

Victorian Farmer

SUMMER 2023



A FRUITFUL FUTURE

In the King Valley with Johnny Cavedon

AT HOME IN HISTORY

A peek inside Ceres Homestead with the Charles family.

A CENTENARIAN'S HAPPY PLACE

Ian McRae shares his secrets to happiness and a long, prosperous life.

FOUNDED AND GROUNDED

Meet the team behind Tenderground in North East Victoria.

Insurance that's down to earth

At WFI, we're experts in insuring people who live in regional Australia because that's where our people live too. We think it's important to get to know our customers. So, give your Local Area Manager a call and they'll be happy to chat over the phone, at your property or at a WFI branch. It's how we've been doing business for over 100 years.

Find your Local Area Manager at wfi.com.au or call 1300 934 934

Insurance issued by Insurance Australia Limited trading as WFI. To see if a product is right for you, always consider the Product Disclosure Statement and Target Market Determinations available from wfi.com.au

Good people to know. 

Hi everyone,

Can you believe we're already flying through 2023? Undoubtedly we've got a big year ahead of us, but before I get to that I would like to sincerely thank you for returning me as VFF President for another two years.

Since you granted me the privilege of the role in 2020, we've faced no shortage of challenges. From a once-in-a-generation pandemic and now historic flooding and everything in between, it's certainly kept us busy.

I say this keeping in mind you who are doing it tough and still on the road to recovery, but we mustn't waste a crisis and that's what the VFF is firmly focused on.

Our industry, us as farmers and the food and fibre we produce has arguably never been more in the mainstream spotlight.

As I'm writing this, potatoes seem to be the new lettuce as retailers impose buying limits in the face produce shortages and what we produce as farmers dominates the headlines across the country.

It's not just the cost of living that's rising, but also the cost of doing business. We're firmly focused on helping to share with decision makers and consumers what it takes to get food from paddock to plates.

Volatile input prices for fertilizer, gas and electricity, rising farm rates, unpredictable worker availability, crumbling infrastructure and inadequate funding is just a small snapshot of what farmers are facing.

There's no time like the present to highlight these issues and work with those calling the shots to find a solution.

It's not about dwelling in the past, but taking a forward thinking approach to the years ahead. Here at the VFF we know the events of the past few years have changed the world forever and we're adapting to that.

Our team and the resources we offer to members are tailored to these changing needs and you can be rest assured that we're committed to continuing to be the voice of Victorian farmers and telling your stories.



Speaking of stories, this edition is jam-packed full of them—including a very special chat with Wallup centenarian, Ian McRae (pictured above) about his happy place on-farm.

I look forward to working with you all on behalf of all Victorian farmers. For now, take care of yourself and your family, and as always, I hope you enjoy the latest edition of our magazine.

Emma Germano
VFF President

Contents

- 6 ELECTIONS WRAP**
Read more about VFF's leadership team and how they plan to continue to advocate on behalf of all Victorian farmers.
- 10 AT HOME IN HISTORY**
The perfect mix of livestock, grains and agritourism with the Charles family and their beautiful Ceres Homestead.
- 16 A FRUITFUL FUTURE**
Meet the Cavedons, VFF members and Italian viticulturists in the King Valley with a side venture in one very special subterranean fungi!
- 22 GROUNDED AND FOUNDED**
See what a new collaboration of North East Victorian agroecological farmers are up to with Tenderground.
- 28 HAPPY PLACE**
Centenarian Ian McRae, shares his secrets to happiness and a long, prosperous life.
- 34 MAKING OUR FARM FAMILIES SAFER**
Coordinator of the Timboon Agriculture Project Andrea Vallance, and critical care nurses Sarah Duncanson and Grace Larsen speak about farm safety and VFF MOFS' exciting new podcast series.
- 36 COMMUNITY SPIRIT**
A sobering conversation around coping mechanisms and rural health with Rural Sobriety's Noeline Brown.

ROAD TO FLOOD RECOVERY IS UNDERWAY

As many farmers continue the clean-up after months of devastating flooding across Victoria, the VFF is continuing to advocate on behalf on impacted communities to ensure adequate support, assistance and funding continues.

To help ensure decision makers are aware of the full impact of this disaster, we're encouraging those impacted to visit the Victorian Government's 2022 Victorian Flood Recovery website and record what damage you have and the assistance you require.

This resource also contains details regarding financial assistance, clean-up services, mental health/wellbeing support and much more. **Please visit www.vic.gov.au/2022-flood-recovery for further information.**

VFF HELPS SECURE FUNDING FOR PIPELINE INVESTIGATION

Government funding has been made available to help expand Victoria's stock and domestic water in the Pyrenees and Northern Grampians Shires.

The proposed Southern Wimmera and Northeast Pyrenees Waters Supply Project has been promoted by local farmers as a way to ensure a secure water supply as well as assisting farm businesses respond to drought and dry conditions.

The VFF supported Pyrenees Shire Council's request for funding to investigate the feasibility of expanding stock and domestic water supply to districts between Avoca, Beazley's Bridge and Glenorchy.

The VFF has been invited to be a member of the Project Steering Committee and will help ensure local farmers are best represented.

RIGHT TO FARM UPHOLD IN THE MACEDON RANGES

A proposal by the Macedon Ranges Shire Council to convert three separate areas of Farming Zone land near Pipers Creek, Lauriston and Baynton into Rural Conservation Zone has been rejected.

With support and information provided by the VFF, impacted landowners successfully swayed the Council towards the decision, in move that will see farmers retain vital fundamental farming rights.

Local farmer James Walsh said there was a sense of relief for farmers. "I think we had resigned ourselves to a belief that we were going to be in this for the long haul."

The VFF would like to remind members of the services and support available to farmers for such matters and to contact us on 1300 882 833 for further information.

A TRUE WIMMERA LEGACY VALE TOM BLAIR | 1938-2022

The VFF Wimmera Branch are saddened to note the passing of local Horsham farmer Tom Blair.

Tom was tireless advocate for agriculture and a passionate, long-standing member of the VFF and its Wimmera Branch; actively contributing well into his 80s. As a strong grassroots member, he continuously fought on behalf of Victorian farmers on a wide range of rural issues, with a focus in recent times on road infrastructure and ensuring council rates were fair for farmers.

VFF POLICY COUNCIL GREEN LIGHTS NEW POLICIES

The VFF Policy Council adopted four new policies at its December meeting, including:

CHILDCARE:

Regional and rurally-based Victorians must have easy access to essential basic childcare and early education services in their local community to ensure the long-term wellbeing of families and ongoing viability of regional and rural Victoria.

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT (NATURAL HAZARDS):

The VFF seeks Government recognition that at all stages of emergency management, the impacts of natural hazard-based emergencies (fire, flood, storm) on farm assets is recognised from a business sense.

FOREIGN INVESTMENT AND OWNERSHIP:

Government policy towards foreign investment must achieve a balance between continuing to attract foreign investment and ensuring investments do not harm the national interest.

HEALTH:

All farmers, rural, and regional Victorians must have access to essential basic healthcare services in their community to ensure the long-term wellbeing and health of farmers and regional, rural and remote communities.

Read the full policies online at: www.vff.org.au/resources/news

NEW CHILD-FOCUSED FARM SAFETY PODCAST LAUNCHED

The VFF's Making our Farms Safer Project (MOFS) has been hard at work launching a new podcast series aimed at driving social change to improve the safety of Victorian farming families.

The initial two-part series features tips and guidance to reduce accidents involving children on the farm and focuses on better outcomes for children aged 10-15.

Listen to Head of Trauma and Burns Unit at The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne, Dr Warwick Teague (pictured below) as he shares his insights when dealing with child injury and trauma.

The podcast series is now available for listening and can be downloaded via your favourite streaming app and searching 'Victorian Farmers Federation'.

[READ MORE ON P34](#)



For more news and updates, head to our website: www.vff.org.au/resources/news

Victorian Farmer

EDITORIAL

Publisher
Victorian Farmers Federation

Content/Creative
Hannah Crook
Ryan Moloney

Contributors
Georgina Morrison
Natasha Lobban
VFF Policy Team
Wendy Hargreaves

MARKETING

Advertising
magazine@vff.org.au

Partnerships
partnerships@vff.org.au

Media/PR
media@vff.org.au

General Enquiries
info@vff.org.au



Victorian Farmer magazine is published by the Victorian Farmers Federation (ABN: 67 079 980 304)

Farrer House
Level 3, 24 Collins Street
Melbourne VIC 3003

©2022. All rights reserved.
Printed by Sovereign Press
in Ballarat, Victoria.
Cover image by Phoebe Dunn.

