

VICTORIAN

LANDCARE

Summer 2021 Issue 80

& CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT



SMALL FARMS AND FOOD PRODUCTION

Growing murnong

Food and fibre in the Otways

Soil health underpins home food production



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Victorian Landcare and Catchment Management

SUMMER 2021 ISSUE 80

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Cover photograph

Xavier and Laura Meade with baby Molly on their free-range pork farm at Barongarook. Photograph by Tracey McRae.



From the Minister

Happy New Year to you all. I hope you enjoyed the festive season.

While public health measures to slow the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) impacted on many Landcare and environmental volunteer group meetings and on-ground activities last year, reports from our Regional Landcare Coordinators show that a great deal of environmental work was still completed.

In recognition of the continuing great work undertaken by Landcarers and environmental volunteers, the Victorian Government is pleased to continue to support the Landcare community into 2021, with \$8.9 million for environmental volunteering and the Victorian Landcare Program announced in November in the Victorian Budget 2020-21.

This issue of the magazine is about small farms and food production. The breadth of articles shows that this sector is diverse, creative and adaptable.

Some producers who shared their stories reported that downtime during the pandemic gave them the opportunity to plan, trial more sustainable land management methods and develop new products.

The Central Otways Landcare Network identified a need for small and medium

producers to connect with their customers and the community.

The network created a biennial food and fibre showcase featuring guest speakers, workshops and demonstrations. The event brings the region's producers together to share information and get advice from experts.

Olive growers Rita Bikins and David Margetson from Pomonal in the Wimmera have created a successful paddock-to-plate business using organic farming practices. They have taken a holistic approach to sustainability by improving soil health, using environmentally sound packaging and reducing energy consumption.

On a smaller scale, retired research scientist Richard MacEwan shares his experience producing food on his property at Lockwood South, near Bendigo. The MacEwans grow a variety of herb and vegetable crops, and even make wine.

Farmer discussion groups are a great way for small producers on the Mornington Peninsula to share knowledge during challenging times. When local restaurants and wineries closed because of coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions, several growers from one discussion group pooled resources and found new markets for their produce.

As ever, I am inspired by the commitment of Landcarers and environmental volunteers to improving our environment and our communities. I look forward to hearing about your successes during 2021.

The Hon. Lily D'Ambrosio

Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change

Minister for Solar Homes

Environmental grants website

The Victorian Government is continuing support for our natural environment by funding multiple grant programs this year for environmental volunteering projects.

The details of these environmental grant programs will be available online.

For more information, visit environment.vic.gov.au/grants

2021-24 Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program

On 28 January 2021 applications will open for the 2021-24 Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program (VLFP), with applications to close on 18 March 2021. Landcare and environmental volunteer groups and networks can apply for VLFP funding to employ a Landcare facilitator from July 2021.

The guidelines and the application form will be available on the DELWP website when applications open. Go to www.environment.vic.gov.au/grants/vlfp

Additional information regarding the 2021-24 VLFP employment requirements and updated frequently

asked questions will also be available on the website.

For more information contact the Victorian Landcare Program staff at DELWP by email at landcare@delwp.vic.gov.au

From weeds to woodland – in five years

By Tim Trottier

Protecting remnant vegetation and restoring denuded areas has been a key aim of the whole farm plan at Geoff and Joan Anson's Barwon Ridge property in the Barrabool Hills, west of Geelong. As well as four hectares of vines, Barwon Ridge has a small flock of merino sheep and an orchard of heritage fruit trees.

Since 2000 remnant vegetation has been fenced off, shelter belts established, and bog plants and crayfish in a local creek protected from livestock.

In 2015 Geoff and Joan started the revegetation of 4.5 hectares of denuded paddock. They focused on indigenous species aiming to create something close to the natural bushland that once covered the area. Seed was sourced locally to ensure its provenance. Approximately 25 different species were planted.

Considerable thought was given to site design and planning. The Otway Agroforestry Network and consultant Steven Murphy provided advice. Species were grouped in different sized clumps according to their final form. A corridor of lower growing species was planted under a power line.

To make future management easier a number of rarer plants selected for seed collection (broad leafed sweet bursaria, white cypress pine, lightwood and silver banksia) were planted along the access tracks, together with spotted gum and red ironbark for logging.

Barrabool Hills Landcare Group, Geelong Landcare Network, family, friends, volunteer groups and Gordon TAFE students assisted with planting, with the TAFE also using the site in its training.

Life for the young plants has been tough. The soil is sandy over shallow limestone bedrock and the site has an average rainfall of 500mm. Even after ripping and weed control, losses in some areas were high. Several replants have been necessary over the past five years.

Snails and old pasture grasses including phalaris and sand rocket are ongoing threats. Some weeds are being sprayed and in other areas the growing trees are starting to keep the weeds under control.

As one target is achieved new challenges are being met. This year small plots of kangaroo grass were planted. Weeping grass is under propagation and other ground plants such as chocolate lily are being investigated. Trimming of the logging trees has also just started.

Wildlife returned quickly once the habitat became established. Blue tongue lizards

are breeding, kangaroos rest in the shade of the trees and the bird life has exploded. The homemade bee hotel has lodgers.

The site has brought countless hours of pleasure to everyone involved. Barwon Ridge won the 2019 Geelong Chamber of Commerce Clever, Creative and Sustainable Business Award for the sustainable whole farm approach to the vineyard and land management.

Geoff Anson said the site was a haven during the recent lockdown.

"One of the joys during the COVID-19 lockdown was our daily walk through lush stands of giant hop bush, yellow gum and wirilda wattle, while listening to the bird chorus and savouring the heady smell of the tree violets," Geoff said.

Joan agreed. "It's especially satisfying given that the area was a dry, weed-infested paddock just five years ago," she said.

Tim Trottier is Landcare Facilitator at Geelong Landcare Network. Tim's position is funded through the Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program. For more information email geelonglandcarenetwork@gmail.com



Preparing the site in 2015.



Joan Anson in the denuded paddock five years later. The foreground is trimmed spotted gum with mixed species to the rear.



Murnong tubers are flavoursome and highly nutritious.

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Under Aboriginal management murnong was widespread across grasslands and grassy woodlands of southern Australia, providing a staple food crop.
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Growing and transplanting murnong – a cultural and commercial crop

By Annette Peisley and Rebecca Peisley

A research project in East Gippsland has achieved significant results in increasing survival of murnong in restoration plantings. The results are encouraging for the production of this culturally significant species as a commercial crop.

Murnong or yam daisy (*Microseris walteri*), is a highly nutritious, summer-dormant, tuberous perennial herb.

Under Aboriginal management murnong was widespread across grasslands and grassy woodlands of southern Australia, providing a staple food crop. The introduction of grazing from livestock, rabbits and soil compaction due to western agriculture decimated murnong. It is now vulnerable and confined to small remnants. Bruce Pascoe's book *Dark Emu* is a good source of information on the cultivation of murnong by Aboriginal people.

The low germination success of field-sown seeds, low germinate seedling survival and low transplanted seedling survival in the first year of translocation have hindered its re-establishment in restoration plantings.

Annette Peisley and Rebecca Peisley conducted an independent research project from 2015 to 2017 to determine protocols for producing large, healthy murnong tubers in nursery conditions; identify the most suitable over-summer storage method of

these tubers; and determine if transplanting murnong tubers could increase survival compared to field-sowing seeds.

They found that dry-air after-ripened murnong seeds need to be sown in the nursery in autumn (March-April) to produce tubers. This is important to allow the plants enough time to complete flowering by early December before entering summer dormancy to prevent heat stress and allow tuber survival underground.

Applying fertiliser that contains phosphorous during seed sowing significantly increased tuber size and resulted in more flower seed heads per plant. The positive response of murnong to increased soil nutrition demonstrates how hand-tillage and fire under Aboriginal management increased nutrient cycling and provided nutrient flushes into the soil resulting in better murnong crops. It also suggests that murnong can survive in reclaimed agricultural restoration sites with permanently elevated levels of phosphorus.

