

# Victorian Farmer

WINTER 2022



## CALVING SEASON

Step inside The Camel Milk Co

### PATCH OF GOLD

*Gamila MacRury and the art of saffron farming*

### PUMPKIN TORTELLI

*A winter warmer from Melbourne cook and author Julia Busuttill Nishimura*

### DUNKELD PASTORAL CO

*Exploring the culture of care philosophy*


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Hi everyone,

A big thank you once again for taking the time to read our latest edition of the *Victorian Farmer* and for those of you who are first time readers, welcome!

As I'm writing this, cost of living pressures are front and centre of many discussions and we as an industry and most importantly, as people, are no doubt feeling the pinch on all fronts. I for one didn't expect to see the humble iceberg lettuce selling for more than \$12 at some supermarkets! What a resurgence it has made. The silver lining of these price hikes is that the community is turning to the farm sector for information, and we are at the ready to explain how their food gets to the shelves and highlight the importance of a strong and resilient ag industry in Australia.

We will have the opportunity to put food, farming and regional Victoria on the agenda for the upcoming Victorian election in November. Too often, elections are focused on how to make Melbourne the most liveable city on earth, rather than making Victoria the most liveable state.

Our focus will be on delivering better regional road and rail; making regional Victoria the best place to live and work; protecting farmland and our natural environment; and supporting farm businesses and regional jobs.

I had the pleasure of attending branch meetings in Corryong and Dederang last month and I was stoked to see a large group come together to share a meal at each occasion. It was wonderful to see the usual faces, along with the next generation of farming men, farming women and some babies and toddlers crawling around too!



This sense of community couldn't be more important as we navigate turbulent times together. We discussed everything from local to global issues and how they impact on our members.

Your stories play a key role in helping decision makers understand what we need to succeed into the future and I speak on behalf of everyone at the VFF when I say, we look forward to making a difference in each and every one of your lives.

Speaking of stories, this edition is jam-packed full of them, so I won't keep you any longer!

As always, take care of yourself, your family and happy farming.

**Emma Germano**  
VFF President

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## FUTURE CLIMATE TARGETS SET

The Victorian Government has appointed a panel to set a climate target for 2035. The VFF and NFF recognise a need for an industry wide target, but that not every individual sector should have to meet the target.

Our submission to the panel highlighted the significant research and development being done within agriculture on adaptation, mitigation and emissions intensity.

Our view is agriculture needs a system that supports the uptake of that research and recognises the sequestration of carbon by sector and in each sector's reporting figures. Currently sequestering carbon in trees and crops is reported in Land Use Change and Forestry.

We will keep you updated on this important topic.

## HIGH PRODUCTIVITY FREIGHT POLICY PASSED

The VFF's new High Productivity Freight Policy aims to slash red tape, solve access problems and streamline the frustrating current permit process many farmers are currently experiencing.

VFF Transport and Infrastructure Committee Chair Ryan Milgate said the Policy was passed at our June Policy Council after rigorous discussion and consultation.

The Policy advocates for removing barriers for farmers wishing to move to high productivity freight vehicles.

"High productivity freight vehicles have the potential to substantially improve freight efficiency, increase safety and reduce emissions but there are key issues impeding greater uptake."

"This Policy goes to identifying issues around Performance Based Standards (PBS) and the associated pinch-points and access issues that are holding back the adoption of these vehicles.", Mr Milgate said.

"While PBS won't be appropriate for all farmers, we want to ensure PBS is fit for purpose for agriculture and those who want to participate."

The full Policy can be viewed on at website at [www.vff.org.au/publication-category/policy-statements](http://www.vff.org.au/publication-category/policy-statements)

# What's on

Please visit the VFF events page for further information: [www.vff.org.au/events](http://www.vff.org.au/events)

## August/September



**Stock Sense Peri-urban Workshops**  
Check our website for dates during August/September in Geelong, Lancefield, Red Hill, Healesville and Pakenham

## October



**VFF Symposium**  
Colonial Brewing Co, Starward Distillery and Sofitel Melbourne on Collins  
**Secure your spot today!**  
Tickets available on the VFF website.

## RIVERSIDE CAMPING CONCERNS LINGER

Recently the number of potential riverside camping sites being inspected and opened has steadily increased.

The VFF is discussing the many issues and concerns raised by members with senior public land staff and the Minister for Environment. As we transition from assessment to operation, the VFF continues to advocate for registration, compliance, and the need for a biosecurity response plan.

A reminder you can visit our website for guidance and fact sheets, contact [policyteam@vff.gov.au](mailto:policyteam@vff.gov.au) or your membership services team if you have any concerns or need to highlight issues with the process or with camping on your licensed land.



## STEPS TAKEN TOWARDS SENSIBLE TYRE USE ON FARMS

For almost a decade if you had more than 5000 tyres on a farm, you have required a license.

The VFF has been raising concerns with this control as not being related to risk for several years. In partnership with Dairy Australia, the VFF has advocated for the preparation of a Regulatory Impact Statement based on an actual assessment of the risk from silage tyres.

It recommends that the use of tyres for silage should not require a license, but would require a registration that is free of charge.

Guidance on the safe use of tyres will be prepared and the VFF is supportive of this outcome as a more sensible approach to risk.

## Victorian Farmer

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## AUTONOMOUS VEHICLE ROAD POLICY GETS THE GREEN LIGHT

The VFF's new Autonomous Vehicle Road Policy has been given the green light at the recent VFF June Policy Council.

The Policy calls for a proactive and nationally consistent reform agenda to support the development and adoption of autonomous vehicle technology.

With John Deere recently announcing that the first commercially available autonomous tractor for large-scale farming operations will be released later this year, it is crucial Australia's transport regulation keeps pace with technological advancement.

The full Policy can be viewed on at website at [www.vff.org.au/publication-category/policy-statements](http://www.vff.org.au/publication-category/policy-statements)



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# Connecting the future of farming:



As a technology company and as Australia's leading telecommunications provider, we see the huge benefits from Australia becoming a world leading digital economy by 2030.

It's incredible how much digital adoption has accelerated, particularly during the COVID pandemic which, at its height, saw a huge acceleration in the adoption of telehealth, online learning, remote working and e-commerce.

This acceleration in digital adoption is also going to drive growth in the farming sector. Agriculture is already a very sophisticated, highly technical industry and technology is transforming the sector, enabling a raft of new capabilities.

Australia's farmers already lead the world when it comes to efficiency and productivity. For some, the image of a farmer is somebody driving a tractor. But the new

generation of primary producers can run their farms from an app on their phone while flying a drone and using a huge range of connected sensors, predictive analytics and machine-learning capabilities.

In an agricultural context, digitisation will be revolutionary, and we're investing more than any other telco in growing and maintaining our network to help power this change in Australia.

Today, our 5G network reaches more Australians than any other telco and we're exploring new technologies to increase our network coverage, such as Low Earth Orbit satellites (LEO Satellites).

To support our customers to get the most out of the rapid technological developments and better listen and engage with regional Australia, we are also boosting our on-the-ground support in regional and outer-metro areas around the country.

The bottom line is that a thriving regional Australia is critical to our nation's success, and telecommunications is the keystone for meeting our 2030 ambition of becoming a world leading digital economy and 100 billion dollar agricultural sector.

## Regional Investments and Connect Communities:

Over the seven years to the end of June 2022 Telstra will have invested \$11bn in our mobile network nationally with \$4 billion of this invested in our regional mobile network.

We haven't stopped there. A further \$200 million will be spent for co-investments with government and local communities that will expand 4G and 5G coverage in regional Australia by 100,000 km<sup>2</sup> over the next four years.

We are also investing \$150 million in the current financial year to improve the experience for our regional customers by upgrading more than 180 3G-only sites to 4G and augmenting capacity at selected 4G sites which are experiencing very high growth in traffic.



And in April we also announced further investment into our Regional Australia team with the Connected Communities initiative where we will double the number of Regional Engagement Managers and, because customer needs differ in different regional areas, we will split the existing regional footprint into much more focussed zones.

We will also triple the number of highly experienced Regional Network Advisors who will work directly with our Regional Engagement Managers and customers to work out and provide the best connection possible to meet their requirements.

## 5G:

3G, having been launched in 2006, is now a legacy technology and by closing this network in June 2024, we can repurpose the spectrum it uses for 5G.

5G is the first telecommunications technology specifically designed to connect devices other than mobile phones – it is the first telecommunications technology specifically designed for the world of the Internet of Things (IoT).

These massive IoT deployments can benefit just about every industry.

