Victorian Landcare Magazine

Issue 4, Winter 1997

From the Editors

In this issue of the Victorian Landcare magazine we are setting out to discover what you think. We urge you to complete the enclosed reader survey form and sent it back. Not only will you be helping us to make a better magazine, but you could also win a case of lovely Shiraz donated by Banrock Station Wines.

Many Landcare Groups and individuals will be recovering from the enormous amount of time and effort put into the recent Natural Heritage Trust funding applications. The first time around of any new process is always a challenge. We hope the effort is rewarded with more money for more works on the ground.

Applications for the 1997 round of the Victorian Landcare Awards have just closed and there has been a good response across all categories.

The applications will be passed on to experienced judging panels who will have the difficult task of assessing them. See the next issue for a further update on the awards.

Remember to keep sending us your landcare news, stories and photographs. We look forward to hearing from you!

The editors, Mal Brown, Paul Crock & Greg King.

Catchment Management Partnership launched

The State Government has launched a blue print for the future management of Victoria's catchments including a new partnership program with the community.

Minister for Conservation & Land Management Marie Tehan and Minister for Agriculture & Resources Pat McNamara said "managing Victoria's Catchments – Partnerships in Action', was based on strong community participation in planning, decision-making and implementation of catchment initiatives.

A key component of the partnership is the implementation of 10 regional catchment strategies covering every region of the State. The strategies have been developed by regional Catchment and Land Protection Boards and the community.

For the first time across Victoria, land and water resource management issues have been systematically reviewed in each catchment and objectives and priorities for action put in place. This will provide a focus for joint efforts by the State and Commonwealth Governments and the community in catchment management and sustainable agriculture.

Mrs Tehan said the Victorian Government would allocate $100 million each year to allow the Catchment strategies to be implemented, including $40 million of additional funds during the next three years.

Mr McNamara said that the State Government was committed to working in partnership with farmers, landcare groups, industry, catchment organisations and the community to achieve sustainable development and conservation of land and water resources.

Victoria's Partnership statement has been developed to meet the Natural Heritage Trust challenges set by the Commonwealth and the needs of rural communities for a sustainable and prosperous future.

Mrs Tehan congratulated the Regional Catchment and Land Protection Boards and their communities involved in the preparation of the 10 regional strategies.

"Community involvement in the development of the regional strategies was important however community involvement in their implementation is even more vital," Mrs Tehan said.

Mr McNamara said Victoria was now entering a new phase in catchment management.

"The Partnerships in Action program provides an opportunity to showcase how Victoria is taking the lead in its approach to integrated management of our vital natural resources, "he said.

Farm Forestry Conference – a focus on Western Victoria
By Liz Hamilton, NRE Colac

The Corangamite Farm Forestry Project (CFFP) is organising a Farm Forestry Conference at Ballarat University on September 30 and October 1 1997.

The Conference aims to bring farmers, investors, millers and government officers up to date on the best current information and practices in the rapidly developing farm forestry industry. The conference will largely focus on aspects of farm forestry that are particularly relevant to Western Victoria.

The conference will cover:

- Market Prospects for Farm Forestry – local countrywide and export: Some exciting new local and export developments in sawlogs and pulpwood are occurring in the region which will be of interest to potential and current growers.
- Choosing the Right Farm Forestry Option: Pine for sawlogs, blue gum for pulp or speciality timbers? Various speakers will cover the range of options and the factors affecting the economic returns on each.
- Wood Properties and Qualities of Plantation Grown Hardwoods: A feature of this discussion will be the results of recent sawing and dry trials by low rainfall eucalypts as undertaken by CSIRO. Species trialled included sugar gum, spotted gum and red ironbark.
- Business Planning: Attributes of farm forestry investments; superannuation, taxation and appropriate business structures.

- Planning requirements for timber production on private land: The latest planning laws and changes that affect timber growing and harvesting on private land. The development of farm forestry rights will also be covered.
- Site preparation: A number of landholders will be discussing aspects of good site preparation critical for successful tree growing. Recipes for successful site preparation on heavy soils solutions for bent grass and phalaris infested sites will be discussed by farmers.
- Controlling pests in plantations: How to identify them and how to when to control them.
- Integrating farm forestry into the farm: Designing farm forests to maximise returns and other on-farm benefits.
- Harvesting and marketing consideration and ideas: A number of real life examples of how and when to harvest and sell timber. Landholders, millers and researchers will relate their own experiences in this aspect of farm forestry.
- Managing farm forestry for maximum return: Pruning, thinning and examples of various sivicultural regimes suited to small growers.

The program and registration forms for the Conference will be available in late May through the CFFP. For more information about the Conference, or about any other aspect of farm forestry, please contact either Liz Hamilton or Sue Harris at Colac on (03) 52335533.

National Landcare Conference

A detailed program is now available for the National Landcare Conference to be held in Adelaide from September 16-19 1997.

The conference, 'Landcare Changing Australia' boasts an impressive array of speakers including the Premier of South Australia John Olsen, Former Minister for Primary Industries John Kerin, Professor Michael Tyler, a passionate frog expert and Dr Wendy Craik from the National Farmers Federation.

The conference will kick off with a selection of one and two day field tours showcasing some of South Australia's best landcare projects. Three days of lectures, discussions and workshops will follow.

Programs and registration forms are available from the conference secretariat on (08) 82127555.

Chatsworth House keeps its past and gets a future

For many farmers in the Western district history can be one of their biggest bills. The cost of upkeep on old bluestone homesteads and out buildings can be crippling. Some of these 'grand old properties' cease to be viable. They pass through numerous owners, often falling into a state of disrepair along the way.

Chatsworth House is one such property that has been bought back to life by an owner keen to invest in both history and the future. Jean Claude Desmet is a Melbourne business man who haisl originally from France. He first saw Chatsworth

House with its magnificant but run-down, 1850's bluestone homestead and stables in 1993. He took up the challenge of restoring the property to its former grandeur and indulging his passions for horses and hunting.

Desmet is a Melbourne-based owner who is also committed to renovating and improving the property. He appointed Jack Donaldson as Manager of Chatsworth House and they set about developing a five year plan to turn around the farms environment and economics. The property is around 3,500 acres. It produces fine Merino wool, cattle, horses and has 400 acres of cropping.

Jack says their first plan was to return trees to the property. They had some old photographs that showed the now barren and salty land was once heavily treed. But it was obvious any trees simply wouldn't survive until they tacked a massive rabbit problem.

"In March 1997 we did a count of 250 acres. We saw over 400 rabbits. It wasn't unusual to go out shooting over a weekend and come back with 150 pair," he said.

Jack planned an extensive 1080 campaign. Over one tonne of poisoned carrots were laid across the problem areas of the property. This has been followed by ripping of warrens and gassing of hard to get at areas.

Jack says the campaign has been a huge success. "Recently we did a count on the same 250 acres and came up with 23 rabbits. In fact there are probably even less now, as our follow up work has been very thorough."

Jack has also been busy with new fencing. This will reduce stock access to the Hopkins River which flows through the property. Jack says previous owners had concentrated on extracting sand from the river and this was another reason why the property was neglected. The five year plan also includes an extensive pasture renovation program.

Jack says the neighbouring farmers have been really positive about the works at Chatsworth House. "There is a good sense of community, with people helping each other out and lending machinery. I think the locals are relieved that the place is getting back to the way it should be, "he said.