The most successful over-summer storage method was storing dormant tubers in-situ in potting mix. These tubers had the highest regeneration percentage once transplanted into a restoration plot the following autumn, and went on to flower, produce seeds and survive to transition into summer dormancy. These new tubers can result in new plants

the following year and are an important part of reproduction and local spread of this species.

Transplanting dormant tubers was much more successful than field-sowing seeds. Significantly more tubers regenerated than seeds germinated in the restoration sites. The tubers also produced more leaves more quickly than seedlings, which made them better at competing with weeds. Most tubers flowered, produced healthy seeds and survived to transition into summer dormancy while all seedlings died before flowering.

Being able to produce large, healthy tubers makes murnong an attractive species for the emerging bushfood industry. The white tubers are nutritious and sweet tasting. They can be eaten raw or baked, mixed with other vegetables or turned into a paste for desserts. The leaves can also be used in salads.

The methods from this study can be reproduced using containers in home vegetable gardens, or scaled up for production on farms.

Dr Rebecca Peisley is a lecturer in the School of Environmental Sciences at Charles Sturt University. Annette Peisley has spent the last 15 years studying native plant foods in East Gippsland. For more information email alpeisley@skymesh.com.au

Showcasing food and fibre in the Otways

By Andrew Gray

In mid 2015 the Central Otway Landcare Network (COLN) wanted to find the best way to engage small to medium landholders across the Otways in more sustainable land management.

A landscape use and demographics study commissioned by the Corangamite CMA had revealed high land prices in the region due to good rainfall, soil fertility, recreation and tourism, including agri-tourism opportunities. The study highlighted the many small to medium farms in our Landcare area and predicted significant land ownership change in coming years.

Farmgate producers across the Otways are represented by several effective organisations like the Otway Harvest and the 12 Apostles Food Artisans. These organisations assist with marketing fruit and nut orchards, pork, beef, lamb and wool graziers, vegetables, viticulture, egg producers and value-added products like jams, preserves and olive oil.

A holistic approach to sustainable businesses

The traditional Landcare model involves working with landholders to achieve more sustainable land management through weed and pest control, revegetation, improving soil health, enhancing biodiversity, whole farm planning and building climate resilience. But the priority for many of the small to medium farmers in the Otways is building relationships with their community and

their customers. COLN decided to enter this space. We believed that by supporting producers with sales and marketing we could then engage them with sustainability across the whole operation.

We got underway in 2015 by building on an existing event, Eat Local Month. We ran a large finale for this program, bringing all of the Otway food and fibre producers together in one place. The event celebrated their contribution to an ecologically sustainable, just, accessible, community-based food and fibre system.

In 2016 the Otway Food and Fibre Showcase was born. The showcase is an opportunity to show people where their food comes from, how it's produced, and enable people to make the connection between food, community, environment and personal health.

The event is now biennial. Stallholder numbers have grown from 25 to 60, and visitor participation from several hundred to several thousand.

We run three stages for guest speakers, workshops and demonstrations over the day. The stages are coordinated by local producers who determine the topics

of interest. These have included fibre production, soil biology, regenerative farming, agroforestry, local food systems, accreditation systems, butchery, shearing demonstrations and features on local restaurants and cafés.

In 2017 Corangamite CMA assisted in publishing a celebratory booklet sharing producer stories. This was another gateway to practice change – as producers took stock of their land management issues in order to share their stories.

Through building relationships with producers we have been able to introduce them to land management services like whole farm planning, biodiversity and shelterbelts, indicator monitoring, soil biology, succession planning, cover cropping and water management.

From showcase to water efficiency

Xavier and Laura Meade run a small pasture-raised free-range pork business in Barongarook. Their 6.5-hectare property is on Boundary Creek, a tributary of the Barwon River – a high priority waterway for the Corangamite CMA.

Six years ago, Barongarook Pork identified the opportunity to scale up the business,

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We believed that by supporting producers with sales and marketing we could then engage them with sustainability across the whole operation.

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The dam at Barongarook Pork in 2017 before installation of the filter and revegetation.



The dam during a regenerative agriculture field trip in 2019.

but Xavier and Laura were concerned about the risks to the local landscape and waterway through erosion and increased nutrient loads escaping to the creek.

Barongarook Pork participated in the first Otway Food and Fibre Showcase in 2016. The Meades raised their farm impact concerns from increased livestock levels with their local Landcare facilitator.

The Landcare facilitator supported them in drafting an application for the Corangamite CMA's Our Catchments Our Communities, On-Farm Water Efficiencies program. They secured substantial funding to assist with farm design, water management and installing a whole farm solar system.

The farm design for Barongarook Pork was based on replicable and scaleable permaculture principles. The water is filtered through protected vegetated swales and a wetland filter to process water in the dam for recycling back to the header tank, then back to troughs and new wallows.

The section of Boundary Creek that flows through their property is now fenced and planted with native riparian species. The next stage of the transformation is to harness nutrient build up in the rotationally grazed paddocks by growing diverse cover crops for forage and green manure.

The family has also invested in another property where the same principles are applicable and has begun installing shelter belts in exposed areas of the landscape. This farm was featured on a field trip for

the 2019 From the Ground Up – Growing Regenerative Agriculture in Corangamite Conference.

Barongarook Pork sell their products by order to restaurants and occasionally at farmers' markets. The farm improvements are a great marketing story for the business.

Coordinating the Otway Food and Fibre Showcase has produced multiple positive outcomes for COLN. Many local farms have hosted their first farmgate sales and market stalls at the showcase. Interest in value-adding has strengthened with farmers meeting and working directly with local chefs and cooks and introducing new enterprises like free-range egg chooks to

their business. There has been an increase in landholders taking up family farm succession planning, cover cropping and soil biology programs. We also garnered huge support for our 2019 Growing Regenerative Agriculture conference.

COLN has found a new way to engage with its small and medium sized producers – testament to the creativity, strength and flexibility of the Landcare model.

Andrew Gray is Landcare Facilitator for Barongarook Landcare Group and Central Otway Landcare Network. Andrew's position is funded through the Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program. For more information email andygray@coln.org.au



Laura Meade on stage at the 2017 Otway Food and Fibre Showcase with a local butcher and chef.

Farms2Schools – connecting Melbourne kids with farmers

By Karen Thomas



Artwork by a student from Derinya Primary School after an online incursion with a Farms2Schools lamb producer.

It takes a lot to feed a growing city. Meeting the nutritional needs of Melbourne’s more than five million residents requires access to a wide variety of nutritious locally grown food. Farmers strive every day to produce sustainable food and fibre to support this growing community.

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Many people who live in cities are disconnected from local farms and lack knowledge about how food and fibre is produced.

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Many people who live in cities are disconnected from local farms and lack knowledge about how food and fibre is produced. Added to this, the farming sector is ageing and can provide rich career opportunities that many young people are unaware of.

The Farms2Schools program has been using online school incursions to provide primary and secondary students across the greater Melbourne area with insight into how agricultural products get from the paddock to their plate.

The program was delivered by the Port Phillip & Westernport CMA in partnership with AUSVEG VIC – the peak industry body for the Australian vegetable and potato industries – with support from the Victorian Government’s Working for Victoria initiative.

Three skilled professionals were hired to deliver the program across the Port Phillip and Western Port region. Camille Coleman has a background in agriculture and grew

up on a small farm in NSW; Osman Sobrie has a Masters in Community Development and delivers grassroots projects; and Narelle Debenham is a local teacher and Junior Landcare educator.

