difference in tastes between seasons through taste and texture, as it means that it hasn't been manipulated."

He said he preferred Jersey cows as they were easier to manage than larger animals like Holsteins, and were the best breed as they provided richer milk.

Farmers around the country have been dealing with drought conditions and Mr Wohlstadt said it was challenging for them as well.

"The drought has made it really tough and like everyone, we really hope it rains soon," he said.

"I have been fortunate that I have a really committed team on the farm, I used to do it all by myself and to have that support has been great, especially turning 68 this year.

"At this time of year, we would be more confident about the season but we have to be careful of the cost of feed and additional irrigation that is required due to the lack of rainfall."

The Dairyman Barossa also specialise in oyster mushrooms that are known for their nutty and subtle flavour and are great for stir fry, soups and cooking with roasted meat.

They also create artisan butter, with the secret lying within the Jersey cows and the fresh pasture that they graze in. The butter is velvet in texture and an amazing golden colour.

Moving forward, Italian cheeses and a new outdoor hospitality area with the potential to host weddings and events is on the priority list for The Dairyman Barossa, where everything served will be from the property.

Mr Wohlstadt said he hoped he lived long enough to see the fruits of his labour.

If you want to stay at The Dairyman Barossa or find out more, visit the website (www.thedairyman.com.au/).

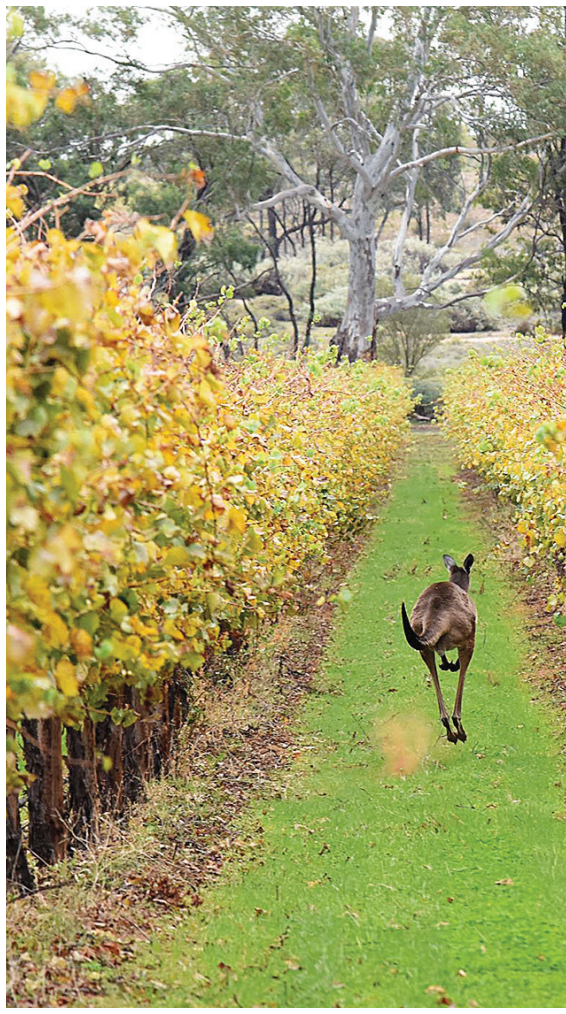
HERITAGE PORK

FARM BUTTER & CREAM

OYSTER MUSHROOMS

ACCOMMODATION

Freestone Estate recently sent a sample of its wine over to Bordeaux in France, with the label featuring at La Cite du Vin.



Pouring into a new era

WORDS LACHLAN DAND

BEGINNING the year in a significant way, a new wine label entered the Riverland region in February, and have already had great success.

Located in Waikerie, and proving popular among locals following releases at the launch night, the Riverland Food and Wine Festival, and at its warehouse wine sale over the Easter weekend, the business have already begun making waves in the region.

The importance of being a family-owned business remains strong at Freestone Estate, in what is an ever-growing field.

In what was a dry start in warm conditions in 2025, vintage proved to be an early one for Freestone Estate.

"We're a family owned winery, and 80 per cent of our grapes come from the family that own the winery as well," sales and logistics co-ordinator Shelby Colbert said.

"We recently rebranded and released our own bottled stock as well, but we've now stepped into a different field of the wine industry.

"Vintage started early and finished relatively early, and towards the end of it, the grapes dried out more than usual, so there's a lot less yield compared to previous vintages.

"The wine quality is coming out really well, and our winemaker, Mel, is amazing at her job with knowing when to pick and crush, as well as knowing what the grapes need when they come in."

Having taken up business in the Riverland back in 2015, the wine label was only released in 2025, and Ms Colbert said one of the biggest challenges has been changing the mindset of its customers.

The Riverland wine industry is enormous in itself, and pushing the local label has been a key focus at Freestone Estate.

"A lot of people don't think that they like Riverland wine, even though we are one of the biggest suppliers in the world," she said.

"With our Riverland wine, we're really pushing the Riverland label, and trying to change how people feel and think about it.

"I think it's just adjusting to the market, and the wineries need to stick to all of the same plans, so that we're doing it together."

Still hoping to break into the market, family members of Freestone Estate can often be seen at public events, helping buyers gain a local feel, and answer any questions available to them.

"We're very family driven, and we talk about being family owned a lot, so it's very important to us," Ms Colbert said.

"You'll see that when we hold events our owners are always there, so you can really see the family dynamic on show in the public eye.

"For us, it's just pushing that the Riverland wine region is a good one, and taking as many opportunities as we can get to show the Riverland wine."

> ***"We're a family owned winery, and 80 per cent of our grapes come from the family that own the winery.***

PLATINUM Ag Services®

A NUTRIEN AG SOLUTIONS PARTNER

PLATINUM AG SERVICES

OFFERING EXPERT ADVICE ON ALL YOUR RURAL NEEDS

Throughout **South Australia** and **Mildura**

KIMBA
Karen Eatts
T 0400 227 570

CLARE
Nic Jones
T 0428 574 718

RENMARK
Jack James
T 0447 111 476

COORONG
Michael Camac
T 0457 794 330

BALAKLAVA
Martin Bond
T 0409 632 185

LOXTON
Corey Gilgen
T 0447 012 084

MURRAYLANDS
Shane Sullivan
T 0438 904 751

MILDURA
Mark Johnson
T 0400 701 168

CRYSTAL BROOK
Ben Hook
T 0457 408 900

VIRGINIA
Richard Knowles
T 0458 799 803

WE SPECIALISE IN

- AG-CHEM FERTILISER
- SEED
- ANIMAL HEALTH
- FENCING
- WATER & IRRIGATION
- LIVESTOCK
- FINANCE
- INSURANCE
- WATER BROKING
- RURAL MERCHANDISE

www.platinumagservices.com.au

VR4878896

AG NEWS

Snail and slug baiting methods put to the test

A RESEARCH project is underway to aid South Australian grain growers to manage snail and slug damage in crops by optimising bait-spreading operations.

Snails and slugs cause substantial crop damage and impose costs on the Australian grains industry estimated at $43m annually.

Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC) investment, together with substantial in-kind contributions from the Aerial Application Association of Australia (AAAA) and research partners will see around $450,000 invested in better understanding mollusc bait placement from aircraft and smaller ground rigs.

The research team will be co-ordinated by Western Australian agricultural research engineer Ben White with technical and practical support from mechanical engineer, Josh Giumelli, and Victorian machinery specialist Mark Saunders.

They will work collaboratively with mollusc researchers and the AAAA to conduct the research with a focus on aircraft and operating parameter influences.

Mr White said effective molluscicide baiting is crucial in broadacre cropping systems.

"The project will include testing a range of aircraft types and surveying stakeholders to pinpoint key factors for effective bait distribution," Mr White said.

"Additionally, we'll evaluate a range of common 12-volt ground spreaders to provide a guide on suitable equipment and configurations for smaller spinner spreaders delivering consistent mollusc baiting outcomes.

"An established test protocol will be adapted to evaluate bait spread performance distribution uniformity."

GRDC crop protection manager - west Georgia Megirian said the project had arisen from feedback via GRDC's National Grower Network (NGN).

"At recent NGN forums, growers... made it clear that current snail-baiting strategies aren't always hitting the mark," Ms Megirian said.

"Snails are a persistent challenge, with control often inconsistent due to difficulties in achieving effective bait coverage and timing.

"Application methods and spread accuracy play an important role, and improving these techniques could help reduce crop losses and minimise the need for multiple applications."

Optimising bait timing, integrating cultural and mechanical control methods, and improving the precision of molluscicide bait spreading can enhance snail control, reduce input costs, and minimise grain contamination — helping growers meet market standards.

The project will produce accessible resources detailing the strengths and limitations of different spreader types, along with practical recommendations to improve bait placement and effectiveness for snails.

Snails and slugs cause substantial crop damage and impose costs on the Australian grains industry estimated at $43m annually.

Cropping land to be lost under rezoning proposal?

THE State Government and Opposition are supporting the rezoning of productive cropping land in Roseworthy, Two Wells and Murray Bridge that could supply an equivalent of 57 million loaves of bread, or 31 loaves for every South Australian annually, independent analysis shows.

Grain Producers SA (GPSA) recently released an independent report by agricultural analyst Episode 3 (EP3), revealing the significant and irreversible cost to South Australian grain production under the State Government proposal to rezone high-quality cropping land for housing.

The State Government's Greater Adelaide Regional Plan (GARP), supported by the Opposition, proposes lifting Environment and Food Production Area (EFPA) protections to allow housing developments across highly productive grain-growing regions, including Roseworthy and Two Wells.

GPSA chief executive officer Brad Perry said the independent analysis puts a dollar figure on the true cost of the proposed land use changes, which the State Government states is only one per cent of agricultural land in the Greater Adelaide region.

"The evidence is clear — this is not just a planning issue, it's a food security issue," Mr Perry said.

"This report shows that the affected areas currently produce nearly 23,000 metric tonnes of grain annually — enough to bake over 57 million loaves of bread. That's 31 loaves for every South Australian, every year.

"In today's terms, that land contributes over $8m in annual production value. Extrapolated over the lifespan of a regular farm, considering projected yield improvements through innovation, the loss equates to $1.6bn in future food-production value if this land is converted to housing. This is a very conservative estimate and demonstrates that rezoning productive farming land under the current proposal has a long-term impact on South Australia's food security.

