

## IN THIS ISSUE

GRDC/MSF Grains Update  
Mallee Machinery Field Days  
New Projects  
From the Boardroom  
Staff comings and goings  
RabbitScan  
Crop Progress  
Increasing optimism for  
ongoing rain

## Diary Note

### GRDC/MSF Grains Update Swan Hill Thursday July 30th

Details can be found on  
[www.msfp.org.au](http://www.msfp.org.au)

RSVP (essential for catering purposes) by Tuesday 28th July to MSF on 03 5022 0579 or [admin@msfp.org.au](mailto:admin@msfp.org.au)

The Loxton GRDC Grains Update will be held at the Sporting Club on August 20th

### MSF/SPAA Crop Walk in Loxton Tuesday 4th August 2-5.30 pm

Visiting the farms of Robin Schaefer and Paul Kaesler, topics will include decision making in the variable rate process, yield mapping and other software and trials. More information from Richard Saunders on 0419 853 089.



# Sustainability Snapshots

Volume 1, Issue 4, July 2009

## Funding Success

Mallee Sustainable Farming Inc. has been successful in obtaining funding for several new projects in the past month. \$150,000 funding has been approved under the *Community Investment Program* through the Department for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. The Community Investment Program is an extension of the successful *Strengthening Our Community* project run by MSF over the past two years which has assisted 40 communities with small community based projects. Focus Consulting has been engaged by MSF to liaise with additional communities. The purpose of the *Community Investment Program* is to ensure that small rural towns and communities retain their identity and their resilience in times of adversity.

Further federal government funding of \$49,610 has been made available to MSF and Focus Consulting for the Recognising Women Farmers project. This project is supported by funding from the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry under its Australia's Farming Future initiative. Women from three states will benefit from this project with workshops planned for six centres—Loxton, Pinaroo, Wentworth, Balranald, Ouyen and Werrimull. Through Rural Solutions SA farmers will benefit from increased knowledge of perennial pastures thanks to three new projects funded by the SA Government through the Complimentary Community Natural Resource Management Grants. The three new projects are:-

Using Gibberellic Acid to promote winter pasture growth  
Post emergent herbicides for Veldt Grass  
Low rainfall perennial grass demonstration.  
Watch future editions of Sustainability Snapshots for progress on these and other MSF projects.

## Mallee Machinery Field Days



## Entry & Transport

MSF Members are invited to attend the Speed Field Days on the 5th August absolutely free. Two buses will carry passengers from Balranald/Euston and Wentworth/Mildura to Speed. Bus refreshments and Field Day entry will also be provided. This is free for MSF members and \$20 for non-members. For those not yet members of MSF, it is not too late to join. Annual membership is \$55 and with this offer, provides immediate membership benefits. Bookings are essential. Contact MSF on (ph) 03 5021 9100, (fax) 03 5022 0579 or (email) [admin@msfp.org.au](mailto:admin@msfp.org.au).

## From The Boardroom

Good-day Members,  
I am absolutely delighted this month to announce the appointment of Michael Moodie as MSF Agronomist. It has been a dream of mine since becoming Chairman to employ an agronomist at MSF and now it has happened. I feel that this will make a real difference to members and the Mallee farming community to have the in house services of an agronomist. We

anticipate this expertise will open up many new R & D opportunities. Additionally, I think an agronomist will provide strong technical assistance to the MSF staff enhancing the team and project delivery. Welcome aboard Michael and here's to a productive future.

**Jim Maynard**  
Chairman



## SA Gibberellic Acid on Pasture Trial

Thursday 16th July  
3.30pm

Chad Burbridge's Paddock, Burbridge Rd, Etrrick (follow the signs from Murray Bridge to Bow Hill Road

The trial demonstrated the use of ProGibb™ (gibberellic acid on medic pasture to improve winter production. The trial also includes Flexi-N™ and Pasture Foliar™.

## Rascally Rabbits

Rabbitscan is an initiative of the National Rabbit Management Advisory Group developed to coincide with the 150th Anniversary of the introduction of the wild rabbits to Australia.

Thomas Austin from Barwon Park, Winchelsea, Victoria is the culprit history remembers as being responsible for first releasing rabbits into the wild in Australia. The story is that Austin was an avid hunter in England but on arrival in Australia found nothing he was accustomed to hunting. He asked his nephew William to send him 24 grey rabbits, five hares, 72 partridges and some sparrows so he could continue his hobby. William could not source enough grey rabbits so he made up the numbers with domestic rabbits.

One theory that now exists as to why Austin's rabbits adapted so well to Australian conditions is that

the hybrid rabbits that resulted from these two types breeding produced a particularly hardy and virile rabbit. Following Austin's example, many other farms released their rabbits into the wild. At the time Austin stated, "The introduction of a few rabbits could do little harm and might provide a touch of home, in addition to a spot of hunting."

History, of course, has proved Austin wrong and rabbits have significantly degraded Australia's landscape.

The RabbitScan Challenge hopes to record data from 5,000 survey sites across Australia to further our knowledge of their activity. They are looking for interested individuals and groups such as farmers, landcare groups and schools, to get involved.

To find out more, visit [www.rabbitscan.net.au](http://www.rabbitscan.net.au).



## Hello and Goodbye

In the last month, MSF said goodbye to one of its favourite staff members but hello to two new faces.

### Michael Moodie

Michael takes up the position of MSF Agronomist and will work on various projects as well as contribute technical advice to the MSF team. Michael comes to the organisation after a year working on the family farm in Deniliquin. Prior to this, Michael worked for the Victoria DPI, often in collaboration with MSF, on a variety of projects including TOPCROP, trials with Yield Prophet and Grain & Graze. He has a BAppSc (Hons) in Agriculture from Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga. He is also an active member of the Australian Society of Soil Science and has recently applied for accreditation as a level 2 Certified Professional Soil Scientist.



