

Victorian Farmer

SUMMER EDITION 2023

FUTURE OF AGRICULTURE IS IN GOOD HANDS

The agricultural industry is in safe hands if it's filled with young farmers like Katherine Bain.

VIRTUAL FENCING

How will this new technology benefit the future of farming?

VARROA MITE

The latest on the frontline to halt the spread of this destructive pest.

THE FUTURE OF THE VFF

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A message from our President

Hi Everyone,

What a huge year it's been, I can barely believe that we're set to usher in the silly season and flick the calendar over to another year.

Before we do, I would like to thank you all for your resilience and support in what has been another massive year- not just here at the VFF, but for the industry as a whole.

If we cast our minds back to this time last year, we were at the height of some of the worst flooding Victoria has seen in decades.

It's pretty crazy to think that whilst some are still recovering from flooding, many are gearing up for a potentially incredibly dangerous fire season. I guess that saying that we live in a 'land of drought and flooding rains' couldn't be more on the money at the present time.

While there's plenty of unknowns at the moment, what I do know is that farmers and regional communities look out for each other, and more than ever, we are key to the prosperity of every Victorian.

As the cost of living crisis continues to bite, consumers are looking to us farmers with a new trust and appreciation. We need to leverage this community trust to get better policy outcomes. You'd think that the whole world had become anti-farming activists for some of the decisions we've seen from state and federal governments. I assure you, they have not.

By now I hope you've had the opportunity to hear about the re-invigoration of the VFF. We've had to get

back to basics and do some structural reform to ensure we remain relevant and effective in the future. It hasn't been easy, but the team expected some resistance.

Its easy to fear change, but if we don't change, we don't grow. The green shoots of progress are already appearing, and I'm confident that in a few years time we will be grateful that we made some tough decisions and got real about the value and the future of the VFF.

For now, take care of yourself and your family. I wish you a blessed festive season and as always, I hope you enjoy the latest edition of our magazine.

Happy farming.

Emma Germano

VFF President



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Victorian Farmer

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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

©2023. All rights reserved.
Printed by Sovereign Press
in Ballarat, Victoria.
Cover image by Katherine Bain.

1300 882 833



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TAX EXEMPTION FOR VACANT FARHOUSES SECURED

In a win for farmers and after clarification sought by the VFF, the Victorian Government confirmed the extension of the vacant residential land tax will not apply to houses on primary production land.

VFF President Emma Germano said the Treasurer had responded to her letter that highlighted the VFF’s concern and sought clarity on the government’s position.

“I am pleased the Treasurer has responded directly to the VFF’s advocacy.”

“It is important the government understands that circumstances in regional areas are often far different to those in Melbourne.”

“The application of this tax to vacant farmhouses would have been completely unfair, given these houses are used for seasonal workers, or where a vacancy has been forced due to workforce shortages,” Ms Germano said.

The VFF is continuing to closely monitor the implementation of the tax across regional communities and will keep members updated on any changes.



WILD DOG MANAGEMENT PLAN EXTENDED AFTER INTENSE LOBBYING

After sustained lobbying and hard work behind the scenes, the VFF welcomed a one-year extension to the Wild Dog Management Plan.

The VFF is looking forward to continuing engaging with the Government on the many benefits that this program delivers and will advocate for programs strengthening and extension over the next year.

The Wild Dog Management Plan has been a successful wildlife management program since launching in 2012. It has helped deliver both conservation and pest management objectives, including a 75 per cent reduction in livestock loss and attacks on properties that neighbour public lands in the east and north-west Victoria since 2012.

The VFF will continue to strongly advocate for the continuation of the program in order to protect livestock producers from the effects of wild dogs and dingo-dog hybrids while also ensuring that native wildlife is protected from the ravages of wild dogs and dingo hybrids.

MIXED-BAG SUMMER ON THE CARDS

In comparison to previous years, this summer is shaping as a mixed-bag, with certain parts of the state dry and others incredibly wet.

The VFF has raised with the Victorian Government about the failure to plan for bushfires and the impact on the state’s agricultural industries.

In a VFF submission, we called on the government to create a dedicated chapter in the Bushfire Management Strategy to cover impacts on agriculture with criteria on:

- Data tools, systems and knowledge of the impacts fires have on agriculture and other primary industries and different commodities within agriculture;
- Integrating research and knowledge of intensity of fires on different agricultural production systems into models;
- Improving monitoring, evaluation and reporting of risk reduction and fire management activities on agricultural production.

You can read more on the VFF website at

<https://www.vff.org.au/submission/>

NEW PARTNERS BOOST VFF MEMBER BENEFITS

VFF Members are set to enjoy more tangible benefits than ever before with a number of new exclusive deals and offers available to VFF Members.

Our partners offer great deals for members and also support regional communities. We’re excited to have secured a range of new partners and continue to approach more based on what you, our members tell us you need and want.

Make sure you visit our website to see our latest offers from our VFF partners and sponsors:

<https://www.vff.org.au/about/corporate-partners/>





Making the VFF work for *you*

The farming landscape is changing and so are we.