Connected transport, drones, healthcare and infrastructure could communicate with centralised dashboards to help the nation move more smoothly. Global IoT connections will increase from 8.6 billion connections at the end of 2018, to an expected whopping 22.3 billion by 2024, all driven by a world where billions of sensors on farm gates, tractors, water troughs, livestock and countless other things will be connected and generating data about almost everything imaginable.

To support this, by the end of FY25 we are aiming to provide 5G coverage to 95 per cent of the population and expect 80 per cent of all mobile traffic to be on 5G.

That means more of our customers will have access to our 5G footprint, which has the potential to revolutionise the way that we live, work and stay entertained.

## Low Earth Orbit Satellites:

In March we announced we had signed a Memorandum of Understanding with OneWeb, to use LEO Satellites to improve coverage across Australia and the Asia Pacific. LEO Satellites have huge potential, from backhaul to back-up, from enabling the Internet of Things to supporting emergency

services, from improving home broadband to supporting ag tech.

The Earth is surrounded by satellites, each one serving a different and important role.

Traditional "Geostationary Earth Orbit" or GEO satellites work by staying in geosynchronous orbit at 35,786km above the Earth, staying focussed on one part of the land at a time, where as 'Low Earth Orbit' or LEO satellites circle the earth in orbits of 500km to 1,200km moving their communication beams as they move over the surface of the earth resulting in high-speed, low-latency internet connectivity to areas where it was previously unavailable.

In the end it will be a mix of connectivity solutions like these that will further support digital adoption in agriculture along with Telstra's commitment to helping farmers improve operational efficiencies and the industry to meet their goal of \$100 billion farm gate output by 2030.



# Taking the Paddock to Parliament

For dairy farmer and VFF Farm Business Committee Chair **Daniel Meade**, fighting for a fair go is something he does day in and day out.

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY  
Charles Everist

The Garvoc dairy farmer, who milks 400 cows with his wife Michaela and four young children Seamus, Ailish, Cassidy and Keenan has served on his local Moyne Shire Council for the past six years and also serving the Shire's youngest ever Mayor from 2019 to 2021.

Like most rural communities the Moyne Shire in south-west Victoria isn't immune from its fair share of troubles. Lack of housing, disintegrating roads and the conflict between renewable energy development and the right to farm are just some of the big issues Daniel has to be across.

"South-west Victoria is in need of critical investment in infrastructure to help our community grow. As a local Councillor, my job is to work with our community to lobby State government for greater assistance," Daniel says.

Daniel was one of 30 farmers who attended the VFF's Paddock to Parliament event held at Victorian Parliament House in early June. The event gave farmers the opportunity to engage personally with the State's decision makers.

He said it's important to foster personal relationships in advocacy and that meeting decision makers in person, leads to more positive outcomes.

"Two years of holding meetings through a computer screen has been very frustrating. Talking to people face-to-face is so important to establish a connection and to understand where each person is coming from," he says.

"When we are trying to get politicians from Melbourne to understand the challenges and opportunities that are facing regional Victoria, you have to go to them and tell your story directly, and use the opportunity to invite them to the regions to see the opportunities and challenges first hand."

As Chair of its Farm Business Committee since early this year, Daniel says the VFF's focus in 2022 is to have a say in the November State election, and to secure the infrastructure and services that are needed by regional communities.

"As farmers, we recognise that our advocacy has broader benefits for the community than just to our businesses. Everyone travels on country roads, uses the electricity generated from the regions, or relies on local health services."

"We have a duty beyond just advocating for farmers, because its rural communities that depend on agriculture, and we as farmers similarly depend on our communities."



Dairy farmer and VFF Farm Business Committee Chair Daniel Meade at his property in Garvoc.

At the event, the VFF presented its State election platform to Members of Parliament and later formally launched the Fair Go for Regional Vic campaign at its Grains and Livestock conference later in June.

"It's great to see the VFF has a clear advocacy strategy leading into the State election. It's crucial we use the election as an opportunity to shine a light on the issues that face all regional communities," Daniel says.

"We know that when government partners with farmers, regional communities receive the dividend. It's so important we use the election campaign as an opportunity to get support for farm businesses and farming communities."

The shortage in regional housing is a critical issue sighted by Daniel that he sees for his local community and economy. It's an important issue for Moyne Shire and one that the Council has made a lot of effort to help address.

*"We have a duty beyond just advocating for farmers, because it's rural communities that depend on agriculture, and we as farmers similarly depend on our communities."* Daniel Meade

"One result of the pandemic has been an increase in residents shifting from metropolitan Melbourne to regional Victoria. This is a great outcome for the economic development in regional Victoria, however it has led to housing shortages for workers across agriculture, tourism, hospitality and other industries."

"We need to see the creation of a Victorian government taskforce with the job of creating a State-wide regional housing strategy. More also needs to be done to investigate community housing trusts, fast tracking of planning scheme amendments that will open more land for growth for our towns and packing developments and its pleasing to see the VFF call for these things."

Daniel says the State election is also an opportunity to highlight the abhorrent condition of regional road infrastructure across western Victoria. As a dairy farmer, he says investment in fixing roads and freight routes is needed to help lower costs.

"South-west Victoria is the nation's largest dairy producing region. We have tankers and freight vehicles on the road every day with transport costing the industry up to \$345 million each year."

"The deteriorating condition of ageing infrastructure just drives these costs up and puts people's lives at risk. We need a fair go when it comes to road funding, not just to fix and resurface roads, but to also fix pinch points on priority freight routes."

"The benefits of doing this doesn't just serve agriculture, it helps tourism, timber and energy sectors also. Most importantly, it makes our roads safe for all road users."

Being a strong voice for his community is something Daniel is proud to do, but he knows the responsibility doesn't fall just on the shoulders of leaders like him. That's why he calls on all farmers to speak up when the time is right. But not only farmers, to all people living in regional Victoria who rely on agriculture, directly or indirectly, to come on board with the VFF's advocacy efforts.

"It's a big year in advocacy. If we can get every farmer and rural Victorian being engaged, talking to politicians and sharing their story, we can make a big difference. We can get a fair go for regional Victoria." 🌱

READ THE VFF'S 2022 ELECTIONS PLATFORM ONLINE:

[www.vff.org.au/investing-in-regional-victoria](http://www.vff.org.au/investing-in-regional-victoria)

## Paddock to Parliament Highlights



## PICTURED

Victorian Farmers descended on Spring Street on Wednesday 8 June to engage with parliamentarians at the first Paddock to Parliament event.





# Silver Linings

South-east of Horsham, not far from the iconic Dadswells Bridge giant koala and in the shadows of the Grampians, lies the **McLellan family's** mixed cropping and livestock property.

**WORDS** Annabel Mactier  
**PHOTOGRAPHY** Georgie Mann

Having grown up near Bacchus Marsh, Denise and husband Shannon (from a farm in the central wheatbelt of Western Australia) moved to the region over 20 years ago and they love the wide-open Wimmera skies and connection to nature that farming brings.

While being first generation farmers in a new region has been a “tough journey” at times, Denise says she would not swap her life in farming. “COVID has really shown how lucky we are, living in regional Victoria” says Denise. In fact, Denise says that one of the silver linings of COVID has been that the mainstream adoption of remote working technology has provided rural residents like herself the ability to participate in many more opportunities than ever before.

One such opportunity has been participating in the VFF’s Workforce and Social Infrastructure Committee which develops VFF policy on critical issues such as workforce training and skills development, education and rural health. Denise is passionate about promoting agriculture as a career of choice for those like her who did not necessarily grow up on farms. “Working on farms and in agriculture is a life changing experience, and such a rewarding career.”

“  
*Working on farms and in agriculture is a life changing experience, and such a rewarding career.*

” Denise McLellan



Denise has experienced first-hand the diverse opportunities a career in agriculture can bring. Having grown up off-farm, but with strong family connections to farming, Denise always knew she wanted to work in agriculture. After completing an agricultural science degree at the Dookie Campus of the University of Melbourne, Denise has gone on to have an extensive and varied career working for the Department of Agriculture in agronomy and extension, as well as barley industry development and now farming. Most recently Denise has been consulting to industry in the areas of marketing and communications, whilst also working with farm businesses on better managing people and safety.

In addition to juggling farming, consulting, committee roles and looking after a busy family, Denise is a keen gardener and she has recently started the Grampians Quince Company growing quinces with the aim of supplying quince

for food manufacturing and also pectin. Last year she participated in the ‘Seeds of Growth’ pilot program run conjointly by Food Innovation Australia, Wimmera Development Association and Beanstalk Ag to build and support new emerging food businesses in the Wimmera Southern Mallee region.