With renovations to the homestead and stables now almost complete Jean Claude Desmet is a regular rider with the local Ellerslie Hunt.

Save on fencing by going around in circles
By Frank Carland, NRE Colac

Clumps of trees in the middle of paddocks can have advantages, stock are always able to find shelter whatever direction the weather is coming from.

The type of tree species selected can also add to the value of clump or block plantings. Select trees that not only provide shelter but also have value for timber, firewood and fodder.

There are a number of options available when it comes to designing forestry blocks. Running a fence across a corner to create a trianble can be efficient because it

utilises existing fences. Likewise a square or rectangle in the corner of a paddock can save on fencing materials.

When it comes to mid-paddock forestry blocks, a circle design is a very favourable option. This is best explained by comparing the relative merits of some common shapes.

A circle design saves on material and labour. There is also a lack of short strains, which often go slack due to the slight movement of end assemblies. This shape can be useful for fencing out clumps of remnant native vegetation, which is a cheaper alternative to planting trees.

For further information contact the NRE Colac office on (03) 52335500.

See pdf file titled farming in circles for illustrations.

Farm$mart gets bigger and better
By Greg Smith, VFF

Farm$mart is moving into stage two with a healthy funding increase that will see more Farm$mart facilitators and more modules offered.

Farm$mart is Victoria's Property Management Planning (PMP) program. It helps farmers to be more profitable, farm sustainable and be better risk and business managers.

Farm$mart provides information and skills development over eight areas:

- Missions, goals and objectives
- Natural Resource Management
- Enterprise Management
- Marketing Management
- Self and Staff Management
- Risk Management
- Financial Planning and Control
- Information Management

There are several topics or modules in each of the eight areas, the topics are covered in a group sessions of two to three hours.

Stage two of Farm$mart will develop stronger linkages with industry programs like Target 10, TOPCROP and several pastoral industry programs. There is also a strong regional influence on the program. Farmers led steering committees plan projects for their areas of Mallee, Wimmera, North Central, South West, North East, Gippsland, Port Phillip and Northern Irrigation.

For further information on Farm$mart contact your regional office of NRE or the VFF.

New Structures for Catchment Management

The State Government has announced the creation of 9 Catchment Management Authorities following a major review into structural arrangements across Victoria.

Minister for Conservation & Land Management Marie Tehan and Minister for Agriculture and Resources Pat McNamara said the new Authorities would take the roles of the existing Catchment and Land Protection Boards, river management authorities, salinity implementation groups, water quality groups and sustainable regional development committees.

The new Authorities will be formally established from 1 July this year based on existing CALP regions. Their key task will be to effectively and efficiently implement the recently released Regional Catchment Strategies.

Other key roles of the new Catchment Management Authorities will include identifying priority activities and work programs under the Regional Catchment Strategies, providing advice to the State and Federal Governments on resourcing priorities and negotiating with the Department of Natural Resources & Environment on regional service delivery.

Mr McNamara said the new catchment management arrangements would, for the first time, bring together the efforts of community service delivery and advisory groups, resulting in a whole of catchment approach. The Minister said the CMA's and their implementation committees would provide a clearer focus for regional decision making and strengthen links with the landcare movement.

Mrs Tehan said the decision to create the new Authorities was based on the recommendations of the Catchment Management Structures Working Party established last year to review the current arrangements for catchment management in Victoria.

The review involved a comprehensive public consultation process and attracted 182 submissions.

The establishment of the new Catchment Management structure will enable a fully integrated approach to sustainable development and conservation of land and water resources, Mrs Tehan said.

The Ministers said the new Catchment Management Structures, combined with the Regional Catchment Strategies and the prospect of additional resources under the Natural Heritage Trust would result in major advances in sustainable natural resource management in Victoria.

Landfest a huge success
By Tarnya Kruger, NRE Creswick

During 1996 the idea of a carnival type day at the Creswick Landcare Centre was first mooted. We hoped, but never imaged that it would be the success that it finally was on Sunday March 23rd during Landcare Month. More than 1500 people braved the weather for an action packed day.

Landfest planning involved three Landcare groups, Baldhills/Creswick, Beckworth/Bolton and Ulina, a number of local community groups, the Creswick Nursery and of course the Landcare Centre.

Landfest was desinged to be a fun family day, hosting many of the locally grown produce and talents, an opportunity for everyone to enjoy, discover, learn, share and embrace the concept of landcare – the community working and celebrating together.

There were over 40 staff holders offering a range of goods and information – local winers, honey, wood turning, pottery, organic foods, permaculture, the Ballarat Regional Seed Bank, horse and cart rides, animal mobile making, music and theatre to name a few. There was plenty of hot food provided by the local primary schools of Creswick North and Smeaton and the Ballarat Steiner Kindergarten prepared some interesting treats.

It would be great to see a number of "landfests" taking place across Victoria during Landcare Month, - you may like to contact us about information and ideas for a Landfest near you! Call Creswick Landcare Centre on 03 52542200.

Redfin return to the Hopkins

A panel beater, a grocery shop owner and a few farmers. In fact the Caramut and Hexham Angling Club has only either members. But this hadn't deterred them from planting over 700 trees in a bid to improve their favourite fishing spot on the Hopkins River.

Annette Patinson, the club's president, says she has fished in the river for a slong as she can remember. "We catch mainly trout and eels. There have been no redfin in the river for the past six or seven years but this year three have been caught already. We put this down to our 'Fisherman's Friends Tree Planting Project".

Annette Patinson said club members first started to get concerned when severe erosion along the river caused it to get wider and wider.

The club has received two grants from NRE to cover fencing materials and the purchase of native trees. The works have been carried out on an area of crown frontage downstream from the club's main fishing spot.

Annette explained the plantation: a variety of eucalypts, wattles and tea trees. The smaller trees are at the front to bind the river banks and the larger gums at the back to provide shelter for stock. The planted area has been fenced to keep stock out until the trees are establishing.

"We had the rods in while we were planting the trees so it was a big of fun as well as a lot of hard work. We've only watered the trees twice and they've survived really well despite the hot summer," Annette said.

Annette's message to other angling clubs is that no matter how small they are, river restoration is well worthwhile. "If we want to keep fishing, looking after the future of the rivers is essential."

In brief

Picturing Landcare

Do you have a great photograph showing a person, a pic or progress in landcare? Landcare Australia is running a major photographic competition sponsored by Fuji Film. There are a number of difference categories, winners will receive cash and other prizes. Entries close on July 30th 1997. Call 1800 151 105 for entry details.

Saltwatch on the web
Saltwatch celebrates its 10th year in 1997, and it has been estimated that over 100,000 students, teachers, community and Landcare groups have taken part over the years – a lot of salt watched! It is Australia's longest running community monitoring program.

This year Saltwatch has gone global. You can view the Saltwatch data collection on the internet at: http://dse.vic.gov.au/saltwatch/

Victoria hosts International Landcare Conference
The State and Federal Governments have just announced that Victoria will host the first ever International Landcare Conference in the year 2000. The conference aims to share our experience of this unique program and learn about overseas challenges and models. Further information is available from Jo Safstrom at NRE on (03) 94124382.