WORDS

Staff Writer

PHOTOGRAPHY

Tali Mason

What's thousands of farmers, more than 40 years of collective history and the leading voice for Victorian farmers called? No prizes on who guessed that. The Victorian Farmers Federation, in short, the VFF, has been at the forefront of Victorian agriculture and the voice of farmers for decades since forming way back in 1979.

It's been your voice in the good times, and in the bad times...but most importantly, it's always been a constant that you can rely on to have your back and fly the flag for farmers. That hasn't changed and you can trust that it never will.

What has changed, is the world in which we live in. In this increasingly busy, automated, time-poor and stressful environment, the need the keep up with the times has never been greater.

The VFF needs to change or risk being left behind and that's the driving force behind one of the VFF's largest organisational renewal since its inception.

Still need some convincing on the need for change?



In 1979, VFF was fit for purpose reflecting times and member needs, but it's not 1979 anymore.

Today, we are faced with:

AGRICULTURE MAKING UP: NOT
2.5% **25%**
 Of the state's economy

OUR MOST PRESSING CHALLENGES ARE: shared ones, NOT commodity-specific



MEMBERSHIP REVENUE = steady



BUT, COSTS ARE... UP



It's clear things have changed from a farming point of view, but what about the political landscape and our ability to influence decisions makers?

Our political landscape is now dramatically different. The rise of minor parties and independents is profound and politics and policy influenced by highly professional and resourced activists feeding public opinion, and fueling increase in populist politics.

In short, arguably our job to be heard is harder than it has ever been before and that's before we enter the social media revelation space, where information is available to everyone in almost real time.

The battle to be heard is underway and we need to utilise new ways of working to deliver results and ensure we're still the trusted and heard voice of farmers.

So, how do we change?

The question on how organisations such as ours tackle the future has been raging for years with little action and that, in part has been part of the problem.

The time for change is now and we're well underway revitalising the VFF. At the core of our change for the future is:

Policy and Advocacy:

We're focused on being a professional advocacy powerhouse for members, shaped by members.

Financial responsibility to members:

We must live within our means, it's as simple as that.

Streamlined membership model:

What it means to be a farmer has changed over the years and our membership offering is changing to match that.

Empowering members through local branches reinvigoration:

We need to reinvigorate our roots and strengthen our branch network.

A new and fit-for-purpose VFF Constitution:

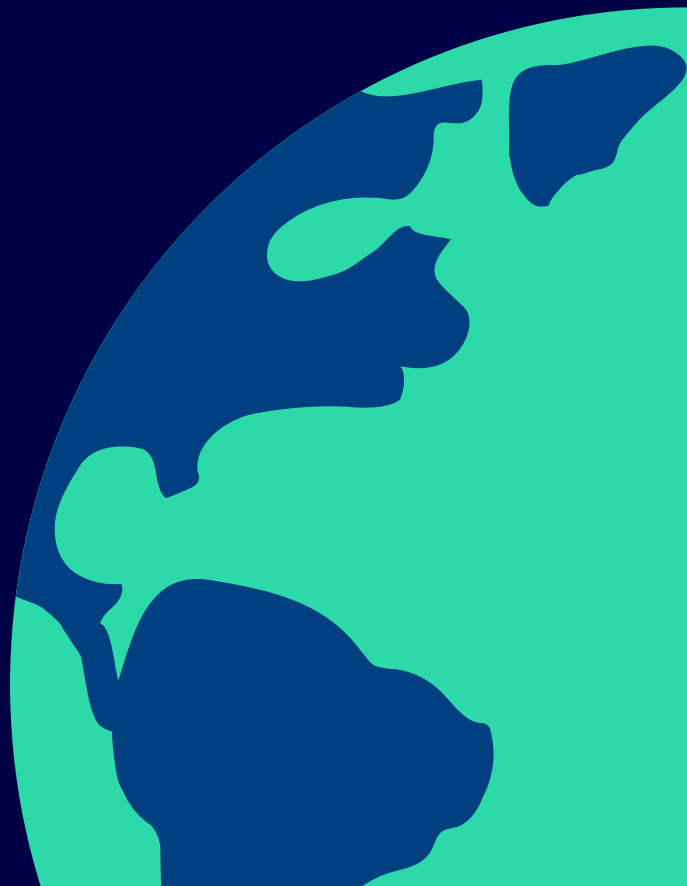
Updating the VFF's Constitution to work for members.

At the core of the VFF's renewal is our members and ensuring the VFF stays *relevant now and into the future*.

Visit vff.org.au to learn about our renewal.



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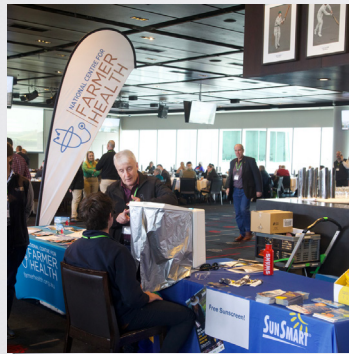
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Offer not available for any Supply Address that consumes 160MWh of electricity per annum or more. Terms and conditions apply. An Energy Fact Sheet or a Basic Plan Information Document containing the key details of this plan is available on request.

VFF Annual Conference Throwback.