She is excited to be a part of exploring new ways to value-add to the Wimmera local economy.

Denise feels that one of the key issues in attracting people to work in farming is the limited way agriculture is often presented to students. She tells of a recent careers expo at her daughter’s school where being a vet was the only animal related career presented. “The actual opportunities are really endless in agriculture. You can pursue any career in agriculture, whether it be finance, design, manufacturing, in a paddock, in an office, it is such a diverse industry.”





PICTURED

Denise and husband Shannon at their Dadswells Bridge property Noorong.

This frustration at the way agriculture is sometimes taught at school sparked her involvement with Primary Industries Education Foundation Australia (PIEFA). PIEFA aims to engage schools and community through education of food and fibre production careers. Denise made a 'Day in the Life of a Grain Producer' video that is shown to children to educate children on the grain industry through one of PIEFA's programs.

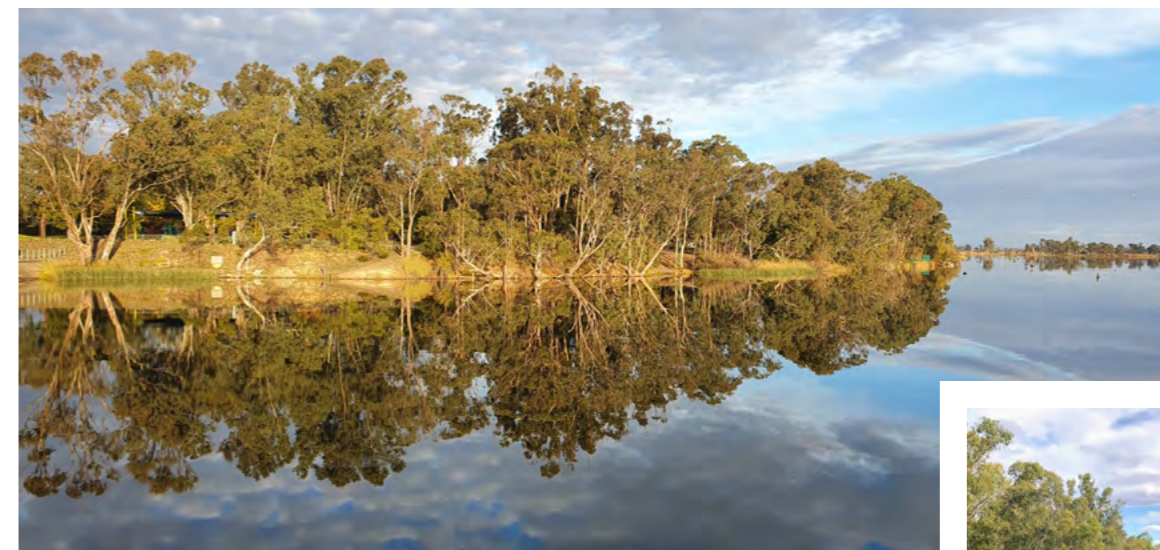
Denise strongly believes in the importance of everyday farmers participating in advocacy and telling agriculture's story. "Bridging the city-country divide is one of the biggest challenges facing agriculture" says Denise, "there are so many misconceptions and a real lack of understanding about what we do and how produce things."

Like countless farm businesses across the State, Denise and Shannon have been impacted by the current labour shortage. "We definitely haven't been able to tap into the usual pool of workers and have needed to think a bit broader" says Denise. Rather than simply looking for experience, Denise advises farms to look for workers with a positive attitude and a willingness to learn.

*“Bridging the city-country divide is one of the biggest challenges facing agriculture.”* Denise McLellan

For example, one of the casual staff they hired for last harvest, was Jesse, a student completing an aviation degree from Cairns who had no farm experience but turned out to be a fantastic addition to the team.

In the lead up to this State election Denise would like to see commitments from both sides of politics for increased funding for agriculture education at all levels, including at tertiary level to allow for more students to study. "Longerenong College, one provider of agricultural education, can currently only produce approximately 100 students a year and our industry needs thousands." 🌱



## Long-term Goulburn to Murray Water Trading Rules Take Effect

The Minister for Water has announced a long-term trade rule and operating rules to **protect** the lower Goulburn River and provide sustainable trade opportunities for irrigators.

On 1 July 2022, a long-term Goulburn to Murray trade rule came into effect. The new trade rule replaces an interim rule that has been in place during 2021-22. This follows extensive consultation with community as well as scientific assessments to improve trade, environmental and cultural outcomes. The Government believe the new trade rule is simpler, makes it easier to understand and access opportunities to trade – and aligns trade to what can sustainably be delivered in the lower Goulburn River.

The revised trade rule applies to anyone wanting to trade water from the Goulburn, Loddon, Campaspe and Broken Catchment Management Authorities to the Victorian Murray and to interstate trade.

### When will trade from the Goulburn be available?

There are three important dates to remember each year:

- **1 July** – around 80–85 gigalitres (GL) of trade opportunity is made available. This is after setting aside or 'quarantining' legacy and grandfathered tag commitments.
- **15 October** – when 0–30 GL of additional trade opportunity can be released. Each year this will depend on how much irrigators have used in the Murray over winter and early spring.
- **15 December** – when 0–30 GL of additional trade opportunity can be released. This will again depend on how much irrigators have used in the Murray in spring that year. At this time, additional trade may also be available if Goulburn seasonal determinations for high-reliability entitlements are not projected to reach 100% – that means a bit more trade in dry years.

### Where can I seek further information?

Information on seasonal determinations is available on the Northern Victoria Water Resource Manager website:

[www.nvrm.net.au/seasonal-determinations](http://www.nvrm.net.au/seasonal-determinations)

Information on how irrigators are using water in the Murray and expected trade in October and December will be made available on the Victorian Water Register website. You can find out information about available trade opportunities here:

[www.waterregister.vic.gov.au/water-trading/allocation-trading#AllocationTradeOpportunities](http://www.waterregister.vic.gov.au/water-trading/allocation-trading#AllocationTradeOpportunities)

The 'Where can I trade' tool on the Victorian Water Register website also provides real-time updates on trade opportunity, or you can download the Water Market Watch App. 🌱





# A Patch of Gold *in* Beechworth.

There may be gold in the Beechworth hills, but there's something far more valuable growing on well-loved dirt just out of town. For four weeks each autumn, a quarter-acre patch of saffron, about the size of two Olympic swimming pools, flushes with the distinctive purple flowers of ***Crocus sativus*** each day.

#### WORDS

Natasha Lobban

#### PHOTOGRAPHY

Rebecca Haycraft

**W**e meet with Gamila MacRury on the twelfth day of the 2022 saffron harvest. She expertly 'bounces' pretty flowers off the plant. It's a well practised manoeuvre to casually pick the flowers, while keeping her fingers clear of bees, all while chatting and under the watchful gaze of her Blue Heeler Liz. Remarkably, the flowers keep opening before our eyes, seemingly faster than they can be picked.

Saffron flowers are a vibrant purple and can be used for colouring and flavouring gin and also freeze-dried and powdered over pastisseries. However they are not the star of the show. Inside each flower there are three precious strands of saffron. It takes 200 flowers, or 600 strands, to produce a single gram of saffron.

Its paucity, and the labour intensity required to grow it, make saffron one of the most prized spices around the world. Gamila at Beechworth retails its saffron at \$240/gram, which is well above the price of gold. "This year is our biggest production year and we're definitely going to make it into three digits. That is over 100 grams," Gamila clarifies.

Saffron is one of the most adulterated food products in the world, up there with olive oil and honey. Its high value attracts many fakes, with some fraudsters even going to the trouble of making moulds of the distinctive trumpet of the stigma and recreating fakes from agar. They can also use chemical colouring or alternatives such as turmeric and paprika. Many Australians have never tasted true saffron, so find it difficult to tell the difference.

Iran produces 90 per cent of the world's saffron. Australian growers simply can't compete with Iran's costs of production, such as low land prices, and government incentives to keep kids on farm.

According to Agrifutures in 2012, ABARE and ABS statistics indicated that there were 80 saffron producers in Australia. These growers were producing about 10 kilograms of saffron annually. There are no more recent studies available, but anecdotally it appears there are fewer growers at the moment. Saffron growers are notorious for lasting just a few years in the industry, when disease burden, a huge physical workload and frustration with cheap, inferior imports have them stepping away.