The St Yves development, at Roseworthy, has created a residential community over the fence from prime agricultural land. PHOTO: supplied

"Property developers and the associations that represent them would want nothing more than to see the urban growth boundary scrapped as they did when the EFPA was set up in 2017. The EFPA must be maintained for the protection of the future of agriculture in South Australia, as it was originally intended to do when first legislated."

Mr Perry said the analysis failed to consider livestock production, with many cropping areas in the Adelaide Plains area being mixed-farming businesses.

Mr Perry said there would also be a significant amount of financial contribution in lost taxes to the state's coffers that these farmers pay every year.

The EP3 analysis found that affected cropping land in Roseworthy, Two Wells and Murray Bridge is 33 per cent more productive than the state average.

"These areas are some of our most fertile and productive cropping regions. Once they're rezoned to housing, we will lose them forever," Mr Perry said.

The report also highlights broader risks, including impacts on farm viability through landscape fragmentation, biosecurity challenges, adverse environmental and biodiversity outcomes, and increased conflict between urban residents and primary producers.

"South Australia cannot afford to sacrifice intergenerational food-producing land at the altar of urban sprawl," Mr Perry said.

"GPSA strongly urges the State Government and Opposition to reconsider any support for lifting EFPA protections in key grain-growing regions.

"We need a smarter approach to housing and planning policy in this state that does not come at the cost of South Australia's food security and export capability."

Mr Perry said grain producers in the regions impacted by the GARP proposal were already dealing with concerns about farming alongside housing estates.

"As an example, a grain producer at Roseworthy told me they had people in a housing estate complain to them because the lights of the header during harvest were shining into their bedroom window," he said.

"The proposed changes supported by both major parties spell major challenges for the future of farming in the Adelaide Plains region."

AG NEWS

Close-up of Wynns and CSIRO progeny plants in the ground. PHOTO: supplied

Blend of science with heritage grapevines to future-proof Australian wines

NEW mildew-resistant and drought-resilient grapevines have been planted in South Australia, to help safeguard the future of Australia's wine industry – including the Riverland's and Barossa Valley's – against a changing climate, and disease threats.

Australia's national science agency, CSIRO, and Treasury Wine Estates (TWE) partnered to future-proof some of the most collected wines in the region from old vines, with the first vines of the new progeny recently planted.

The new grapevines blend genetics from TWE's heritage vines, in the Barossa Valley and Coonawarra, which have enhanced climate resilience, with mildew-resistant traits developed through years of selective breeding by CSIRO, with funding from Wine Australia.

Powdery and downy mildew costs the Australian wine sector an estimated $160m in management expenses and production losses annually.

CSIRO research scientist and project lead Paul Bos said breeding mildew resistance into elite vines gives future grapevines a genetic advantage to withstand these disease-causing pathogens.

"Using traditional breeding methods, we introduced two distinct genes… which give resistance to downy mildew and powdery mildew," Dr Boss said.

"These are from CSIRO-developed breeding lines that confer robust disease resistance and other quality traits onto their progeny.

"Having resistance genes for both powdery and downy mildew makes these plants more robust as it is unlikely the pathogens can break both sources of resistance with a single mutation."

Treasury Wine Estates chief supply and sustainability officer Kerrin Petty said the global wine industry faced significant challenges managing grapevine disease pressure sustainably, while managing the increasingly variable growing conditions created by the changing climate.

"In partnering with CSIRO for this important project, we're combining the genetics of heritage Australian vines... with scientific research and innovation," Mr Petty said.

"Creating mildew-resistant vines that are also able to withstand climatic variation means we're setting up our vineyards to continue producing world-famous wine for generations to come."

The resulting superior cultivars are expected to require fewer inputs, such as the application of fungicide sprays, which will likely lead to additional sustainability benefits, including lower carbon emissions from less-frequent use of diesel-powered tractors in vineyards.

The project demonstrates how science innovation can be used to bolster adaptation to a changing climate and manage disease pressure, providing knowledge that benefits the wider Australian wine sector to become more sustainable into the future.

The mildew-resistant grapevine breeding lines used in this project were partly funded by Australia's grape growers and winemakers through their investment body Wine Australia, with matching funding from the Federal Government.

Mental health roundtable discusses drought gaps

GRAIN Producers SA (GPSA) has taken a leadership role in addressing mental health challenges arising from the drought across regional South Australian areas, initiating and co-ordinating a state-wide Mental Health Roundtable.

The roundtable, held in Adelaide in March, brought together key mental health professionals, regional support organisations, and agricultural leaders to identify existing services, current gaps, and future mental health and wellbeing needs of farmers, with the state continuing to battle the challenging conditions from the drought.

GPSA chair John Gladigau, who chaired the roundtable, said the collaborative discussion was an important step toward ensuring regional communities are better supported.

"(GPSA) recognises that mental health is as vital as physical safety when it comes to supporting South Australian farmers," Mr Gladigau said.

"We were pleased to bring together representatives from across the agriculture sector, psychology and rural health to share what's working, identify where the gaps are, and importantly, talk about what support is needed over the next six to 12 months."

Representatives from GPSA, Rural Business Support (RBS), ifarmwell, Primary Producers SA (PPSA), Livestock SA, PIRSA, SA Health, Rural Aid, Mentally Fit EP, Farm Life Psych, the National Centre for Farmer Health, Fat Farmers, and more, contributed to the conversation, with a focus on co-ordinating services.

"There was strong agreement around the importance of investing in programs that have already proven to work on the ground and other community-driven initiatives," Mr Gladigau said.

"But we also heard loud and clear that as drought persists, the need for practical, farmer-led support and early intervention services will only grow.

"This roundtable was about more than just talking.

"It was about ensuring that what's being fed into Government – including the Minister's Drought Advisory Committee – reflects the real needs and lived experience of South Australian farmers."

The buck stops here with livestock health

MALLEE farmers in charge of livestock have a responsibility for ensuring the health and welfare needs of their livestock and animals are met.

Agriculture Victoria program manager of livestock and welfare compliance Veronica Campbell said this includes providing animals with proper and sufficient food, ensuring sick or injured animals are provided with appropriate attention or treatment, and basic husbandry practises such as shearing are being carried out.

Agriculture Victoria officers, authorised under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986, have a number of tools available, including issuing legal notices to owners or persons in charge of livestock, to direct them to "cease committing an offence or to ensure an offence is not committed".

"In serious cases where the animals are at risk of distress and disablement; and the owner or person in charge has failed to comply with directives, Agriculture Victoria can undertake a seizure of the affected animals, removing them permanently from the owner or person in charge," Ms Campbell said.

Agriculture Victoria has recently conducted three seizures of livestock in a three-month period.

"In December 2024, 55 sheep were seized from a Broomfield property due to repeated failure to shear the animals for a number of years," Ms Campbell said.

"In January 2025, 52 cattle were seized from a property in Murrayville due to a failure to provide proper and sufficient feed to the cattle, resulting in a large number dying across the property.

"In February 2025, 441 cattle were seized from a Balmattum property due to an ongoing failure to provide proper and sufficient feed to the cattle.

"Due to their serious nature, the matters relating to the recently seized livestock are not finalised, and therefore further detail or comment cannot be provided.

"While we know the majority of farmers are doing the right thing, livestock producers who don't take appropriate action to prevent and address animal welfare issues can face regulatory action, including prosecution for offences under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986."

Anyone wishing to make a specific complaint regarding livestock welfare can contact Agriculture Victoria on 136 186 or online (aw.complaint@agriculture.vic.gov.au).

For information on dry seasonal and drought support visit the website (agriculture.vic.gov.au/dryseasons).

> ***"In February 2025, 441 cattle were seized from a Balmattum property due to an ongoing failure to provide proper and sufficient feed to the cattle.***

Harvest results reveal the most-efficient ripping setup

WHEN spending big on soil amelioration, every pass of the ripper counts. That's why the Grains Research and Development Corporation's National Grower Network project, *Optimising Soil Amelioration in Typical Mallee Soils*, set out to answer a big question: how do we get the most bang for our buck when deep ripping?

Last year, the Mallee Sustainable Farming trial site at Copeville, South Australia, saw UniSA's Chris Saunders, and Frontier Farming Systems, set up a ripping trial to compare different tyne configurations. At the time there were no yield results – just force measurements, fuel use data, and some promising visual differences between treatments. Now, with harvest done and dusted, the results are in – and it's worth talking about.

The setup

The trial compared:

- ❑ Standard ripping.
- ❑ High-efficiency ripping (lower draft, wider spacing, less steel).
- ❑ Maximum loosening setups.
- ❑ Ripping with inclusion plates.
- ❑ And a commercial Bednar ripper as a farmer practice comparison.

Each setup was measured for its power requirements, soil loosening impact, and most importantly – its effect on barley yield in a tough, low rainfall year.

What did we learn?

The control plots (no ripping) came in at around 0.73t/ha. From there:

- ❑ Standard ripping jumped to 1.36t/ha.
- ❑ High-efficiency ripping pushed yields up to 1.51t/ha.
- ❑ Maximum-loosening ripping delivered 1.49t/ha.
- ❑ The Bednar ripper increased yield to 1.2t/ha.
- ❑ Ripping with inclusion plates stole the show, reaching 1.71t/ha.

Inclusion plates clearly made a difference in this deep-sand paddock, where non-wetting soils were a known issue.

It's not just about yield – it's about ROI

When Frontier Farming Systems crunched the numbers on partial gross margins, the high-efficiency ripper came out on top. It delivered the best return per hectare when factoring in fuel, labour, and machinery costs.