Over 300 farmers and industry leaders flocked to the MCG to take part in our annual conference, where our audience engaged in insightful agricultural discussions, networking opportunities and more.

Celebrating our VFF Life Members

Gerald Leach and Richard Anderson

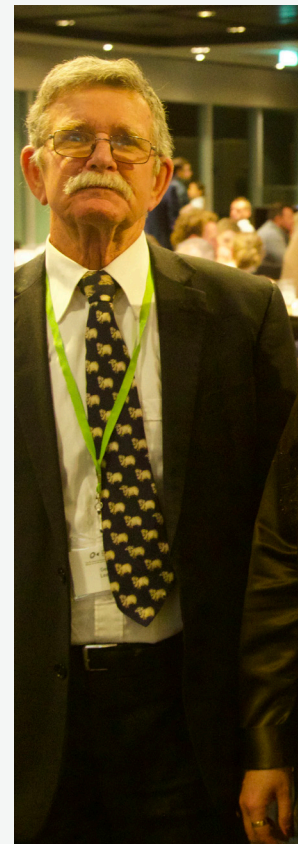
Gerald Leach is a farmer based in Walpeup, situated in the Mallee region. His dedication and contributions to the Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) and the broader farming community are extensive and enduring.

He became a member of the Victorian Farmers Union (VFU) in 1970 and remained a member as the VFU transitioned into the VFF in 1979. During his VFU membership, he served as the secretary of the Walpeup branch in the Mallee. In the 1980s, within the VFF, he held prominent roles as the President of the North West Grains and North West Pastoral district councils.

In 1992, he was appointed to the VFF Land Management Committee and eventually assumed the position of Committee Chair in 2005. Currently, he continues to serve as the Chair of the VFF Planning, Environment, and Climate Change Committee. Gerald has been instrumental in shaping the state's



ABOVE: Gerald Leach at the 2023 VFF Annual Conference



policies regarding agriculture and the environment, particularly focusing on land management and sustainability.

His impactful efforts encompass policy achievements such as securing Victoria's moratorium on coal seam gas fracking, advocating for voluntary fencing of waterways, and influencing mining legislation to safeguard farmers' land rights, compensation, and rehabilitation.

Beyond his VFF involvement, Gerald demonstrated remarkable dedication as the Chair of the Mallee Regional Catchment and Land Protection Board from 1995. He also held the inaugural Chair position at the Mallee Catchment Management Authority from 1997 to 2000, and has been a board member of the Ouyen Livestock Exchange since 2003.

At a national level and as a VFF representative, he led the NFF Natural Resources Committee from 2005, eventually assuming the role of Chair from 2006 to 2017.

His influence extends beyond Australia, as evidenced by his acceptance of a United Nations Award in Azerbaijan on behalf of the Victorian Rabbit Action Network, an organization he has chaired since 2014.

Gerald Leach is highly regarded for his considerate, respectful, and gentle approach to addressing issues and providing advice. He strongly believes in farmer unity and the VFF's promise to deliver this unity, consistently upholding this principle in his actions and endeavours.

Richard Anderson is a mixed farmer based in Bamawm south of Echuca. He has played a significant role within the VFF Water Council, having been elected in 2004 and later serving as Chair from 2006 until 2021.

During his tenure as Chair, Richard collaborated closely with four Victorian water ministers, namely John Thwaites, Tim Holding, Peter Walsh, and Lisa Neville, as well as six Federal water



BELOW: Gerald Leach, VFF President Emma Germano and Richard Anderson at the 2023 VFF Annual Conference



ministers including Malcolm Turnbull, Penny Wong, Tony Bourke, Barnaby Joyce, David Littleproud, and Keith Pitt.

Throughout the entire duration of the Murray Darling Basin Plan, Richard actively engaged in debates, striving to secure the best outcomes for irrigators and safeguarding their entitlements. Notably, in 2004, he played a crucial role in the development of the 80:20 deal, a proposal crafted in collaboration with the VFF and Water Service Committees.

This arrangement legally acknowledged farmers' rights to their 'sales' water, ensuring they received 80% of it, while 20% was allocated to environmental purposes.

Richard represented the VFF on the NFF Water Taskforce for an impressive 15 years, staunchly advocating for the rights of Victorian irrigators during challenging periods in Australian water policy. On the local front, he has been a dedicated member of the Rochester-Campaspe Water Service Committee since 1988 and has held the position of Committee Chair since 1994. Additionally, he served

as the president of the Natural Resources Conservation League from 2004 to 2008.

He has been driving force behind several critical water supply projects, notably the Mitiamo and district domestic and stock pipeline completed in 2021.

Richard has garnered immense respect for his comprehensive understanding of water policy matters. His expertise has been sought after by water users, managers, and ministers alike. In the realm of politically charged water policy, Richard has consistently demonstrated great respect and integrity. His influence on water policy in Victoria and Australia has been profound, and the VFF and Victorian irrigators are deeply appreciative of his dedicated service.



ABOVE: Richard Anderson at the 2023 VFF Annual Conference



Virtual Fencing in Agriculture: A new future for livestock management?

There's no question about the need for innovation in agriculture as we look to keep up with the demands of the modern world we live in.