1300 882 833



Disclaimer: This publication is produced by Victorian Farmers Federation, (the "Publisher"). Materials in this publication have been created by a variety of different entities and, to the extent permitted by law, the Publisher accepts no liability for materials created by others. The materials in this publication are provided on an 'as is' basis. Victorian Farmers Federation makes no warranties, expressed or implied, and hereby disclaims and negates all other warranties including, without limitation, implied warranties or conditions of merchantability, fitness for a particular purpose, or non-infringement of intellectual property or other violation of rights. Further, Victorian Farmers Federation does not warrant or make any representations concerning the accuracy, likely results, or reliability of the use of the materials, suggestions, process, opinion or otherwise in this publication. In no event shall Victorian Farmers Federation or its suppliers be liable for any damages (including, without limitation, damages for loss of data or profit, or due to business interruption) arising out of the use or reliance of any materials, suggestions, process, opinion or otherwise contained in this publication. While we use our best endeavours to ensure accuracy of the materials we create, the materials appearing in this publication could include technical, typographical, or photographic or factual errors. Victorian Farmers Federation does not warrant that any of the materials in this publication are accurate, complete, do not include technical, typographical, or photographic or factual errors or are relevant or current. These terms and conditions are governed by and construed in accordance with the laws of Victoria and Australia including copyright laws and you irrevocably submit to the exclusive jurisdiction of the courts in that State or location. Copyright © 2023 Victorian Farmers Federation.



Elections Wrap

The 2022 VFF Elections resulted in a number of **new and well-known faces** being appointed and re-appointed to various positions across the VFF.

Read more about their background and how they plan to continue to advocate on behalf of all Victorian farmers.

WORDS

Ryan Moloney

PHOTOGRAPHY

Phoebe Dunn

VFF PRESIDENT

EMMA GERMANO

Emma has been re-elected as VFF President in her second term which began in late 2020. As a third-generation farmer from Mirboo North in Gippsland, Emma is focussed on ensuring a vibrant future for agriculture in Australia.

Her family farm, 'I Love Farms' is mixed across livestock and horticulture. Emma is passionate about leading the conversation on key issues for Australian agriculture including food security, sustainability and climate resilience.

She has previously held the role of VFF Vice-President, VFF Horticulture Group President and was acknowledged as a Nuffield Scholar in 2014 for her research examining global export opportunities for Australian primary producers.

VFF VICE-PRESIDENT

DANYEL CUCINOTTA

Danyel has been re-elected as VFF Vice-President in her second term which began in late 2020.

She is a third-generation Victorian caged-egg farmer helping to operate her family's egg farm, onsite café and deli in Werribee on Melbourne's western outskirts.

She is a member of the VFF Board and also commits her time to Chair both the Farming Systems Policy Committee and Making our Farming Families Safer Committee – as well as being a committee member of both Farm Business and Policy Council.

Danyel understands the dedication, hard work and sacrifice needed to run a successful farm and is committed to ensuring farmers receive strong government policy needed to ensure Victorian farms and agriculture thrives into the future.

VFF UNITED DAIRYFARMERS OF VICTORIA PRESIDENT

MARK BILLING

Mark farms with his wife Sam and four children at Larpent, west of Colac in Victoria's South West. He's a dry land farmer with a passion for the dairying industry, an industry that has sustained five generations of his family. He is attuned to the pressures that confront the dairying industry, but also believes the industry has a strong history of adoption, adaption, passion and persistence.

VFF LIVESTOCK PRESIDENT (APPOINTED UNCONTESTED)

SCOTT YOUNG

Scott is a third-generation livestock and cropping farming from Ballan, near Ballarat. He began in the industry through a farm apprenticeship.

Through field days, participating in field trials, forming partnerships with other progressive farmers in the local district and his passion for soil health, sheep husbandry, he is passionate about progressing the Victorian livestock industry.

ADDITIONAL LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

APPOINTED VIA AN ELECTION:

VFF Livestock Commodity Council - Councillor
(Additional Position) - Bradley Venning

UNCONTESTED REPRESENTATIVE POSITIONS:

VFF Livestock Vice-President - Peter Star
Peter has also been appointed to be the VFF Board Livestock representative.

North East Region Councillor - Natasha Lobban
Corangamite Region Councillor - Lachlan Barclay
East Gippsland Region Councillor - Trent Anderson

The 2022 VFF election vote counting process was conducted on Thursday 22 December 2022 at Farrer House in Melbourne under supervised conditions and the VFF would like thank all participants who had their say on the next generation of VFF leaders.

EVENTS TO KICK-START THE YEAR

Please visit the VFF events page for further information: www.vff.org.au/events

2023 VFF AGM



Annual General Meeting

The 2023 VFF Annual General Meeting will be held both in person and online on Monday 27 February 2023 commencing at 11:30am.

MOFS AND STOCK SENSE

MARCH

- Cream of the Crop Conference** (Koroit)
- Peri Urban Workshop** (Healesville)
- Wimmera Machinery Field Days** (Longerenong)
- Farm World** (Lardner Park)
- Cattle, Sheep and Goat Workshops** (Horsham, Drouin)
- Farm Safety Briefings** (Mildura, Swan Hill)

APRIL

- Farm Safety Briefing** (Werribee)

MAY

- Additional Cattle Workshops**
- Farm Safety Briefing** (Shepparton)

JUNE

- Additional Sheep and Goat Workshops**
- Farm Safety Briefings** (Leongatha, Wonthaggi)



TELSTRA BLUE TICK:

How we test for regional Australia

Over the last couple of decades, connectivity has become more crucial than ever – and in remote areas it can be the difference between isolation and community. Which is why for the last 15 years we've been putting phones to the test to see if they deserve a Blue Tick.



The Telstra Blue Tick is the mark we give phones that our technicians and engineers have thoroughly tested to ensure they deliver superior voice coverage in rural and regional areas.

We test every phone that we sell on our network, but only the best get a Blue Tick.

How we test for Blue Tick

When Blue Tick first started, a crack team of Telstra technicians and engineers went bush with a range of devices to test exactly how they performed. While they were out there, they pioneered a testing regimen that is still used today.

Originally testing was only performed with our 3G network, but in recent years, testing voice calls across our 4G VoLTE network has become part of the process, with Samsung's Galaxy S8 the first 4G phone to receive the Blue Tick in 2017.

These days we don't need to head out to the bush for each test, but can do most of our testing in purpose built device testing

facilities. Here, we're able to simulate exactly how a new phone would perform as if it were being held in your hand on the very edge of a coverage area.

We seal the handsets in our specialised echo-free chamber to ensure that tests are accurate and only the best-performing devices are awarded the prestige of carrying the Blue Tick. And to make extra sure the handset performs well, we then take it out into rural areas to replicate these test results for double-confirmation of its performance.

More than a coverage map

When you rely on knowing where you can find coverage in remote areas, being able to trust in the Blue Tick across different devices is a point of pride for us. There are many factors that can impact the signal strength, but with Blue Tick testing, one of the most important we test for is how our bodies impact signal.

When you hold your phone, your hand and all the lovely stuff in your body – which is mostly made up of water – work to



essentially absorb and almost block parts of the signal. Engineers call it a “detuning” effect and it can have a real impact on your overall coverage.

In fact, your hand position and size is so important that to ensure consistency we've used the same bloke and his same hand for over a decade to hold the devices in testing.

A phone's antenna strength can also make a big difference in terms of connectivity, which is something we test across all our connected devices. Even a small amount of extra signal strength (measured in dBm) can result in kilometres of extra coverage when you're on the borderline of connectivity.

Regional coverage tips for Blue Tick

If you want to get every bit of coverage you can and the most out of your Telstra Blue Tick phone, we have a few tips to follow, straight out of our lab.

1. Hold your phone as light as possible – how you hold your phone matters a lot. So next time you're trying to make a call on the edge of coverage, try not to squeeze the life out of your phone.

2. Turn on Wi-Fi calling and SMS – if you get coverage outside, but not inside your home you can turn Wi-Fi calling and SMS on to make phone calls or send texts like normal using your home internet, even without any mobile coverage

3. Use a headset or headphones for calls – don't need to worry about how you're holding your phone if you aren't holding it, right?

4. Take a look at repeaters or antennas – an external antenna or repeater is much larger than the antenna in your phone and can pick up coverage your phone can't. It then repeats that signal short distances for your phone to connect to.

More information

Go to <https://www.telstra.com.au/mobile-phones/mobiles-on-a-plan> to discover the range of Blue Tick handsets that are available.



At Home *in* History.

Situated in Learmonth, Central Highlands of Victoria, the majesty of **Ceres Homestead** is a culmination of layers of history, and years of loving restoration by the Charles family.

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY

Georgina Morrison



“It was funny, because when we were building it, I would come out from Ballarat and someone would have moved the pegs in a bit, and Geordie would say, ‘Oh, I don’t know who did that!’”

Jane Charles

“But you had to do everything proportionately to the house,” says Jane.

Restorations were not without its challenges, especially with older craftforms and skill sets.

“In The Duke’s bedroom, the Ceiling Rose came down. We went to one place that created moulds, and it broke, so then we went to (a couple more places) and were thankfully able to get it done. Our builder screwed it up into 17 places, to prevent it from falling 24ft on anyone in bed!”