Rural Seminar and Training Program
Hosted by Greening Australia and NRE this series of rural seminars and bus tours targets revegetation and land conservation issues. Topics include fire management, catchment management, managing wetlands, direct seeding, grasslands, riparian and waterways management and red gum decline on the western plains. The seminar and bus tours will be held at five regional venues. For more information call Gerard Clark on (03) 94573024.

Farmers fox control efforts pay off for the whole district

John Brewis remembers shooting foxes when he was a kid. They were always a problem and his father was kept constantly busy. "I'd hate going into the paddocks to see a lamb still alive, but with its nose bitten off by a fox overnight."

John Brewis farms 4,000 acres at Strathkellar on the outskirts of Hamilton. He has co-ordinated an innovative Foxoff baiting program in the area.

Four years ago John read about Foxoff in the papers and thought it had to be better than shooting. "When you're getting on a bit the last thing you want to be doing is staying up all night shooting foxed, "he says.

John organised a field day on his property and invited all his neighbours. In face he managed to convince almost everyone over a 10 mile square area o get involved and make a commitment to lay baits within three weeks of the field day.

Before the foxoff program John was seeing 18 to 20 foxes over a 40km area. After baiting there were three or four foxes over the same area. John says the key to success with foxoff is getting people to do it together. He recommends baits should be laid six to eight weeks prior to lambing and calving. "If everyone makes a commitment to lay baits at the same time the benefits are much greater than trying to do it on your own, "he says.

John has tried to main the enthusiasm in his area by repeating the Foxoff field day each year. He has been assisted by John Mathews from NRE at Casterton who has created a 'fox control results map' for the area.

John Mathews assisted landholders to mark and monitor foxoff on the map and record their lambing percentages. They have been adding to the map each year and it now has some pretty convincing evidence about why farmers should get involved. John Mathews says farmers can easily quantify what they spend on internal parasites through drenching bills but they often don't have abudget for 'external parasites' like foxes. He is confident that Foxoff provides good returns for a fairly small outlay.

John Brewis estimates his own lambing percentages have improved by six to eight percent. John says the good thing about Foxoff is that it works 24 hours a day. "At around $1 a bait it's reasonably priced anda lot less labour intensive than shooting."

When John is out laying his baits he tries to hink like a fox. For particularly wily foxed he has dragged a carcass along the bait trail or dribbled tuna oil on the side of a fence post near the bait.

John is convinced that Foxoff is really the only way to get on top of the fox problem.

Weevil battles spear thistle

Conditions could hardly have been worse when Conservation & Land Management Minister, Marie Tehan and local member Dennis Napthing, visited a property at Strathdownie to see the latest developments in a biological control program aimed at reducing spear thistle.

The visit took place at the height of summer; the temperature hovered around 45 degrees, perfect for all star attraction: the thistle receptacle weevil.

The four to six millimetre long, brown beetle is a natural enemy fo spear thistle and has been imported in an effort to control the weed.

Thistles have long been a problem for managers of agricultural land. Their spines contaminate wool and cause injury to stock. Their rapid invasion reduces the area of productive grazing.

The party at Strathdownie heard how researchers from the Keith Turnbull Research Institute at Frankston are progressing with their trials with the thistle receptacle weevil.

One of the project, partly funded by the International Wool Secretariat, is to develop a series of nursery sites for rearing the weevils. Once the site network is established in an area, landcare groups harvest weevils from the nurseries and help redistribute them throughout the state.

Up to 50 adult weevils are released inside a mesh tent over an infestatiaon of thistles in late spring. At the end of summar, offspring weevil numbers at each of the nursery sites are assessed.

The greater the number of weevils, the better the seed destruction rate.

The 1997 assessments have begun with some very promising news. An eightfold increase from the initial release populations has been reported at some sites.

KTRI staff are currently assessing other biocontrol agents at the institute, these include:

- Gall fly is also being used against spear thistle
- Plume moth and clearwing moth are being used against horehound
- Bitou tortoise beetle, bitou tip moth and seed flies used against boneseed
- Crown weevil, root weevil and taproot flea beetle against Paterson's curse
- Stunt mite against St John's wort
- Clearing moth against docks
- Stem and crown boring moth, cinnabar moth and flea beetles against ragwort
- Rust fungi against slender thistles and tutsan.

A 20 year battle with salt in Campaspe West

After sharefarming at Tongala for 7 years, Ron & Judy Kay eventually acquired their own dairy farm on a new Rural Finance Commission (RFC) subdivision, a little north of Rochester. Barely a year later a rapidly worsening salt problem resulted in bare paddocks and declining productivity, and threatened to make their stay at Rochester a very short one. Here's now Ron & Judy tackled the problem, 'stopped the salt', and returned their farm to full production.

Q1 When did you start farming at Rochester?

A We came here 21 years ago. The farm, which is 104 acres in size, was part of an extension of the soldier-settlement subdivision started west of Rochester. We are not soldier-settlers. Our opportunity to own our own farm was the result of a scheme to get young people back onto the land.

Before this area (the Campaspe West Irrigation District) was cup up, it was larger, dryland farms. We started with basically 75 acres of annual pasture and 29 acres of rubbish. There were very few trees. The house was quite unprotected and exposed.

The soil here is very good, probably something like a red-brown sandy loam, and it naturally drains well. You can easily walk on the paddocks a day after watering. We think the soil here is more productive than at Tongala, and that may be due to the fact it drains so well. Our rainfall here is about 18 inches a year. This supplemented by a water right of 160 megalitres, with a further 9 megalitres of Stock & Domestic water.

Q2 When did you realise you had a salinity problem?

A It started showing up barely a year after we got here. I (Ron) was born on a dairy farm at Undera and have had a lifetime in dairying, but this was my first experience with salt. It was a big shock to us, very scary. A neighbour even walked off his place after 4 years, it was so bad.

Q3 What were the visible signs of the problem?

A Bare, black patches started appearing in the lowest parts of the farm. They were snow white in summer when the water evaporated, leaving the salt crystals. About 15 acres was just like a desert, with hardly anthing on it. Neighbouring farms had similar problems. In fact, some were even worse than our farm.

The watertable was right at the surface. When we dug holes, water literally bubbled out. The problem was caused basically by providing properties with a water right without ensuring that they were properly drained.

While we had a drainage channel it didn't go right through the property, but stopped at the lowest point. And where the channel stopped the water ponded, the watertable rose – and up came the salt!

Q4 How did you go about fixing the problem?

A The Department of Agriculture advised us to plant trees and sow tall wheat grass, which we did. We put trees along fencelines and sowed wheat grass through all our paddocks.

We extended our farm dainage channel a few chains to link up with the SR&WCS arterial drainage system. Then the SR&WSC, in conjunction with the Department installed a groundwater pump in the middle of our lowest spot, where the problem was the worst. We pumped water into the drainage channel, from where it went into the Campaspe River and eventually into the Murray. We weren't allowed to do that for long because of concern about putting salt into the Campaspe. The rivers, though, are our natural drainage system.

Nowadays, we only pump into the drainage system from May to September, when people aren't irrigating and the rivers' flows are usually at their highest. Water is pumped away from the Campaspe River into the Bamawm drains, from where it flows into the Murray.

During the watering season we put our pumped-out water back onto the paddocks as irrigation water. It is shandied at the water wheel in the ratio of 12 parts of good water with 1 part of salty water.