WORDS

Staff Writer

PHOTOGRAPHY

Sourced

Traditional farming methods have seen significant technological advancements over the years, and one such development that is transforming the way farmers manage their livestock is virtual fencing.

Virtual fencing is a groundbreaking technology that uses cutting-edge tools like GPS and sensors to replace traditional physical barriers, such as barbed wire or wooden fences, in containing and managing livestock. This transformative approach has the potential to enhance animal welfare, reduce labour costs, and promote sustainable farming practices.

Understanding Virtual Fencing

Virtual fencing is a modern alternative to conventional physical boundaries used in agriculture to control and manage the movement of livestock. Instead of relying on permanent structures like wooden or metal fences, virtual fencing employs a combination of GPS technology, sensors, and software algorithms to create virtual boundaries for animals. These boundaries are flexible, dynamic, and can be easily customized to suit specific livestock management needs.

At the heart of virtual fencing systems and how it works are GPS-enabled collars or ear tags worn by the livestock. These devices are equipped with sensors that can detect an animal's location and movements in real-time. In addition, they receive signals from a central control system that defines the virtual boundaries. When an animal approaches or crosses these boundaries, the system triggers alerts, which can be auditory, visual, or through mild electric stimuli, to encourage the animal to turn back or redirect its path.



ABOVE: A look into the concept of virtual fencing.

The system also logs data on the animal's location, behaviour, and movement patterns, which can be invaluable for farm management.

Virtual fencing is a modern alternative to conventional physical boundaries used in agriculture to control and manage the movement of livestock.

How Virtual Fencing Works

Virtual fencing systems are designed to be user-friendly and flexible. Farmers can easily set up and customise virtual boundaries according to their specific needs. The process typically involves the following steps:

Installation of Hardware: The first step involves outfitting each animal with a GPS-enabled collar or ear tag, which is lightweight and comfortable for the animal. These devices communicate with a central control system, allowing the farmer to track and manage the livestock remotely.

Defining Virtual Boundaries: Using software or a user interface, the farmer can define virtual boundaries on a digital map of the farming area. These boundaries can be drawn or set by inputting coordinates. The system allows for flexibility in shaping the boundaries and adjusting them as needed.

Training Animals: Once the virtual boundaries are set, the animals need to be trained to understand and respond to the system's alerts. This often involves associating the auditory or visual alerts with the physical boundary they should not cross.

Monitoring and Alerts: The GPS devices on the animals constantly communicate with the central control system. When an animal approaches or crosses a virtual boundary, the system sends alerts, which can include sounds or visual cues. In some systems, it can also provide mild electric stimuli, similar to a static shock, to deter the animal from crossing.

Data Collection and Analysis: The system continuously collects data on the animals' location, behaviour, and movement patterns. This data can be analysed to gain insights into the animals' health, grazing patterns, and overall well-being.

Benefits of Virtual Fencing in Agriculture

The adoption of virtual fencing in agriculture offers several significant benefits, impacting both farmers and their livestock:

Enhanced Animal Welfare: Traditional physical fences can pose risks to animals, such as injury from getting entangled or trapped. Virtual fencing eliminates these risks, providing a safer and more humane way to control and manage livestock.

Reduced Labour Costs: Virtual fencing reduces the need for manual labour associated with the installation, maintenance, and repair of physical fences. This translates into cost savings for farmers.

Flexibility and Customisation: Virtual boundaries can be adjusted and reconfigured easily, allowing farmers to adapt to changing environmental conditions, such as shifting grazing areas, or to manage different livestock species separately.

Improved Land Management: By monitoring animal movement and behaviour, farmers can make more informed decisions about pasture rotation and grazing management. This leads to better land utilisation and prevents overgrazing in specific areas.

Environmental Benefits: Virtual fencing can contribute to soil conservation by preventing the creation of permanent physical barriers that can disrupt natural drainage and erosion patterns. It also supports more sustainable land management practices.

Data-Driven Insights: The constant data collection and analysis enabled by virtual

management practices.

Data-Driven Insights: The constant data collection and analysis enabled by virtual fencing systems provide valuable insights into animal health and behaviour. This data can help farmers identify and address potential issues early, resulting in healthier livestock.

Reduced Equipment and Material Costs: With virtual fencing, there is no need for expensive fencing materials, and the costs associated with fence maintenance and repair are eliminated. This reduces the overall environmental impact of livestock management.

Greater Control and Safety: Virtual fencing allows for real-time monitoring and immediate response to boundary breaches, reducing the risk of livestock straying into hazardous areas, such as roads or neighbouring properties.

Implications for the Future of Agriculture

The adoption of virtual fencing in agriculture represents a significant shift in livestock management practices. As this technology continues to evolve, it has the potential to bring about transformative changes in the agricultural landscape.

Virtual fencing is an innovative and sustainable approach to livestock management in agriculture. By replacing traditional physical barriers with GPS-enabled technology and sensors, it offers a wide range of benefits, including improved animal welfare, reduced labor costs, and greater flexibility. As this technology continues to evolve, it has the potential to reshape the agricultural industry, promoting more sustainable and efficient farming practices.