The program was originally designed to deliver incursions to primary and secondary schools, where farmers visited schools to talk about their farms. Schools would also have been able to take students on an excursion to tour a local farm. When COVID-19 restrictions were introduced in the greater Melbourne area, Farms2Schools had to quickly pivot and design an innovative online program with virtual incursions delivered by digital platforms.

This was also a big shift for the farmers taking part in the program. While tentative at first, support from the Farms2Schools program officers assisted many of the participating farmers to develop the confidence to present online, record their own videos and even live stream their incursions from the paddock with virtual walk and talks.

Virtual lambing a highlight

The program has also been a huge learning curve for the students. They gained firsthand knowledge from farmers across Melbourne's food bowl on where their produce comes from, as well as learnt about supply chains and how food and fibre can be exported to other countries and sold locally through farmers' markets and at the farmgate. Students were able to virtually experience life on a farm – watching lambs being born and beehives being opened.

Special development schools have also participated in the program. In addition to online presentations, these schools were provided with produce boxes to support their learning needs. This allowed the students to learn through sensory activities such as making honey sandwiches, tasting fresh produce and smelling lavender.



Isabella Amouzandeh from Sugarloaf Produce was an enthusiastic Farms2Schools presenter.

The program has also worked to support STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and maths) learning opportunities as part of the curriculum. Teachers have created innovative activities for students to continue to engage with agriculture and consider the many career opportunities the industry offers. Some examples include art projects, slug and snail trap inventions and writing letters to the farmers. Several schools hosted an entire farm week, with the whole school community participating in Farms2Schools.

COVID-19 restrictions prevented some of the program's resource development (such as videos showcasing farm life) from going ahead, but farmers got creative and produced their own home videos that schools can now use to continue learning in the classroom.

The Farms2Schools program finished at the end of term four in 2020, but it has left a legacy of resources for teachers to continue to engage their students in conversations about the importance of sustainable agriculture. In addition to the videos, student activity sheets focused on the paddock to plate process and farm ecosystems services such as integrated pest management from beneficial insects, insectivorous birds and micro bats.

An interactive virtual farm will further enhance student learning with a focus on how farms manage their natural assets such as soil, water and biodiversity.

Teachers praise the program

After their incursion with local apiarists, teachers from Dromana Primary School said "the combination of live action and photographs was excellent. The students enjoyed seeing the process of honey extraction and the opportunity to ask questions."

Altona Primary School students loved the fresh vegetables they were given from Velisha Farms. "We know that farmer Catherine Velisha is passionate about growing cauliflowers and we could taste the deliciousness. We can't wait to meet you in person in the future," the teachers said.

Derinya Primary School undertook an incursion with Gillian Goudie from Gippsland. The teachers commented that Gillian was friendly and easy to understand. "She had a lovely manner with the students and showed them some lovely aspects of her beautiful farm and its animals. It was also great to see and hear about the sustainable practices that operate throughout the farm."



Sophie O'Neil from Torello Farm was one of the presenters at the Farms2Schools online farm incursions.

Learning comes in many forms. 2020 showed us the importance of technology, creativity and adaptability. Despite COVID-19 restrictions, the Farms2Schools program delivered more than 100 incursions to more than 5500 students. The students have a new understanding and appreciation of farming and the role they could play in its future. Schools have applauded the program, with 98 per cent of teachers recommending it.

Karen Thomas is Regional Agriculture Facilitator at the Port Phillip & Westernport CMA. For more information about the Farms2Schools program and to access the resources go to www.ppwcm.vic.gov.au/farms2schools

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Teachers have created innovative activities for students to continue to engage with agriculture and consider the many career opportunities the industry offers.

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Grampians olive farm is a labour of love

By Andrea Mitchell

Landcare often involves partnerships. In the case of Rita Bikins and David Margetson from Pomonal their passion for improving the environment led them to the ultimate partnership – each other.

Rita and David met at a Project Platypus tree planting event. They married in 2013 and purchased Red Rock Olives, a 76-hectare property consisting of pasture, 5000 olive trees and a covenanted Trust for Nature reserve at the foot of the majestic Grampians National Park (part of the Gariwerd Aboriginal cultural landscape).

Red Rock's first event in the converted farm house café was David and Rita's wedding reception. Since then they have developed a successful paddock-to-plate enterprise supplying olive oil and other olive products. Farmgate tourism grew quickly and now makes up 90 per cent of their business.

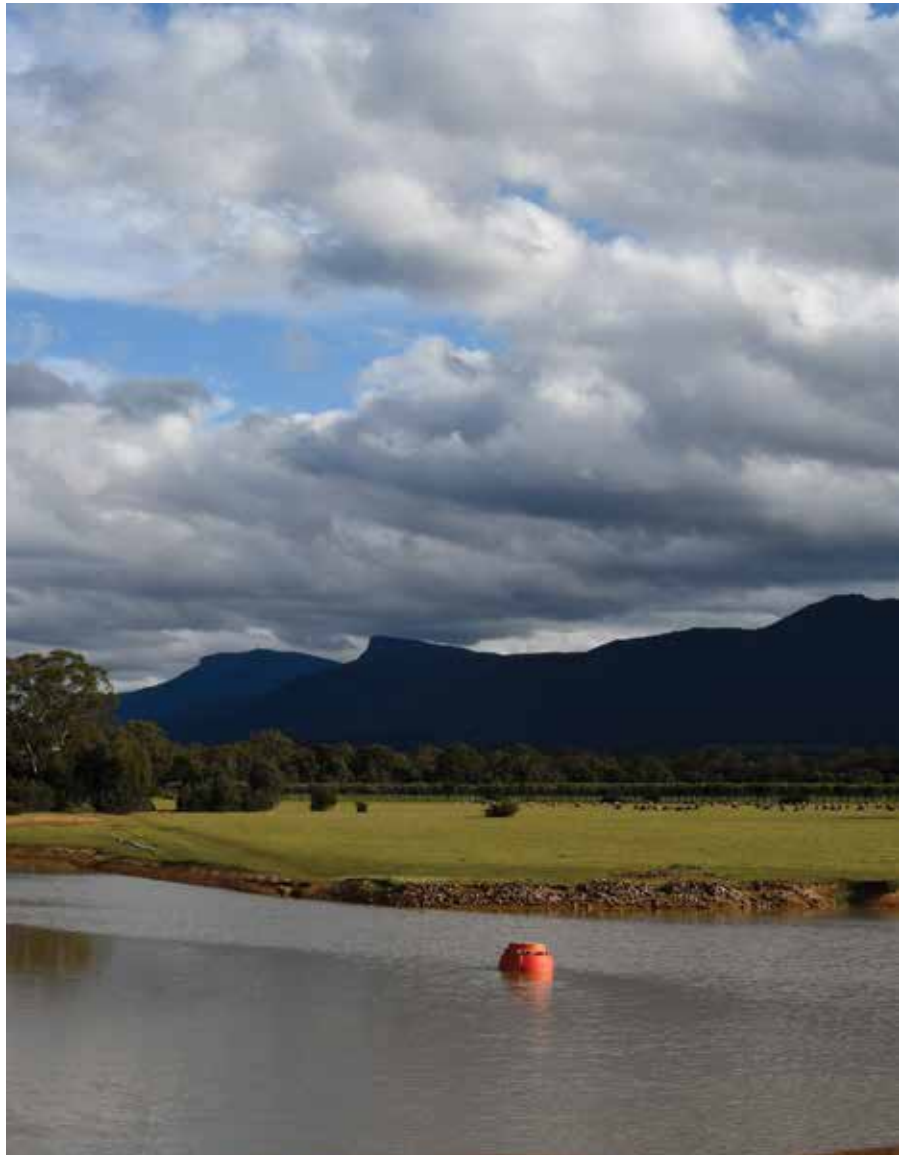
According to Rita, the success of the business is due to the successful combination of skills – her previous business experience, and David's expertise in farming and natural resource management.