In the mid 1980's Tatura started doing experiments here with different mixes of shadied water. As we recall, they used up to 50 per cent of pumped water. With our well-drained soil, and the watertable at depth, there were no apparent differences.

Q5 How effective has the groundwater pumping been?

A This has really been the key to beating the salt. The watertable started going down immediately, and plants started coming back onto the bare ground. The watertable is now down at about 9 feet at our lowest poing – and we aim to keep it down there. The level of salt in our pumped water has also dropped from around 3,000 ppm (parts per million) when we started pumping to its current level of around 1,700 ppm.

We sowed wheat grass into the bare areas. This species doesn't seem to have much feed value but it is valuable in establishing plant cover on salty ground. When clover and perennial grasses started coming in, the wheat grass declined.

Q6 Has it been a long and costly job?

A It has taken around 20 years to get right on top of the salt problem, but we seem to have it beaten now. We owe a lot to the government departments for advice and for installing the pump and supplying fueld and soil. For our part, we had to maintain the equipment and keep it going. A couple of years ago government assistance ceased and we had to buy the pumping equipment from Goulburn-Murray Water. We did, however, receive an 80 per cent subsidy on the purchase price. But now we are on our own we will have to bear all future costs ourselves. GMW still monitors the quantity and quality of groundwater removed by pumping.

We had also had to supply seed, tree seed, tractor hours, and so on. The local shire subsidised trees for a 1 for 1 basis, up to 100 per year.

We started planting a variety of gums, and also paperbarks (melaleucas). As trees died, we just keep replacing them. The melaleucas have done the best in the long run. Of course, no dairy farm is complete without its willows and these have done well also.

Q7 So the farm is now producing at maximum potential?

A We think so. When we first ran into salinity problems, we milked a maximum of 70 Fresian cows. Nowadays we are milking 115. Milk production per cow is much higher, too. Our total milk production is probably at least double what it was 20 years ago.

Our paddocks now have good pastures, consisting of white and strawberry clovers and perennial ryegrass and paspalum. We don't supplementary feed in the bale. We buy in all our hay and fee it out from mid autumn until early spring.

With the watertable under control, and paddocks sown down to well-maintained improved pastures, we feel our milk production is now at a high and sustainable level. As far as salt is concerned we hope, for us, it is a thing of the past."

Rebuilding bridges between city and country –
Goal of a new urban/rural alliance
By Gib Wettenhall

Once, when Australia's cities were smaller, almost every city person had a friend or relative in the country who they would visit regularly. Those days are gone.

For the 85 per cent of Victorians who live in cities, rural Australia has become an alien place – unvisited, unloved.

Rebuilding bridges between city and country is the goal of a new urban/rural alliance calling itself the Urban Rural Links Program. Members of the alliance include farmers, landcare groups, councils and some 20 city and country schools. Funding for an ambitious community education program is being provided by the 10 urban and rural councils using educational packages developed by NRE community education officers.

Following the recent appointment of a co-ordinator, the alliance is set this April to bring classes of primary school children and their teachers to experience first hand

life and death on a farm, as well as exposing them to land degradation problems and what is being done to combat them. One thousand children are expected to make overnight stays or school camps, initially within the Shepparton Irrigation Region, then with other rural councils who are members of the program. Rural children will also be given an opportunity to experience city life and urban landcare.

“If rural Australia is to have a future at all, we have to build a bridge to the consumers of tomorrow so they will grown to become adults with some understanding of agricultural processes and the changes require to sustain and conserve our country’s natural resources, “claimed Ingrid Duncan, the Urban Rural Links Program’s first co-ordinator. She believes the program has the potential to make rural Australia accessible to those living in cities.

One of the prime movers in the program, NRE community education officer, Geoff McFarlane, expects it to go nation-wide with 10,000 school children involved within five years.

Amazing ignorance

Members of the Undera Landcare Group are all to aware that rural Australia has become an alien place to urban youth in particular. Mainly dairy farmers within the intensively-farmed, 500,000 hectare Shepparton Irrigation Region, members of the landcare group played host to school children from the former municipality of Essendon over a two year period from 1993.

Three executive members of the landcare group gathered around a kitchen table, recalling their amazement at how little the kids knew about the source of the good products on their supermarket shelves.

With a wry laugh Stuart Drysdale, the immediate past chairperson of the Undera Landcare Group, remembered how some kids had even commented how milk fresh from the dairy pail tasted better than the real thing (in supermarkets, that is).

“Many of the kids had never seen a calf close up, let alone a cow giving birth to a calf,” chimed in Graham Meneilly, the current chairperson.

“They were fascinated by the sight of a dead cow,” said the landcare group’s secretary, Barry Osborne. “They loved running in the mud or picking blackberries, covering their faces in red stuff.”

Beginnings

The origins of the Urban Rural Links Program go back to the return of the major of the City of Essendon from his holidays in the summer of 1993.

As the major, Alistair Fraser, passed through the Shepparton Irrigation Region, be heard on the radio that the rising watertable threatened to destroy farming in the Murray Darling Basin, one of the powerhouses of Australian agriculture, accounting for 25 per cent of rural exports. On making enquiries, he found that what he thought sounded unbelieveable was, in fact, true.

Using his authority as mayor, he committed Essendon Council to providing funds in conjunction with a successful National Landcare Program bid aimed at sending kids from Essendon schools on field trips to learn about life on the farm and the land degradation farmers faced.

“At first the kids and teachers only came for a day,” Geoff McFarlane remembers. “Wed rush them around the busy reserve. They didn’t even get to kick the dusk on a farm. We soon learn it was not the way to do it.”

That was when the farming members of a number of landcare groups, including the Undera Landcare Group, become involved as enthusiastic hosts not only giving the kids a free run on their farms, but also showing them the problems associated with a steadily rising watertable.

To improve educational outcomes, teachers from the Essendon schools undertook in-service training with a focus on learning about salinity and what was being done to combat it.

After two years of successful operation, this precursor to the Urban Rural Links Program was abandoned with the arrival of municipal amalgamations.

Reborn anew

Now a commissioner at Melton, Alistair Fraser has once again played a key role in creating a broader, deeper successor to the Essendon project. In the new alliance, six urban councils are involved (Darebin, Hume, Melton, Moonee Valley, Stonnington & Wyndham) and four regional councils (Campaspe, Greater Bendigo, Loddon Moira), plus the Municipal Association of Victoria.

In its first year of operation, the Urban Rural Links Program has a budget of $50,000 with the urban councils contribution $5,000 per year and the regional councils $3,000 per year.

A thoroughbred horse breeder and former salinity link worker, the program’s co-ordinator, Ingrid Duncan, is based at the Bundoora Park Children’s Farm. Its scaled down ‘cottage’ version of a farm brings town and country together, offering a natural progression for introducing young children to the countryside itself, says Geoff McFarlane.

Through her work with the Upper Maribyrnong Catchment Group, Ingrid played a vital role in instituting landcare activities at Daraweit Guim Primary School, a small rural school between Kilmore and Romsey which her three children have attended. With just over 50 children and only three teachers, Daraweit Guim P.S’s impressive achievements highlight the potential for making conservation and environment a central part of the curriculum.