At the heart of virtual fencing systems and how it works are GPS-enabled collars or ear tags worn by the livestock.

These devices are equipped with sensors that can detect an animal's location and movements in real-time.

In addition, they receive signals from a central control system that defines the virtual boundaries.



Indigenous agriculture brand makes it big: Jala Jala Treats

In the heart of Bunurong/Boonwurrung country, Sharon Brindley, a Yamatji/Noongar woman, has made her mark as the owner of **Jala Jala Treats and Timberscope**.

WORDS

Tali Mason

PHOTOGRAPHY

Tali Mason

With a passion for her Indigenous roots and a vision for promoting her culture, Sharon's journey in the agricultural industry has been nothing short of inspirational. In this exclusive membership highlight piece, we learn more about her story, the birth of Jala Jala Treats, and its profound impact on the agricultural landscape.

The Vision Behind Jala Jala Treats

Sharon's journey began with Cooe Cafe on the Mornington Peninsula. Her dream was to create unique products infused with Indigenous language and totem. Jala Jala Treats was a venture that would not only showcase her culture but also address a critical issue - the misuse of Indigenous flavours in non-Indigenous companies. Her first project, infused chocolates, proudly proclaimed their Indigenous ownership, by creating a voice for a community that had been underrepresented in the multi-billion-dollar industry.

The Path to Agriculture

Sharon's pursuit of creating authentic Indigenous products led her to the agriculture sector. She discovered that Indigenous presence in this space was only at a meagre 3%, which has since dwindled to less than 1%. Determined to make a change, Sharon became the Vic Rep for FNBBAA (First Nations Bush Foods and Botanicals Alliance Australia).

Her mission was to help Indigenous-owned businesses obtain the necessary certifications to make their mark in the industry. Her efforts extended to



A selection of Jala Jala treats, ranging from chocolate, detox tea and bite size chocolates.

“

This led me to the likes of a few people that were in the Victorian Farmers Federation and seeing that there was support there and there was alignment there to be able to tackle some of these issues together.

” Sharon Brindley

supporting Indigenous farmers and addressing challenges such as land ownership and certification hurdles.

Personal Empowerment through Culture

Sharon's personal interests seamlessly aligned with the mission of Jala Jala Treats. Her motivation stemmed from the desire to increase Indigenous presence in the market and overcome personal battles with depression and anxiety. The venture empowered her to embrace her culture, learn from her community, and forge lasting friendships. Through Jala Jala Treats, Sharon found her strength.

Niche and Contribution to Agriculture

Jala Jala Treats has been a platform for Sharon to raise awareness about the lack of Indigenous representation in the native food space. A major obstacle was the scarcity of land for sustainable harvesting and the dearth of necessary certifications for large-scale production.

Sharon envisions her five-acre property as a native food haven, aligning with the natural flora of the area. She aims to collaborate with like-minded individuals and organisations to bring Indigenous farming practices back to the forefront and rejuvenate the Peninsula's agricultural landscape.

Sustainable Farming and Ethical Sourcing

Sourcing high-quality Indigenous ingredients sustainably and ethically has been a challenge. Sharon's journey led her to FNBBAA and like-minded individuals such as Stephen Todd and Lisa Bassington from the VFF's, Peninsula Branch.



Collaborative efforts are underway to explore the possibility of creating an Indigenous-led farming space on the Mornington Peninsula.

Shaping the Future

Jala Jala Treats, under Sharon's leadership, strives to create awareness and alignment within the agricultural industry. Her goal is to establish harmony between Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders, revitalise native farming practices, and promote tourism for the right reasons.

Sharon envisions a brighter future for both Indigenous communities and the agricultural sector. As a recent member of the VFF, she finds hope in the support and alignment with individuals like Stephen. Sharon believes in the importance of diverse voices within the industry and the potential for positive change.

Innovation and Global Reach

Sharon emphasises the importance of staying true to oneself in a competitive food industry. Beyond chocolate, Jala Jala Treats tells a profound story - her story and the story of her people. Sharon's global aspirations include collaboration with Indigenous communities in New Zealand and America, leveraging each other's strengths and promoting global Indigenous initiatives.

Long-Term Goals

Sharon's long-term vision for Jala Jala Treats is to create a living legacy. She aims to support future generations of Indigenous individuals in the industry, sharing her knowledge, and helping grow the sector. Sharon believes that by aligning and forming alliances, the entire nation can benefit from the Indigenous presence in agriculture.

In the hands of Sharon Brinley, Jala Jala Treats isn't just a business; it's a movement, a cultural revival, and a beacon of hope for a more inclusive and sustainable agricultural industry. With determination, collaboration, and a deep love for her roots, Sharon is shaping the future of agriculture for generations to come.

To test or not to test

In recent months VFF's Making Our Farms Safer Advisor, John Darcy, has fielded a number of inquiries from farmers about the **risks of workers** coming onto their farms when potentially **under the influence of drugs or alcohol**.

WORDS

John Darcy

PHOTOGRAPHY

AgriShots

Sheep farmers in particular, have expressed strong concerns about the risks of shearing contract workers coming onto their farms.