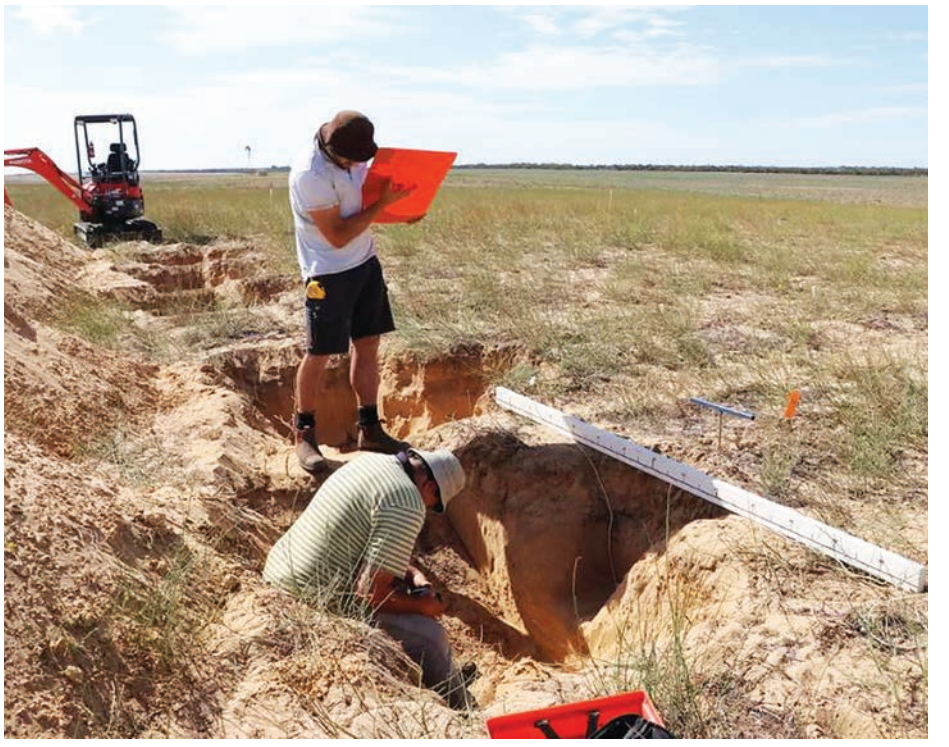
Here's the breakdown:

- ❑ Standard ripping: +$66/ha.
- ❑ Maximum loosening: +$82/ha.
- ❑ High-efficiency ripping: +$109/ha.

The key takeaway? If you can get the same, or better yield from a ripping setup that uses less power and fewer tines – you're ahead.

Key messages for growers

- ❑ Smarter tine setup might get the same result as a bigger tractor, without the extra capital spend.
- ❑ Dry seasons still respond. Even in low rainfall, the ripping treatments made a clear difference in yield.
- ❑ Inclusion plates are worth watching. They're not widely available yet, but in deep sand, they can be a game-changer.



AG NEWS

Making every input count for the 2025 season

AS the 2025 season kicks off, growers across the Mallee are weighing every input decision carefully. Following a dry 2024, there's real pressure to cut costs – without cutting corners.

A recent Mallee Sustainable Farming (MSF) Farm Talk podcast featured soil fertility specialist Sean Mason, who recently presented at the Mallee Research Updates. Dr Mason shared timely advice on how to improve fertiliser efficiency, make the most of existing nutrient bands, and adjust strategies to ensure growers are getting value for every dollar spent.

Here's a snapshot of the key messages from the podcast, to help set up paddocks for success:

Sean Mason presenting at the Mallee Research Updates. PHOTO: supplied

Five Smart Moves to Improve Fertiliser Efficiency in 2025

1

Know which soils are nutrient responsive

After a tough year, cash flow is tight. Dr Mason urges growers to identify zones where fertiliser inputs deliver a return and where they don't. That includes both nitrogen and phosphorus decisions.

2

Use your data layers.

Free tools like Google Earth and NDVI, plus yield and protein maps, can reveal how paddocks have performed over time. These layers are crucial for zoning and guiding smarter soil testing.

3

Understand phosphorus buffering index (PBI).

Mapping PBI once can pay off for years. High PBI soils tie up phosphorus, so applying more – or placing it more strategically – may be necessary. Conversely, low PBI soils might already have enough in the bank.

4

Be strategic about sowing placement.

Sowing close to last year's furrow – particularly in high-PBI soils – can give this year's crop a better shot. It's a small shift that could deliver big gains, with some growers achieving this by sowing at a 5-degree angle. It is also important to note the potential for extra disease pressure, with on or near-row sowing that needs to be considered.

5

Protect your roots – especially in pulses.

For lentils and other sensitive crops, excess fertiliser in dry soils can prune roots and limit nutrient access. Dr Mason recommends keeping rates below 50kg/ha of monoammonium phosphate, and considering splitting seed and fertiliser, or broadcasting to avoid seed damage.

Australian nursery growers, and Mansfield's Nursery and Tissue Culture Australia general managers, Matt Mansfield and Symone Brown, are encouraging horticulture growers to join the Australian-Grown Innovation program. PHOTO: supplied

Program to unlock grower solutions for biggest horticulture challenges

RIVERLAND horticultural producers have been encouraged to participate in a new initiative aimed at generating innovative progress in the sector.

Mentoring to transform ideas into real solutions is one of the key offerings of a new program recently launched by Hort Frontiers.

The new program – Australian-Grown Innovation – developed in partnership with Startupbootcamp and Cluster Connect, is designed to drive innovation that will tackle the most-pressing challenges in horticulture.

Over the next five years, the program, which is for Australian growers and those across the horticulture supply chain, will accelerate grower-led innovation through three stages of mentorship. The aim is to turn great ideas into commercially viable products and services that make a real difference on the ground.

Its objective will be to unlock transformative opportunities and deliver practical solutions to real industry challenges, such as climate resilience strategies, value-added product innovation, technology-driven solutions harnessing AI, and supply chain improvements to increase productivity.

All solutions created will deliver on solving these challenges through a requirement to meet one of the five overarching Frontiers themes, including healthy living, adaptation and resilience, market access, disruptive technologies and capability building.

Hort Innovation CEO Brett Fifield said "Australian growers are the country's most innovative entrepreneurs, they're on the frontline of horticulture and know better than anyone the problems that need solving".

"This program has been designed to tap into this knowledge and the entrepreneurial spirit of Australian growers to try and solve problems together for our horticulture sector," Mr Fifield said

"Our recent Australian Horticulture Statistics Handbook showed that the horticulture sector has now reached a total production value of $1bn , with more growers being given the tools to bring farm changing ideas to life, we know that we will see this number continue to grow."

Australian nursery growers, and Mansfield's Nursery and Tissue Culture Australia general managers, Matt Mansfield and Symone Brown, have experienced their own innovation journey and shared the potential they see in a program like Australian-Grown Innovation.

"We found the innovation journey was a bit of a rollercoaster full of ups and downs," the couple said.

"It felt like we were renovating a house at times — setting out to solve one problem, only to uncover more along the way, and seeing the costs escalate beyond what we had planned."

"A program like Australian-Grown Innovation would have helped us explore the ideas more thoroughly and figure out our end goal faster. We can see how it would have benefited our program creation, and we are sure it will help lots of other growers just like us to create their own innovations."

Startupbootcamp food and agriculture innovation partner Anna Barlow said "Australian-Grown Innovation is for growers, producers, entrepreneurs and businesses across the horticulture supply chain who want to develop new ideas and turn them into real-world products or services".

"Helping new businesses in the food and agriculture space has been a big part of what Startupbootcamp has been focused on, and we are thrilled to be able to work with Frontiers to bring this program to life to continue doing so," Ms Barlow said.

This program has been co-funded by the Hort Frontiers program, and Startupbootcamp, to solve real world horticulture challenges and give growers the tools to innovate more homegrown technology.

To find out more or register for the program, visit the website (www.frontiers.au/agi).

9326FMFP

Join us at

Trinity College Roseworthy

Enrol Now – Preschool to Year 5

Offering a College bus route:
Angaston, Tanunda, Nuriootpa, Roseworthy & Evanston South

Visit our website for details.
www.trinity.sa.edu.au

Follow us on @TrinityCollegeSouthAustralia

TRINITY COLLEGE

COCO & HONEY
FLOWER FARM

Coco & Honey the pick of the bunch

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY MADISON EASTMOND

THE boutique flower farm and studio Coco & Honey has almost finished its fourth harvest this autumn, with the local floral delight providing the Riverland a unique and blooming primary industry.

Tended to and owned by Monash couple Natalie and Aden Brock, Coco & Honey sits amidst a vineyard, pomegranate and quince orchard and grows dozens of flower varieties, with the season opening with ranunculus in August and ending with dahlia's in early May.

After more than a decade of teaching, Mrs Brock's desire for a career change from wellbeing leader to flower farmer four years ago came from her decision to "follow (her) own advice and do something (she) truly loved".

"It was after (the pandemic), and I really just wanted a change," she said.

"I have always loved tending to and arranging flowers, and I really love to be creative.

"Aden and I have also always gardened together, and he has a background in viticulture.

"Between the two of us, I knew we would be able to do it."

Owner and farmer of Coco & Honey Flower Farm, Natalie Brock said she has loved the challenge of transforming her almost half acre into a flourishing floral delight, and now, a thriving local business.

Though a labour of love, Mrs Brock said she has loved the challenge of transforming the almost half acre into a flourishing farm, and now, a thriving local business.

"Though I have had to really work at it, I have always loved the challenge of doing something new," she said.

Growing each species from seed, Mrs Brock sows from spring through to summer, with her season also requiring constant re-planting, picking, and then arranging each unique bouquet.

"It is pretty full on, but I just love every aspect of it," she said.

"I pick up to three times a week, with the summer months requiring me to head out to the farm in the early morning.

"It takes around two to three hours to pick, before bringing them back to the studio to condition and rehydrate for another couple of hours before working with them and beginning the arrangement.

"Each crop also has a very different lifespan.

"Some crops, like basil flower, I will succession plant — (which is planting different waves of seedlings over time) — every three weeks as they have a very quick turn-over, but something like dahlia's begin flowering in December and go right to early May."

With plantings of snapdragon, zinnia, leucadendron, cosmos, lace, phlox, amaranth, celosia, strawflowers, and now 50 roses only seeded last winter, Ms Brock said ranunculus and dahlias still remain her biggest crop.

"(Riverlanders) love those two species because I think they are so colourful and eye-catching," she said.

"They're my main flower and they're very pretty.

"However, while some might not name the other species as their favourite flower, they're so essential to the bouquet as they help breakup the roundness of those two flowers and provide other shapes in the arrangement."

Though the 2025 brought the farm it's first "really hot Riverland summer", Mrs Brock said each crop handled the heat well, with harvest remaining similar to her previous year which had doubled in productivity and size since beginning the farm in 2021.