The breathtaking exterior, beautifully curated spaces, and lush garden that traces its edges, are a testament to 14 years of consistent improvements and a commitment to celebrating and preserving the magnificent property.

“After about a year (of living at Ceres), I would look at the garden, and nothing made sense; the old remnant garden blended with something different, and it didn’t quite marry,” explains Jane. “So I said, ‘if we have no other money, we’re going to get a really good garden designer and have a blueprint.’”

They connected with revered designer Michael McCoy, who recognised the couple’s vision to make the garden speak to the house.

“When Michael first arrived, I took him through the house past all the windows, and said, ‘I want you to paint me a picture, because I want them to be the frames,’” says Jane. “And he has been really sympathetic in bringing the house and garden together.”

“When the kids got a bit bigger, we got outside a lot more and really started to work on it. Because we sat back and lived with it for a long time, we were able to (ascertain) what it needed.”



Named after the **Goddess of Agriculture, Harvest and Motherly Love**, Ceres was built in 1864 by the first licencees of the Ballarat Goldfields, Thomas and Joanna Bath.

Steeped in history, the property famously hosted Queen Victoria’s son, Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh; the bedroom he resided in, since earning the namesake ‘The Duke’s Room’.

The Queen’s subsequent gift to then-property owners was a cutting of a vine from Hampton Court Palace – and it still crowns the central hall of the home today.

Since the Bath era, the property has been lovingly cared for by the Coghlan and Charles families.

Geordie Charles and his wife, Jane, moved to Ceres in 2008 with their young family, embarking on a mission to improve the homestead and its surrounding grounds.

The renovations were a painstaking process, with the couple making every effort to honour the history of the property, while making it functional for their young family.

“We were thinking, studying, asking questions – everything we did, we consulted experts, to be sympathetic and retain integrity,” Jane tells Victorian Farmer. “At one point, there were up to 40 people working on this place for about a year; it was skates on.”

After selling their Ballarat home, the couple remember their move to Ceres vividly.

“We moved out here, and were walking in the front door as the cleaners were walking out the back door,” recalls Jane. “There were no seats, because the furniture hadn’t arrived yet, so I was breastfeeding George on the toilet seat. We had these beautiful curtains hung, but on the first night there was a bat in one of them, and there were mice. Not ideal!”

“At one point, there were up to 40 people working on this place for about a year; it was skates on.”

Jane Charles

“The arable aspects of the farm – the sheep and cropping – does work around the clock, and it is a 7-day week with livestock too, so we have to have rosters with everyone involved, and rotate weekends.”

Geordie Charles



The couple's four children, Edward (18), William (16), George (14) and Isobel (9), are now **very much part of helping** around the house, garden and farm.

“They help with seasonal jobs during the school holidays, like lamb marking and harvest,” says Geordie.

Particularly during summer, they've had a roster with the kids, and each night Geordie looks at who is scheduled to help the next day.

It's been a busy season, with the piggery (off-site from the homestead) having its own grain storage and bringing in around 6000-7000 tonnes of barley and wheat.

“The arable aspects of the farm – the sheep and cropping – does work around the clock, and it is a 7-day week with livestock too, so we have to have rosters with everyone involved, and rotate weekends,” says Geordie.

It's all hands on deck with multiple generations (including Geordie's 83 year-old father, and brother), working alongside up to 47 employees across the piggery, feed mill, garden products, maintenance, and admin sectors. Contributing to the cycle of a working farm teaches Geordie and Jane's kids invaluable skills and a great work ethic.

“The kids are really good at understanding that when they're not at the farm – which is only seasonal – they're here working at home,” says Jane.

“So a lot of what you've seen here today has been with their help; particularly landscaping, and we do a lot of gardening together.”



(L-R) Jane and Geordie with their two youngest, Isobel and George at Ceres.

This began during COVID, when the Charles' weren't able to get tradespeople out to help.

“The kids had no sport, so we had to throw them into it and we had so many projects,” Jane shares. “I think that (period) was one of the best times of our lives, because we stopped. We did the conversion of the little glasshouse, tiling, paths and edges – and our kids have done a beautiful job of it too.”

Isobel has also taken a keen interest in Jane's online store, and loves helping her mother pack orders.

The Ceres store logo sports a crest taken from the original wallpaper in the house, and the business champions the values of the goddess herself – while also celebrating and promoting local industries like Australian Wool.

“COVID really said to me, you've got to try and be in Australia as much as you can – so products like our wool blankets, are 100% Australian wool and made in Geelong; our hemp aprons are made in Melbourne; our linen tea towels are also made in Australia,” says Jane.

“We also work with French perfumeries and work out the fragrances we really like, and have a beautiful range of candles and teas inspired by the homestead and our garden.”

Ceres Homestead is moving into an exciting new chapter of agritourism as well, with bespoke weddings, workshops, and curated events like its upcoming ‘Conversations At Ceres’, which will bring a range of thoughtful and intriguing individuals and professionals to share their knowledge.

“On Sunday 19 March we'll be hosting ‘An Afternoon with Belina Jeffery,’” says Jane.

To find more information about Ceres Homestead and upcoming events, connect with Jane and Geordie online. 🌿

SEE WHAT THE CHARLES FAMILY ARE UP TO:

www.cereshomestead.com.au

INSTAGRAM: [@cereshomestead](https://www.instagram.com/cereshomestead)



A Fruitful Future.

It was 1956 and a young **John Cavedon** was helping his Aunt and his pregnant Mother Adelia push the family car along the road from Gapsted to Myrtleford; his Father, Marcello, sitting in the front seat steering.

Even a cow stops to take in the scene, which was immortalised in this black and white photograph by Jeff Carter.

WORDS

Natasha Lobban

PHOTOGRAPHY

Jeff Carter, Phoebe Dunn

With special thanks to the Carter family.
Pictured above: "Tobacco Road" Ovens Valley (1956), photographed by Jeff Carter©.

The **Cavedon family**, who had immigrated from Italy, were enjoying a tough but fulfilling life, similar to many others in North East Victoria at the time. Marcello lived by the principle that if you had a farm you could always eat. Their vegetable garden was large, and Adelia's kitchen was the centre of the home.

That little boy in the black and white photograph would grow up to be the first Italian to plant a vineyard in the King Valley in 1977. The Cavedons continue in viticulture to this day, with John supported by his wife Helen and their son Johnny at King Valley Vineyard.

John started planting vines because the tobacco industry was coming to an end. It was a long transition and an even steeper learning curve.



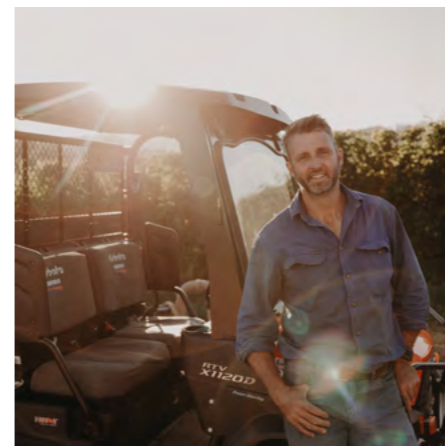
(L-R) Johnny and John Cavedon on the vineyard.

There wasn't a lot of information available about viticulture, so John and Helen travelled to Mildura to learn about trellising. "There wasn't a great deal of support in so far as how to go about it or what trellis to use," she says. "There was a group of growers here who had put in vineyards. We started to get together and talk and help each other out with ideas."

"Brown Brothers were very instrumental in the beginning in so far as taking the fruit from the area and basically that's how people got their start in the vineyards in the King Valley. Browns wanted us to plant Riesling so that's what we planted. Other companies then came in, and then other growers went out on their own and built their own labels. We've remained true to what we started doing."

"There was a group of growers here who had put in vineyards. We started to get together and talk and help each other out with ideas."

Helen Cavedon



Remarkably 46 years later they still sell some grapes to Brown Brothers, but have also built relationships that span generations with other winemakers. These relationships have stood the test of time and are now intergenerational. "You're dealing with their children or people that have been in their company for 20 years now," Johnny says. "Or changing from my parents dealing with them to me. The industry is a fantastic industry for that."

He also praises the industry for sharing knowledge. Most of Johnny's skills have been learnt from his father and others in the King Valley. He credits this to the fact that a large part of the community are migrants from humble beginnings who are happy to share equipment and ideas, which he both loves and is grateful for.

Johnny now runs the vineyard, but his parents remain very active in the business. His mother takes care of a lot of the office work and his dad still lives and breathes the business. "My father hasn't got any hobbies except for work. So he's always working," Johnny says.

"Every decision we make we have a coffee, have a discussion, every decision is made together." He laughs that their Italian heritage means they can get a bit fired up.

"We don't leave anything on the table," he says. "I do listen to them. They've got the experience, they've seen it all before."

This know-how has helped them get through what could have been a **very difficult season**, with record rain across the state making vines susceptible to disease.



"We're fine, we have it under control, again it comes down to the know-how. I think most people in the King Valley are across it. I haven't really heard anything too bad out there," Johnny says.