There's also only so many years you can get your friends and family to help you pick flowers because hiring labour for the job is cost prohibitive in many cases. Gamila's business differs from a lot of other saffron growers because she seconds employees from her table olive grove to the saffron business when needed.

"The table olives are my bread and butter and take 18 months from harvest to be ready for sale," she says. "I know how much money I've got sitting in the shed I have ready to go, whereas with the saffron I have no idea what I'm going to produce until it comes out of the paddock."

The grove was planted over four years and is made up of 600 table olive trees, including nine dedicated varieties and their corresponding cross pollinators. "There wasn't a lot of information out there for running a dedicated table olive grove so I made it all up, there's a cross pollinator every six trees and then it's in a grid pattern."

The olives are handpicked, graded and then go straight into salty water for up to three years for some varieties. The cool temperatures of Beechworth means the olives are treated to a slow fermentation in brine only, with no need for the use of caustic soda.



A daughter **never** likes to admit that her mother was right, but in this case she certainly was.

During the global financial crisis of 2007-08, Gamila, 23 at the time, was looking to the future. "Mum said I'd see another two recessions in my life, and she was right, how annoying is that! She said 'You should buy country land because country land is far more stable'. I don't think she thought it would go up by 300 per cent in 10 years though."

After 18 months of looking at properties Gamila bought her block at Beechworth. At the time she had just broken up with her first serious boyfriend and threw herself into finding the perfect enterprises for the block and learning as much about them as she could.

"Because it's only 12 acres, I decided I had to do products that didn't need much land space," she says. "To be commercial with oil olives you need to be at the 2000-tree mark and there's a lot of boutique olive oil producers out there. Unlike wine, consumers don't go through a bottle of oil a night, whereas table olives on the other hand, they consume a lot."

#### PICTURED

Gamila (and a local bee!) on-field, just as the saffron flowers begin to bloom. Flowering occurs over about four weeks, and need one dose of decent rain for success. The bulk of harvest occurring over a 10-day intensive period.



For the next 10 years she commuted up and down the Hume Freeway and in 2019 moved to Beechworth full-time to be a farmer. It's a move that's paid off as she continues to expand the business. She believes she is now the largest seller of *Crocus sativus* corms in Australia and is about to start exporting internationally.

International orders for her corms are coming from clients with access to biocontrol labs with full climate control. True southern hemisphere corms allow them to have production 12 months of the year in these facilities which grow saffron for lucrative markets, including one buyer from Israel who will use the saffron for cosmetics.

Saffron growing is half art, half science and a little dose of luck. This year Gamila relied on all three for her success, in what should have been one of the worst. This year's humidity created conditions ripe for fungal disease, however management including fungal treatment before planting and irrigation manipulation to delay flowering, paid off.

### *Saffron growing is half art, half science and a little dose of luck.*

Gamila credits her intuitive and generational knowledge of plants to be the key to growing great corms. "Some people are fundamentally plant people and some aren't," she says. "Mum is a gardener by trade so I grew up working with her as a gardener and then we spent all of my teenage years travelling around Australia and working as itinerant workers in horticulture and vineyards so I acquired experience and information about how to run a successful horticulture business."

Gamila may have come to Beechworth from Melbourne, but she's not a treechanger or even a first generation farmer. She comes from a long line of farmers, particularly orchardists, and tending to plants, recognising when there's something wrong with them and knowing how to best treat them is in her blood.

#### FUN FACT

Bees can **overdose on saffron**, becoming "drunk" and not being able to find their way home to their hive. Saffron is picked early in the day so any bees that have indulged have time to "sober up" before they're due back home.







Gamila prefers to be known as a **farmer**, rather than a young farmer or a female farmer.

“To put that in context I was in the army and an engineer, what does it matter that I’m now a farmer? Being young was probably harder than being female specifically. I’m now 37 and have been doing this for 13 years, actively involved in horticulture for 25 years. I think nothing beats time and experience.”

Gamila has invested both time and experience in her saffron patch, so that it has grown to an impressive half a million corms this year. Her enduring hard work is rewarded with strands of what is known in some parts of the world as “red gold”. It’s far more valuable than the gold traditionally found at Beechworth and it certainly tastes better. 🌿

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# The Culture *of* Care Philosophy.

**Dunkeld Pastoral Company** is unique.

**WORDS**  
Trina Weatherly

**PHOTOGRAPHY**  
Georgie Mann



The pastoral based, family owned company in **Western Victoria** runs a fully integrated, highly productive farming system in conjunction with a high value conservation management program.

Eleven thousand hectares in six separate business units are managed by five separate farm managers and a conservation manager. Livestock enterprises run 38,000 sheep and 4,000 cattle with a stocking rate of 86,000-140,000 dry sheep equivalent (DSE).

In an ambitious undertaking, this year 85,000 trees will be planted in a registered carbon program, part of the 20 per cent native vegetation target for each of the properties under ownership.

There are Bush Broker blocks for environmental offsets, a high end hotel with an accommodation business and two prestigious restaurants, plus valuable properties in the Kimberley and Northern Territory. The acquisition of 2,428ha at Blackwood in 2019 and 1214ha at Devon Park the following year, was part of an important geographical consolidation strategy.

All facets of this unique business operate under the umbrella of Dunkeld Pastoral Company (DPC).

In a project that could have far reaching implications for agriculture, the DPC Conservation Department is undertaking a research project with Zoos Victoria, working to establish if Maremma dogs bonded with sheep, will also protect Eastern Barred Bandicoots running in the same paddock, from foxes.

“It’s unusual to have this amount of conservation work going on amidst agricultural production,” says Conservation Manager, Kai Dailey. “The whole program is integrated and driven by the personal interest and involvement of the owners, Allan and Maria Myers.”



“For a private family-owned business to be investing so heavily in conservation should be celebrated,” says Wayne Johnstone, Operations Manager. “This is not often seen, particularly in a district of Western Victoria where land values and productivity are so high.”

With 22 full time staff in the farming division alone, the attraction, recruitment, training and retaining of personnel is crucial. To do this successfully, a deliberate strategy of focussing on staff has been adopted by the company.

“We want to reduce staff turnover so it’s vital we become better, staff focussed employers,” explains Tom Polkinghorne, General Manager Strategy and Finance.

In March 2020, one week before COVID lockdown restrictions were imposed, Sarah Malik was appointed Human Resources Manager at DPC. But as the doors of The Royal Mail Hotel closed, the committed staff suddenly found themselves idle.

The DPC Board, Allan and Maria Myers and their three adult children, reflected a culture of care philosophy, asking “What more can we be doing? How can we keep these people on board? Do they need accommodation assistance, utilities, advanced annual leave, or redeployment into other areas?”

Sarah explains “We couldn’t fathom the possibility of losing these valuable staff.



“*We couldn’t fathom the possibility of losing these valuable staff. So my first task was to address the issue of what could we do to keep them?*”

Sarah Malik

So my first task was to address the issue of what could we do to keep them?”

To retain them in the business, a brainstorming session listed work needing to be done within the company and how valuable staff could be redeployed to do it.

Some chefs morphed into a painting crew, turning their skills to painting two houses. Other staff helped with scanning sheep and cattle, maintenance jobs or placing gravel around troughs. Some planted trees in the Conservation Team while others grew vegetables in the Kitchen Garden established years earlier to support the two restaurants.

When the acclaimed restaurants were closed during lamb marking, kitchen staff prepared 200 frozen meals using fresh farm produce from the vegetable garden or lamb and beef from the farm enterprises. Tired after long days lamb marking, the farming team came home to nutritious meals from the freezer. This initiative was warmly received by staff and will be repeated during lamb marking this year.

“Job deployment into other areas was about inviting people to do these tasks, not forcing it on them,” Sarah explains. “Royal Mail Hotel staff were positive about their new experiences. Kitchen staff had a chance to see what goes into growing their veggies, the planning, prepping, waste management and composting. One of the chefs now has a tractor ticket to turn the compost!”



PICTURED

(L-R) DPC team members at the Mount Sturgeon Homestead; a number of threatened species educational programs are run by the DPC conservation crew.







PICTURED

(L-R) The Royal Mail Hotel in Dunkeld; DPC's Kitchen Garden that supports its two restaurants; this year 85,000 trees will be planted in a registered carbon program by DPC.

One of the unforeseen benefits of this program was the **breaking down of barriers** between different departments at DPC, opening windows and understanding into other roles of the business and allowing staff to realise the teams are not all separate from each other.

"We all have that shared experience now," Sarah explains.