However, Mrs Brock said she has had to adapt to the changing consumer trends with current cost-of-living pressures more of a challenge than the weather to her business.

"The market has changed quite a bit, which is definitely a reflection of the economy," she said.

"I am currently getting more sales through businesses, than the individual person — with the price of food, the difficulty in the wine industry, people aren't buying flowers for themselves as they once might of, it's more for those special occasions and as gifts."

While times are tough, Mrs Brock said she still has plans to hopefully expand her business with an outlet in Loxton, selling ranunculus corms and garlic shallots across Australia, and providing her blooming beauties for more Riverland weddings.

"I am finding every season, the farm has been able grow into different areas, not only to expand the business, but also to make it financially sustainable," she said.

For more information, follow Coco & Honey Flower Farm on Facebook, or visit the website (www.cocoandhoneyflowerfarm.com.au).

> ***"The market has changed quite a bit, which is definitely a reflection of the economy.***

DELIVERING TO THE RIVERLAND, SA

GALLARD GROUP

PROUD DEALERS FOR THE RIVERLAND AND MALLEE

'AND NOW IN MILDURA'

JCB

WE HAVE A FULL RANGE OF SPARE PARTS & WE CAN SERVICE YOUR MACHINE.
INTERESTED IN SEEING WHAT JCB HAVE INTRODUCED IN THE PAST YEAR
FOR SALES ENQUIRIES CONTACT – DREW GALLARD 0400 761 790
FOR ALL SPARE PARTS AND SERVICE CALL 0477 900 225 OR 85821671

GALLARD GROUP

w | gallardgroup.com.au
e | enquiry@gallardgroup.com.au
t | 08 8582 1671

AUSTRALIAN OWNED & OPERATED
100%

Dr David Henry from Murdoch University will lead a new GRDC investment into soil water repellence. PHOTO: Evan Collis/GRDC

Water repellent soil research underway

SOUTH Australian and Victorian Mallee grain growers will be able to better manage and mitigate soil water repellence, and its impact on crops, thanks to a new research project exploring management options.

Soil water repellence causes the temporary resistance of wetting, restricting the water available for crops, and affecting more than 5,000,000ha of cropping area between Southern Australia and Western Australia.

This costs growers an estimated $100m each year in reduced yield due to poorer germination, nutrient storage and availability, and plant-available water.

The five-year, $3.9m Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC) investment, led by Murdoch University, will explore the relationship between soil repellence and crop and pasture species, stubble and farming systems, across different seasons and soil types.

Murdoch University is set to partner with The University of Queensland, Leibniz University, the University of Adelaide, the South Australian Research and Development Institute, and grower groups across each region.

Murdoch University Centre for Sustainable Farming Systems Professor David Henry is leading the project, and said the spatial and seasonal variations in soil water repellence create significant challenges for growers.

"Australian growers are aware of existing amelioration and mitigation methods available for managing soil water repellence, largely due to previous GRDC-invested research in this space," Prof Henry said.

"However, there are gaps and issues remaining including the dependence on applying soil wetters each year, the 'patchiness' of areas affected and the impact of stubble.

"The project team will explore how common crop types (wheat, canola, barley, oats, and pulses) as well as pasture species (ryegrass and clover) contribute to soil water repellence both within and across crop rotations."

GRDC manager sustainable cropping systems Rowan Maddern said "issues related to soil water repellence continued to be raised by growers at GRDC National Grower Network (NGN) meetings".

"GRDC has undertaken previous projects looking at the available management options for soil water repellence including wetter placement, application rates, wetter tie ups on stubble and practical methods for applying clay," Dr Maddern said.

"But the unpredictable and transient nature of soil water repellence, coupled with gaps in understanding of where and when to target soil amelioration, means that wetters are often applied by growers as an insurance option, which can be expensive and is not always effective.

"This project will explore these gaps and issues to develop management options for growers focusing on crop type and environmental conditions, cost-benefit analysis and the biological and wetter chemistries currently available."

Information and resources generated by the project will support growers to manage soil water repellence, both strategically and tactically.

Members of the research team will include recommendations on crop sequence and strategic soil tillage such as spading, as well as optimal sowing times, direction of sowing, and the use of soil wetters.

Field trials for the project will start this year in the Mallee region, in SA, and the Mallee/Wimmera region of Victoria, across a range of non-wetting soil types.

Research findings are expected to be available from the second year of the project (2026), and will be communicated to growers via GRDC, grower groups and agronomists.

Peter Magarey has worked for more than 40 years across Australia, helping wine and citrus growers tackle plant diseases, aiming to help reduce maintenance costs and improve crop yields.

Peter Magarey: Pioneering plant pathologist shaping our ag future

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY SEBASTIAN CALDERON

RECENT struggles within the farming industry have revived a long-standing conversation about plant diseases and pathologies affecting crops amid record heatwaves and shifting climate patterns. With local growers facing an increase in plant diseases, plant pathologists have become a vital resource within the farming industry.

From fungal infections in vineyards, to emerging bacterial threats in citrus orchards, the battle against plant pathologies has intensified, and as farmers race to adapt, the Riverland's struggle underscores a larger truth: modern agriculture's resilience may depend on how quickly it can respond to these evolving biological threats.

Plant pathology experts warn that traditional methods of disease control might be one of the best solutions to tackle the most common pathologies and diseases.

Peter Magarey is one of Australia's lead pathology experts, with more than 45 years of experience in researching plant pathologies, diseases and ground-breaking solutions to minimise their effect on grapes, almonds and citrus plants.

"Speaking about grapes, the most common diseases found are downy mildew and powdery mildew, having different characteristics and treatments," Mr Magarey said.

"For almonds, there's a disease called phytophthora, which is a root rot and it is caused by overirrigation and soils remaining wet for too long. That's a major one because it starts to rot the trunks of the tree, and that affects the whole tree.

"Powdery mildew has been around since the very early days of the grapes coming into Australia, and downy mildew didn't start here until 1917. It was a very wet year, which favoured the disease.

"There is a disease called huanglongbing (yellow dragon disease), previously known as citrus greening, which has caused huge devastation in South and North America, but fortunately for the moment, it hasn't been detected in Australia. That would be a devastating hit to the Australian citrus industry."

Climate variations, soil conditions and irrigation systems can have a shifting impact on the spread of several plant diseases, potentially affecting not only small crops, but also affecting other plant variations that are vital to Australia's ecosystem.

That valuable information is something Mr Magarey learned while growing up on an orchard in the Adelaide Hills, which gave him the necessary knowledge to understand, at first, how the weather could affect different crops, and their ability to manage it.

He went on to study Plant Pathology at Adelaide University, and moved to the Riverland in 1976 to pursue a career within the region. Since then, he has become one of Australia's best plant pathologists, working with private and public agencies towards improving the life expectancy of crops.

"I believe the Lord wanted me to be here, so I have enjoyed it all, especially working with the grape industry, which is to be complimented for their adoptive approach," Mr Magarey said.

FAST FACTS

- 45+ years in plant pathology
- Founder of GrowCare system
- Expert in Downy & Powdery Mildew, Phytophthora, and more

DOWNY MILDEW

POWDERY MILDEW

PHYTOPHTHORA

The influence of most diseases is controlled by weather conditions...

"The attitudes have changed with new machinery, and they learned about it, they inquired about it, and we've worked together as a team.

"For effectively 30 years, the Riverland has been leading the way in Australian viticulture for disease control measures using systems like GrowCare.

"The growers' attitudes have changed as they've seen it working, it's a gradual process, but, they changed, adopted, developed and helped advance the whole system."

Mr Magarey said "the influence of most diseases is controlled by weather conditions, and diseases, like downy mildew, can spread if you have a certain amount of rain, for a certain period of time."

"The rain spray and moisture will increase the disease's ability to grow, germinate and spread within the soil, creating new spores in other plants," he said.

"For downy mildew, they release a spore called swimming spore, or zoospore."

"Zoospores need rain splash to move around and stay, in aerosol form, within 10cm-to-20cm above the soil, and when they find a droplet of water, they float around into leaves and other plants. Having the right temperature and moisture conditions, for long enough, definitely helps them to survive."

Mr Magarey said powdery mildew is less dependent on weather, so it can become a more-common disease, especially in grape vines, but the one that can seriously affect these types of plants is downy mildew.

"Downy mildew used to be a big issue in grapes when I came to the Riverland in 1976, as it wasn't very well known," Mr Magarey said.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 26

Downy mildew can grow in any local plant, but Peter's research has developed a system to understand how to identify it, before it spreads into other native plants.

"Even though it was introduced in 1917, the conditions that actually controlled the disease weren't really known, and during the big droughts and dust storms of the 1940s, the disease got a head start.

"Between the 1950s and 1970s the disease spread across Australia, with weather conditions being favourable, it raised awareness with farmers who asked themselves, what can we do?"

At the time, Mr Magarey started working on the epidemiology of downy mildew, alongside researchers from Europe and the United States, trying to understand how the disease spread according to different weather conditions, and how the Australian environment affected its capability to grow.

"From that research, we developed a wonderful international team that worked on downy mildew, getting to important conclusions about when not to spray for the disease, or when to actually spray for it. We did that by understanding its epidemiology and how it behaved with our changing climate.

"We designed a new revolutionary system for downy mildew control called GrowCare, a computer data-based platform to advise growers when to spray or not, depending on data collected across the regions.

"GrowCare, which we still use today, saved the farming industry a lot of money, especially the grape industry, because it gives farmers real-time data and alerts about certain diseases affecting the region, and advises them about the need of spraying their vineyards.

"With downy mildew on grapes, we knew about the conditions under which it spreads and built a simulator of disease, (GrowCare), where we put in the weather data, process it through the black box, and deliver an outcome in terms of disease risk by virtue of how favourable were the conditions.

"On that outcome, we would know how to spray, or when to spray and when not to."

When it comes to management and prevention of diseases, experts controlling the microclimate within the crops is of vital importance to maintain healthy vines and almond trees.

"With almonds, controlling soil moisture and time between drying periods, gives growers the capacity to manage their crops in a chemical-free environment," Mr Magarey said.

"It's more a management issue rather than a chemical treatment

"With diseases like downy mildew on grapes, managing the microclimate can become difficult, because the canopies are too close to each other, usually only about half a meter wide, or three-quarters of a meter.