"We are very fortunate how well our skill sets match. My expertise is marketing and branding which complements David's knowledge of farming and his local knowledge – who to call, where to get help and his problem-solving ability," Rita said.

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Farming practices are based on organic principles. They don't use sprays and actively encourage beneficial insects.

”



The dam at Red Rock Olives is fitted with a solar powered pump.

The couple responded to a strong demand for table olives from face to face contact with their customers. The farmgate gave them an opportunity to expand into value adding to their produce. This includes a unique range of salt products, olive leaf tea and infused olive oils.

Holistic approach underpinned by soil health

Their holistic approach to the business means caring for the environment and starts with soil health. Farming practices are based on organic principles. They don't use sprays and actively encourage beneficial insects.

One-year-old merino wethers are grazed to suppress weeds in the olive grove and the annual prunings are mulched under the trees. This year extra mulching was applied to keep the tree roots cool and save on irrigation requirements. They purchased wheaten straw and duck manure for this purpose.

"We feel that if we can get the soil biology right the trees can then look after themselves. We feel soil health is the main driver of health in the grove," David said.

Restrictions due to COVID-19 have given them more time to concentrate on farming.



David Margetson believes that if the soil biology is right the trees will look after themselves.

"We've had an opportunity to breathe, stop, look and work on the grove. We improved our harvesting practices. It used to take two weeks, but this year we harvested within the day and were able to get the olives to press within 24 hours. This ensured that our product was of extra virgin standard," Rita said.

A lighter footprint

Other innovations to the business include environmentally sound packaging. The salt bags are made of biodegradable cornstarch and the olive oil is packaged in cardboard

casks with bladders. Rita has been keen to avoid the use of glass which is currently only produced overseas.

"We've put a lot of effort into being as sustainable as we can be. So that we have a lighter footprint on the planet," Rita said.

There are several solar panel systems installed to run the café, the insulated cool room storage shed, and to pump irrigation water from the dams and bore. There is also a charger available for customers with electric cars.

Adjoining the olive grove David and Rita manage a 30-hectare block of stringybark, red gum, grass trees, and many varieties of flowering plants and orchids. The block is covered by a Trust for Nature covenant.

In the last 10 years they have also planted more than 18,000 trees on the pasture and sheep farming part of the property. They are part of the Jallukar Landcare Group's project to build a biodiversity corridor from the Black Range to the Grampians.

David and Rita's vision of learning, sustainability, and environmental stewardship means they are active in their community. They are also involved in the Perennial Pasture Systems and the local CFA.

Internet sales increased during the COVID-19 period. Rita explains that what looked like an overnight success was really eight years of hard work.

"Our continued sales through the shutdown period come from customer loyalty. Running a business in uncertain times is about keeping at it. Work it, work it, work it," Rita said.

Andrea Mitchell is the local Landcare Facilitator for Project Platypus. Andrea's position is funded through the Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program. For more information email llf@platypus.org.au



Rita Bikins and David Margetson met at a Project Platypus planting event and now own and manage an olive grove together at Pomonal.

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We've put a lot of effort into being as sustainable as we can be. So that we have a lighter footprint on the planet.

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Amber Creek runs right through, with three tributaries joining on the property. Its diverse landscape rather than its productive capacity was what initially interested me.

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Aerial view of the dam and revegetated gullies in January 2020.

The story of Amber Creek Farm

By Daniel Bright

I grew up on the farm next door and used to spend my spare time in the bush and creeks on this place. I often dreamt of owning this land and what I would do with it. My trade as a diesel mechanic and the mining boom of the 2000s enabled me to buy the land at Fish Creek.

Our property is 66-hectares and 26 of those are remnant bush. Amber Creek runs right through, with three tributaries joining on the property. Its diverse landscape rather than its productive capacity was what initially interested me. There was no infrastructure on the farm and minimal history of pasture improvement. I was 26 years old and

didn't yet know what I wanted to farm, just that this was a piece of land I felt a strong connection with. I agisted the land to a dairy farmer who ran young cattle here.

Before I could fully fence off and plant out the creek from the cattle the farm needed water infrastructure. I identified a site for a dam and researched dam and wetland construction. Once the dam was dug I established a system of pipes and troughs around the farm. This was in the millennium drought years of 2008 and 2009. The dam filled through the winter.

In 2010 I fenced off the rest of the creek. The farm now had all of the pasture separated into eight paddocks. I was planting up to 5000 trees a year to revegetate the gullies. As the initial plantings became established wallabies moved in which has made recent plantings a challenge.

I bought a portable sawmill to mill timber for the buildings I was planning. I discovered I enjoyed sawmilling immensely. I started contract sawmilling and it soon became a small business. I built a

workshop and set up off-grid solar power and a rainwater tank. I lived in an old caravan on the site.

Sawmilling waste used in pig enterprise

In 2012 I met my wife Amelia and my energy for the farm and business had a new purpose.

It was time to start farming. We identified a market opening for high-quality pork.

We bought six weaner gilts (young female pigs) and grew them out to finisher size. Milly embarked on our first pork marketing exercise selling directly to family and friends. We processed three of the gilts and kept three for breeding. The meat looked great and the feedback from customers was positive, so we decided to continue.

We started off with a standard free-range pig set-up with the pigs fenced in on an area of paddock until it was eaten and dug bare, then moved to a new section and repeat. As the herd increased it became apparent that this was degrading the soil.



Building the dam at Amber Creek Farm during the 2008 drought.



We considered the resources we had available and what we could do to fix the problems and farm pigs in a way that enhanced the land.

We considered the resources we had available and what we could do to fix the problems and farm pigs in a way that enhanced the land.

The sawmill was producing a reasonable amount of trash – unusable sections of logs. We hired a chipper and made woodchips for pig bedding, and to soak up manure and spilt feed. This immediately improved the situation, reducing odour; flies, manure runoff and provided the pigs with somewhere to get out of the mud in winter.

The next phase of pig farming development was to keep the pig's shelters and feed and water troughs on home pads (15 metres by 30 metres) covered in a thick layer of woodchips and strip graze the pasture around it. After a few years of having pigs in these paddocks and using a minimum till renovator to plant crops, the pigs mainly graze and dig very little.

Initially we were buying grain, this was an enormous financial strain and we sought out alternatives. We were offered the opportunity to buy (for a modest fee) the waste and spilt grain from a local grain mill. This helps their business as they are not paying for waste removal. Twice a week we also access trailer loads of veggies from a local grocer and daily pick up of whey which forms half of the pigs' diet. The other half is pasture and crops we grow ourselves.

Home pads improve soil health

The development of the home pad system has continued. We add more sawdust and



From left Delilah, Amelia, Valerie, Hazel and Daniel Bright have a busy but satisfying life on their family farm at Fish Creek.

woodchips as manure and spilt feed builds up. Once a year we scrape the home pads into large piles for composting. The compost is then spread over the paddocks as fertiliser. We have replaced the soil we lost initially and continue to add to its vitality and to sequester carbon.

When I was working in the mining industry it was financially rewarding, but I felt a huge gap between my values and actions. Milly and I have four important measures of success for our business. That it enhances the environment; supports and engages with the local community;

provides an interesting and engaging place to work; and, is financially profitable.

Both the timber and pork sides of the business have continued to grow. Amber Creek Farm now employs Milly and me along with three full-time and four part-time employees. We have achieved three of our measures of success and are getting close to consistently achieving the last.

Daniel and Amelia Bright run Amber Creek Farm and Amber Creek Sawmilling at Fish Creek. For more information email amber.creek.farm@hotmail.com

Discussion groups great support for small farm enterprises

By Peter Ronalds

The area surrounding Port Phillip and Western Port bays has reliable rainfall, fertile soils and easy access to a potential market of (Melbourne's) five million people. This is a peri-urban region where growth corridors, green wedges, holiday destinations, hobby farmers and working farms meet. It is the second most valuable agricultural region in Victoria, producing 15 per cent of the gross value of the state's agriculture from four per cent of its farmland.