Access has been a bigger issue, with Johnny saying there had been plenty of bogging in recent months. "We've used the smaller equipment, equipment we haven't used for the past decade because we had upgraded to bigger and heavier equipment. I'm glad we kept our old gear."

He's expecting a good vintage this year, but jokes that every year is the best year when it comes to the wine industry.

That's just how he is. Johnny goes about his day with a healthy sense of humour, as shown on his social media channels. From being covered in mud, to funny observations around the farm, and even what his dog is listening to in the tractor cab, Johnny's posts show a lighter side to farming.

"You've got to have a laugh," he says. "I'm very fortunate being backed all the way by my parents so I guess I'm privileged that I can see the lighter side to it all sometimes. I do think it's how you deal with what's in front of you and have a laugh at the situation you find yourself in and move forward. Let's try to crack a joke and keep it a bit more real."

Times have certainly changed since the black and white photograph era, but that Cavedon attitude of hard work, and a little fun, remains as strong as ever.

“

Every decision we make we have a coffee, have a discussion, every decision is made together.

”

Johnny Cavedon





Sniffing out a new opportunity.

The Cavedon family are known for their grape growing prowess, but they've also made a mark in another **evolving industry** in recent years.

Johnny is quick to point out that it was all Helen's idea to grow truffles - and he had been fully prepared to blame her if it didn't work out.

Her carefully researched and executed plan has worked out better than anticipated, with their 3500-strong grove of inoculated French and English Oaks now producing 30-40kg of truffles each year.

Truffles are subterranean fungi that grow near the roots on certain trees and their earthy musky and pungent notes are highly prized by some chefs and diners with discerning palates.

The Cavedons' trees were planted in 2010, with their first truffles unearthed four or five years later, and yields have been growing year-on-year.

"I haven't been able to get on the ground to cultivate and do certain things I'll usually do because it was simply too wet, so it will be interesting to see what happens this season," Johnny says.

Truffle farming is largely focused on ensuring the right nutrients are available and that soil structure is conducive to truffle growth. Soil compaction should be avoided.

However, the hardest work is arguably done by one clever nose. Once the weather cools and frosts begin a truffle dog visits the farm each fortnight to sniff out the location of the truffles, which are then unearthed and inspected.

"It's another great industry, you meet a lot of good people," Johnny says.

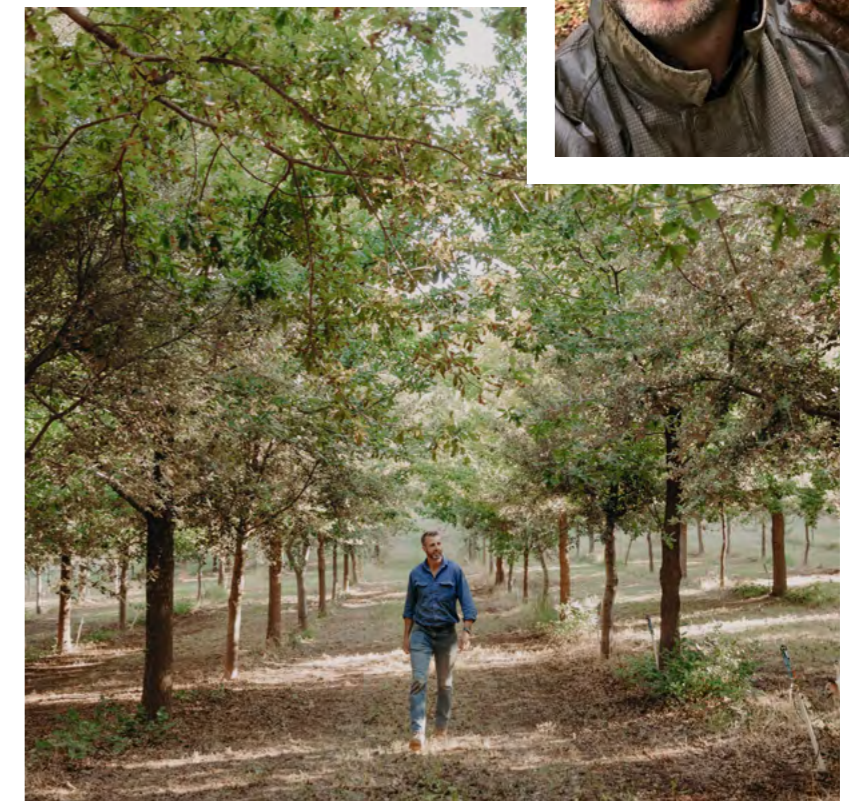
He says that the industry is still expanding so lots of the truffles are given away to family and friends.

"People have to try it first. It gets associated with caviar and things like that. However if you think about it, it goes with peasant food, like a basic pasta sauce or something like that. You can just add truffles and you've got a certain flavour. It's just people experimenting and trying, so we've given a lot away over the years to kind of build a familiarity to it for people. It can be tough trying to move it."

They will focus on being growers and won't be "value adding" with their truffles. "Just like the wine, we know what we're good at and we'll stick to that," Johnny says.

TRUFFLE YIELD

3500 inoculated French and English Oaks produce **30-40kg** of truffles per year.





Grounded *and* Founded.

The more the merrier is ringing true for **Tenderground**, a new collaboration of agroecological farmers from North East Victoria.

WORDS
Natasha Lobban

PHOTOGRAPHY
Courtney Young

Tenderground is made up of **Allt Farm**, from Beechworth, **Woodstock Flour** and **Woodstock Lamb**, from Rutherglen, and **Why Farm**, from the Buckland Valley.

Allt Farm's Hanna McCreath says the collaboration came after first building friendships and lots of talking about the problems and successes they were experiencing on their farms.

"We thought it was a good opportunity to team up and see if we could overcome some of the barriers that we face as small farmers, where we don't have the scale to be able to justify some of those bigger expenses, or we don't have the skill ourselves," she says. "Hopefully the sum of the parts is greater together."

The collaboration's dedication to agroecological farming is important to all of its farmers, which is reflected in their name.

"Choosing a name was hard," Hanna says. "We wanted to be regionally focused, we wanted to focus on the fact that we were young and we wanted to easily communicate to our customers that we cared about the environment and we also cared about the produce that they were receiving. Tenderground came about because we liked the idea of the produce being tender itself, but also the kind of picture of us being tender with the ground that we're all looking after."

Dom Walker from Why Farm says agroecology is important because it's not just about the farming, it's also about the social system that sit behind it.

"Agroecology, specifically, I think, is an important kind of set of principles, because it also integrates the human and social and community dynamics into production. So we're not just thinking about how we operate on our farm, but also thinking about how we operate within a broader community locally, and also within a kind of human community on a global level," he explains.

In the future Tenderground hopes to share infrastructure, they wouldn't be able to access alone, with Dom particularly keen on a mobile abattoir.



(L-R) Lachlan Hamilton, Hanna McCreath, Dom Walker, Ian Congdon and Courtney Young.

"There is such a need for it and such a great variety and strength of production in the North East region. I think it's really crying out for a portable and modular solution, so leave it with me, give me another two years and I'll sort it out," he says.

Courtney Young, from Woodstock Lamb, said she really enjoyed interacting with customers at the Carlton Farmers Market and the local Wodonga Farmers Market during December, which were the first markets under the Tenderground brand.

"I think people just liked the idea of us working together and that we were friends," she says. "It was good to vibe off each other and a lot more fun to be together than by ourselves."

The cooperation means that they only have to pay one stall fee and they have been pleasantly surprised to find that it's often easier to hype and sell each other's produce better than their own.

“Agroecology, specifically, I think, is an important kind of set of principles, because it also integrates the human and social and community dynamics into production.”

Dom Walker

LEARN MORE ABOUT TENDERGROUND AND THE TEAM ONLINE:

www.tenderground.com.au

INSTAGRAM: [@_tenderground](https://www.instagram.com/_tenderground)



HANNA & LACHLAN



COURTNEY & IAN



DOM

An increasing awareness of the role agriculture could have in mitigating climate change, and a desire to have a more resilient food system, has led Lachlan Hamilton and Hanna McCreath to agroecological farming in Beechworth.

"We wanted to combine that desire to want to have an impact on the climate change side with also producing food for our communities and looked around for farms and found we couldn't really afford anything except for this pine plantation," Hanna says of the 200-acre property they purchased.

She didn't realise their work fell into agroecological farming until a farm advisor told them.

"We didn't necessarily seek out a particular mode of farming, but more looked at what have we got to work with? What are our strengths on the farm? And then how could we introduce animals into the system that might have a positive impact on the farm's outcomes, and then also produce food for our community? And it just so happens that that seems to be called agroecology."

When they first bought the farm they planned to get rid of the pines so they would have clear land like all their neighbours, starting with a Christmas Tree business the first two years, but their plans for the trees have changed over time.