This staff deployment initiative has also opened new doors and led to some life changing career changes.

One example is Terri Turriff, who'd spent the four years preceding COVID as Rooms Division Manager at Dunkeld's Royal Mail Hotel. Terri had worked in some big hotel chains at some incredibly beautiful places during her hospitality career. But when the hotel closed, Terri moved into the DPC Conservation Team and loved it, pursuing some conservation studies along the way.

For four months of 2021 Terri worked on DPC's two northern stations in the Kimberley and NT in a Carbon Abatement Program that managed the landscape. There was weed management at Tipperary and fire reduction burning to reduce large scale lightning fires in the Kimberley.

Today, in a life changing career move, Terri has returned to DPC as a full-time Conservation Officer. Kai, the Conservation Manager explains, "Terri was one of the senior managers in the Hotel so it wasn't a light decision to change her role and career. Without the COVID induced redeployment at DPC, this may never have happened."

Sometimes the agricultural industry has a poor image of long hours and poor life/work balances. DPC is working to address this by listening carefully to staff requirements and managing workloads.

"Time off is a really important thing," Sarah stresses. "If we're going to attract bright young people into the industry, they need to know they'll have a bit of balance in their life. Can they get to footy practice on time or see their kids play sport?"

Involvement in off-farm commitments means friendships can be made in the community, making staff happier and wanting to stay longer.

Tom explains that operating at a large scale has meant simplifying DPC's business model. "We often say keep it simple, do it well". This philosophy allows "manageable workloads with a better chance of all staff understanding why we do things and what the key focus areas are."

Emphasis is placed on the word 'Team'. "There's no 'i' in team," Wayne chuckles.

A team culture is built by getting staff together, moving and mixing across work boundaries. Paddock and conservation tours are offered a couple of times a year; skilled sheep dog handlers on staff offer demonstrations and coaching to younger, enthusiastic learners.



And for the HR Manager, Sarah, it's about seeing and recognising potential, where there's a willingness and drive to continue with education and training.

"We need to provide a work environment where young people are supported in their career development."

At DPC there's recognition that for young people, entry into the agricultural industry is not always easy. To encourage and provide a pathway, Tom runs an Agri-Business Graduate Program at DPC, to recruit a young person just out of university, with an agriculture related degree.

This year's graduate, Rhiannon Hennessy has done farm and office administration work at DPC, including valuable analysis work crunching numbers in Excel.

"At university I gained a lot of academic knowledge but don't have the practical skills to back it up," she said. DPC has been good at recognising this and providing formal training in quad bike accreditation, Ag Chem training, First Aid tickets, chainsaw tickets, and TAFE certificates."

"We are given a sense of responsibility so we want to do a good job for the company and for ourselves."

In recent years DPC has been joined by two school-based apprentices, including an electrical apprentice. These skills are valued in the business and with training, these people can be upskilled very quickly.

Operations Manager, Wayne reflects "in previous decades, agriculture has been seen as a loser's way forward. We've been very bad at promoting our industry and

encouraging young people into it. Now I think people are seeing the family farm as a good place to be and for a career. Now things are so buoyant, land prices, commodity prices, developing farms. It's a great place to be."

So at DPC there's a deliberate willingness to put resources and time into young people, knowing that in the short term, it may not necessarily create a dollar improvement in the business but in the long term it might build a far reaching relationship with schools, support young people and help build an important reputation in the local area.

Communication within the DPC business is fundamental. Sarah explains "We expect and encourage each person within our business to let us know of their aspirations, goals and how we can work together to achieve those personal and business goals. Then we're creating a win-win environment with long term impacts for the agricultural industry." 🌱

*"If we're going to attract bright young people into the industry, they need to know they'll have a bit of balance in their life. Can they get to footy practice on time or see their kids play sport?"*

Sarah Malik

DISCOVER MORE ABOUT DPC ONLINE AT:

[www.dunkeldpastoral.com.au](http://www.dunkeldpastoral.com.au)

INSTAGRAM & FACEBOOK: [@royalmailhotel](https://www.instagram.com/royalmailhotel)



# On the Road to 2030.

## AGRICULTURE AND THE FUTURE OF LOW EMISSION VEHICLES

When we think about reducing carbon emissions in agriculture, the focus is often on livestock, but what about **agricultural machinery and freight**?

### WORDS

Annabel Mactier

The transport sector accounts for 25% of Victoria's total carbon emissions and significant work is currently underway to enable the transport industry to transition to low emission technologies such as battery electric and hydrogen fuel cell vehicles.

Whilst uptake of low emission vehicles is currently relatively low, the VFF is taking a proactive policy position to ensure future regulation is fit for purpose and reflects the unique requirements of agriculture and operating in remote and regional areas.

### Low Emission Vehicle Market

Australia has comparatively low levels of electric light vehicle adoption. In 2020, 0.78% of all vehicles sold in Australia were electric. In comparison, in Norway three-quarters of all light vehicles sold were electric and Australia is also well behind the UK (10.7%), China (6.2%) and the United States (2.3%)

The Victorian Government has set a target that 50% of all new car sales will be zero emission vehicles by 2030 and by the end of 2022, there will be 55 electric vehicle models on the Australian market and several carmakers have now set timelines to become 100% electric: Jaguar Land Rover (2025), Volvo (2030), Mazda (2030), Nissan (early 2030s) and Honda (2040).

Low emission technology is still being developed in the heavy vehicle space. Rigid trucks that carry less freight and have a higher utilisation in urban areas have been identified as a priority area for electrification. There are currently 14 electric truck and van models available in the Australian market and more than 58 models available for purchase in North America, Europe, and China.

Hydrogen fuel cell vehicles have been identified as more suited for larger trucks traveling longer distances however much of the technology is still being commercialised.

Deakin University is building a Hydrogen Research Centre at its Warrnambool campus where in partnership with Kenworth, it will undertake research and development of hydrogen fuel cell trucks for the freight industry.

The development of low emission agricultural machinery is similarly still in its infancy, however electric side by sides are already available for sale in Australia. A trial at Agriculture Victoria's Ellinbank Smart farm in West Gippsland found that an electric side by side travelling 5,200 kilometres a year would emit just two kilograms of carbon dioxide compared to 5.5 tones from a traditional model in addition to being substantially cheaper and quieter to run.



### Case study: Victoria Bitter

*Did you know the next VB you have in Melbourne may have been delivered in an electric truck?*

Last year Victoria Bitter announced that it would be partnering with Linfox to use Australia's first ever fully electric truck to deliver beer from Asahi Beverages' distribution centre in Melbourne.

With up to 250km driving range, the Volvo electric truck will be powered entirely from 100% renewable sources as a result of an energy purchasing deal cut in 2019 to buy output from the 112MW Karadoc solar farm in Mildura in Victoria.

### Risks and Opportunities for Victorian agriculture

"This is something we as an industry can't afford to be on the backfoot with" Says VFF Transport and Infrastructure Committee Chair Ryan Milgate. "Agriculture and rural communities are too often an afterthought when developing this kind of regulation."

The VFF are particularly concerned about the potential use of taxes or penalties on older vehicles to increase low emission vehicle adoption. "This would disproportionately impact farmers who often use trucks to travel short distances and only at certain times of the year such as harvest" says Ryan. "Initiatives such as grants to replace older trucks would be a far more effective solution". Whilst these measures have been ruled out of the Federal Government's current Future Fuels and Vehicles Strategy, it is critical the VFF monitor future government measures to meet targets.

Ensuring equitable access to charging and refueling infrastructure in regional Victoria remains another key challenge. There are concerns that the private sector is more likely to fund the early rollout of infrastructure in metropolitan areas where demand will initially be concentrated which may lead to an inequality of access in regional areas where uptake may be slower. "Government has a key role to play in addressing these market failures. Rural and regional communities and businesses should not be penalised for living in remote areas" says Mr Milgate. As a positive start, the State Government has already committed \$644,000 toward



Electric side by sides which made a debut overseas are now available in Australia (Photo: Polaris).



*This is something we as an industry can't afford to be on the backfoot with.*



Ryan Milgate

"If we capture the moment we'll capture abundant benefits: creating tens of thousands of regional manufacturing jobs, reducing our dependence on raw resource extraction, reinforcing our accelerating transition toward non-polluting energy sources, and spurring innovation, research, and engineering activity in Australia" says Dr Mark Dean, the report's lead author.