### Kathryn Kenny

Kathryn joins MSF as Project Officer. Many would remember Kathryn (Biesaga) from the Lower Murray Darling CMA where she worked closely with MSF on the Soils, Cropping and Recharge project. She studied at LaTrobe University, graduating with a BSc (Hons) in Environmental Management & Ecology. She has lived and worked in the Mallee since 2002, first with the Millewa Carwarp Landcare group and then LMD CMA. She said, "I have always wanted to become more involved with MSF as I believe in the MSF ethic of economic viability and sustainability." She is married to a Carwarp cereal grower/contractor and has an eight month old daughter, Matilda.



### Nicole Dimos

Nicole has resigned from MSF to take up a position with the Southern Precision Agriculture Association (SPAA). She will be missed by many, but being in an allied organisation, paths are bound to cross in the future. Nicole has been involved in all the major MSF projects over the past 18 months including the final report for Grain & Graze and keeping the wheels turning for Healthy Soils. She contributed to major extension activities such as the MSF 10 year celebration and Kerribee Field day. Graeme McIntosh from NSW DPI said, "She always had the farmers needs in clear focus. Her drive, professionalism and ability to keep agronomists on time will be sadly missed."



## Sustainability Snapshots

### Inconsistent Growth?



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#### Mallee Growing Season Rainfall

The table below show rainfall figures for 1st April to 18th May, 2009.

Balranald	92.9 mm
Hay	133.0 mm
Hopetoun	114.4 mm
Karoonda	112.5 mm
Lake Victoria	101.3 mm
Lameroo	110.4 mm
Loxton	56.0 mm
Mildura	77.2 mm
Murray Bridge	123.0 mm
Ouyen	100.1 mm
Pooncarie	71.2 mm
Renmark	80.0 mm
Swan Hill	113.8 mm
Walpeup	130.4 mm

#### Contact Us

Phone: 03 5021 9100  
 Fax: 03 5022 0579  
 Email: [admin@msfp.org.au](mailto:admin@msfp.org.au)  
 Postal Address:  
 PO Box 5093  
 Mildura 3502  
 Office Address:  
 2/152 Pine Ave  
 Mildura 3500

[www.msfp.org.au](http://www.msfp.org.au)

Due to the healthy rainfall, there has been a keen interest in the health of the emerging 2009 wheat crop. In response to this, a group of farmers, agronomists and resource managers toured the NSW crops from the Darling River to the Arumpo Road on Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> July, 2009. Some of the crops viewed on the day looked magnificent while others had variable height, colour and maturity. The usual suspects of soil borne disease, insects, nutrition and agronomy were considered. Rhizoctonia was not evident: in other words, there was no circular ill thrift or black pruned arrow-like roots after washing out. There was some evidence of inconsistent depth as can be seen in the photo.

In the paddock with most variation, there was a large amount of nitrogen (N) in the profile (65kg 0-20 cm, 48 kg 20-40 cm and 24kg at 40-60 cm). The available Phosphorous (P) concentration was 17kg/ha in the top 10 cm, a marginal level requiring some fertiliser addition at sowing (11kg/ha). There was no stored moisture and a May planting to a decile 5 year had a potential yield of 1.2 t/ha. In this paddock the poor colour followed the cereal lines suggesting that the history of fertiliser placement, harvest residue and seed placement were the main culprits.

These variations in the crop are not evident in the second paddock. The soil types in both paddocks are a clay loam over loamy clay. The nitrogen levels

were very similar with the only real difference being that the second paddock had an available P concentration of 21 ppm. The low level of P is likely to be a strong contributing factor to the variation in this crop.

So the year has to date been a decile 9 year and monitoring the nutrient requirements has merit. We took tissue samples and will convey the results in the next edition of Snapshot. If you are observing inconsistent growth, look for patterns such as yellowing hills indicating N deficiency. Check soil tests to determine if any nutrients are lacking. A test strip of foliar nutrient is a practical way to determine if a nutrient response and therefore a nutrient deficiency is the issue.

**Graeme McIntosh**  
 NSW Department of Industry and Investment



*Two wheat plants: the one on the left planted 2.5 cm deep with a well established root system; and the plant on the right 4 cm deep.*

### Increasing optimism for ongoing rain

Since the last newsletter, the rain has kept coming in the main and the crops, as evidenced in the photo, are doing well.

Last month, the Bureau of Meteorology were reporting an increased probability of the remainder of the year being dry.

In spite of this, in the past week the Bureau site (<http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/enso/>) has reported a rise in the Southern Oscillation Index (SOI) to near zero. However, this would appear to be a response to local weather conditions near Darwin and Tahiti, rather than a long-term climate signal. Hence the SOI is likely to fall again in the weeks ahead and settle into a El Niño.

El Niño events are usually (but not always) associated with below normal rainfall in the second half of the year across large parts of southern and inland eastern Australia.

Another indicator of upcoming weather conditions is the Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD). After many weeks of positive values, the most recent value of the IOD as measured by the Dipole Mode Index (DMI), was

slightly negative. In the past, positive IOD values have been associated with drier conditions through south east Australia in winter and spring.

These factors combined indicate a slightly more positive outlook than last month's snapshot of weather. In fact, the Bureau has forecast a 75% chance of exceeding 100 mm from 1<sup>st</sup> July to 30 September 2009.

**Graeme McIntosh**  
 NSW Department of Industry and Investment



*May planted wheat at Petro Station, NSW.*