Landcare activities enthusiastically embraced by both teachers and students at Daraweit Guim P.S. include watertable monitoring of the creek behind the school, site revegetation and road planting of a ‘landcare avenue’, putting in a Korri garden with more than a 100 varieties of bush tucker plants, interviews with ‘old-timers about what the area was like when they were young, contributing to a ‘Landcare for Kids’ brochure and performing a play and singing at venues as varied as the launches of the Decade of Landcare and Saltwatch Week, as well as appearing on ‘Burke’s Backyard.’

Different perspectives

Each of the participants to the Urban Rural Links Program sees its value from a different perspective.

“One of the rural councils believes that if one kid visits and develops an interest in the country, studies to become a doctor and moves to the country, then the whole program will be worth it,” says Ingrid Duncan.

“Another council wants to create links which increase ties and the circulation of city people through their region. Yet another sees urban and rural areas as polarised with the program acting as a way of breaking down barriers & divisiveness.”

The dairy farmers of the Shepparton Irrigation Region have their own vision for the program too. They want more than greater understanding and awareness. They want city folk to appreciate and value their existence.

Barry Osborne summed up what they feel best. “There’s no hope for those of us who live off the land unless we have empathy from those we sell to in the cities. If they feel comfortable, we’ve got them as friends. They’ll appreciate that things actually happen beyond the end of the tram track that are worth saving.”

Farming the natural way
By William Twigg

My family farm is at Bears Lagoon, 60 km North of Bendigo on the Loddon Plains. It is a mixed farm – sheep, grains and cattle. The soils are naturally poorly structured red duplex type (average 5.5pH) with shallow top soil and dense clay.

The Loddon Plains were originally savannah woodlands. The area has been heavily cleeared, and we have been left with a harsh environment and some areas of dryland salinity. My family has farmed in the Bears Lagoon area for almost ninety years so we have a lot of history to draw on when making decisions. In 1970 we had 1,500 acres and were farming with traditional methods. But we began to notice that although yields were good our expenses were high in comparison to our gross income.

We made a decision to set about reducing our expenses while trying to maintain yield. After many years we have been able to develop a system of farming in sympathy with the environment and nature which has enabled us to achieve this aim. The biggest obstacle I had to overcome in developing this system and understanding my land was with myself. The ingrained beliefs and attitudes to the leand, that all my life I had accepted from other people, farming books and farming traditions.

Farm like a drug addict
When we were farming traditionally our farm became like a drug addict – the more we put in, the more the land demanded to achieve a satisfactory yield. We felt we were using most of the fertility in our soil to pay the cost of the inputs. We concluded that a smaller yield per acre with less expenses would be almost as profitable, and considering the reduced demand on soil fertility, much more profitable in the long term. Over the last twenty five years we have rarely needed to use inputs such as fertilisers, drenches, supplementary feeding, and dips.

The secret of this system is in the development of Lucerne, a deep rooted perennial plant, as our major pasture species. Lucerne is similar in root growth to much of the original vegetation of our areas, it has the ability to recycle nutrients and moisture to the soil surface.

With our whole farm sown to Lucerne we are able to double the dry sheep equivalent (DSE) per acre compared to traditional annual pasture. The Lucerne also uses rainfall more effectively which helps eliminate dryland salinity.

Imitating nature on the farm

We try to imitate nature on the farm by establishing Lucerne at a density of one to three plants per square metre. This is similar to the density of the original native vegetation int his area, it allows annuals to thrive in winter and spring and provide a balanced pasture for livestock. Clovers and Rye Grass are also sown to improve soil fertility and structure. In contrast to most other farming systems where wateratables are rising, in our system the sinking of test bores has shown that the watertable is receding.

With the introduction of Lucerne we have moved to spring lambingh, which is after all natures time to reproduce. Spring lambing has increased our lambing percentages by at least20 per cent. As the feed requirements of the stock follow the pasture production more closely than in autumn lambing, no supplementary feeding is needed. We sell the prime lambs in the higher priced markets of February and March.

Our Lucerne pastures are rotationally grazed and for this reason we do not need to drench livestock. Rotational grazing imitates the cycles of native animals, they grazed and polluted one area and moved to another, reducing the spread of worms and disease.

Our approach to weeds also tries to imitate what happens in nature. When weeds appear in certain areas of our farm this is telling us something about soil conditions, nature is trying to balance her system. If a particular weed is causing a problem it is because the land really needs what that plant has to give, or, the land is badly in need of a rest. It is the same with sick and unhealthy plants, nature responds to imbalance by sending in insects to destroy them.

In nature we find that the sick and unhealthy individuals as are culled out – this keeps the species strong and continually evolving and improving over time. Instead of spraying unwanted weeds we use heavy stocking to manipulate the weeds to our advantage and correct the imbalance of the pasture or soil.

All we sell is fertility

The next major change occurred on our farm in the mid 1980's. We came to the realisation that as farmers all we sell is our fertility, (sunlight or energy) to produce our income. Cereals extract massive amounts of fertility but bring in only 20 cents per kg. Meat brings in around $2 per kg and wool $4-$5 per kg. Since we have reduced our cereal production our fertility has increased and so has our profitability.

Trees are an integral part of our farming system. We plant 5,000 indigenous trees each year to improve the landscape and soften the environment. The trees are planted in irregular clumps of five to ten acres (100 trees per acre planted). We plant a large percentage of acacias, which put nitrogen back into the soil for eucalypts and other species to feed from. When most of the acacia's are dead, (in 10-15 years) the area is burnt to promote regeneration, as in a forest fire the eucalypts survive.

The threes have brought in increase in bird activity. We encourage them to breed and become part of our workforce. All native species, plant, animal and insect are needed to create a balanced system. Lose one and it starts an ecological chain reaction.

Along with the changes on the farm I have also changed my approach with people. I used to argue and debate and try to covert people to may way of thinking and seeing things and feel disheartened and depressed when they didn't change. Now I'm much more interested in actually doing it myself and showing it can be done.

A get a great deal of personal satisfaction from seeing the ways of nature and adapting them to our farming system. Our farm has increased from 1,500 acres in 1970 to 10,000 acres now. It is a profitable and sustainable enterprise. I am happy to share my ideas and experience with people are are interested but don't judge anyone for what they do on their own properties.

The Junction Corridors of Green Project
Take 100 families, a few dollars and a degraded river…

The Central Hopkins Land Protection Association is a strange beast. It consists of five landcare groups, three fishing clubs, Deakin University, the Royal Australasian Omithologists Union, local schools and government organisations.

The Association has given birth to an ambitious project to create a corridor of green along the Hopkins River from Chatsworth to Framlingham. The web of green will spread across the landscape linking the Cobra Killuc Wildlife Reserve with the river and the Salt Creek and Blind Creek catchments.

The project will erect 47km of protective fencing and establish around 125,000 native trees over the next two years. The on ground works include stream degradation, improved pastures for dryland salinity and habitat improvement for the soon to be released Eastern Barred Bandicoot.

The project plan has a staggering list of objectives:

- To protect and revegetate areas of the Hopkins River, Salt Cree, Blind Creek and Mustons Creek, Including re-establishing missing understorey species.
- To provide linkages or habitat corridors into the 'islands' of significant habitat within the project area
- To control predators using Foxoff. This will help to protect native animals in the local bushland reserves and promote their movement into new corridors.
- To collect data on the rivers, creeks and wetlands through a Waterwatch Program run by local schools.

The projet will also provide a boost for the flagging local economy with all supplies being sourced from the small country town of Mortlake.