The risks of 'at risk' workers coming into the workplace have been exacerbated with the severe labour shortages facing the industry. Farmers openly report concerns about alcohol consumption, marijuana and methylamphetamine (ice) use by itinerant shearers.

Horticultural farmers have also expressed concern about seasonal workers using substances such as kava, which is a plant-based drug, native to the Pacific Islands.

One of the first questions that farmers ask is whether they can have a worker drug tested. MOFS Advisors strongly recommend that drug testing should only be applied where there is a detailed policy and procedure which provides for such testing.

Given the absence of testing service providers in regional areas, combined with the absence of testing laboratories and training opportunities, the capacity to undertake testing is beyond the realms for most small business farming operations.

MOFS Farm Advisor, John Darcy, suggests that it is imperative that farmers should engage with their contractors and labour hire providers, to ensure that there is a level of understanding between them about how a worker that is suspected of being under the influence will be carefully managed, away from the workplace.



Shearing contract hard at work.

“

If you ever suspect that you have a person in your workplace that is not fit for work, you must deal with it immediately.

” John Darcy

Having a policy that makes it clear that the consumption of drugs or alcohol is not acceptable, and that management will safely remove any person that is not fit for work, is the starting point. The policy does not need to include testing.

“If you ever suspect that you have a person in your workplace that is not fit for work, you must deal with it immediately” Mr Darcy said.



“ *Having a policy that makes it clear that the consumption of drugs or alcohol is not acceptable, and that management will safely remove any person that is not fit for work, is the starting point.* ” John Darcy

It is recommended that farmers should make clear their expectations to their own employees during their inductions.

When contractors and labour hire workers arrive on farm, these expectations should be given prior to them commencing work. Maintaining written records, in the form of an induction checklist is important.

Shearing contractors and farmers have overlapping duties to ensure that workers are safe. In the event of an incident, both could be potentially investigated by WorkSafe.

Some farmers have expressed reluctance to tackle the shearing contract worker that is perceived as being unfit for work because the worker is not their direct employee. Both parties need to work together so that there is a clear level of understanding.

At the very least, farmers should limit alcohol consumption on their farms to the service of one drink at the end of the work shift. This would be consistent with a 'responsible service of alcohol' approach, which should aim to not put workers at risk when they drive home.

It is also important to recognise drug and alcohol usage as a social problem, and to encourage people towards rehabilitation and support when necessary.



All in a day's work with our hard working shearers.



Making sense of biosecurity



Lisa Doi Rayner, Brad Venning and Dr Andrew Whale at a recent VFF Stock Sense event.



Since Foot and Mouth Disease was detected in Bali last year, farmers have been on **high alert** about the risk of an **outbreak** coming to our shores.

Some farmers have voiced concerns about a growing demographic of livestock owners: hobby farmers. As urban sprawl continues and an increase in the number of lifestyle properties sold continues to grow, so do concerns about the potential risk this group poses to the wider agricultural industry due to lack of knowledge and understanding of their responsibilities when owning livestock.

Tegan Brammar, the VFF Stock Sense Project Manager, says Stock Sense recognises this growing demographic and is shifting the focus of the project to target this high-risk group to protect the agricultural industry as a whole.

Stock Sense is the only extension project in Victoria which is aiming to target peri-urban landholders across the State and is funded by the Cattle Compensation Fund and the Sheep and Goat Compensation Fund.

Over the past two years, Stock Sense has delivered 34 face-to-face workshops, and six webinars which have engaged over 1,000 producers, hobby farmers and industry.

Tegan says the project has had amazing feedback with 83 percent of participants saying they will implement gained knowledge into their farm practices.

Taking from the learnings of the past three years and thinking about how the project aims to protect the livestock industry, Tegan said, “biosecurity can often be a hard thing to define, and it can be difficult to understand how it relates to the day to day running of a farm.”

“
It is important for people to have a biosecurity plan and a biosecurity management plan as this is critical for these signs to be enforceable.

” Tegan Brammar

“ The feedback from our members and the wider community about Stock Sense biosecurity signs has been great. They are an important tool to protect our livestock and remind people of the disease and pest risk trespassing poses to a farm.

VFF Livestock President, Scott Young

The Stock Sense team handed out over 400 signs in 2023 and there is a constant demand from farmers who want to know best practices in this space”.

In regard to the framework around the signs, Tegan said, “it is important for people to have a biosecurity plan and a biosecurity management plan as this is critical for these signs to be enforceable”.

In collaboration with Agriculture Victoria and supported by Animal Health Australia, Stock Sense will continue to deliver workshops, webinars, factsheets, peri-urban booklets, newsletters, and marketing campaigns to improve on farm practices on biosecurity, animal health and welfare.



“ Biosecurity can often be a hard thing to define, and it can be difficult to understand how it relates to the day to day running of a farm.

Tegan Brammar



Our focus is on practical skills while bringing awareness to the proactive biosecurity measures everyone can implement on farm.

Our aim is to make biosecurity simple and straightforward for people starting out and connect hobby farmers with those in the community whether it be their neighbour, the local vet, or local Landcare.”

Over the past six months, Stock Sense has distributed over 400 biosecurity signs and aims to deliver 1,500 more over the next 15 months along with farm biosecurity plan templates.