"In Australia, we grow huge canopies because we've got water and we have soil temperature, alongside strong roots into good soil, making the huge hedge running down the rows very conducive to spreading the disease.

"Powdery mildew is killed off by UV light, and the more ultraviolet light you can get into the inner parts of the canopy, the better, because the humidity is higher when the canopy closes over and the UV kills the spores.

"It is a narrow space, so you don't get sunlight in, and air flow is restricted, which creates a good condition for downy mildew to grow.

"This is done because we need heat protection, but it can disrupt disease management."

"On one hand, we want to increase the airflow between the canopies, but on the other hand we need shading. You can't have shading without reduced airflow."

Mr Magarey said that soil can be an issue, depending on what type of disease is more prone to grow in a specific type of crop.

"Let's take for example, phytophthora on almonds, it can be devastating, but the question is, how does it become devastating?" Mr Magarey said.

"With phytophthora, the levels of the disease in the soil are really important, and they need to be measured, but also the controlling factor may be not whether or not the disease is in the soil or the organisms in the soil, but whether the conditions are right for the disease to spread.

"Soil health is an issue, but it is soil management in the context of irrigation, meaning how often the disease was moist or wet, having not let the soil dry out by controlling my irrigation timing.

"If growers know their irrigation timing, they can control moisture and have drier periods, or create a wet period, it can be a thin line."

> ***It's a bushfire analogy, but if you can kick the disease and stop it right from the beginning with your foot, then you stop the whole disease happening.***

"If we go back in history, Australia lost almost $80m in the 1980s due to diseases and lack of soil management, but in the recent years, that number has been reduced to around $2m per year on average.

"Growers have learned that they must control where and when they spray their crops, in order to manage the canopies and managing disease control by knowing the weather conditions.

"That is where GrowCare made a change in the Australian farming industry. We didn't change the weather, we just got organised and started monitoring it."

GrowCare still continues to provide valuable information about the current and historic weather conditions across stations all over Australia, by monitoring data such as moisture, rainfall, and droplets.

"The disease simulator we built in the 1980s was not adopted by other regions, but this approach was adopted by the Riverland," Mr Magarey said.

"Within this system, there is a disease simulator, which can model downy mildew based off data collected around the network of weather stations around the area.

"They now automatically download the data, process it about every half hour, sometimes a couple of hours depending on the season.

"Back then, we had to type the information, but now everything is automated. The information is automatically stored and processed, and a disease risk statement and alert are sent out within two minutes of it occurring in a vineyard.

"That alert arrives at your phone, and it's up to the grower to decide if there is a need to spray, whether a downy mildew or an infection condition has been met."

Mr Magarey said that controlling diseases is a matter of prevention rather than reaction, being the sooner you act on a possible infection, the long-term financial benefits will be greater.

"It's a bushfire analogy, but if you can kick the disease and stop it right from the beginning with your foot, then you stop the whole disease happening," Mr Magarey said.

"If growers act when the disease has just been detected and it hasn't spread, it can be controlled and eradicated.

"If you wait until other conditions are met, or perhaps want to wait because of financial reasons, the outcome can become difficult if the disease has the right conditions to spread fast around a vineyard.

"Based on applying the right chemicals when you need them and the right timing, is the minimalistic approach, but can be the right one."

AG NEWS

2025 cereal and pulse disease guides out now

VICTORIAN Mallee grain growers can now access their disease management plans for this season's winter crops, with a new guide containing the latest disease information.

Agriculture Victoria's recently released the 2025 cereal and pulse disease guides, in collaboration with the Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC), ranking varieties for disease susceptibility and providing advice on reducing disease risk.

The guides are pivotal for both new and commonly grown grains in Australia, such as wheat, barley, oats, lentil, field pea, broad bean and chickpea.

Agriculture Victoria plant pathology research leader Joshua Fanning said "the guides will help growers make seasonally informed decisions around disease management".

"Despite less disease observed during 2024, any paddocks with stubble remaining that had disease previously, will increase the risk," Mr Fanning said.

"Proactively managing disease in 2025 will be very important as seasonal conditions will determine the severity of disease.

"Wide-spread use of susceptible varieties will increase the risk if conditions are favourable for disease development.

"(PREDICTA B) testing prior to sowing will identify paddocks at risk of soil-borne disease and help growers choose less-susceptible varieties."

Agriculture Victoria cereal pathologist Hari Dadu said fungicide resistance is an increasing issue, particularly in wheat and barley.

"During the 2024 season net form net blotch (NFNB) showed wide-spread resistance to fungicide resistance, particularly fluxapyroxad," Mr Dadu said.

"The disease guide will assist in selecting varieties with resistance to various diseases, reducing the need for fungicide applications and supporting better fungicide resistance management."

The disease ratings in the guides are based on the current understanding of recent diseases present not only in Victoria, but all over Australia, and on recent data collected for expert plant pathologists who work around the country, with support from the GRDC.

The 2025 Cereal Disease Guide and 2025 Pulse Disease Guide are available on the Agriculture Victoria website (agriculture.vic.gov.au/biosecurity/plant-diseases/grain-pulses-and-cerealdiseases).

INDUSTRY EXPERT UPDATE

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

Tim Grieger

Summerfruit SA executive manager

What stage of development are we at for stone fruit varieties in the Riverland?

Right now, April, we are at leaf drop with trees going into dormancy. In autumn growers should have applied their post-harvest fertiliser, traditionally based on leaf analysis or based on historical yield and fruit removal. Growers need to be applying urea or zinc sulphate to remove leaves to ensure there are no carry over diseases from summer. A copper is also applied to protect against leaf curl for next year.

In winter we will be at the dormant stage, where traditionally we prune the trees back further than what we would have already done during spring and summer. In late winter we also apply an oil and follow up with a copper spray as trees come out of dormancy.

Is there confidence around the volume and quality of fruit at this stage?

Yes, most crops last year were ok, albeit some reports of lower than normal apricot yields. If the nutritional and fertiliser requirements of the tree were maintained then I would expect similar if not better crops coming into the next season. Fruit quality will depend on whether growers have applied enough irrigation during the year and on what the weather patterns throw at us over the next few months.

Is there expected to be any increases on overall yields compared to the previous season?

From a yield perspective it will depend on the accumulation of 'chill' If it is a warm winter, chill may be an issue on crop yield and quality. In the absence of rain, irrigation should be maintained. To mitigate against low chill, growers should have a high mid-row cover crop to trap in the cold air temperature.

Has there been any challenges in transporting stone fruit to overseas markets?

Fruit fly maintains as a challenge to export markets but there are options open to growers. Each country has strict access and in some cases chemical requirements which growers need to be aware of.

What are the keys for healthy trees heading into the winter?

Healthy buds on clean limbs, free of old fruit and dead wood. Maintain the hygiene in the orchard before spring to avoid diseases becoming an issue during harvest.






Adrian Hoffmann

Wine Grape Council of SA Region Two chair

Did the Barossa experience an early vintage this year?

We definitely had an earlier vintage, with a lighter crop and smaller yields. The drier conditions brought vintage forward about two-and-a-bit weeks earlier for most people.

Those growers with water produced fairly good yields, and I think the quality was exceptional across the board. Generally I call it a winemakers' year, because the yields are a little bit lower, but the concentration of the fruit is higher up as well.

I think there will be some really good parcels of wine, especially for winemakers that had a bit of patience.

What was the decrease in tonnage like for this season?

Tonnage is definitely down. I was about 35 per cent down on average, and I know a lot of growers were down further than that. The dryness of the season impacted on the yields just as equally as some of the frost events as well.

How did dry conditions over the summer impact on vines?

There was smaller-than-normal canopy. The vines are surprisingly resilient though, and I was quite surprised how well they were hanging onto leaves. There was small bunches and berries though, and extraction rate for wineries was lower too. You saw a little bit more tannin, and a bit more of the fruit flavours come through as well.

Will this be a good year for the classic Barossa full-bodied shiraz?

For me it's going to be very-much classic Barossa shiraz being made this year. For the growers that left their fruit on the vines a little longer, you can see the benefit of that coming through.

Exports to China seem to be recovering well?

The initial pipeline has been filled, and we're now seeing a little bit more strengthening in that market. The Chinese market has changed quite a bit. It was always going to be good to get back in, but for us it's about building on that market, and re-forging those relationships that were there previously.

The initial hit was good, now it's a matter of them selling wines off the shelves, and for Australian producers not to get too over-anxious in the Chinese market, to make sure we're looking at all markets.

What impacts are low rainfall figures having on wine grape growers?

At the moment it's just a reduction in yield, in the fact the vines are working hard. If we don't end up with a good season this year, I know a few growers tapping into bores again, and looking at the vineyards, and how much water is available for the coming season.

If we don't have a half-decent winter, I'll have to work out what blocks we have to manage for the coming season, and what blocks we might have to leave go a bit.

What factors are most important for vine health heading into dormancy?

For me it's basically nutrition. We finished vintage… but giving the vines a bit of water post-harvest, to make sure they are shutting down with reasonable nutrient levels, makes sure they have plenty of get-up-and-go for spring.

Mark Doecke

Citrus SA chair

Which citrus varieties are currently being harvested, and which will be harvested over the winter?

Growers are currently harvesting navel oranges called M7s. Within the next couple weeks we move on to navelinas, then Washington navels from mid-June on.

Are growers confident in the volume and quality of fruit at the moment?

Volumes are slowly increasing as plantings in the last 10 years come into production. SA citrus growers are the best in the world and know how to produce volumes with quality.

Will there continue to be an increase in total volumes compared to last year?

Apart from increasing volumes due to maturing trees, other factors affect production. Extreme weather is the main factor affecting continued increases in production. Also the uncertainty of Labor's water buybacks has an impact on any increases in production in the future.

Are overseas tariffs expected to impact exports of Australian citrus?

We just don't know what effect tariffs will have on our industry. The USA is one of our markets, so we will have to wait a bit to gauge the impact of recent USA decisions. Other markets continue to appreciate the quality fruit we produce.

Is ongoing water allocation security a benefit this year?

I appreciate the recent 100 per cent allocation announcement, but notice the dam levels receding, and prayers for some rain in our state and the catchments would be a good idea.