Richard Weatherly is the Chairperson of the Association. He is also a renowned wildlife artist, an innovator in direct seeding technology and the owner of 'Coonewarran,' a 4,000 acre Merino stud at Mortlake. Richard is pragmatic about how the project got off the ground.

"A year ago this project was only a dream, there were landcare groups in the area and they were doing good things. But now for the first time we have co-ordinated. It has bought 100 families together and a grant of around $27,000. Certainly the 'threat' of getting some corridors of green funding was one of the things that spurred us into action. But it is also a critical time for agriculture in the area. Our money

comes from wool and beef which are both poor. Eighty percent of the money going into this project comes from the landholders themselves, a considerable commitment when cash is short".

Richard says the future of the project depends on farm incomes and 'p[erceptions'. Any farm, "he states," can put one to one and a half percent of their gross turnover into sustainability. People have to perceive that this work is an integral part of their farm management to create an energy that will run on."

Richard is blunt bout who benefits from the 'landcare type' projects. "The primary benefits goes back to the farmers in increased productivity. Maybe five percent goes to the community. If farmers want to have a saleable asset in 5, 10 or 20 years time there is simply no question that they have to get involved in sustainability.

The backbone of the Junction Corridors of Green Project is the combined knowledge and commitment from the four landcare Groups: Hopkins, Woorndoo, Blind Creek and Ellerslie. The planning, administration and communication alone in a project of this scale is time consuming and complex. Each of the main parties has a representative on the steering committee who then reports back to their own membership.

Richard recognises the complexity of administering such a consortium. "Of the people involved some show passion and some show leadership. We have to utilise people's skills quickly before they get burnt out."

"We have spread the enthusiasm so that innovators can innovate rather than administer. And we must allow for different approaches. No two families are ever the same, some don't look beyond the next week, others work with detailed plans for the next fifty years."

The Association recognises the importance of providing graphic examples of their work. They will be establishing 'photo points' at each of their sites for six monthly recording of progress. The photographs will provide a reference point on the conditions of the resource and allow measurement of change over time.

Ultimately, Richard Weatherly says the project needs to branch out and find some corporate sponsorship. His job is to delegate. He is confident that amongst the 100 families involved he can turn up someone with the ability to talk to sponsors.

The Central Hopkins Land Protection Association has a lot to provide over the next few years. But it also has a Chairperson motivated by getting the job done and using the best possible model. Richard is continually in contact with a network of colleagues overseas and says we have much to learn from similar projects in South Africa and Canada.

Victorian Landcare will provide updates on the progress of the Junction Corridor of Green Project in future issues.

When school is a Merino stud

Cally Greagen admits to not knowing much about farming. A student at Mortlake College in south west Victoria, she was often on the outer when her school friends swapped stories bout farm life.

Cally took the challenge of studying farm management for the year 12 VCE geography unit she is attempting ayear early, in year 11. The unit requires an in-depth study (common assessment ask or CAT) of the use and management of a resource. Cally and four other students from Mortlake College hve been studying 'Connewarran' a 4,000 acre merino sheep stud near Mortlake.

Cally says studying Connewarran has been an eye opening experience. She knew farming was hard work but had no idea of the breadth of knowledge a farmer needed. "The first time I went our for a visit I was really overshelmed by the amount of information that Richard Weatherly (Connewarran's owner and manager) had about the property," she said.

Cally and the other students first task was to create a use and management table for the farm. This helped them to focus on what happens on the property at a particular time and the management strategies Richard used.

"When Richard first talked bout drenching I didn't even know what he meant. The more time we've spent at Connewarran the more we've started to see things happen at different times of the year and know where they fit into the big picture. Richard has a very scientific approach, he experiments, plans and records what happens all the time. His philosophy is about managing a whole ecosystem which is very complex." Cally says completing the CAT has been hard work. And with a limit of only 2,000 words much of the information she has collected will be recorded in maps, plans, tables and graphs.

Richard Weatherly says that students like Cally who have no prior farming knowledge can actually have an advantage in undertaking this sort of project. "So often farmers do things because it has always been done that way. Students like Cally ask why, they bring fresh ideas and a different perspective."

Cally says she has appreciated the sense of peace at Connewarran. One of Richard's motivations for getting involved was to share a special environment. "I recognise how fortunate I am to have this property and the lifestyle that goes with it. And I am genuinely interested in people. These students are not only the next farmers they are also the next business leaders, politicians, lawyers and engineers. Projects like this make learning real and increase community understanding of resource management."

Cally says she would like a career in business management. If she stays in the country her new-round knowledge of farming has got to be an advantage.

Scaling the heights – NLP final project reports
By Jane Ryan, NRE

Why did the landcare group committee climb Mount Everist? Because the other option was writing their National Landcare Program final project report!

There is no need for these extremes. Its really very easy to write that report. Read on for the seven main details of project reports. Jargon follows in brackets.

- What did you want to do? (objectives)

- What did you do? (activities/outputs)
- What did you achieve? (outcomes)
- Who helped? (participants)
- Did you get your face in the paper?
- What did you spend the money on?
- If you triumphed against huge difficulties (eg bureaucracy-gone-mad, mother nature, the absent neighbours) tell us your secret
- If you didn't, warn others of the pitfalls.

Remember your report is very important, it does get read and is an opportunity for you to influence the NLP. It must be written within three months of project completion.

The easiest way of being prepared for writing your final report is to think about it when you start the project! Start by asking yourself what changes you expect to see and how will you measure these changes?

With your expectations worked out you can gather the information you need for your report as you proceed.

The good news is that a final report form has been produced to make life easier for groups.

Groups can obtain this form from Jane Ryan on (03) 96378373 or their Regional NLP Contact Officer at the Department of Natural Resources & Environment.

New rabbit weapon launched with a thud

With no more fanfare than a dull thud, a new weapon has been launched in the fight against rabbits.

More than 50 landholders from the Alcoa Woady Yaloak Catchment Project were part of the recent Australian launch of Rid-a-Rabbit.

Invented by retired gasfitter George Douglas, Rid-a-Rabbit destroys burrows quickly and easily by igniting a 'charge' of liquid petroleum (LP) gas blown down a warren.

The resulting explosion concusses the rabbits, starves the burrow of air and partly collapses the tunnels.

The results are deal rabbits and an unusable burrow.

Inspiration
George was motivated to develop the technology by two events.

The first was seeing the rabbit menace on his sister's property at Casterton.

The second was seeing the damage after a friends campervan was brown apart by escaping gas from a stove griller.

Thinking laterally, George put the two together.

The technology for Rid-a-Rbit has been three years in the making and extensive trialing before commercial release.

Three hundred burrows were treated 10 months ago and not a single burrow has been re-inhabited' said George.

"I think the fumes of the explosion makes the burrows smell and the rabbits don't like going back."

Thirty burrows in the Woady Yaloak catchment were treated as part of the launch and are being eagerly watched by local landholders to test the maker's claims.

Potential
Fred Heard, a member of the Woady Yaloak catchment rabbit sub committee, can see the potential for Rid-a-Rabbit in the Woady Yaloak Catchment.

"After a good bating program, it is frustrating to see rabbit numbers build up because of the difficulty in getting rid of the last few? Fred said.

"Fumigation is slow because it involves having to search each opening and then using a highly toxic poison".

'This approach seems a lot simpler and quicker to use?.