Currently Australia is one of the largest exporters of many key rare minerals and materials required to manufacture batteries including lithium and cobalt and domestic manufacturing in the electric vehicle and battery energy storage supply chain could create an estimated 34,700 jobs in Australia by 2030 and improve Australia's supply chain resilience.

The VFF will continue to advocate on farmers' behalf to ensure future low emission regulation is fit for purpose and reflects the unique requirements of agriculture and operating in remote and regional areas.

the installation of 15 or more new charging stations in northern Victoria, including at Ouyen, Swan Hill, Kerang, Maryborough, Wedderburn and Echuca, as well as a further \$6 million toward the installation of charging stations in at least 50 locations across Victoria, with a focus on regional destination charging.

Similarly, ensuring the energy grid can withstand the changing usage patterns is critical. McKinsey estimates that around 75% of electric vehicle charging will occur at home. This large proportion of at-home charging will necessitate the Government considering how this new usage may impact the electricity grid. For example, if multiple electric vehicles are charging at the same time in close proximity, increased demand on the local grid may increase the risk of overloading the network.

The Australia Institute argues in its report 'Rebuilding Vehicle Manufacturing in Australia' that the transition to low emission vehicles however also presents an opportunity for Australia to rebuild its domestic vehicle manufacturing industry.

### HEAD ONLINE TO READ VFF'S LOW EMISSION VEHICLE POLICY:

[www.vff.org.au/publication-category/policy-statements](http://www.vff.org.au/publication-category/policy-statements)



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Good people to know.





# The Camel Milk Co.

Every farmer has a happy place.  
Some find it sowing crops.  
Others get it shifting sheep, or watching  
the sun set after a hard day's work.

WORDS  
Wendy Hargreaves

PHOTOGRAPHY  
Nicole Peters



For **Megan Williams**, 34, happiness is a newborn camel.

With 150 camel calves expected to drop at her Kyabram dairy farm this winter, there's plenty to smile about.

"They come out feet first," says Megan, who launched Victoria's first camel dairy farm with her husband Chris Williams in 2014. "From the time you see those tiny little feet sticking out, the calf's born in an hour. They're all legs, but they're soon standing up for a drink."

"It's always breathtaking to watch an animal give birth, but camels are something else. They make the birthing process look so easy."

Megan grew up milking Friesians on her family's dairy farm in Kyabram, just up the road from the camel farm.

Megan and Chris have 580 camels roaming their 194ha farm, where old dairy buildings have been converted to fit dromedaries standing more than three metres tall.



In just eight years, the young couple has established an entirely new industry in north-central Victoria, drawing customers across Australia and around the world. They work well together, with Megan managing the camels and the dairy, while Chris oversees feed, cropping and fencing. Milking is done twice daily, using the same four-teat system as bovine dairies. They also process their own fresh and powdered milk, much of it transformed into a hugely successful range of camel milk cosmetics.

And they built this truly innovative farm while raising three sons, Hugh, 9, Cabe, 8, and Carter, 6.

“It’s always breathtaking to watch an animal give birth, but camels are something else.”

Megan Williams



So how did a dairy farmers' daughter end up taming wild camels to sell milk products?

It all started with gap year in the Northern Territory -- and a licence to drive big rigs.

"Life was fantastic growing up on a farm," Megan says. "I was one of four kids, and third in line. It was such a gift, and I didn't fully appreciate it until I got older. We learned to drive cars and tractors, reverse trailers, use power tools. It really set me up for so many things."

"I wanted to see the rest of Australia, so I moved to the Territory in 2008 and became a tour bus driver. I was only 20 when I got my heavy rigid licence and started driving massive coaches. I met some amazing people from all walks of life. I can't recommend it highly enough for a gap year."

And what about the fascination with camels?

"Driving in the outback, it was always really exciting for everyone on the bus when we saw a herd of camels," Megan says. "I became really fascinated with them. They're amazing animals. Everything about them. Their big, padded feet and giant humps. Their long eyelashes for the sandstorms. The way they lose hair in summer and grow back woolly in the wintertime."

"I always thought they were something special. Who knew I'd end up milking them for a living?"

About a year later, Megan met Chris at a pub in Alice Springs. They shared a fascination with camels.

"Chris was a station hand on Andato Station and I was a tour guide at Uluru," Megan says. "We met one night at the pub. He must've turned on his charm."

"Then the next few years were a bit nuts. I met Chris at 21. We moved home to Kyabram at 22 and married at 24. Our first child arrived four days before I turned 25, with another child 18 months later. Then another child 14 months after that. We had three boys in less than three years."

"We were working on my parents' farm, but still dreamed of starting a camel farm. I was pregnant with our youngest when we took the plunge and launched our farm up the road. We had incredible support from my family, which made a huge difference."

"Now all three of our boys love the camels. My eldest is a bit of an animal whisperer. You can see he's got that soft, gentle touch with all the animals. We've got a couple of cows, dogs, and chooks. Our kids are doing exactly what I used to do when I was a kid on the farm, which is just great."

When *Victorian Farmer* visited Megan at Camel Milk Co Australia, she was busy training five wild camels and their calves how to join the milking herd. She follows a strict protocol, developed by trial and error over the past eight years.

Camel milk is about 30 per cent lower in fat than bovine milk, with about 40 per cent less lactose and more protein, but the milking process is fraught with obstacles.

“

*Every now and again, I look out across the farm and think to myself... we milk camels. It's the most bizarre thing in the world. It's insane.*

”

Megan Williams

Females have a gestation of 12-14 months. They are then milked for 18 months and rested for 18 months after that, which means a juggle to achieve year-round production. Milkers also need their calves with them to let down milk, and are extremely sensitive to any change in their daily rhythm.

"Every now and again, I look out across the farm and think to myself... we milk camels," Megan laughs. "It's the most bizarre thing in the world. It's insane."





“But I have a real sense of pride in my work. Camels are incredibly sensitive creatures, so you can’t rush them. When we’re training them, it has to be slow and very gentle. It might be a few weeks, or up to six months. If they don’t feel 100 per cent comfortable, they won’t let down their milk, so we keep babies right beside the mums for milking, which is a whole other challenge.”

“Back when we first started, everyone in town thought we were pretty nuts. That’s all changed now. We have great local support.”

“And Chris is the hardest working person I’ve ever known. I’m the public face and talk to the media, but our business is a joint effort. Sometimes I see farmers who are single, I wonder how they do it on their own. Who’s their soundboard? Who supports them?”

“We all need support sometimes, and that’s where the VFF has become really important to me. As a member, I’ve been able to tap into an amazing network of fellow farmers and get advice on all sorts of issues. And we’ve had a few issues.”

“*We all need support sometimes, and that’s where the VFF has become really important to me.*” Megan Williams

Megan says red tape was a major challenge when they first launched. Camels were **not recognised under dairy law**, so their farm fell between the bureaucratic cracks.

They started small with a few camels and managed to navigate the minefield of permits and bylaws. Media soon jumped on the story, boosting demand. People were seeking out both fresh and powdered camel milk as a dairy alternative, as some consider it easier to digest.

But the biggest growth came when Megan encountered a “soaper”.

“I had no idea there were people out there who made soap and called themselves soapers, but one day a lady rang asking for a couple of litres of our milk to make some soap,” she says. “I said yes and told her I’d love to give the finished product a try, as I had no idea it was a thing. Turns out camel milk soap is really good.”

“It was all new to me. I’m the person who bought four-packs of soap for \$2.99 at the supermarket. Then I tried the camel soap and it cleansed and moisturised at the same time. My skin was so soft. I started giving it to people with eczema and psoriasis. We’d all heard the goats’ milk story, so we thought why not camel milk?”

“One of my girlfriends was using soap on her toddler and asked when I would make a moisturiser. I could see an opportunity, but it was never going to be my strength, so I ended up outsourcing the production to a manufacturer in Sydney. It’s a great product that’s grown and made in Australia, and people love it.”

Boutique gift stores in tourist towns snap up the unique creams, balms and soaps, which were relaunched last year in more travel-friendly containers.

“In parts of Australia where you find camels, our products sell like hotcakes,” Megan says. “When people have that camel experience, they want more. At the same time, more people are travelling around regional Australia, and they’re looking for Australian-made products.”

“I love how our business has evolved. I love my camels. I love farming. I love being on the land.”

“But the best part is seeing our product out there and hearing somebody say, ‘I love that fragrance’ or ‘I love how this absorbs straight into my hand.’”

“When you hear people talk like that, it definitely pumps your tyres up. We’ve come such a long way, and we’re not stopping yet.”