"We have noticed that our farm stays green longer and we also noticed walking through the forest on a hot day, it was so much cooler in the forest than it was outside of the forest. We started shifting our mindset from a beautiful farm is a clear farm to the one that might have more trees integrated into it."

They currently run pigs in dedicated areas on the property, which are moved every 12 days, with the area rested for six months. The pigs are processed at six months old and they do about 100 each year.

Courtney Young and Ian Congdon are perhaps best known for Woodstock Flour, which supplies milled flour, but they have also started producing and selling Woodstock Lamb.

They have just survived their first harvest at their new 100-acre farm at Rutherglen, in a tough year plagued by record rains.

"Ian and I were just looking for a place to call our own. We're obviously connected to the family farm but we really wanted our place to experiment more with regenerative farming practices and a place to raise our children," she says.

"This spot in Rutherglen pops up and it ticks a lot of boxes, we hadn't really been specifically targeting Rutherglen, but it's turned out to be really perfect for us. I think it being a wine region, they are already into the food tourism industry here. Everyone understands what we're doing, and they're really interested and supportive of what we're doing."

Milled flour has a shelf life of three months, but Courtney says local stockists and bakers have been incredibly supportive. The mill is at capacity at the moment until new equipment can be installed, processing two tonnes of wheat each week.

They are in the process of having the farm certified organic and are interested in holistic management practices for their lambs.

They had started to sell whole lambs to their community before Tenderground and now are selling different cuts through the collective. They have also introduced a Hampshire Down ram to their Merino flock, with the breed better suited to their native grasses and faster growing.

Dom Walker produces Belted Galloway beef at his 300-acre property in the Buckland Valley. The farm, which has about 100 acres of pasture, is largely forested and is bordered on three sides by Mount Buffalo National Park and the fourth side is the Buckland River.

Dom grew up in North Fitzroy and has studied agriculture as a tool for food security and rural development in Australia and the United States of America. It's led him to many diverse jobs, including in Guatemala where he worked with coffee farming families to make climate smart adaptations. He currently works for Melbourne Farmers Market setting up a producer depot in the city.

He's always dreamed of having some land to manage himself and when his parents bought some land just prior to the pandemic.

"My work is really focused around short supply chains and building resilient rural businesses. So building a business that was sort of echoing what I preach, I suppose, was part of the goal," he says.

"Cattle felt like a kind of regionally appropriate thing to do and we have the support of neighbours and other people in the valley to call on when we run into things that we don't know how to do. Which has been amazing because coming out for the first generation farmer you really you're learning every single day."

The pasture-based grazing system is operated as part of a grassland ecosystem. "It's kind of the broad church of regenerative agriculture but more specifically under that banner agroecology. For me it's about farming in sync with nature and understanding the ecological niches on our property and then management being adapted to that environment."

He's building his herd, with an aim to finish 12 steers a year. It takes 24 to 28 months for the cattle to be ready for processing. He's also looking to integrate sheep into the farming system.


Be part of something bigger.

VFF's partnership with Momentum Energy isn't just about giving members a good deal, it's about partnering with a company that's serious about our environment. The transition to renewable energy is inevitable – in the meantime, we can all steer clear of the power companies who refuse to quit coal as quickly as the planet needs them to.

Call 1800 628 644 to talk about our VFF member offer

 **Special deal for VFF members**

 **Owned by Australia's largest renewable generator**

 **Go one greener with GreenPower**



**Greenpeace's 2022
Green Electricity Guide**

Offer not available for any Supply Address that consumes 160MWh of electricity per annum or more. Terms and conditions apply. An Energy Fact Sheet or a Basic Plan Information Document containing the key details of this plan is available on request.



Happy Place

Dimboola centenarian Ian McRae has too many happy places to choose just one, but **harvest time** comes close.

WORDS

Wendy Hargreaves

PHOTOGRAPHY

Amelia Scholtz

Ian McRae is a glass-half-full sort of bloke.

Asked by *Victorian Farmer* to name his happy place on the family's Wimmera crop and sheep property, Ian chuckles and admits to being a bit stumped.

"That's a hard one," says Ian, who chalked up his 100th birthday on July 19, 2022, with family and friends in Dimboola.

"I've had so many happy moments over the years, and a few sad ones too, but if I had to choose my happy place, it'd be the time I spent driving a horse team."

"For about four or five years after I left school (in 1936), I drove a horse team. Working them was a wonderful experience. I was driving a 10-horse team on a 20 hoe combine and seven furrow plough."

"Back then, you spent most of your time walking behind horse teams, and I loved it."

"Now I look at my grandson working in those huge headers. Things have got bigger and bigger. You press a button and they pretty much drive themselves."

"It really is a wonderful time to be alive. I'm so proud of how far we've come. Technology has been amazing in the last 10 or 15 years."

Ian McRae was born at home on his parents farm at Wallup, 350km North West of Melbourne between Dimboola and Warracknabeal. He was the eldest of five siblings and went to Wallup State School until he was 14.

"There were no buses back then, so I had no way of getting to the high school," Ian recalls. "It was either board in town or leave school, so I left and worked on the farm."



(L-R) Three generations of McRaes; Ian, Rob and Zander.

“*It really is a wonderful time to be alive. I'm so proud of how far we've come. Technology has been amazing in the last 10 or 15 years.*”

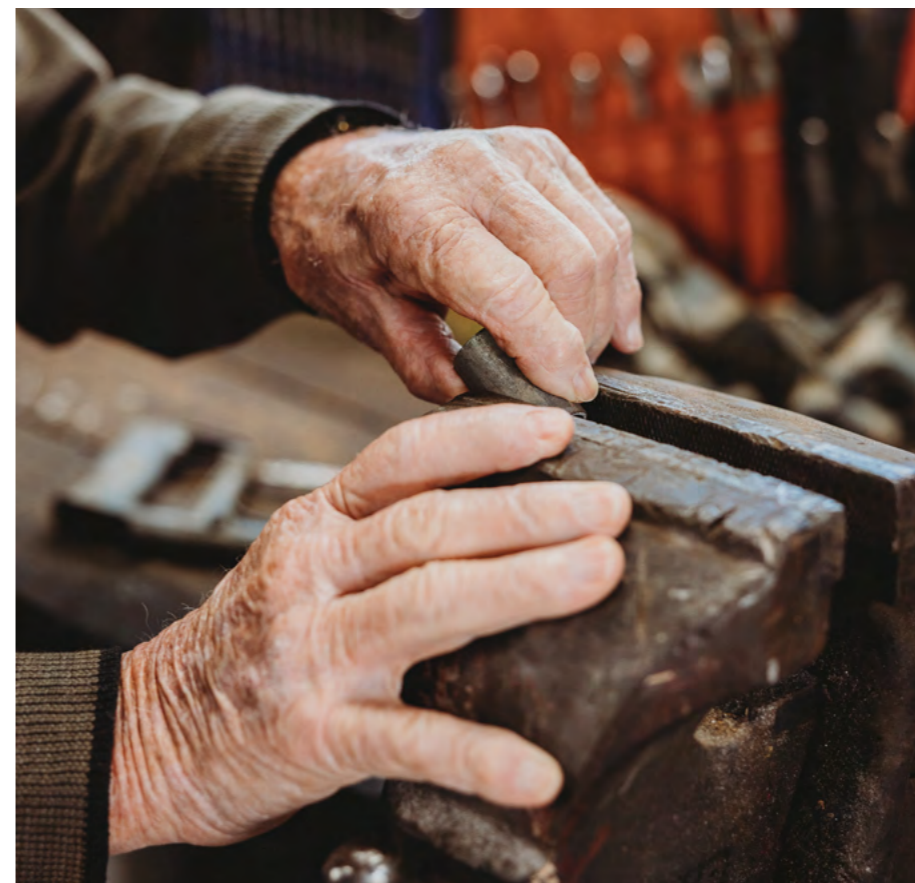
” Ian McRae

Five years later, Ian joined the Royal Australian Air Force to serve in the the Second World War. He trained as a bomber pilot flying Tiger Moths at Noradjuha, a base South West of Horsham, and went on to teach new pilots at Point Cook and Mount Gambier.

"I remember dreaming about the Japanese coming across the farm at night, and waking up in a fright," Ian says.

"I certainly missed home during the war, and I missed my mother more than anyone. That was probably the hardest part. She lost a boyfriend in the first world war, so there were always tears."

"But I've always had a positive attitude. I'm not one to worry about yesterday. You can't do anything about that."



“Granddad’s also an amazing teacher, with great mechanical knowledge after his time in the Air Force. He’ll hear about a problem and call up with ideas on how to fix things.”

Zander McRae

Ian returned to work on the family farm at the **end of the war**, marrying Janet Thomson in 1948. Janet had also grown up on a farm in the district, and trained as a nurse.

The young couple built a house out of second-hand materials and had three children – Robert, Alison and Pamela. Ian and Janet now have seven grandchildren – Eva, Monica, Julia, Hannah, Cara, Alexander (Zander) and James - and nine great grandchildren Isabella, Honour, Sophia, Oliver, Rose, Alyssa, Sotirakis (Akis), Francesca and Daisy, with another on the way in April.