What factors are most important for tree health at this time of year?

With the growing season virtually over, it's a good time to review how our growing systems worked over summer. Was the irrigation reliable? Did insect monitoring pay off? It's a good time for any maintenance issues to be addressed.

THE TRUCK FACTORY

24HR VEHICLE RECOVERY

- Truck Towing
- Truck Repairs
- Accident Recoveries

SMASH REPAIR SPECIALIST

24/7 ANYTIME, ANYWHERE!

PHONE 8280 8231

Lot 6 Angle Vale Crescent, Burton

www.thetruckfactory.com.au | admin@thetruckfactory.com.au

AHVRA Australian Heavy Vehicle Repairers Association

MGA Insurance Brokers Pty Ltd

PPG

SARTA South Australian Road Transport Association

LRTASA

TS6790

PHOTO: Supplied

The iconic and ongoing Whistler journey

WORDS BEVAN JONES

IN the heart of the Barossa Valley and tucked away along the iconic Seppeltsfield Road, among the rolling vineyards, sits a beautiful winery with a rich family history that goes back four generations.

That winery is Whistler Wines, a family run gem with a flair for laid-back charm and thoughtful sustainability.

Founded by the Pfeiffer family, the roots of Whistler's (German for Pfeiffer) run deep and go all the way back for four generations. Kelsey and Sam Pfeiffer are the current custodians of the Whistler brand, purchasing the land and the business from Sam's parents, Martin and Sally, in 2021.

It is an estate winery using organic and biodynamic practices in the vineyard, and minimal intervention in their winemaking.

What makes it even more of a coincidence is that new co-owner of Whistler Wines, Kelsey, grew up in Vancouver and spent many years skiing during her childhood at the resort town of Whistler.

Kelsey and husband Sam met in Brisbane several years ago and lived there for five years before moving to Vancouver where they got married.

The couple decided to move back to South Australia, and now have two young children and live in Tanunda only a few minutes away from Whistler Wines. They are grateful they have been able to continue the family business.

The Pfeiffer grape-growing journey began with Albert Heinrich Pfeiffer, who owned a vineyard in the Riverland region of South Australia.

He would spend many hours in the vines with his son, Hubert, working the vineyard in bare feet with before harvesting the grapes and selling them to local producers.

Hubert Irving Pfeiffer soon followed in his father's footsteps, moving his family to a vineyard in Loxton.

He enjoyed wandering through the vines with his son, Martin, and training both the vines and his young pupil, just as his father before him.

In 1982, Martin and Sally Pfeiffer purchased Whistler's Heysen Estate property.

Initially, the land was used for crop and sheep farming, while Martin ran Penfold's vineyards.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 32

Bold shiraz wines have long been a staple of Whistler's range. PHOTO: Bevan Jones

Over the next 15 years, 3000 trees were hand planted by the family, designating the future vineyard blocks.

In 1994, shiraz cuttings from the famous Penfolds 'Grange' vineyard (a Kalimna 3C clone) were planted, followed by semillon.

A few years later the first Whistler shiraz off the Heysen Estate vineyard went into bottles, and so the Whistler Wines dream began.

In the early 2000s Whistler Wines gained recognition after winning multiple awards, including Best White Wine in Show for the 2000 Estate Semillon at the Barossa Wine Show, and World's Top 10 Shiraz, for the 2006 Estate Shiraz, from Winestate Awards, in 2009.

In 2013, the next generation of Pfeiffer's became involved, and so began the introduction of organic and biodynamic practices at the Heysen Estate vineyards that still remain today.

In 2021, Martin and Sally, retired, and Sam and Kelsey continued the rich family journey by taking over the business.

They continue to farm organically with a focus on producing premium, hand crafted and estate-grown wines.

They also have a focus on soil health, native vegetation and minimal intervention.

Ms Pfeiffer said it was their authenticity that set them apart from others.

"We try not just to have authenticity with our wines, but the experience for the guests as well that visit Whistler," she said.

"It's about grabbing a glass of wine and finding a spot under one of the trees and enjoying the views of both native scrub and vineyards. It's a place to relax.

"The vineyard is run using organic and biodynamic practices, with an emphasis on soil health, native vegetation, and minimal intervention.

"We don't use synthetic chemicals, we're about working with nature, not against it. We have a small-scale, handcrafted approach with minimal-intervention winemaking, meaning there are minimal additions to our wines, (and) we live and breathe that ethos.

"The vineyard is its own ecosystem, and we try to respect that as much as possible."

Ms Pfeiffer said they had good relationships with other winemakers in the Barossa.

"Something the Barossa does well is that there is a lot of collaboration between winemakers which is fantastic," she said.

"Our winemaker, Michael J Corbett, who has his own brand, Vanguardist Wines, shared a group of his customers with us just last weekend so they could experience two places on their trip.

"Michael has also brought with him his experience from New Zealand and France, and his passion in particular for French wines has been very beneficial.

"He is meticulous to his craft and his depth and breadth of knowledge is masterful. He lives and breathes winemaking, we are very lucky to have him.

"He has also helped out with our vineyard redevelopment and been in every meeting, we greatly value his input."

As SA deals with drought conditions never seen before, Ms Pfeiffer said the lack of rainfall had affected them as well.

"Our yields have been impacted — we've had only half the average winter groundwater this year," she said.

"Fortunately, we're part of a water scheme that's given us access to additional water, which has helped us compensate for the lack of rainfall last winter.

"We also experienced some frost events that affected us to a degree, but that's farming — so much of it is beyond our control."

"The great thing about a vintage like this is that you get more concentrated berries with dry conditions.

"In 2023, we had a wet year and higher yields. That's farming. We focus on crafting the best wines possible to reflect the character of the vintage.

"We're also trying to train the vines to be less reliant on water, as part of our commitment to sustainability."

Ms Pfeiffer said the best-selling wine in their cellar door was their Fruit Tingle – Frizzante, which made up 30 per cent of their sales and "was a real surprise packet".

"Fruit Tingle is very popular, it's a spritzy white blend and it's also a lower alcohol percentage at only 9 per cent," she said.

"It's a bit like a cider in that it's suited to people who enjoy a little sweetness, but it's not as sweet as a Moscato so it works well for people like myself that drink dry white wine. After long event days it's my go-to knock-off wine."

The blend of tradition, innovation and a laid-back charm has put Whistler Wines on the map and makes it the perfect place to pop in and enjoy a glass of their award-winning wine.

Their cellar door is nestled among native bushland and wildlife and is a perfect picnic spot where kids can roam freely on the lawn, and guests can taste the delicious wine.

They also have a build-your-own platter food option, which is filled with authentic local produce. Visit their Cellar Door seven days a week, from 10:30am to 5pm.

Kelsey Pfeiffer, alongside husband Sam, are writing the current chapter in the historic story of Whistler Wines. PHOTOS: Bevan Jones

THE HISTORY OF WHISTLER

1982

Martin & Sally purchase Whistler's Heysen Estate property. Initially, the land was used for crop & sheep farming, while Martin ran Penfold's vineyards. Over the next 15 years 3000 trees were hand planted by the family, designating the future vineyard blocks.

1994

Shiraz cuttings from the famous Penfolds 'Grange' vineyard (the Kalimna 3C clone) are planted, followed by semillon a few years later.

1997

The first Whistler shiraz off the Heysen Estate vineyard goes to bottle and the Whistler Wines dream begins.

2000's

Whistler Wines gains recognition after winning multiple awards including "Best White Wine in Show" for the 2000 Estate Semillon at the Barossa Wine Show and "World's Top 10 Shiraz" for the 2006 Estate Shiraz from Winestate Awards in 2009.

2013

The "Next Gen" get involved and introduce organic and biodynamic practices in the Heysen Estate Vineyards.

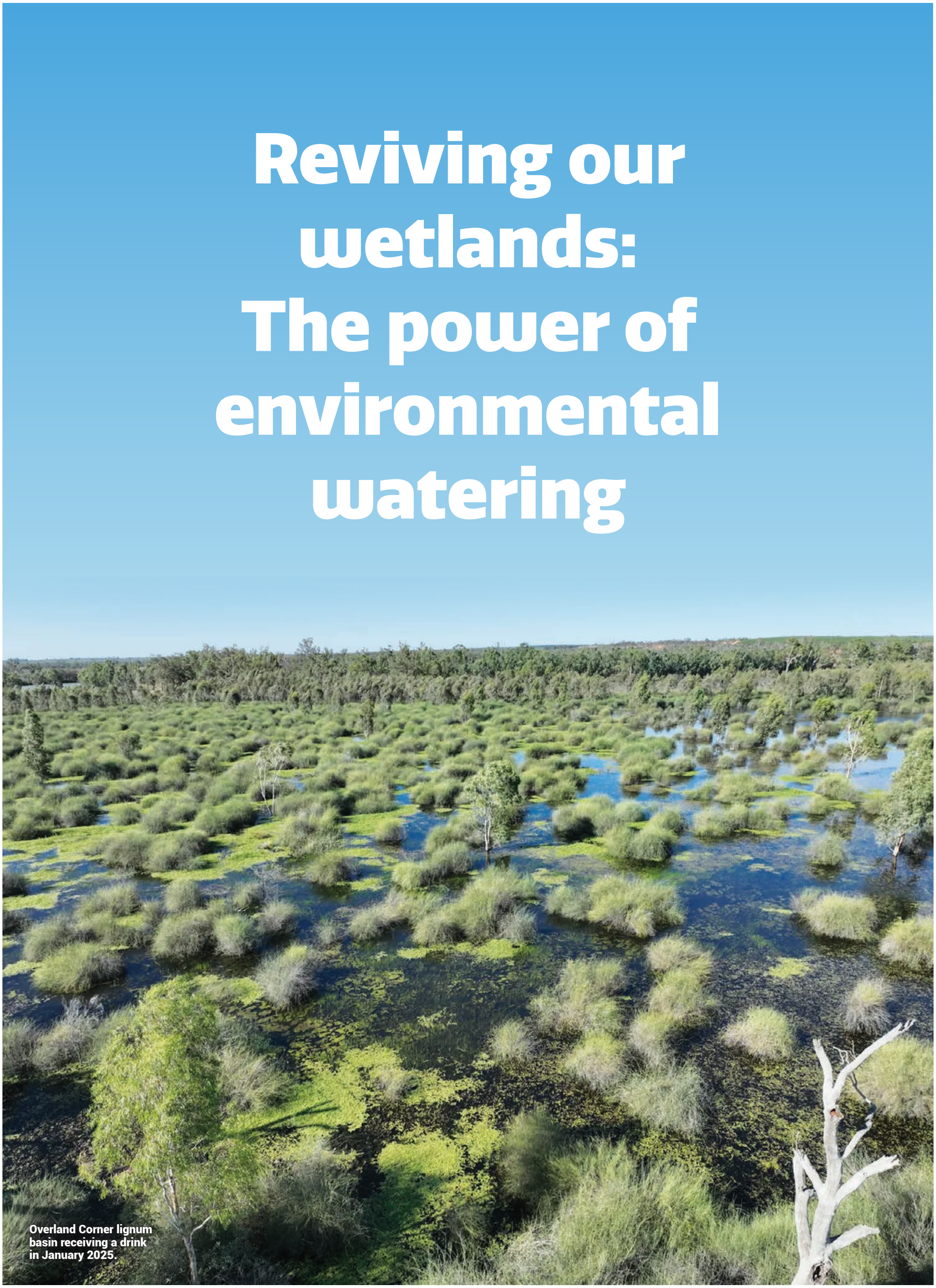
2020

Whistler Wines is named "Best Small Cellar Door" in the Barossa Valley by GT Wine Magazine. Martin and Sally retire as son Sam Pfeiffer with his wife Kelsey take on the business.