According to the manufacturers of Rid-a-Rabbit, two people can treat about 15 five hole warrens per hour.

Safety and Cost
John Hardiman, sales manager for Rid-a-Rabbit said the complete package costs $2,450. This includes the equipment, a comprehensive half day training course and a video.

"There is a skill in using the equipment and we want landholders who use the machine to have success? John said.

"This means knowing how to use it responsibly and safely".

George Douglas recommends two people work together in a team.

"You need one person to set the charge and the other to ignite the mixture", George said.

"The technology may seem simple but has canbe dangerous if not used correctly?.

Woady Yaloak Purchase
Justin Liddy the rabbit control facilitator with the catchment project, said the Woady Yaloak Catchment is purchasing two machines this year.

Justin will help operate the equipment, in partnership with each individual landholder.

"We will be making the equipment available to landholders with the support of a trained operator' Justin said.

"The landholders will help me locate the burrows and ignite the charge".

For more information contact: Justin Lidy, Woady Yaloak Catchment Group, (03) 5344741. John Hardiman, Rid-a-Rabbit, (03) 98575277.

Corangamite 'Reps' succeed in Ragwort control

An innovative new approach to controlling Ragwort is paying off in Victoria's Corangamite region. The Rural Extension Persons (REPS) Program has doubled the area of Ragwort treated in the last year.

Under the program six Rural Extension Persons have been employed on a part-time basis to work in specific ragwort trouble spots. The REPS are local people who work within their local communities. The REPS are located at Deans Marsh, Heytesbury, Winchelsea, Hawkenest, Lavers Hill and Curdies Valley areas specifically identified as a high priority under the Regions Ragwort Strategy.

John Rowney, Senior Pest Plant and Animal Planner at the Department of Natural Resources & Environment Colac office said the REPS Program has been a huge success because of the high levels of personal contact.

"The REPS are highly visible within their communities, this has greatly increased levels of awareness and concern about Ragwort."

"The ultimate aim of the REPS Program is to create an environment where landholders feel it is unacceptable to have any Ragwort on their properties," he said.

REPS approach landholders, often by door knocking, to identify Ragwort infestation. They highlight the damaging environmental impacts of Ragwort and encourage the use of effective control techniques. The REPS are supported by local Catchment Management Officers from the Department of Natural Resources & Environment who provide backup and technical advice.

John Rowney said that because REPS work part-time they are very flexible." We find that REPS often choose to work during the weekends so they can make contact with hobby farmers and absentee landholders.

"The REPS Program has benenfits at two levels. We are achieving a much higher rate of on-ground works hwile Catchment Management Officers have more time for strategic planning. This means new Landcare Groups has been created along with more press releases, displays and other extension materials."

Ragwort has been identified as a priority week under the State Government's recently announced War on Weeds strategy. The strategy includes a weeds awareness campaign, a Community Weed Control Scheme, a Local Government Weed Control Scheme, a Weeds Fighting Fund, a Priority Weed Eradication Scheme and a Weed Watch Scheme.

The State Government has committed $12 million to the weeds initiative over the next four years, with $3 million allocated for this years program.

Weeds are a high priority for the Corangamite Region, the recently released Corangamite Regional Catchment Strategy specifically targeted pest management as a priority area.

The REPS program provides a model for other regions tackling similar natural resource management problems.

Minister declares war on weeds

The Minister for Conservation & Land Management, Marie Tehan has launched a $12 million dollar battle plan to address weeds throughout rural Victoria.

At the launch in Kilmore were (L to R) Craig Madden, Chairman of the Goulburn Broken CaLP Board Dryland Committee, Marie Tehan, Minister for Conservation and Land Management, Alistair Fraser, Chief Commissioner of the Shire of Melton and Linda Brownstein, Municipal Natural Resources Liaison Officer for the Goulburn Broken Dryland Salinity Plan.

National Landcare Facilitator now in Geelong

The new National Landcare Facilitator is now based in Geelong, Lachlan Polkinghorne took up the position as manager of the project in January of this year, and is based with the Rural Resources Group Pty Ltd, a team of agricultural consultants.

An important aim of the NLF Project will be to work with the community to develop structures that will ensure that the voice of community landcare is heard, so that the landcare community can participate more effectively in the national program.

Other aims of the NLF project are the identification of issues, facilitating the development of solutions and acting as a conduit between community Landcare and government. Community landcare groups display a great variety in the activities that are undertaken and the project aims to respond to this variety. Often two groups in the same region are carrying out similar activities with little knowledge of how the other is operating.

Adequate information exchange is necessary so that groups can utilise ideas and resources. In this way the landcare dollar can be spread over a wider area.

Lachlan is particularly keen to focus on a specific regional problem or issue, where communication to Canberra may help in resolving the problem.

Lachlan Polkinghorne, ph 03 52296050, fax 0352226643 email landcare@ne.com.au

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A wildlife corridor for Phillip Island
By Bessie Hussey, Phillip Island Landcare Coordinator

Since forming in 1988 the Phillip Island Landcare Group has worked steadily for almost a decade. After this long the group has not lost momentum but has continued to grow and is about to embark on its biggest project yet.

With its largest membership ever (over 80 landholders) the group is in the throws of planning a Wildlife Corridor that extends the length of Phillip Island.

The corridor will meander through thirteen farms incorporating existing habitat including remnant vegetation and farm shelterbelts. It will ink the Island's two largest reserves, the Koala Conservation centre and the Phillip Island Penguin Reserve. Each of these reserves are currently isolated at either end of Phillip Island and support a diverse range of habitat including Ramsar wetlands, woodland and coastal heath.

By linking such areas the group hopes to provide vital habitat for wildlife to move through freely with out any barriers. Currently the fragments or 'islands' of natural vegetation occurring across farmland leaves animals vunerable to disease, bushfire, predation by feral animals, and even eventually inbreeding.

Phillip Island suffers from mild to severe dryland salinity and piesometers are checked every two months to monitor this. Apart from providing wildlife habitat and floral diversity members of the Phillip Island Landcare see this as an excellent opportunity to help lower saline watertable. Wherever possible the corridor will act as a break of slope planting in recharge areas in an attempt to reduce the amount of water entering the groundwater system.

The idea of a wildlife corridor of this size came from local dairy farmer and former group President, Jim McFee.

The Corridor Project has the support of the Phillip Island Nature Park, Bass Coast Shire Council, Friends of the Koalas and the Phillip Island Conservation Society.

The project was officially launched a the group's Land for Wildlife Field Day on April 5th by the Hon Susan Davies, MLA Gippsland West, Ray Leivers, General Manager, Phillip Island Nature Park and Jim McFee planting the first three trees.

Sensor sheds light on good irrigation practice

John Buxton employs a Water Baby to assist with irrigation management. The Water Baby is a transmitter which is placed on the bay, when the water reaches the transmitter it creates a short and sends a signal to a pager which alerts the irrigator to shift the water.

John said, "the Water Baby has been a big help in improving irrigation management." He has been able to reduce the amount of water applied at each irrigation and saves time attending the water. He now only has to go to the water when it is ready to shift. This eliminated guessing how long watering will take, and the problems of over watering.

John is a Victorian Farmers Federation Pastoral Councillor for Gippsland, and runs a 65 hectare high production beef farm at Bundalaguah, midway between Sale & Maffra, which is something of a success story. The farm is an area predominatly irrigated for dairying with good quality water supplied by the Macalister Irrigation System.