Among the large commercial farms there are many smaller niche enterprises supplying high value produce – often directly to the consumer. These small farms may be only 1–20 hectares in size, but they grow high value crops such as vegetables, berries, nuts, grapes or fruit, often employing multiple staff and generating significant returns.

Many of these smaller farm enterprises are new to farming and keen to get involved in the local community. They often join local Landcare groups as they respect the land, want to manage it well and are eager to learn.

Industry extension and advice provided by departments and service providers often focuses on the common farm enterprises so newer niche operations that are not as well researched may miss out.



Farmer discussion groups can assist those in niche enterprises with land management knowledge and skills. This group was meeting before COVID-19 restrictions.

Learning from each other

The Western Port Catchment Landcare Network (WPCLN) has been supporting farmers with training and extension in best practice land management training for more than 15 years. In conjunction with our partners from the Bass Coast Landcare Network (BCLN), Mornington Peninsula Shire and the Australian Government National Landcare Program, we have also developed specific programs to support small enterprises.

One of the most effective ways that farmers learn from each other is to meet on each other's properties, ask questions and discuss their successes and mistakes.

Over the past decade we have established numerous farmer discussion groups of 10–20 farmers who meet on a regular basis. The groups often invite guest presenters to focus on a topic of interest. The groups are very popular and provide a supportive learning environment for the participants.

One of these discussion groups targets the small market and kitchen gardeners on the Mornington Peninsula who grow vegetables for local restaurants and wineries. This group has provided opportunities for participants to meet other growers, exchange ideas and discuss topics of interest such as marketing and pest management.

When many of the local restaurants and wineries closed due to COVID-19 several growers in the group pooled resources and found new markets for their produce.

Another discussion group established by the BCLN has attracted farmers interested in different niche farm enterprises located throughout their region. This group focuses on a new enterprise each time they meet. They have visited free range pig, olive, mushroom, organic vegetable, dairy cheese, heritage apple, deer, avocado and hydroponic farms. The walks and discussions are very well attended. The generosity with which the host farmers have shared their knowledge has inspired and impressed all of the participants.

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One of the most effective ways that farmers learn from each other is to meet on each other's properties, ask questions and discuss their successes and mistakes.

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Mikey Densham on his small organic flower and vegetable farm at Main Ridge.

Social connections and friendships

The farmer discussion groups provide a sounding board for new ideas. A member of the Mornington Peninsula group who identified as a new (non-generational) farmer, appreciated the guidance from the experienced farmers in the group in making sure they were going down the right path. Many participants have reported the benefits of the group for social connections and friendships made in an industry that can be very isolating.

Mikey Densham from Mossy Willow Farm at Main Ridge is a good example of a farmer making the most out of a small operation. Mikey manages a 0.6-hectare organic vegetable and flower operation with a team of four full-time employees.

"Farming for us is a way of life, not just a job. We strive to farm in a way that supports life and creates fertility. Our practices are gentle upon the landscape, yet we maintain an incredibly high production/yield per square metre. We love to show that high quality production doesn't have to come at a cost to nature," Mikey said.

"We take a lot of inspiration from methodologies encouraging the use of good design and the inclusion of natural elements and patterns in the landscape. Trees and other perennial plants are central to our farmscape and provide us with animal habitat, windbreaks, forage, financial income and beauty."

The small enterprises on the peri-urban fringe are sometimes viewed as hobby farms. Our discussion groups show they are actually setting a very high standard in productivity and regenerative farm management.

Peter Ronalds is Sustainable Agriculture Manager at Western Port Catchment Landcare Network. For more information email peter@wpcln.org.au



Small farms can be highly productive and demonstrate good land management practices.

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When many of the local restaurants and wineries closed due to COVID-19 several growers in the group pooled resources and found new markets for their produce.

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We have celebrated our successes, briefly mourned the failures and come to accept the variability in quality and quantity that different seasons impose.

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The MacEwan's 54-square metre vegetable garden at Lockwood South supplies an abundance of household produce.



Richard MacEwan enjoys a musical interlude in his labour intensive but highly productive garden.

Soil is the key to successful home

This is a personal account of home food production on our four-hectare property near Bendigo. I have never carried out an economic analysis or recorded yields from our gardens but have revelled in their proximity to our kitchen and the freshness of the produce that we grow.

We have celebrated our successes, briefly mourned the failures and come to accept the variability in quality and quantity that different seasons impose. When the broad bean, courgette and tomato yields hit their peak just as the market prices bottom out you know the economics are not in it – certainly not if you were paying for a helper. Gardening is a labour of love. The anticipation of future bounty is an emotional driver, as is the fresh air and exercise.

Understanding the soil is critical for gardeners. As a pedologist I have been lucky to get to know a lot of different soils. The soil matrix enables root exploration, physically supports the plants and is a medium for supplying water and nutrients. The structure of this matrix is paramount. It is the spaces in the soil, their proportion, size and connectivity that allows movement and storage of water, diffusion of air and easy passage for roots.

Soils can be improved with time and care

By thinking like a root, flowing like water and breathing, the gardener will understand some important functions of soil. Some soils are a gardener's nightmare. Hostile soils have too much clay, are too sandy, too shallow, too hard or too stony. Goldilocks soils (just right) are rare but can be built with time and care.

Our garden is on a north facing valley near the Bullock Creek. It has a granite derived soil with some hostile qualities. Like many south-eastern Australian soils the subsoil is clay, tight and mottled, a rather airless, suffocating environment for root growth. Sitting over this subsoil, below a thin but deceptively friendly loam, is a sandy, in some places gravelly, grey 'spew' layer that sets hard when dry and flows like self-levelling cement when wet. This is a Sunday soil – too wet to plough on



Wine making equipment in the shed. Vintages have ranged from zero to 2000 litres.

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Like many south-eastern
Australian soils the subsoil
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food production

By Richard MacEwan

Saturday, too hard to plough on Monday. Deep digging, gypsum, lime and organic matter have been my greatest aids to improving it.

Water supply is critical. We are fortunate to have a 4.6-megalitre water licence of piped rural supply from Coliban Water so there's plenty for the garden and the vines. As well as fearsomely hot summer days over 40C the seasonal lottery can bring devastating frosts as late as November. We monitor the progress of the vines on the Bureau of Meteorology website. In four years out of 16 we have lost our entire grape crop to spring frost.

Designing shade and irrigation

We have an area of 150 square metres fenced from rabbits and kangaroos. Within this area are eight 1.5-metre-wide garden beds bordered with treated pine sleepers. Paths between the main beds were excavated and replaced with bluestone road base. Soil from the paths was added to the vegetable growing beds which now have 30 centimetres of dark friable loam. The external perimeter is planted with fruit trees on dwarf rootstock to espalier and fan-train against the fence.

Each vegetable bed and the perimeter are serviced by driplines 30–40 centimetres apart with 1.6 litre per hour drippers at 30 centimetres spacing. An irrigation

controller regulates the timing of watering via 25-millimetre solenoid valves from a 40-millimetre irrigation main connected to the rural water supply. I supplement with watering from a hose or watering can.

In summer a white 40 per cent shade cloth with 85 per cent light transmission supported by a marquee frame makes a huge difference to plant growth.

We grow many herbs and a complete alphabet of vegetables – from asparagus through to zucchini. It is this diversity of fresh produce that makes home production satisfying. This year I have built a small greenhouse and added unprotected no dig beds outside the fenced area where we are trialling potatoes, broad beans, tomatoes, pumpkin and squash for rabbit resistance.

The labour of winemaking

A few hundred vines were planted on the property in the late 1980s, so we have also become accidental viticulturalists and vigneron. The vines were in poor shape. Fire had damaged the irrigation system and burnt some of the posts, while gum tree saplings grew in the rows.