2024

Sam and Kelsey Pfeiffer continue to farm organically with a focus on producing premium, hand crafted and estate grown wines.

Reviving our wetlands: The power of environmental watering



Overland Corner lignum basin receiving a drink in January 2025.

The benefits of this year's environmental watering efforts will extend well beyond 2025.

Lush aquatic vegetation responding to environmental water.

This past summer, the Murraylands and Riverland Landscape Board (MRLB) has made a significant impact by delivering a record amount of environmental water to 41 wetlands across the region – enough to fill nearly 6800 Olympic-sized swimming pools.

This is the largest environmental watering event our region has ever undertaken – bringing vital support to more wetlands and native species than ever before.

This milestone builds on more than two decades of dedicated wetland management and conservation efforts along South Australia's Murray River.

The MRLB supports the management of more than 85 managed wetland complexes, partnering with landholders, First Nations communities, volunteers, researchers, non-for-profit organisations, businesses and government agencies to ensure these vital habitats thrive for future generations.

How is environmental water delivered?

Delivering environmental water can be challenging and costly. Most of the time, diesel pumps are required to move water from the river channel into wetland sites. Pumps are set up with suction lines that reach the river and outflow lines directing the water into the wetland. In some cases, environmental water can be delivered through gravity if a natural flow path is available.

Bringing wetlands to life

Carefully managing water delivery supports:

- **Native plants** such as River red gums and black box trees, but also understorey and aquatic vegetation that provide critical habitat for an expansive array of animals and invertebrates.
- **Threatened species** including the Southern bell frog, regent parrot, and Murray hardyhead.
- **Bird life** by providing vital habitat for waterbirds and migratory shorebirds.
- **Community connections** with wetlands playing a significant role in supporting First Nations cultural values and fostering strong ties within local communities.

A brighter future for our wetlands.

The benefits of this year's environmental watering efforts will extend well beyond 2025. Restoring natural cycles and enhancing wetland health prevents the loss of ecosystems that will continue to provide habitat for native species, support biodiversity, and enrich our communities for generations to come.

Community Collaboration

This program would be impossible without the support of project partners:

- State and federal water holders including the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder and Department for Environment and Water.
- Millewa Pumping Pty Ltd as pumping partner, mobilising pumps across the landscape to deliver water to many sites.
- The dedication and support of over 200 landholders and volunteers who play an integral role in maintaining and monitoring these vital ecosystems, collaborative advice and on-ground support from our First Nations partners, and many non-for-profit groups, councils and associations.

Environmental watering provides an abundance of habitat and food for wetland birds.

Drought conditions across the state remain a high concern for the state's farmers. PHOTOS: supplied

Rabobank regional manager for South Australia Roger Matthews.

South Australian farmers hang hopes on better year ahead

A MAJOR national industry report has shown South Australia's primary producers – including those in the Mallee, Mid North and Riverland – have increased confidence about 2025's agricultural potential.

Australian farmers have entered the year with renewed optimism and nowhere was this more evident than in South Australia, where sentiment rallied strongly.

Although SA recorded the largest turnaround in confidence across the nation – with farmers in the state now the most optimistic in Australia about prospects for the year ahead – concerns about the impacts of recent poor seasonal conditions were still very evident in the sector.

The quarter one Rabobank Rural Confidence Survey, released recently, saw SA farmers confidence return to positive territory – with more farmers anticipating conditions will improve than worsen in the coming 12 months – rebounding from a net -32 per cent in the December survey, to now sit at 25 per cent.

This is the highest level of farm sentiment recorded in the state since September 2021, with 38 per cent of farmers anticipating the agricultural economy will improve in the coming 12 months, up from 18 per cent with that view in the previous quarter.

After grappling with very-dry weather in a number of regions in 2024, this quarter, 56 per cent of the state's farmers cited beneficial seasonal conditions as having a positive impact on the outlook of the agricultural economy, up from 46 per cent the previous quarter. Just over a quarter (27 per cent) were also optimistic about rising commodity prices.

The state's grain growers were found to be the most positive about their prospects for the year ahead, although beef and sheep producer confidence also rose strongly, propped up by stable and favourable market conditions on the cards.

However, Rabobank regional manager for South Australia Roger Matthews said it was "telling" the number of farmers who expect little change to current conditions had increased, up from 30 per cent last quarter, to 42 per cent.

"SA farmers faced very-challenging conditions during 2024, with a very-late seasonal break, and minimal rain during the growing season, compounded by significant frost events and topped off by some detrimental falls of rain during harvest," Mr Matthews said.

"So, when 42 per cent of our farmers say they expect the status quo to continue, this reflects that their confidence has already taken a hit, and they don't anticipate things to change.

"However, it is encouraging to see that the dial has shifted upwards, with only 13 per cent of SA farmers expecting conditions to deteriorate – well down from more than half who held this negative outlook at the end of last year."

The renewed optimism felt across the state also reflects the long-term trend of SA farmers entering the new year with confidence, he said.

"This reflects the timing of the first-quarter survey period, ahead of the critical seasonal break and before grain growers start sowing their winter crops," Mr Matthews said.

Drought concerns

As farmers emerge from summer and look to the year ahead, he said, it was unsurprising that seasonal conditions continue to play heavily on their minds.

Drought remained the leading cause for worry, however that concern eased slightly – nominated by 63 per cent, back from 70 per cent in the previous quarter.

"This time of year is naturally a dry period in SA, so although farmers are looking ahead to the coming season with optimism, there is a genuine concern – especially among the state's grain growers – about depleted sub-soil moisture,' Mr Matthews said.

"Last year, the yields SA grain growers managed to produce on historically-low rainfall were nothing short of amazing – but they were able to draw on soil moisture reserves from out-of-season rainfall in November/ December 2023, and January 2024.

"This year, growers are heading into planting with nothing in the tank in terms of sub-soil moisture. We can expect to see some fine-tuning of cropping programs in response, for example potentially less canola in the rotation."

Mr Matthews said, on the upside, the lack of summer rain had reduced the need for summer spraying.

"In addition to reducing their input costs, growers now have a good stock of knockdown herbicides and, as a result of reduced requirements last year, fertiliser inventory in reserve on-farm for the year ahead," he said

"We often learn most through adversity and if there was a positive of 2024, we now have a whole generation of farm managers who experienced their toughest year ever, and they are now equipped with insights to guide management decisions into the future."

Economic concerns showed some easing this quarter. SA farmers were less worried about falling commodity prices – nominated by 18 per cent, back from 29 per cent last quarter – and rising input costs – 17 per cent, back from 33 per cent.

"With lambing rates down in SA, as a result of wide-spread destocking during the drought or poorer condition on ewes, sheep producers are positive about market signals, which indicate some upside to prices in response to the reduction in lamb volumes," Mr Matthews said.

Commodities

Red meat producers with sheep in their system were found to be the most confident about the positive impact of improved commodity prices for the year ahead.

For beef producers, their optimism was largely driven by expectations of

stable prices in 2025, underpinned by domestic and global factors.

The state's milk producers were also optimistic about supply and demand, with dairy farm margins poised to benefit from improving farmgate prices through 2025, high commodity returns and a softer currency.

Although concerns about the impact of overseas markets/economies remained stable this quarter at 19 per cent, there was increased worry in SA about the impact from government intervention/policies – 19 per cent, up from 10 per cent last quarter – and the threat to live export – 15 per cent, up from eight per cent.

The survey period captured some optimism around lowered interest rates, with an increase in SA farmers thinking this will be a factor for improved economic conditions for the year ahead – 13 per cent, up from four per cent last year.

In the wake of the US elections, concerns about tariffs and President Donald Trump emerged as a slight concern for SA farmers.

Investment and income

Although there was a rebound in positive farmer sentiment in the state, investment appetite failed to follow, with just 18 per cent of SA farmers intending to increase their investment in the year ahead – back from 26 per cent with that intention in December. However, around two-thirds of SA farmers expect to maintain investment at current levels – 65 per cent, up from 48 per cent – and fewer plan on winding-back spending.

Across the board, 60 per cent of SA farmers intend to spend more on on-farm infrastructure such as fences, silos and yards, up from 54 per cent, a third plan to adopt new technologies, stable quarter-on-quarter, and there is also a renewed focus on irrigation/water infrastructure – 23 per cent, up from 16 per cent – and new plant/machinery – 20 per cent, up from 14 per cent.

"This increased interest in water infrastructure reflects SA farmers' desire for water security, as well as uptake of drought infrastructure rebates to offset costs of upgrading pipes, tanks and troughs," Mr Matthews said.

The more optimistic outlook for seasonal conditions also influenced investment intentions around herd/flock expansions – at the end of 2024, only 12 per cent of the state's farmers expected to increase livestock numbers. This quarter, 16 per cent plan to increase numbers this year.