Most of the paddocks on John's farm have been laster levelled which vastly increases the efficiency of irrigating, as well as reducing water usage.

The pastures are sown with highly productive pastures, and are stocked at a rate of two-and-a-half cows and calves per hectare (or 35 DSE/HA). Electric fencing allows intensive controlled grazing which ensures that pasture is evenly grazed.

John says his pastures are irrigated on an as needs basis, therefore as little water as possible is used. Just prior to grazing pastures are topped by a mower at a height of about 7.5 cm. This makes the pasture more nutritious and palatable for cattle.

Along fence lines, trees have been strategically planted to provide shade and shelter for livestock as well as the potential for future income from timber sales.

John actively promotes the virtues of landcare in his local community, and believes tha tgood landcare practices are essential to good farm management. "There is a close link between landcare and on-farm productivity," John says.

"Unfortunately, there is a production or income shortfall there is less money that can be spent on landcare works."

Robinson at large
Jim Robinson, Greening Australia Victoria

Vale Merv Joh, Community and Landcare Worker Extraordinaire

It was sad to read last November of the death of Merv John, the first secretary and stalwart member of the Southern Mallee Trees on Farm Group and a tireless community worker in Wycheproof for most of his nearly 80 years.

Merv's first involvement with Wycheproof was to begin his engineering cadetship with the Shire in 1935. After serving in the war, he was Shire Engineer from 1950 until his retirement in 1982. His active community service record was extensive including CFA, RSL, Methodist Church, bowling and cricket clubs and Meals on Wheels, and he held many positions of responsibility and received service awards – a genuine "public servant". He was named Wycheproof Citizen of the Year in 1988.

Merv was instrumental in the establishment in 1981 of the Southern Mallee Trees on Farms Group, one of the first four Farm Tree Groups in Victoria initiated jointly by the then Victorian Farmers and Graziers Association and the old Garden State Committee. He was still actively involved in the Group as Secretary-Treasurer virtually until his death.

Merv's "Landcare" legacy is visibly apparent today throughout the whole Wycheproof Shire. The first revegetation in which he was involved were sugar gums along the Calder Highway and other main roads in the Shire in 1938 and 1939 in conjunction with the old Country Roads Board.

The next fifty eight years (except for seven and a half years in the army!) saw a range of projects and initiatives implemented by merv and the Shire, many of which would be lauded today as "innovative local government involvement in landcare!"

These included revegetation of Mount Wycheproof Public Park in the '50's and 60's, and many projects and schemes aimed at encouraging revegetation and retention of native vegetation on farms and roadsides for conservation purposes and to help

control soil salting and wind erosion. In recent years, the Trees on Farms Group have mainly been involved with revegetation along three chain roads.

Merv's many other links into his community ensured that projects were always collaborative efforts with schools, Lions Clubs, Young Farmers, and state conservation agencies.

In my experience, Merv was a generous, enthusiastic man without a "mean bone in his body" who, like many Mallee boys, liked a chat and could tell a good year! It is one of those regrets that I did not take him up on an offer early last year to see how all the projects were going!! RIP Merv.

Weeds and Farm Forestry or (hopefully) Killing Two Birds With One Stone!

The idea of combining high value farm forestry and at the same time controlling an appalling farm weed has considerable appeal!

During the last couple of years, several Landcare groups to the west of Melbourne with horrific "wall to wall" serrated tussock problems are looking to strategic revegetation to help control the weed in their area – while maybe growing a bit of timber.

It is hoped that, after spraying or cultivating the Tussock, closely planted farm forestry species with dense canopies (such as Black Wattle (Acacia mearnsii) and Drooping Sheoak (Allocasuarina vericillata) in this 15-20 inch rainfall area) will help to control this and other weeds by: shading suppression and competition for soil nutrients and moisture reducing vigour and seed head production; and creating physical barriers or buffer strips to stop/reduce the spread of weed seeds.

While it sounds ismple, ongoing herbicide application or cultivation control of the new Tussock seedlings will still be required until tree canopy closure at 3 to 8 years.

Indeed, farm forestry alone will probably not be an effective weed control option for many weed species particularly with arable fertile farm land.

A farm forestry and serrated tussock control field day was held at the end of April in the Bacchus Marsh Diggers Rest area. For more details on the day contact Liz Hamilton or Sue Harris from the Corangamite Farm Forestry Network (03) 52335533 or Graeme Anderson from NRE Geelong (03) 52264667.

On the shelf – new publications

Agroforestry and farm forestry in north east Victoria
This book by Russell Washusen and Rowan Reid is designed as a manual for landowners interested in using agroforestry as a farm management tool to provide shelter for crops and stock, fire protection, diversification of income or simply for beautification. Th book costs $25 and is available from the North East Agroforestry Network on (03) 57611645.

Landcare Australia Yearbook
Landcare Australia Limited have produced the first ever Landcare Yearbook. The book brings togetyher a broad range of contributors to give a picture of the current

state of play in landcare across Australia. Call Landcare Australia on 1800 151105 for price and ordering information.

Tracks, scats and other traces: A field guide to Australian mammals
Barbara Trigg has updated her excellent guide to working out what mammals are around without actually seeing them. This book would make a terrific present for any amateur naturalist and should be on every landcare groups bookshelf. Available from most bookstores for $29.95 and through Oxford University Press on (03) 96464200.

Regional Catchment Strategies booklets
The recent release of Victoria's Regional Catchment Strategies provides a good snapshot of our priorities for land and water resource management right across the State. Each region has produced a summary booklet which outlines the major problems and the actions needed to 'make a difference.' Copies of the booklets are available from your local Regional Catchment and Land Protection Board or NRE office.

Landcare on the Web
Tess Goodwin, Landcare Consultant

A growing number of organisations are popping up on the Internet. Here are a few that have useful information for landcare groups.

http://www.pi.sa.gov.au/landcare/natconf.htm
For all you need to know about this year's National Landcare Conference. Hosted by Primary Industries, South Australia, this years conference will be held in Adelaide in September 1997. This site allows you to register for the conference online, as well as providing all the information you need about speakers, tours, accommodation and timetables.

http://webserver.dpie.gov.au/
PIENet-DPIE-Primary Industry and Energy Network
Allows yourself plenty of time to explore this web site. It's enormous! As well as housing the National Landcare Program, it covers many natural resource management activities from farm forestry to geoscience. There is information on the grants program, as well as information on publications, commonwealth government policy, and committees. It also offers links to other relevant sites. Natural Heritage Trust funding for community groups information can be found on:
http://www.dpie.gov.au/agfor/landcare/prog/general/what—is.html

http://www.vff.org.au/
The Victorian Farmers Federation homepage features their windmill logo spinning in the breeeze. Choose 'Contacts' from the home page menu and you will find the VFF Landcare Group. This provides contact details for all VFF personnel involved in Landcare.

http://www.dce.vic.gov.au/
The Department of Natural Resources & Environment site. Click on groundwater Victoria and disocver the groundwater database, listing bore locations and reports. This site also highlights the beneficial use of groundwater. Other areas to choose from include the environment cadet program, geographic data Victoria, and Victoria's geospatial information network.

Email me on forland@shepparton.net.au if you have disocvered a good landcare web site.