Ian’s eldest son Robert was the next McRae to work the property in partnership with his wife Janet (nee Sartori).

Now Robert is handing the farm over his 33-year-old son Zander and his wife Jacinta. Their two young children are the sixth generation to live on the property.

During this summer’s harvest, Ian drove his car from Dimboola to the farm every week to join Zander for a few laps on the header.

“We all joke that Granddad will outlive us all and end up buying the land back from us,” Zander laughs.

“He’s so sharp and has kept up with all the new technology. I reckon he could probably still drive the headers if he set his mind to it. He can climb up the ladder, and it must be three metres high. He sits up with me for a few laps to check out how the crops have performed.”

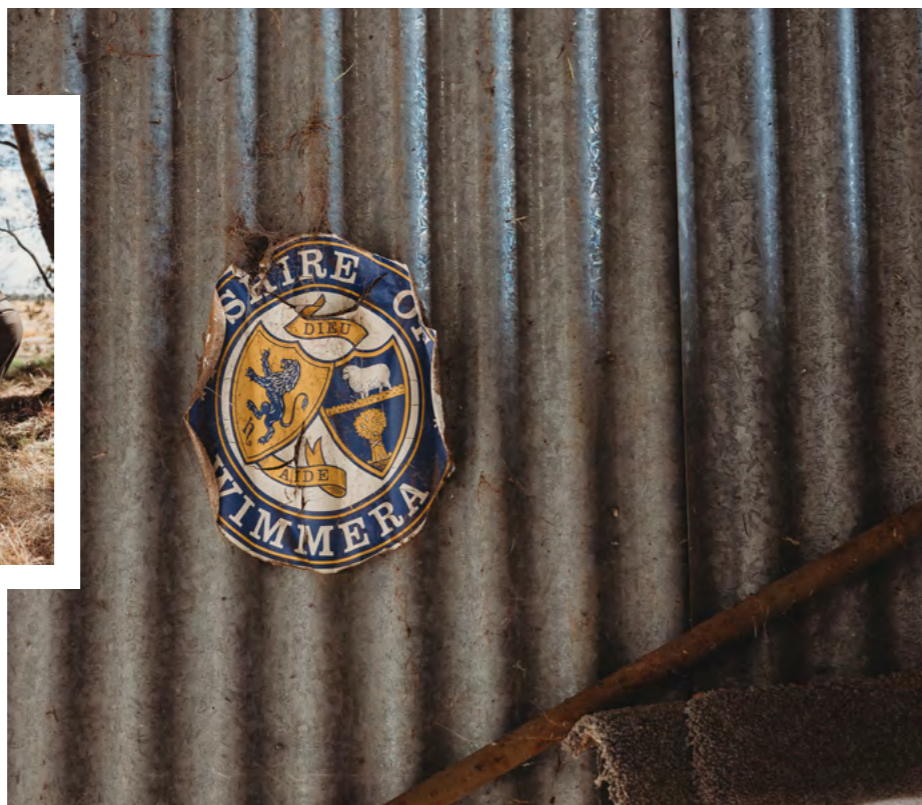
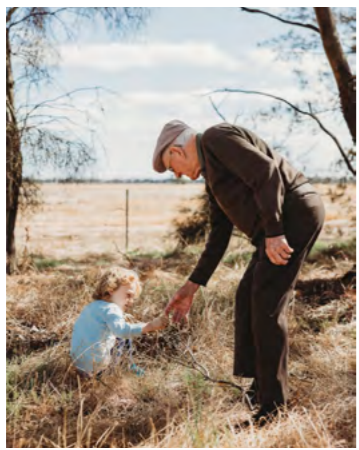
“Granddad’s also an amazing teacher, with great mechanical knowledge after his time in the Air Force. He’ll hear about a problem and call up with ideas on how to fix things.”

“And no matter what happens, Granddad finds the good in things. I’ve never known anyone as positive as him.”

Robert says he has also enjoyed working closely with his Dad over the last 50 years, growing the property’s size and productivity.

With a succession plan in place, the McRae family can look forward to many more years of farming.





Ian is proud of his legacy but admits it's **difficult to step away** from the daily rhythm of farm life – especially in harvest season.

“That’s why I like to get over there as often as I can and poke around,” Ian says.

“I love getting up there on the header. You get a great view, and it’s great to see the technology that’s involved in making them work. They’re all computer driven, and it’s amazing to watch. Zander’s doing a great job.”

“I’m still pretty fit, and I miss the work a bit, but I wouldn’t stand up to much work these days. I just like to see how it’s going.”

“And there’s always something happening. I often say, there’s no need for me to back racehorses. You’re gambling all the time as a farmer. You’re so reliant on the weather and the markets. It keeps you occupied. Keeps your mind going.”

Perhaps this is the secret to Ian’s longevity – a strong, enduring interest in his family, the farm, and the surrounding community.

Ian was a long-time member of the Victorian Wheat and Woolgrowers Association and later the Victorian Farmers Federation.

He also served as a Wimmera Shire councillor for 21 years, back when it was a voluntary position, and played an active role at the Dimboola Rotary Club, the local high school council, the Dimboola Masonic Lodge, and the Wallup Pipe Band (where he piped for 70 years until the age of 87).

Somehow, he found time to play football, tennis, and golf with local clubs, never hesitating to volunteer for administrative roles over many decades.

Ian’s also a gun at lawn bowling. Just a few weeks ago, Ian played in a pennant competition for his beloved Dimboola Bowling Club in the same team as his son Robert and grandson James. The three generations of McRaes enjoyed a resounding win against Nhill.

“

I think it’s a great time for farmers. The population of the world’s getting bigger and bigger, so somebody’s got to feed them.

”

Ian McRae

“It’s good to keep busy,” Ian says.

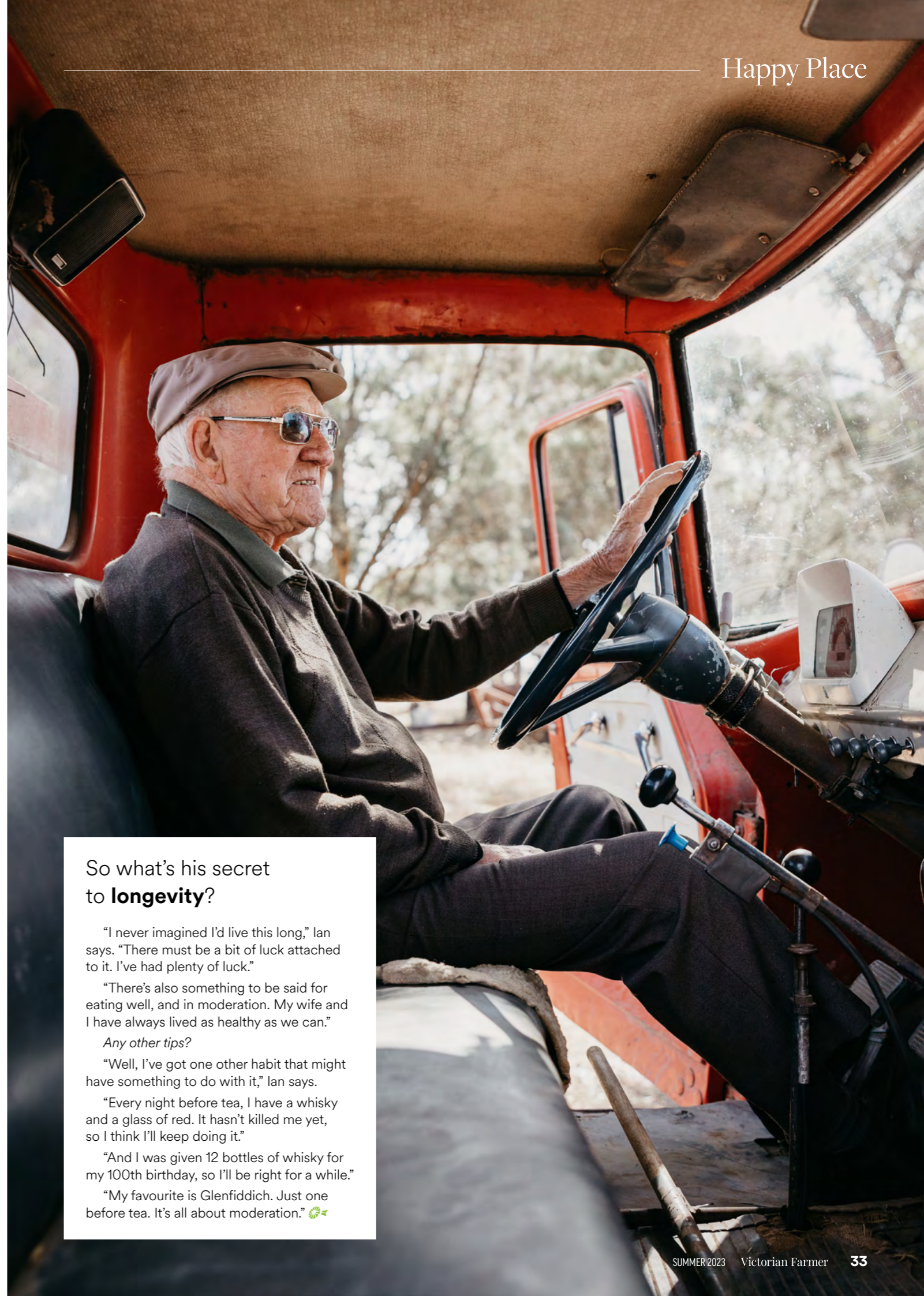
“These days I’m a carer for my wife, which keeps me at home a bit more, but I like to keep myself busy.”