Friends with experience advised us to pull out the vines and not bother with wine making as it was too much work and heartache. We ignored the advice,

removed the saplings and renovated as best we could. The dollar outlay was minimal until we bought nets and equipment.

We made our first rough wine in 2003 in buckets with grapes the birds had left behind. Wine making is labour intensive. Even on our small scale it takes about 20 days a year to maintain the vines, prune, thin the shoots and leaves, mow, net, pick, make wine, bottle and clean the equipment. Our vintages have ranged from zero to 2000 litres in 2017. In other years we filled two to four barriques (a 225-litre barrel) of shiraz and cabernet sauvignon. We've also produced small batches of chardonnay and cabernet franc.

Our garden is an adventure that has enriched our lives and the lives of our friends. It's too small to be commercial and, realistically, too big to be domestic. The adventure continues inside the house where we are creative in our cooking and preservation to make use of the abundant produce. This year we processed olives for the first time, and they were great. There is always something new to grow and taste.

Richard MacEwan is a retired senior research scientist and a member of the Upper Spring Creek Landcare Group.

Healthy Hectares workshops target small properties

By Alandi Durling and Natasha Lobban

Wodonga Urban Landcare Network is working on a three-year project, in partnership with the Mid Ovens Landcare Consortium (MOLC), to build the capacity of small rural property owners to apply best practice land management principles to their land.



Sally Day presenting a Healthy Hectares workshop on understanding your landscape at Wooragee in 2020.

The project is adapted from Healthy Hectares – a program developed by Goulburn Broken CMA and Euroa Arboretum.

According to Healthy Hectares North East project officer, Sophie Enders, one of the project's biggest successes has been delivering all of its intended field day topics despite the huge challenges of COVID-19.

"The face-to-face workshops couldn't go ahead as planned. We had to change our delivery methods but still got all the information out and we were able to keep a network of people active and engaged during the lockdown," Sophie said.

The unprecedented situation of not being able to meet in community locations and on farms even had some advantages.

"Farm visits turned into meetings via Zoom. With distance no longer a barrier, speakers could present from their homes directly into the homes of participants."

The workshops have covered topics on planning, soils, water, and choosing and caring for livestock. Future topics will include managing invasive pests and weeds, and attracting wildlife.

Twenty owners of small properties signed up for the full program with additional casual participants picking up specific sessions. The other advantage of online

learning has been the recordings of the workshops so they can be viewed at any time.

According to Sophie, a small property isn't defined by size, rather it's about the property use.

"A small property is one where the property owners aren't relying on the actions on their property for their sole income," she says. We left this for the property owners to self-determine. The workshops aim to provide information on sustainably managing your property for now and into the future," Sophie said.

The presentation from ecologist, fungi expert and environmental photographer Alison Pouliot on soils worked especially well with an online format as she was able to show her photographs to participants through screenshare. A large number of participants took part and the feedback was overwhelmingly positive.

Sophie Enders spent a lot of time on her grandparent's farm at Carboor, near Wangaratta, when she was growing up and went on to complete a degree in wildlife and conservation biodiversity. She is very positive about the Healthy Hectares project, believing it is possible

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Alandi Durling from the Mid Ovens Landcare Consortium (right) and Anne Stelling from Wodonga Urban Landcare Network inspecting a small rural property at Myrtleford that runs dorper sheep.

to farm successfully while still being sustainable and leaving room for native birds and wildlife.

"I came off a family property where biodiversity and conservation were always encouraged, back to my grandfather's generation, so I learnt these lessons from an early age," she said.

Sophie has been encouraged by the reach of the program. Participants have come from Wangaratta, Beechworth, Albury,

Bright and many places in between.

There has been a diverse mix of participants including retirees, established farmers and even those with large residential blocks.

The workshops encourage participants to engage with Landcare and other local groups so they can continue their learning journey.

Sophie has adjusted the Healthy Hectares booklet created by the Goulburn Broken CMA and Euroa Arboretum to produce

a local version full of useful knowledge and resources.

Natasha Lobban is a journalist and farmer from Eldorado. Alandi Durling is the Local Landcare Facilitator for MOLC. Alandi's position is funded through the Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program. For copies of the North East Healthy Hectares Guide go to www.wodongalandcare.org.au For more information about Healthy Hectares email healthyhectaresne@gmail.com



The last Healthy Hectares workshop in July 2020 before COVID-19 restrictions.

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The workshops have covered topics on planning, soils, water, and choosing and caring for livestock. Future topics will include managing invasive pests and weeds, and attracting wildlife.

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Small-scale agriculture in Japan

By Rob Youl

Australian Landcare International (ALI), now called Global Landcare, has worked closely with SPELJ, the Secretariat for Promoting Landcare in Japan, for more than a decade. Japanese students and academics have travelled between both countries and in 2017 a Landcare conference was held in Nagoya.

Australia differs so much from Japan, with its monocultural urban population, deeply held traditions and long-established institutions.

In 2019, ALI won a grant of \$18,000 from the Australia-Japan Foundation for an agroforestry exchange to Honshu to swap ideas on land management. To reconnoitre delivery of the grant I visited Japan in February 2020 – just before COVID-19 closed the world.

The first stop involved a few days planning in Nagoya with Professor Kazuki Kagohashi from Nanzan University's Institute for Social Ethics. We then visited a forestry co-operative at Shinshiro together. The co-operative manages 150 privately owned forests ranging from 0.1 to 10 hectares. A 10-hectare estate is rare and considered substantial. Most of the forests are inherited and not valued highly as low timber prices and high rates and taxes have made them unprofitable. Good contractors are on hand and the district's annual cut is an impressive 80,000 cubic metres. Mapping of the forests is difficult due to the mediaeval boundaries.

Nearby, in a high sunny valley, we walked up a steep track to a three-hectare organic farm dedicated to regenerative agriculture and community education on soil health and biodiversity. From time to time volunteers help the 73-year-old farmer,



From this small plot in the hills of Central Honshu Mr Matsuzawa, a 73-year-old organic farmer, educates his fellow citizens on soil health and carbon sequestration.

Mr Matsuzawa, who lives on the property in a 300-year-old cottage.

Rice is harvested from Mr Matsuzawa's tiny unploughed paddies. There were timber trees, fruit trees, including apples, nashi, persimmons, grapefruit and oranges and numerous small plots of vegetables, especially giant radishes – daikon used for chicken food. The farm boasted 350 edible crops in all, many of which are weeds – herbs and shrubs with edible components, along with poultry. According to Mr Matsuzawa, wild pigs are a problem, but the very dense root zones of his pasture defied the pigs' rooting capacities. Monkeys are a nuisance elsewhere, but apparently not here.

I then travelled to the environmentally progressive city of Toyama on the west coast where fingers of farmland and forest extend well into the suburbs. I visited a rural Landcare project on the outskirts of the city where I met the Kintaro Club, a group of volunteer retirees who are revegetating a three-hectare clearing on a west-facing forested ridge.

The group has controlled the major weed, Chinese bamboo, and replanted the site with indigenous trees, shrubs and understorey. The council supplies a chipping crew from time to time. Managing incursions of deer and pigs is a challenge. I was impressed by the use of bug beds – rectangles of bamboo staves holding back piles of rotting chipped bamboo for insects to feed on, breed in and use as shelter. Shitake and other mushroom varieties grew abundantly, and many tits flitted through the scrub.

I told the group about the Landcare projects at Westgate Park near my home in South Melbourne. Despite the bamboo and shitake mushrooms in my shadow, the broad rice paddies below, and the Shinkansen railway and city skyline in the distance, I assured them the two projects had much in common.