"This reflects potential restocking by those who reduced numbers last year, and an expectation of improved feed availability this year," Mr Matthews said.

There was a small increase in the number of SA farmers who hold expansionary intentions via property purchase – 15 per cent, up from 12 per cent. Grain growers were the most likely to invest in new farmland over the next 12 months.

"SA farmers remain reluctant to take on expansion at the moment and we're not seeing much depth in the rural property market," Mr Matthews said.

"There are fewer transactions and buyers are far more discerning, meaning rural properties are spending more time on market."

In line with the surge in confidence levels, on-farm income expectations increased to the highest level since December 2022, with three times as many SA respondents – 39 per cent, up from 13 per cent – expecting their gross farm incomes to increase in the year ahead, while those who expected their income to decline nearly halved – 27 per cent, down from 60 per cent last quarter.

South Australian sheep producers were the most bullish about their income projects, with 45 per cent expecting their income to increase over the next 12 months, up from just nine per cent at the end of last year.

A comprehensive monitor of outlook and sentiment in Australian rural industries, the Rabobank Rural Confidence Survey questions an average of 1000 primary producers across a wide range of commodities and geographical areas throughout Australia on a quarterly basis.

The most robust study of its type in Australia, the Rabobank Rural Confidence Survey has been conducted since 2000 by an independent research organisation. The next results are scheduled for release in June 2025.

Results at a glance:

- **South Australian rural confidence rebounded this quarter, but farmers' optimism was tempered by recognition conditions can't get much worse.**
- **Seasonal conditions remain the leading cause for concern.**
- **SA grain growers were the most optimistic about what the year ahead will hold in store.**

Winter gardening in the Riverland: The best fruits and veggies to grow

THE Riverland, known for its Mediterranean climate, fertile soils, and strong agricultural heritage, offers a unique opportunity for winter gardening. While the colder months bring cooler temperatures and shorter days, they also present ideal conditions for a wide variety of vegetables – and even a few hardy fruits. With careful planning and knowledge of the region's climate, you can keep your garden thriving throughout winter and enjoy fresh produce straight from the soil.

Climate overview: why winter works in the Riverland

Riverland winters are generally mild compared to many other parts of Australia. Daytime temperatures hover around 15C to 20C, while nights can dip as low as 2C to 5C. This makes the season perfect for cool-weather crops that would otherwise bolt or struggle in the summer heat. The area's relatively low rainfall during winter also means gardeners must be mindful of irrigation, but it allows for fewer fungal issues than more humid regions.

BEST WINTER VEGETABLES TO GROW

BROCCOLI

Broccoli thrives in the Riverland's cool winters. It prefers well-drained soil and regular watering to develop full, tender heads. Sow seeds in late autumn or early winter for a steady harvest through the colder months. Broccoli is not only nutritious, but also relatively pest-resistant in winter.

CAULIFLOWER

Closely related to broccoli, cauliflower also enjoys cool temperatures but is slightly more sensitive to fluctuations. Keep conditions consistent and avoid overwatering. Harvest the white curds before they open up too much, typically 10 to 12 weeks after sowing.

CABBAGE

Cabbage is another winter classic. Green, red, and savoy varieties all do well in the Riverland's winter climate. They can be sown directly or transplanted as seedlings, and with adequate spacing and a bit of patience, you'll have hearty heads ready by mid-to-late winter.

CARROTS

Carrots love loose, well-drained soil and cool temperatures. They take time to mature – usually 10 to 12 weeks – but the payoff is worth it. Cold temperatures enhance their natural sweetness.

SILVERBEET

A close relative of beetroot, silverbeet is a hardy, leafy green that doesn't mind the cold. It's an excellent alternative to spinach and provides a longer harvest window. Its colourful stems add visual appeal, and nutritional value to any dish.

SPINACH

Spinach is practically made for winter. It grows fast, can tolerate light frosts, and produces a continuous harvest if picked regularly. Baby spinach leaves can be harvested within a month of sowing, making it a quick and reliable green to have on hand.

GARLIC

Plant garlic cloves in early winter for a harvest in late spring or early summer. It requires very little maintenance once planted, but does need good drainage and a sunny spot. The Riverland's drier winters are particularly well suited to garlic, helping to prevent bulb rot.

BEETROOT

Beetroot is another root vegetable that fares well in cooler temperatures. It grows best in full sun and loose soil, and can be harvested at various stages, from baby beets to full-sized roots. Bonus: the leaves are edible too and can be used like spinach.

ONIONS

Onions are a long-term crop, but if planted in winter, you can expect a robust harvest by the following summer. They require regular weeding and sunlight, but little else. Choose shorter-day varieties for best results in the southern Australian climate.

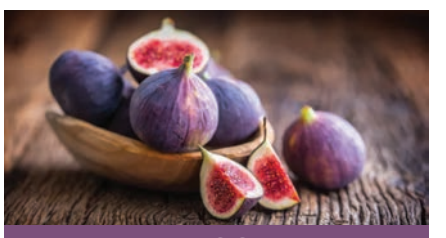
FRUITS THAT CAN HANDLE WINTER

POMEGRANATES

While pomegranates are typically harvested in autumn, winter is a great time to prune and care for these hardy trees. Their drought tolerance and adaptability to the Riverland's conditions make them an excellent long-term fruiting investment.

CITRUS

The Riverland is famous for its citrus, and many varieties ripen during winter. Mandarins often come into peak season from June, followed by lemons and navel oranges. Citrus trees thrive in full sun, and while they need protection from hard frost when young, mature trees are relatively resilient.



FIGS

Fig trees go dormant in winter, making it an ideal time for pruning and shaping. While not productive during the cold season, winter is critical for setting the stage for a fruitful spring and summer.

Tips for a thriving winter garden

1

Use mulch to retain moisture and regulate soil temperature.

2

Cover young seedlings with frost cloth on especially cold nights.

3

Water in the morning to reduce the risk of fungal diseases.

4

Companion plant with herbs like parsley and coriander, which also thrive in winter and can deter pests.

5

Rotate crops to prevent soil-borne diseases and improve soil health.

AG NEWS

Update on SAGIT-funded research into paraquat ahead of proposed restrictions

INITIAL results into research investigating crop topping at reduced rates of paraquat following the announcement of proposed restrictions on the widely used chemical by the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) have been released.

Current practices of crop topping in lentils and broad beans in SA typically involve the application of paraquat at rates of 800 millilitres per hectare or higher, applied just prior to crop maturity, followed by harvest between five-to-10 days later.

However, the APVMA's proposed changes of a reduction in the allowable rate of paraquat to 400ml/ha and increase in the minimum withholding period to 14 days means current practices will no longer be allowable.

The South Australian Grain Industry Trust (SAGIT) funded an out-of-session project in October 2024, managed by Senior Researcher with the University of Adelaide's Weed Science Group Jenna Malone. AgXtra were contracted to set up the field sites.

Prior to harvest 2024, four field trials were conducted, one in lentils and one in broad beans, at two different high and low-rainfall sites.

The trials assessed the efficacy of the reduced rate of paraquat in combination with, or replaced with, other products currently registered for use in crop topping in lentils and broad beans. The trials assessed time to brownout, pod drop, efficacy of ryegrass seed set control, and crop yield.

Preliminary results from the trials demonstrated that the proposed half rate of paraquat failed to achieve adequate levels of brownout, and that preliminary results based on visual assessment suggest that sufficient ryegrass control was also not achieved.

While no alternative treatments were as effective as the current full rate of paraquat, there were a few treatments that showed promising results. This included Paraquat 250 at the reduced rate of 0.4L/ha, with the addition of Sharpen at 34g/ha. The project also looked at some potential new products that are yet to be registered for this use pattern, including Nonanoic acid 525. This product was trialled at 3.5L/ha, with the addition of Paraquat 250 at 0.4L/ha.

Based on a comparison of the percentage of desiccation achieved 14 days after treatment, the treatment that was most effective as an alternative to the full rate of paraquat was Paraquat 250, at 0.4L/ha, plus Nonanoic acid 525 at 3.5L/ha.

The treatment of Paraquat 250 at 0.4L/ha, plus Sharpen at 34g/ha had similar efficacy, however, the percentage of desiccation achieved failed to be consistently higher than that of Paraquat 250 at 0.4L/ha alone.

There was no significant negative effect of any of the treatments on pod retention.

Pot trials focused on application timing and efficacy of ryegrass seed set control have been conducted. Seed viability testing will be conducted in April allowing time for dormancy to break.

Ryegrass plants harvested from the field trials will be tested for seed viability to assess the efficacy of the different treatments on ryegrass seed set control and whether timing of treatments has an effect on ryegrass seed set control.

Lentil and broad bean seeds retained from harvest will be assessed for viability to assess any effects the treatments may have on seed quality.

It is noted that these are preliminary results and final results from this research will be available at the end of the project, scheduled for 30 June 2025.

The APVMA's final decision on the use of paraquat is expected in the fourth quarter of 2025.

Shearwell Data

Livestock Systems

Tag well with Shearwell

eID & visual tags for sheep & goats

- **NLIS Accredited**
- **Our tags stay in!**
- Lightweight, one-piece design
- **FREE postage** when you order 1,500+ tags

A WORLD FIRST!

Metal Cattle NLIS Tag - **Designed for Retention**

- **NLIS Accredited**
- **Built-in eID chip**
- **Stainless steel**

NEW NLIS MET Tag

Supplied in strips of 20 tags

Breeder & post-breeder available

Introducing the NEW 2-piece BOS Tag range

With decades of experience, Shearwell have designed the BOS visual tag - durable ear tags with excellent retention rates

Speak to your local rep or visit our website to find out more!

Small • Large • XL • Button

Your local rep Dan Roe **0487 762 904** | **shearwell.com.au** | Call **1800 998 934**

UPGRADE YOUR OUTDOOR LIVING SPACE

FREE MEASURE AND QUOTE

STRATCO OUTBACK®

VERANDAHS • PATIOS • CARPORTS • SUNROOF

Trust Stratco Outback and Riverland Steel - two family owned South Australian businesses who have been delivering high quality projects for over 35 years.

Riverland STEEL

It's good to go to someone you know!

riverlandsteel.com.au | Old Sturt Highway, Berri | (08) 8582 2144