Until recently, Ian was still mowing the lawns and doing odd jobs around the family’s Glenwillan Homestead, a beautiful 1912 Federation home run as an accommodation and event business.

And true to form, the eternal optimist has high hopes for Australia’s agricultural industry.

“I think it’s a great time for farmers,” Ian says. “The population of the world’s getting bigger and bigger, so somebody’s got to feed them.”

“We’re very lucky to live in Australia.”



So what’s his secret to longevity?

“I never imagined I’d live this long,” Ian says. “There must be a bit of luck attached to it. I’ve had plenty of luck.”

“There’s also something to be said for eating well, and in moderation. My wife and I have always lived as healthy as we can.”

Any other tips?

“Well, I’ve got one other habit that might have something to do with it,” Ian says.

“Every night before tea, I have a whisky and a glass of red. It hasn’t killed me yet, so I think I’ll keep doing it.”

“And I was given 12 bottles of whisky for my 100th birthday, so I’ll be right for a while.”

“My favourite is Glenfiddich. Just one before tea. It’s all about moderation.” 🌿

TAPping into farm safety.

Andrea Vallance has farming and safety flowing through her veins. The dairy farmer, from Nirranda in South West Victoria, dedicates her time as a volunteer first responder and also champions teaching school children farm safety and life-saving lessons.

WORDS

Natasha Lobban

She was recently interviewed on the VFF's Making Our Farms Safer Podcast and stresses the importance of having conversations around farm safety.

"It was great to talk with (podcast host) Tegan Buckley and discuss the VFF's new resource and see why it fitted in with the suite of resources currently being developed by schools, educators, government and industry bodies to try to keep our farm families and our next generation safer," she says.

Andrea praised the *Child Safety on Farms* guidebook, singling out paediatric trauma doctor Associate Professor Warwick Teague's comments that severe injuries on farms are often preventable, not inevitable, as something that has stuck with her.

"We all need to be aware of how easily it can happen with a lapse in judgement or not taking time to complete a task properly, taking shortcuts, even as adults," Andrea says.

Andrea experienced a scare herself during calving in 2019. "I left a gate open while stomach tubing calves colostrum and part of the herd started meandering out the gate. I tried to go round them and the lead cow hit my quad bike just as I was going over a bump and the bike rolled. I wasn't going really fast, it was a level track but it rolled and the ROP (Roll Over Protection) and helmet saved me from injury. I was pretty shook up."



She has trained as an emergency first responder and is a volunteer member of the Nullawarre Community Emergency Response Team and also works as a Timboon Ambulance Community Officer.

"We've helped deliver babies and attended everything from car crashes, farming incidents to respiratory emergencies, crush injuries from animals, strokes and heart attacks," she says.

"We can see injuries that could have been fatalities by millimetres that makes us reassess how we do things on farm."

Andrea draws on her farming and first responder experience as the Coordinator of the Timboon Agriculture Project (TAP), an initiative of Timboon P-12 School and WestVic Dairy that celebrates its 10th anniversary this year.

"The TAP integrates agriculture and community resources into the curriculum to provide real and relevant teacher professional development, support student learning, and increases hands-on engagement with opportunities to develop a range of skills, experiences and understanding often beyond the boundaries of traditional curriculum."

Originally the TAP had a focus on students in Years 5-8 in maths and science but it has grown to involve all students across the P-12 campus.



The Year 5/6 TAP into Farm Safety unit is delivered by industry personnel because their input is more real and relevant to students.

A WorkSafe officer demonstrates worst practice incidents on a LEGO farm set before a field trip to a dairy farm where best practice is modelled by a dairy farmer, veterinarian, machinery salesman, first responders and a WorkSafe officer.

It has made lasting positive change in the region, with one example being when students impressed their parents by immediately calling an ambulance for a friend who broke a leg. "Similarly, during the St Patrick's Day fires in 2018, some school parents recounted how their Year 5/6 kids took the lead and enacted the fire plans they had created during the Natural Disasters TAP into Bushfires unit," Andrea says.

The program has been widely lauded, including winning a Victorian WorkSafe OHS Award in 2015 and it's regularly showcased at industry and educational conferences.

Critical care nurses promote triage of farm safety.

Sarah Duncanson and **Grace Larsen** are on a mission to improve health outcomes for rural children.

WORDS

Natasha Lobban

They have each been paediatric intensive care nurses for about 15 years, and continue to care for the sickest little patients in the state while providing support for their families.

They now also share their expertise by delivering paediatric education courses through PAEDS First Aid, fuelled by a desire to help families before children become sick enough to require critical care.

The VFF's Making Our Farms Safer Podcast recently hosted the farm mums, nurses and educators to talk about how they've gone from being reactive nurses to educating families on how to be proactive.

"We're both rural mums and have moved to rural properties, we're more passionate than ever about protecting kids," Sarah says.

Throughout the episode they share the "Triage of Safety" message, which encourages people to Pinpoint, Prevent and Plan to protect children.

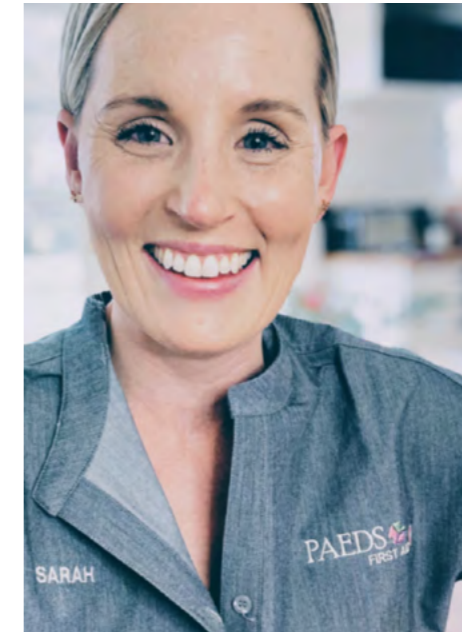
Pinpoint: *Have a think about what can be potential risks - water, machinery, livestock.*

Prevent: *What can you do to prevent injury or death - boundaries, safe zones.*

Plan: *Be aware that despite best intentions sometimes things go wrong. How are you going to get help?*

Sarah and Grace laugh that they are the John Farnham's of The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne's Pediatric Intensive Care Unit and will never leave. They take maternity leave - Sarah has recently had her fourth child and Grace has three children - but can't imagine stopping the work that they love altogether.

This commitment to care opened their eyes to the need for more education to prevent accidents, in this case farm accidents, and also make parents and



caregivers aware of red flags so children can be treated sooner and therefore have better outcomes.

Sarah and Grace have both worked on retrieval teams in which they have seen how early intervention could have helped with health outcomes, but also how a difficult situation is so much worse for families when they have to be separated.

Sarah spoke about one Northern Victorian retrieval that took more than seven and a half hours due to a fog delay and eventually ended up being a road transport. "We didn't have family with us, they beat us to the hospital," she recalls.

Grace remembered a trip to a western Victorian hospital where they were sent to retrieve one child who was having seizures, but ended up retrieving two because it was thought a brain infection may have also spread to a sibling who was starting to show symptoms. It was hard on everyone, especially the parents who had to travel hours by car, separated from their ill children who were flown ahead.

They resonate with farming families, with Grace's property being home to a heritage apple orchard and Sarah having

sheep and cattle, and as such accidents, particularly farm accidents, and illness hit the mums a little differently these days. They are distressed when situations present at the hospital in which they feel they could have helped or prevented.

"I wish we were there. If only they knew what signs of deterioration are. It's like a sliding doors moment," Sarah says.

To help, they started offering baby and child first aid courses to educate parents about the red flags they should be watching for and upskill them in life-saving techniques such as CPR. Over the past 12 months, they have been focusing on training caregivers for children with complex medical needs, especially in regional and rural areas. Paeds First Aid will also be launching online first aid courses soon.

The Making Our Farms Safer podcast series is now available for listening and can be downloaded via your favourite streaming app and searching 'Victorian Farmers Federation'.

Community Spirit.

A SOBERING CONVERSATION WITH NOELENE BROWN

Noelene Brown lived just 15 minutes from a bottleshop in a rural town. Like in all small communities she knew **everyone** who worked there.