VFF Livestock president Scott Young has encouraged anyone who owns livestock, to get involved with the project, has said “the feedback from our members and the wider community about Stock Sense’s biosecurity signs has been great. They are an important tool to protect our livestock and remind people of the disease and pest risk trespassing poses to a farm.



Dr Tom Loughnan and Michelle Jolliffe.



Recovery *and* Resilience

Ongoing recovery from our flood disaster.



OVER several weeks from October 2022 to January 2023, excessive rainfall affected regions across the state and caused devastating effects on Victoria's farming community.

WORDS

Georgina Morrison

PHOTOGRAPHY

Sourced



Northern catchments experienced the most severe damage, but the impact was widespread. An overwhelming 28,000 outbound calls came from farmers who needed support assessing damage and livestock welfare.

Broadacre, fruit growing and beekeeping industries have suffered ongoing damages, with nearly half a million hectares affected by one of Victoria's worst flood disasters.

The major damages to farms, loss of stock, and strain on livelihoods has been at the forefront of collaborative efforts between VFF natural disaster relief organisation BlazeAid (registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission) and the National Centre for Farmer Health (NCFH).

VFF President, Emma Germano, said \$50,000 had been donated to BlazeAid to support regional communities and farmers to continue to recover.

"Farmers and regional communities are still picking up the pieces months after record floods devastated so many," Ms Germano said.

The funds were allocated to assist repairs on some of the 12,000 kilometres of damaged fencing, and the enormous farm building damage. Ms Germano said it was a small gesture they hoped would support farmers and regional communities getting back on track as soon as possible.

"I would like to thank the people who kindly donated to the VFF Disaster Relief Fund and the support of organisations like BlazeAid, who go above and beyond to help those in need," Ms Germano stated.

The charity was founded in 2009 following the Black Saturday bushfires, and supports farming communities across all national disaster recovery. Since, it has supported over 12,000 families in the agriculture industry with assistance from almost 35,000 volunteers.

BlazeAid's National Business Manager, Debbie Buttler, said the donation was able to help farmers with practical and hands-on support.

"We cleared debris, repaired fences, restored paddocks for stock and crops, and provided emotional support to farmers and their families," Ms Buttler said.

"These funds also allowed us to donate tools, equipment, and materials to those who lost much of their possessions in the unprecedented floods. It's been heart-warming to know that the efforts of BlazeAid volunteers have been greatly appreciated by the Victorian farming community, who have expressed their gratitude and shown such resilience in the face of overwhelming adversity."

The lasting mental and emotional toll on farming communities has been a huge focus for recovery.

"It's hard to miss the confronting physical aftermath of what floods of this magnitude cause, but it's the hidden mental burden that we need to shine a light on," Ms Germano stated.

The National Centre for Farmer Health (NCFH) has been undertaking important work, helping families recover mentally and emotionally. Sally Cunningham has led the #BuildingFarmSpirit project, and alongside NCFH Director, Alison Kennedy, provided insight into their work supporting the broader rural and regional communities affected by the disaster.

They noted that for some, the impacts of the floods were brief and dramatic, while for others, it was much more prolonged and complex to deal with, and considerably traumatic.

"For almost everyone, there was additional stress, delays, frustrations, periods of extremely high workload, fatigue, financial uncertainty and more," Ms Kennedy said.

"Often the impact on farmer health [from the floods] was not immediately apparent,

but played out over time. Some are still struggling and may continue to struggle for some time.”

Ms Kennedy noted that farmers now seem to be more forward-focussed, which is a positive indicator of health recovery.

“

Farmers and regional communities are still picking up the pieces months after record floods devastated so many

”

Emma Germano

As NCFH staff have talked to flood-impacted farmers at various events around the state, it is clear many of the services offered to farmers over the last year have been tremendously useful as part of their flood recovery journey.

“Farmers have been able to draw strength, insight and knowledge from those around them, be they friends, family, work mates, or trusted farm advisors, seem to have been able to make better decisions than those who remained isolated,” Ms Kennedy said.

“Those with strong community networks have been strengthened by sharing their stories of frustration and loss, rather than trying to go it alone. Farmers who have been able to pace themselves and take breaks from the never-ending workload seem to have experienced less overwhelm and managed to keep going through the long months of recovery.”

NCFH has observed that farmers who have prioritised self-care and maintained a positive attitude and healthy relationships, have navigated this difficult period better than others who have pushed on ‘until there’s nothing left in the tank’.

Ms Cunningham reflected on the #BuildingFarmSpirit campaign, and shared

that it had sponsored over 40 events so far in farming communities impacted by the floods and difficult farming season.

“The value of these events has been in the social connection, the networking, mutual support and practical tips from guest speakers and participants on navigating tough times,” Ms Cunningham said.

“All of this has had a proactive effect on farmer mental health. Some farming communities have put an extraordinary effort into working together, building their resilience and working together through this tough season. It has been very impressive to observe.”

NCFH noted that many in the farming community seem to have been proactive in seeking professional help to deal with their mental health struggles, personal limitations, strained relationships, or work frustrations in the aftermath of the floods.