Rob Youl is deputy chair of Global Landcare. For more information email robmyoul@gmail.com



From left, Tokyo journalist and SPELJ board member Miho Ito, Rob Youl, organic farmer Mr Matsuzawa holding a giant radish, and Professor Kazuki Kagohashi.



The native bee forum at Bayles (pre COVID-19), was well attended.

Native bee forums buzz with questions

By Karen Thomas

Bee biology and conservation were under the spotlight in August 2019 when the Port Phillip & Westernport CMA, local Landcare networks and groups, local councils, Box Hill Institute and Agribusiness Yarra Valley came together to deliver three native bee forums across the region.

More than 250 people attended the forums. Kit Prendergast, a PhD candidate at Curtin University discussed native bees as potential crop pollinators, Dr Julian Brown from Australian National University discussed their nesting substrate, and Dr Katja Hogendoorn from Adelaide University looked at the possible impacts of varroa mites on pollination and what we can plant to increase native bees on farms.

There was a high level of interest in the informative sessions that with question times lasted for 45 minutes.

Farmers had a call to action when Julian discussed how to repurpose blackberry canes into suitable nesting substrate to create bee hotels for reed bees

(*Exoneura*). These tiny, elongated native bees live in urban areas, forests and woodlands. Reed bees excavate nest burrows inside the dried stems of plants. Several adult bees live together in the nest with the female using her face or abdomen to guard and block the entrance. The adult reed bees hibernate over winter in the nests.

All three speakers promoted the effectiveness of native vegetation to support a diversity of native bee species and discussed how native vegetation adjacent to crops can enhance pollination.

Karen Thomas is the Port Phillip & Westernport CMA's Regional Agriculture Facilitator. For more information email karen.thomas@ppwcma.vic.gov.au

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Farmers had a call to action when Julian discussed how to repurpose blackberry canes into suitable nesting substrate to create bee hotels for reed bees.

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A native bee nesting hotel made using blackberry canes.

Around the State – News from the Regional

Aboriginal Landcare Facilitator

Always Was, Always Will Be, was the theme of NAIDOC week from 8–15 November 2020.

NAIDOC stands for National Aboriginal Islander Day Observance Committee and it's a week where we celebrate the rich history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. The 2020 NAIDOC week was celebrated online, allowing us to go on virtual bush walks with Traditional Owners, witness smoking ceremonies, hear Elders explain cultural burning, learn Aboriginal history, understand Indigenous plant uses and more, all from the comfort of home.

I enjoyed participating in the first ever Victoria Nature Festival, a virtual event that was held in September/October 2020. In my role as a Nature Festival Cultural Ambassador I explained how I remain connected to nature during a pandemic. It was a good platform to promote Landcare. For Nature Festival content go to www.vic.gov.au/victoria-its-our-nature

For more information please contact Jackson Chatfield on jackson.chatfield@delwp.vic.gov.au or 0419 504 451.

Corangamite

The Corangamite Rural Women's Network hosted an inspiring webinar with guest speaker Cathy McGowan MP on the International Day of Rural Women in October 2020. The session encouraged women to turn up, speak up and step up in their communities.

Several webinars on cover cropping in south west Victoria have been delivered to landholders. The CMA has supported the community and industry groups to apply for Round 4 of the National Landcare Program's Smart Farms Small Grants and the Australian Government's Future Drought Fund Natural Resource Management Drought Resilience Program grants.

The Corangamite Landcare Volunteer Recognition Program 2020 recognised fourteen individuals, four groups and eleven networks. Recipients were rewarded with hampers including products sourced from local producers within the region, nursery vouchers and framed certificates.

Webinar training for Landcare facilitators was delivered in partnership with Goulburn Broken and North Central CMAs. Messaging for Change was conducted by Dr Trudi Ryan, Introduction to Mentoring by Tamara Boyd and Inclusive Leadership by Dr Bree Gorman.

For more information visit www.ccma.vic.gov.au (What we do/Community Landcare) or contact Elisia Dowling on 0418 397 521.

East Gippsland

Landcare in East Gippsland continues to adapt to COVID-19. Online meetings are becoming the norm with groups and networks embracing the challenge of new technology. Distance has always been an issue for people involved in Landcare, but evening meetings can now be attended from the comfort of the lounge room.

As restrictions begin to ease groups are focusing again on delivering current projects and planning for the future.

The region was successful in receiving funding for 28 projects across fire impacted areas through the Victorian Government Biodiversity Bushfire Recovery Grants. Projects include engaging school children in rehabilitation works and learning about water quality after fire and on ground works such as weed control, revegetation and fencing. Other projects will monitor ground parrots and provide habitat for the glossy black cockatoo.

For more information visit www.egcma.com.au (What we do/Landcare) or contact Carolyn Cameron on 0419 892 268.

Glenelg Hopkins

Some late spring rain was a bonus for landholders completing revegetation projects in 2020. COVID-19 restrictions have disrupted many projects as organisation such as Landmate and Conservation Volunteers Australia have been unable to operate. It is a credit to groups who found alternate methods to get the trees in the ground.

Our region's Landcare facilitators have done a fantastic job in adopting new technology so we can continue our work. They have redesigned training packages, field days and meetings to be accessible on-line. They have also worked on upskilling their Landcare members to be able to connect to these services.

Opportunities have been created by the Victorian Government Working for Victoria program. The CMA's work crew has assisted landholders with additional revegetation projects including fencing paddock trees. The crews have also partnered with Landcare groups to deliver invasive species control.

For more information visit www.ghcma.vic.gov.au (Get involved/Landcare) or contact Tony Lithgow on 0418 180 996.

Goulburn Broken

Community natural resource management in our region is all about peer learning, sharing ideas and getting works done on the ground. Groups and networks have adapted well to the new online delivery model; however, it is not the same as meeting and working together in person.

Uncertainty around Landcare facilitator roles has caused concern among our networks. A strong partnership approach to planning has seen some potential partnerships arise to address new program directions.

Groups and networks have been providing positive early input into the renewal of the CMA's Regional Catchment Strategy. This information, along with newly commissioned social research, will guide the future management of our land, water and community and environmental assets over the coming years.

For more information visit www.gbcma.vic.gov.au (Community natural resource management) or contact Tony Kubeil on 0408 597 213.

Mallee

Increased rainfall events provided favourable growing conditions for broad-acre crops covering a large extent of our region in 2020. These positive conditions reinvigorated a number of farming communities across the Mallee, including the Millewa Carwarp region, which has been in significant drought.

According to Annette Lambert from the Millewa-Carwarp Landcare Group conditions have turned around. "The 2020 cropping season has been significant as it marks a turnaround from close to zero crops in the drought conditions of 2019 to good yields. We are not out of the woods by any means as it takes a number of years to recover from extensive drought, but the general community consensus is very positive and optimistic," Annette said.

Landcare gatherings have been able to recommence cautiously in line with the relevant COVID-19 guidelines.

For more information visit www.malleecma.vic.gov.au (Get involved/Landcare) or contact Nelson Burand-Hicks on 0427 540 468.

North Central

Our annual Chicks in the Sticks event for rural women was hosted online in October 2020. It was a joyful event with three exceptional speakers, Rebecca Phillips from Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation, Anna Carlile from Viola Design and Katrina Myers from Barham Avocados.

Landcare Coordinators

The speakers captivated the 40 women who participated and there were lots of opportunities for connection. It was a rainy day and a relief not to be in the paddock.

Landholders and Landcare groups strengthened their partnerships as they co-developed bids for the Australian Government's Future Drought Fund Natural Resource Management Drought Resilience Program. Our Landcare Team is proud of the quality of the submissions and wishes everyone the best success.

The CMA continues with the renewal of our Regional Catchment Strategy. The draft strategy will be published online and available for public comment in early 2021. Keep up to date with progress at www.nccma.vic.gov.au/regional-catchment-strategy.