Megan’s skincare range includes body wash, body butter, hand cream, triple milled soap and a nourishing milk lip balm.

SEE WHAT THE CAMEL MILK CO. ARE UP TO ONLINE:

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“*I love how our business has evolved. I love my camels. I love farming. I love being on the land.*”

Megan Williams





# Pumpkin Tortelli

*with* Julia Busuttil Nishimura

I can never resist buying whole pumpkins from the farmers' market or grocer. The dark-green motley skin and bright-orange interior is one of nature's best colour combinations. It automatically makes me feel like spending a cosy afternoon cooking in the kitchen while it's raining outside.

#### WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY

Pan Macmillan Australia

#### SERVES 4

1.5 kg kent pumpkin, cut into large wedges, skin left on, seeds removed  
sea salt  
150 g fresh full-fat ricotta  
½ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg  
1 tablespoon brown sugar  
40 g (½ cup) fresh breadcrumbs  
100 g Parmigiano Reggiano, finely grated, plus extra to serve  
finely ground semolina flour (semola rimacinata), for dusting

#### TORTELLI DOUGH

300 g tipo 00 flour, plus extra for dusting  
pinch of sea salt  
2 eggs  
4 egg yolks

#### BUTTER & SAGE SAUCE

150 g lightly salted butter  
handful of sage leaves

While I often lean on pumpkin soup to use mine, sometimes I like to go to a little extra effort and make these gorgeous tortelli stuffed with roast pumpkin, ricotta and Parmigiano Reggiano. I first tried tortelli di zucca in Mantova, where they traditionally add crushed amaretti biscuits and mustard fruits. I've substituted the amaretti biscuits for a little brown sugar here, which accentuates the pumpkin's sweetness, just like the biscuits do. While the favoured pumpkin for this dish would be the zucca mantovana as it is sweet and firm, kent pumpkin works just fine, too.

Preheat the oven to 180°C.

Arrange the pumpkin, skin-side down, on a large baking tray. Scatter some sea salt over the pumpkin, then transfer to the oven and roast for 45 minutes or until cooked through. Set aside and, when the pumpkin is cool enough to handle, scoop the flesh into a bowl, discarding the skin, and mash with a fork. When completely cool, add the ricotta, nutmeg, sugar and breadcrumbs, stirring well to combine, then stir through the Parmigiano Reggiano. Taste the filling and check for seasoning.

Meanwhile, to make the tortelli dough, tip the flour and salt onto a clean work surface and combine with your hands. Create a large well in the centre of the flour and crack in the eggs and yolks. Gently whisk the eggs using a fork, then slowly bring in the flour and mix to incorporate. When the dough becomes stiff, use your hands and a pastry scraper to mix the flour with the eggs. Bring the dough together and knead for about 10 minutes, until smooth and elastic. As the dough becomes smooth, it is important to clean down your work surface and hands, then continue to knead. Cover with an upturned bowl and allow to rest at room temperature for 30 minutes.

Using a rolling pin, roll one-quarter of the dough into a rough disc around 3 mm thick. Roll the dough through a pasta machine set to the widest setting, then roll again through the next two settings until the pasta sheet is about 20 cm long. Fold in the short ends so they meet in the middle. The pasta should now be a little narrower than the width of the machine. Use a rolling pin to flatten slightly.

Set the machine back to the widest setting and repeat this rolling and folding two more times. This will make the pasta dough nice and strong. Now roll the dough continuously through the settings until the pasta is around 1.5 mm thick. If at any point the pasta sheet feels sticky, simply dust with some semolina flour.





Place heaped tablespoons of filling along one long edge of the pasta sheet, leaving a 1 cm border at the edge and around 2 cm of space between each mound of filling. Fold the empty side of the pasta sheet over the filling to meet the other pasta edge, then press and seal between each mound of filling to remove any excess air. Seal along the long edge with your hands to enclose the filling, dabbing with a little water if necessary to help the pasta stick.

Use a pasta cutter to cut along the length of the sheet, being careful not to trim too close to the filling. Finish by cutting in between each mound to give you the tortelli. Dust with semolina flour and place on a clean tea towel. Repeat with the remaining dough and filling.

Bring a large saucepan of generously salted water to the boil and cook the tortelli for about 2 minutes, until they float to the surface and are al dente.

While the tortelli are cooking, make the butter and sage sauce.

Melt the butter with the sage leaves in a large frying pan over low heat. Add a good splash of the pasta cooking water and swirl the pan to combine. I like the butter to be just melted rather than 'burnt', but if you prefer a nuttier sauce, simply cook the butter for a minute or two longer. Using a slotted spoon, transfer the tortelli to the butter and sage sauce and stir gently to coat. Serve immediately, topped with extra Parmigiano Reggiano. 🌿

OUT NOW



**Julia Busuttill Nishimura** is a Melbourne-based cook and author.

Her work celebrates simple ingredients, seasonal produce and the joys of coming together at the table. Julia's cooking is influenced by her Maltese heritage and Japanese family, the distinctive ebb and flow of Melbourne's seasons, and by her time spent living in Tuscany, where she learned the joys of the Italian kitchen.

***Around the Table*** by Julia Busuttill Nishimura, published by Plum, RRP \$44.99, photography by Armelle Habib.

Take a look at some of the best shots taken at our **VFF UDV Annual Meeting and Conference** and our **VFF Grains and Livestock Conference**.



# READER SURVEY

We'd like to hear more about what you think of *Victorian Farmer* and our broader communications via a short survey.



Scan the QR code or head online to: [bit.ly/3y8gQD7](https://bit.ly/3y8gQD7)

By completing the survey you will go into the draw to win a **\*\$500 Bunnings Warehouse** voucher.

\*T&Cs apply





# Cactus Country

Currently plaguing the northern and central Victorian landscape, Wheel Cactus is a rapidly spreading, wheel-shaped reminder of Australia's **prickly past**.

## WORDS

Daniel Forwood

## PHOTOGRAPHY

Lee Mead

An ornamental, drought-resistant shrub turned escapee garden plant; wheel cactus (*Opuntia robusta*) is so named after its peculiar spherical shape. Once an oddly placed fixture in the Victorian landscape, wheel cactus has undergone plague-like spread in northern and central Victoria, akin to the other 27 *Opuntia* species across Australia. Each species has their own unique biological features, growth patterns and response to chemical treatments. This has firmly etched their place as Weeds of National Significance – an infamous accolade awarded to 32 weeds based on their invasiveness, potential for spread and environmental, social, and economic impacts.

Although, in Victoria, several catchment management authority boundaries aim to prevent further spread of wheel cactus.

Native and endemic to central and northern Mexico, the Australian climate presents ideal conditions for wheel cactus to naturalise and spread into Victoria, South Australia, New South Wales, and Queensland. With no natural predators, no competing cactus species native to Australia and a tendency to grow on top of inaccessible rocky granite hills, the weed has established unopposed in regions of Victoria including the Maldon district for the last 50 years.

Recognising the magnitude of this cactus-borne catastrophe, a team of dedicated local volunteers from surrounding Landcare groups and landholders formed the Tarrangower Cactus Control Group in 2005 with one primary target – wheel cactus.

Lee Mead, President of the Tarrangower Cactus Control Group leads the charge of the esteemed Froggatt Award-winning organisation, protecting Australian native plants, animals and the natural environment from the incursion of dangerous new invasive species.

“

*People don't think cacti are a problem... There's just as much Wheel Cactus as there is when we started. It grows just as fast as it's killed.*

”

Lee Mead

“There's just as much wheel cactus as there is when we started. It grows just as fast as it's killed,” she said.

Lee and the ‘Cactus Warriors’ work consistently and passionately to raise the profile of wheel cactus, increase awareness and educate farmers in Maldon and surrounds, with many property owners aware and actively controlling wheel cactus. Although, their hands are tied when it comes to the apathetic or absentee property owner and securing resources from the Victorian government as wheel cactus is not considered a priority weed.

“People don't think cacti are a problem. Wheel cactus won't stop spreading.”

With the continued threat of infestations at Mount Buckrabanyule and Maldon merging, now is the time to act to mitigate the development of a core wheel cactus seedbank.

Given weeds such as serrated tussock and blackberry cost the Victorian economy \$900 million a year, significant investment is required to protect regional Victoria from the spread of wheel cactus.