WORDS Natasha Lobban
PHOTOGRAPHY De Strange

So she found reasons to visit another larger town, 40 minutes away, multiple times a week to help hide her secret - an addiction to alcohol.

The planning and brain power it took to keep her secret safe, and her fridge stocked with two bottles of chilled wine each night, was all consuming. "Even at the pub or out to dinner I'd be thinking 'Are they noticing that I'm filling my glass three times as fast as they are?'"

These are behaviours you may recognise in yourself or a loved one. Noelene's message to you is: "There are people who have been through this and have come out the other side of it. There is help out there."

Noelene drank on and off for 20 years thinking she was hiding it from not just her community, but friends and family as well, before her partner one day lovingly told her: "I can't watch you kill yourself".

In 2020 she gave up drinking for good, became a certified sobriety coach and now dedicates her life to helping others in rural and remote Australia do the same with her business Rural Sobriety from her home in Ballarat.

Her addiction is a far too common story in rural and remote Australia. Results from the 2016 National Drug Strategy Household Survey showed that people aged 14 or older living in regional and remote areas were significantly more likely than people living in major cities to consume alcohol daily (8 per cent compared with 5 per cent) and to drink in excess of the lifetime risk guideline (21 per cent compared with 15.4 per cent).

Reflecting on these numbers is sobering. Rural Australians seeking sobriety also have their own unique hurdles to navigate, such as a lack of anonymity and services and accessing GPs in a timely manner. It's also difficult for farmers to leave the farm to go to an in-hospital detox or rehab program in the city.

"We have a solution to that now. But that obviously has held people back in the past and still continues to do so if they're not aware of what options are out there," Noelene says.

The solution is Clean Slate Clinic which offers specialist alcohol withdrawal and recovery support via telehealth, including prescription of medication if needed.

"The service is goals-based - it is absolutely focussed on what clients wish to achieve - for many this is complete abstinence from alcohol or other substances, for others it is to reset their relationship to one of moderation," Co-Founder and CEO, Pia Clinton-Tarestad, says.

The burden of drug and alcohol use increases with remoteness.

Nearly 1 in 10 people aged 14 or older living in regional and remote areas consume alcohol daily.

CLIENTS WHO SEEK TREATMENT IN REGIONAL AND REMOTE AREAS:

Are more likely than clients in major cities to travel 1 hour or longer to treatment services.

Johann Hari famously posited: "The opposite of addiction is not sobriety, **it's community.**" Noelene couldn't agree more.

"There are many things that the community can do to support somebody and that starts with something as simple as just supporting your mate by accepting that they don't want to have a drink," she says.

"I'm not prohibitionist but I am very pro making it inclusive. It is OK to say no to a beer if you don't want one." The #OK2SAYNO hashtag comes from 2022's Australian of the Year Local Hero Shanna Whan's Sober In The Country (SITC). Noelene supports SITC's work in a voluntary capacity as a lived-experience admin support member in Bush Tribe, an online community that supports those who have a problem with alcohol.

Recent floods across our state have been another stressful time, which can increase alcohol consumption as people seek ways to numb the pain.

"What can you do? I think it is just being mindful of rather than showing up with a six pack, show up being fully present for your mate," Noelene suggests.

Another simple tip for communities is to include grown-up alternatives to alcoholic drinks at events. She says non-alcoholic beer, wine and mixers are also good, although some people find them triggering.



“What can you do? I think it is just being mindful of rather than showing up with a six pack, show up being fully present for your mate.”

Noelene Brown

"I think this plays into the inclusiveness, you don't actually have to have a problematic relationship with alcohol to not want to have a beer on that day," she says.

Noelene shares that the way in which her partner Mike called her out on her drinking, was a masterclass in how loved ones can approach alcoholics. "He very gently and lovingly, basically said to me, I can't watch you kill yourself. And, you know, I think that was really the key for me because it wasn't confrontational. It was very loving. It was very kind. And it wasn't an ultimatum."

While Noelene felt great shame and guilt over her drinking, this conversation with her husband also brought with it great relief that allowed her to move towards sobriety and to now help others do the same.

Data obtained from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

RESOURCES

Simple ways to make a difference:

- ➔ Don't question why someone isn't drinking. It's no-one else's business if you're pregnant, on medication or dealing with a problem with alcohol.
- ➔ Provide delicious alternatives to alcoholic drinks at events.
- ➔ Hold events at non-drinking times, like hosting breakfast and lunch events.

For more information head to:

- www.ruralsobriety.com.au
- www.cleanslateclinic.com
- www.soberinthecountry.org

For direct support phone:

- Family Drug Support **1300 368 186**
- Family Member Help **1300 660 068**
- Lifeline **13 11 14**
- Kids Helpline **1800 551 800**
- Beyond Blue **1300 224 636**
- MensLine **1300 789 978**

Out and About

Here we showcase some of the best agriculture shots from 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 or tag us on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter with [#vicfarmers](https://twitter.com/vicfarmers).



1. A farm is more than land, crops and cattle—it is a family's heritage. *(credit @_candicewatsonphotography_)*
2. Huge turnout in Inverleigh for the Safe Recovery of Bogged Machinery Info Session. *(credit John Darcy)*
3. Harvest in full swing after a wet start. *(credit @e.m.images_)*
4. Bravo for the Goulburn Valley pickers! *(credit @radevskicoolstores)*
5. Carting the grain before the rain. *(credit @bindiw_photos)*
6. Great to see a little bit of the country outside the Melbourne Town Hall with the City of Melbourne's summer planter boxes. *(credit VFF Media)*
7. Peek-a-boo! A curious sheep in the South West. *(credit @e.m.images_)*
8. One word: Iconic. *(credit Danyel Cucinotta)*
9. The country comes to the city during Ag Day 2022 celebrations. *(credit NFF Media)*



Time to Deliver

PHOTOGRAPHY Phoebe Dunn

G'day readers,

We wanted to close this edition of the Victorian Farmer magazine by thanking you for taking the time to read all of these important stories that help form our Victorian agriculture industry.

Together we contribute an enormous slice of the Australian agricultural landscape, billions to our economic output, play a vital part in our regions and most of all, supply the very best food and fibre to millions throughout the world.

However, to enable our farmers to continue to play this vital part, it's time our decision makers followed through on the many election promises and commitments made over the past year.

2022 was a year of planning for the future given both the Federal and Victorian elections were run and won.

Now it is time to deliver on these promises and requirements.

The VFF led the way, calling for commitments and focus on four key areas we know our regions are crying out for:

- 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

We asked for a fair go, and while we didn't get everything we asked for, there is definitely some welcome investment for our industry that needs to be delivered upon.

Our roads are still a neglected mess, and that's even before months of flooding rains rendered parts of the network unusable. This must be a priority to be fast-tracked to fix and we'll continue lobbying those in charge for action.

Of course, this is just one of many focus areas we'll be monitoring closely as we continue to be the leading voice of Victorian farmers.

Speaking of voices, you our members, readers and supporters of agriculture have been instrumental in helping us deliver these messages to those in charge. Without you on the ground telling us what you need, our job would be incredibly difficult.

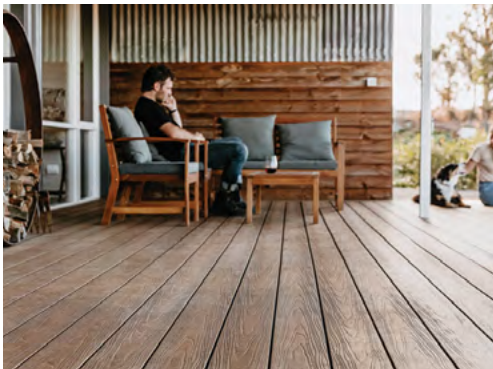
As a team and an organisation, we encourage you to continue talking with us and telling us how it is. Please get in touch with us if you have an issue, need advice or just want to have your say at policyteam@vff.org.au

VFF Policy Team

The Future of Decking.



Ekodeck composite decking looks and feels the same as real timber, minus the maintenance. Made from reclaimed timber and recycled plastic, its naturally weather resistant and UV stabilised, which means no oiling, staining or painting.



Ekodeck+ Classic Range

Solid boards with a sanded finish

- ✓ 90% reclaimed and recycled materials
- ✓ R11 and P5 anti-slip rating
- ✓ Available in 3 colours
- ✓ 10-year warranty



Ekodeck+ Designer Series Range

Co-extruded with a Durashell coating

- ✓ Custom colour options to match most Dulux colours
- ✓ Custom made designs, sizes and styles
- ✓ Won't rust, rot or warp



Quickfix for Ekodeck+

Specially made concealed fixing system

- ✓ 30% faster to lay
- ✓ Automatically gaps boards
- ✓ Available in 3mm or 6mm board spacing
- ✓ Designed to suit timber or steel joists

VFF members with a linked PowerPass can view their exclusive pricing on select Ekodeck ranges in store, online or on the PowerPass app