For more information visit www.nccma.vic.gov.au (Landcare) or contact Tess Grieves on 0438 357 874.

North East

There's a lot of new growth in the region and Landcare groups are keen to get active on their projects. A number of groups have conducted socially distanced events where they can, while others have put events on hold and focused on on-ground works.

The CMA has engaged three crews as part of the Victorian Government Working for Victoria program. The crews are based in Wodonga, Omeo and Corryong. The crews will be supporting landholders in the region that have been affected by bushfires as well as supporting other natural resource management groups, Landcare groups, landholders and property owners on their conservation projects.

For more information visit www.necma.vic.gov.au (Solutions/Landcare & community groups) or contact Richard Dalkin on 0409 683 467.

Port Phillip and Western Port

Landcare and other environmental projects are among the beneficiaries of the CMA's new 44-strong works crew. Supported through the Victorian Government's Working for Victoria initiative, the crews have been working since December 2020 on a variety of public and private properties. Groups that need a hand can still register an expression of interest for agricultural and environmental teams to help out on weeding or autumn planting projects up until at least April.

We welcome Andrea Clifford, the new Landcare Facilitator for South Gippsland Landcare Network. Sarah Backholer and Chantal Morton are sharing the Landcare



Graeme Nicoll features on the GippsLandscapes podcast. Graeme milks 300 cows at Fish Creek with wife Gillian and is passionate about sustainability and Landcare.

facilitator role at Mornington Peninsula Landcare Network.

Landcare networks and other partners have been involved in the production of the Regional Catchment Strategy. A draft document for public exhibition is expected by April 2021.

Recent training opportunities for Landcare volunteers and Landcare facilitators have included an online film and story development course, mental-health first aid, and a two-part webinar series exploring the causes and empowering techniques presented by eco anxiety.

For more information visit www.pppwma.vic.gov.au/landcare/ or contact Barry Kennedy on 0447 821 559.

West Gippsland

Agriculture and Landcare is continuing to go from strength to strength in the region.

Maffra and Districts Landcare Network, with the support of Yarram Yarram Landcare Network, has been supporting farmers through their Wellington Weeds and Pest Animal Control Project. This project uses small grants, training and workshops to help farmers tackle weeds and pest animals in drought affected areas.

Bass Coast Landcare Network and partners have been working on their Bass Coast Climate Project, Growing Southern Gippsland to help farmers adapt to climate change

through a new website and case studies.

Landcarers in the region feature on the GippsLandscapes podcast hosted by Gerard Callinan and available on iTunes. Recent episodes feature stories on Coral and Kevin Hughes, Karl and Rachel Russo, Charlie Pinch and Graeme Nicoll.

For more information visit wgcm.vic.gov.au (Getting involved/Landcare) or contact Sam Shannon on 0409 944 114.

Wimmera

2020 was a challenging year for Landcare. Many groups and networks were able to progress their projects due to valuable support from works crews as part of the Working for Victoria program.

The Wimmera Biodiversity Seminar, which has been held annually for 23 years, was able to adapt to COVID-19 restrictions and shift online. The 11 speakers can now be viewed at any time on the SWIFT Vic YouTube channel.

Regular Wimmera Partnerships meetings – involving all Wimmera Landcare facilitators, agency extension officers and other group support personnel – also shifted online and provided an important forum for us to stay connected, share ideas and tackle issues through our regional teamwork approach.

For more information visit www.wcma.vic.gov.au (Get involved/Landcare) or contact Joel Boyd on 0429 949 196.

Growing Victoria's native food industry

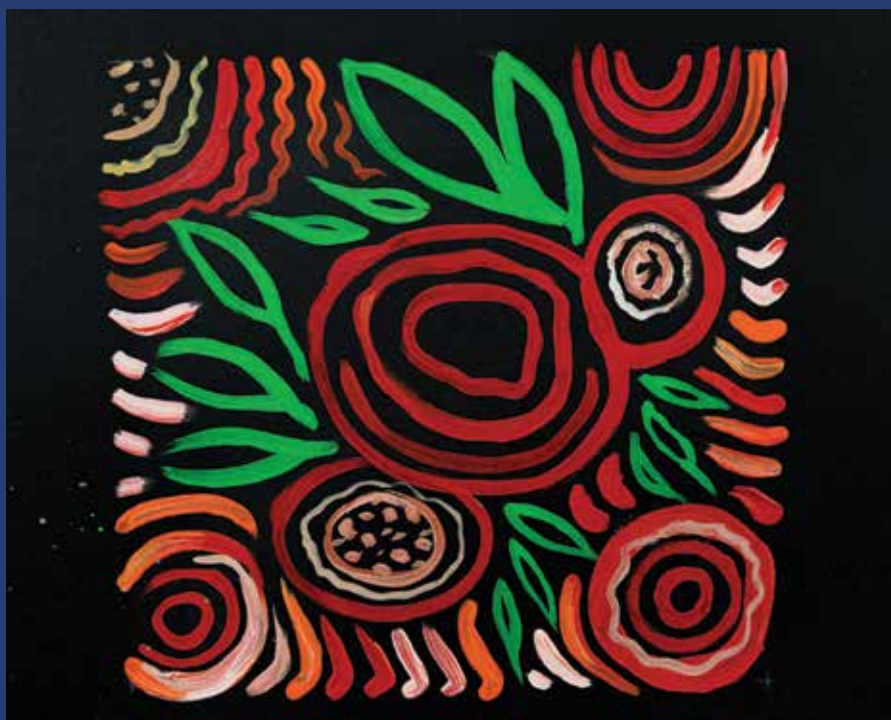
The Victorian Government's partnership with the Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations is harnessing the power of Victoria's native food with significant grants to boost Aboriginal Victorian-owned businesses working to develop the industry.

The Djakitjuk Djanga program has provided \$2 million in grants to support 13 Aboriginal businesses to overcome key resource related barriers to commercially producing native plants for use as food and botanicals. Djakitjuk Djanga is a Dja Dja Wurrung language term that means 'Country's food'

Djakitjuk Djanga will also establish a community of practice to help progress Aboriginal leadership of Victoria's native food and botanicals industry.

Nalderun, based in Castlemaine, plans to use their grant to establish a commercial native food garden, employ a part-time gardener, set up an irrigation system and purchase equipment to support sales. Nalderun is also proudly utilising the grant to support an educational component to promote native foods locally.

Other businesses will invest in water tanks, irrigation systems, horticultural advice, skills training, pest, disease and fire management planning, crop production trials, bush food gardens,



A painting of murnong (yam daisy) by Boon Wurrung artist Adam Magennis.

orchards, nursery redevelopment and equipment for purchasing and sales.

Popular native ingredients being produced include ground wattle seed, saltbush, lemon myrtle, chocolate lily, pepper berry and bush tomato as well emerging bushfoods including kunzea, correa, boobialla and several eucalypt

species. Many of these species are sought after in Australian cooking and personal care products.

For more information go to
www.agriculture.vic.gov.au/support-and-resources/funds-grants-programs/djakitjuk-djanga

The *Victorian Landcare & Catchment Management* magazine is published by the Victorian Government Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning and distributed in partnership with Landcare Victoria Incorporated and the Victorian Catchment Management Council. The magazine aims to raise awareness of Landcare and natural resource management among Victorian farmers, landholders, the Victorian Landcare community and the wider community.



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Next issue

The next issue of the magazine, to be published in Winter 2021, will feature stories on invasive plants and animals.

We are interested in hearing the experiences of groups, networks and landholders working on these challenging issues. Our readers are keen to learn about the success of different projects, as well as what hasn't worked, and the insights and reflections of your group and network along the way.

The magazine fills up with stories very quickly so please get in touch with the editor well before the copy deadline.

Contributions to the Winter 2021 issue should be sent to the editor by 26 March 2021.

Email: editorviclandcare@gmail.com



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