## At a glance

**Scientific name:** *Opuntia robusta*

**Morphology:** Spherical, blue-green segments (or lobes); 1-2 metres high at maturity

**Maturity:** three-four years, can live up to 20 years

**Flowering and fruiting:** Flowering (Oct-Nov); fruiting (Nov-Jan)

**Mode of spread:** Bird, fox or other animal droppings

**Preferred habitat and climate:** Arid and semi-arid areas; Warm-temperate and subtropical conditions

**Impact:** Renders land non-arable; Inedible to and impassable by livestock; Limits grazing capacity; Difficult to clear; Suitable habitat for pests such as rabbits.

## Noxious weed classification in Victoria

### 🚫 Regionally prohibited:

Port Phillip and Western Port  
Private landholders responsible for control on private land but not on roadside

### 🚫 Regionally controlled:

Mallee, Wimmera, North Central and North East

Plants widespread in region. Ongoing control required, landowners take reasonable steps to prevent growth and spread

### 🚫 Restricted:

Glenelg Hopkins, Goulburn Broken, West Gippsland, East Gippsland and Corangamite

Unacceptable risk of spread and a serious threat to states or territories in Australia.

## Control of wheel cactus

Considerable labour and effort is required to control wheel cactus. Conventional herbicide control is fraught, as the cactus has a thick cuticle that reduces the impact of herbicides, and does not respond to surface spray herbicides.

Pioneered by the Cactus Warriors, wheel cactus is treated using diluted glyphosate, intricately injected into the lobes of each cactus segment.



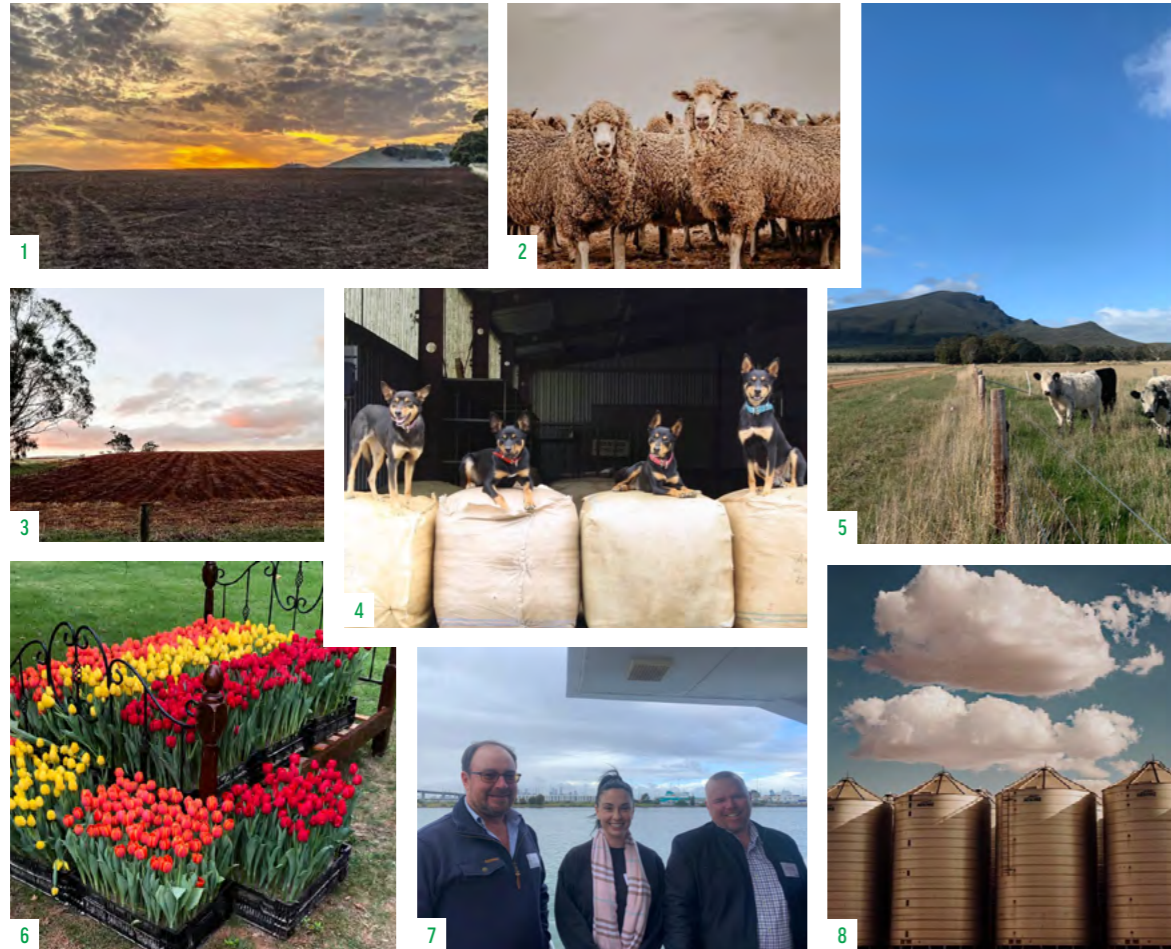
The cactoblastis moth (*Cactoblastis cactorum*) and dactylopius scale insects (*Dactylopius spp.*) are examples of two biological controls introduced with success in controlling other prickly pears (*Opuntia stricta*) in the *Opuntia* genus. Despite the documented success of cactoblastis moth in the control of prickly pear in Queensland and New South Wales, similar attempts to introduce the moth in southern Australia have proven futile, as the moth is considered ineffective in cooler climates

However, little research into biological control of wheel cactus has been conducted to date, with no biological control identified.

Concerningly, South Australian reports have indicated that wheel cactus can increase their genetic diversity, potentially impacting the ability of biological control agents to successfully destroy cactus populations. With costs of conventional control estimated at \$4.50 per plant or \$566 per km<sup>2</sup>, and a projected spread of up to 80% of the Australian mainland, work must be done to ensure continued access to agricultural land.

The spread of wheel cactus tells a cautionary tale about the importance of pest plant management. That's why the VFF are calling on the Victorian Government to prioritise the management of endemic and established pests, weeds and diseases that may impact Victorian agriculture at the State election this November. 🌱





# Out and About

Here we showcase some of the best shots from our members all over the State.

If you have a great photo of your farm that you would like published, send it to [media@vff.org.au](mailto:media@vff.org.au) and follow us on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A spectacular South West sunset near Camperdown (credit bc_photography)</li> <li>2. The gang all rugged up for winter (credit e.m. images)</li> <li>3. Big winter skies in Gippsland (credit emmasteendam)</li> <li>4. These guys are taking a well-earned break (credit thekelpieclan)</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. VFF on the road to the Grampians.</li> <li>6. Spectacular blooms at this year's Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show</li> <li>7. A host of VFF representatives braving the chill for a special Port of Melbourne tour</li> <li>8. The Wimmera in all its glory (credit @e.m.images)</li> </ol> |
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# Fair Go for Regional Vic

PHOTOGRAPHY  
Charlie Kinross

G'day readers,

We wanted to finish this edition of the *Victorian Farmer* magazine by taking the opportunity to once again talk about the significant policy work that's been driving us in the leadup to November's State election.

There's no doubt about it, this is when the whips are cracking and the opportunity to influence our decision makers and push what farmers need, counts the most.

Our election policy platform is simple and revolves around a 'Fair Go for Regional Victoria.' You've probably read this earlier in this edition and will likely do so many more times between now and November. That's what we need to do, keep drumming the message with the goal to make those in charge, take note and deliver.

It has four key points of focus we know will improve regional Victoria:

- Delivering better regional road and rail
- Making regional Victoria the best place to live and work
- Protecting farmland and our natural environment
- Supporting farm businesses and regional jobs

These are based on the countless phone calls, emails, meetings where you have told us what the most pressing issues are. After all, by talking to you, our members, you help inform our priorities and share the big ideas and local projects you need. This, combined with some of the best agriculture policy minds in the Country is how we've arrived at this message.

It's important to note that whilst most of the commitments we are seeking this election revolve around the agriculture industry, we know the farming community doesn't exist in isolation and that regional Victoria receives the dividend from government partnering with farmers.

For far too long, decision makers have been focused on inner Melbourne at the expense of our regions and we are committed to ensuring regional Victoria is front and centre at the election, and equally to working with all parties and candidates to deliver a better future for our State.

It's not about us and them, together we are one state that needs to be treated that way in order for both to thrive and progress into the future.

As a team and an Organisation, we look forward to talking with you throughout this election campaign. We encourage you to get in touch with us if you have an issue, need advice or just want to have your say at [policyteam@vff.org.au](mailto:policyteam@vff.org.au).

The VFF Policy Team

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# BUILT TOUGH FOR WORK OR PLAY



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