“Some people have made the most of the increased availability of mental health and wellbeing counsellors, social workers, clinical psychologists, and established positive learning and counselling relationships to help them work through the issues identified,” Ms Cunningham revealed.

Although there has been a positive uptake of services from a wide range of providers, both Ms Cunningham and Ms Kennedy said that there is still a way to go. This is despite efforts to raise awareness of available mental health services, and to ensure mental health professionals have the skills and understanding to effectively engage and support farmers.

“It is very difficult to discern how extensive the ongoing need will be from those in need of services, who have not yet come forward for assistance,” Ms Kennedy said.

“The barriers to help-seeking are often personal and complex, and it takes time to find courage and seek appropriate help.”

Ms Cunningham noted that while stigma can be a factor in seeking support, they are witnessing farmers showing an interest in their mental health.

“This was particularly highlighted in the stories we collected from farmers during the #BuildingFarmSpirit campaign,” she said.

Many farmers mutually agreed that having a positive attitude and leaning into the support of their local communities was at the forefront of recovering mentally and emotionally.

Dairy farmer from Rochester, Andrew Kath, talked about the importance of remaining positive within the community in the months that followed the disaster.

“Some people aren’t going to be in their houses for up to two years, so trying to bring a positive vibration is something I believe I can bring to my community,” Mr Kath said. “Every time you walk into a shop, say hello, or ask them [how their day is], with a smile and a firm handshake.”

Cereal grower from Bridgewater, Tracey Webb, said it was important to focus on the way everyone has rallied together.

“If you can pull a positive out of a negative, it was a really good feel that we could help. We were on the radio, on the phone, and [discussing] how it was going,” she said.

“People in the country are pretty resilient. They just keep going. And you’ve got that support network with your neighbours too.”

NCFH are continuing to work with farming communities to develop programs, education and services to support farmers’ health and wellbeing. Along with a wealth of resources and ongoing community initiatives, the organisation also facilitates access for farmers to have three free sessions with a farmer-trained and registered AHPRA accredited psychologist – without a need to have a GP mental health plan, until 30 November 2023.

To learn more and explore the supports available with NCFH, visit:

farmerhealth.org.au

The lasting mental and emotional toll on farming communities has been a huge focus for recovery.



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Snapping out of it: Mental health in new focus

If you were to close your eyes and think about mental health in farmers, who would you think of?

WORDS

Natasha Lobban

PHOTOGRAPHY

Steph Schmidt

Putting mental health first

According to results from Google Images, the only farmers experiencing stress, anxiety or depression are lonely men in bare paddocks.

That was, until the #ChangeThePicture2023 campaign yielded extraordinary results and, for the first time, put rural women in the frame to tell their stories about mental health - both their struggles and their strengths.

The campaign ran during September and October and was the brainchild of farm life psychologist and farmer Steph Schmidt who set out to showcase snapshots of what farmer mental health looks like through the eyes of rural women across the country.

Steph farms with her husband and three boys in the Mid North of South Australia and knows better than most the juggle of farm and life pressures and how it impacts mental health, and importantly families and relationships.

“For far too long, the picture of farmer mental health has remained unchanged – it’s time for a new approach that benefits everyone within farming and provides a more realistic and all-encompassing view of what life on the land actually looks like,” Steph says.

“When we focus only on men, the mental health of women in farming is often invisible and so we don’t see the whole picture.”



Camilla Herbig from Herbig Tractor Snacks.

“With a focus on both men and women, we can celebrate mental health as something that is not black and white, but instead as a continuum of positive and challenging aspects of rural life for men, women, relationships and families.”

The campaign

The rural women involved in the campaign showcase a huge range of diversity in terms of what farmer mental health looks like and means to them.

“Hearing real life examples of the joys and struggles of farming life is so powerful, and a big step towards changing the picture of farmer mental health to a more realistic and all-encompassing story,” Steph says.

“If a picture paints a thousand words, what is the picture of farmer mental health that we want to paint?”

The women featured in the campaign shared snapshots of struggling with isolation, being overwhelmed after doing budgets, and trying to stay resilient through fluctuating commodity prices.

On the brighter side, positive snapshots include spontaneous family bonfires on a school night, satisfaction after learning to drive the airseeder, and working together as a family unit during shearing time.

The campaign has also created an awareness about inclusivity when it comes to mental health supports in rural areas and it’s hoped that legacy will be felt for a long time.

“A lot of people hadn’t thought about it before, it’s so unquestioned and then once you notice it, you can’t forget and we need to change it,” Steph says.

Farm stress in 2023

Steph acknowledges that the livestock price crash has been particularly hard, on top of the rapid rise of interest rates, cost of production, and extreme weather events.

“It’s just that the prices crashed so quickly and it feels like nothing is being done about it,” she says.

“There’s a big difference between watching sheep starve (during a drought) and having to kill them in good condition.”

It can be hard to prioritise mental health when there’s so much going on.

Support needed

Steph advocates for tailored mental health support in rural Australia - and is quick to point out that what works for city families, may not be appropriate or realistic in the bush.



Steph and her children on farm.

“A one-hour wellbeing regime each day, getting a break from the farm or revamping the diet isn’t always possible,” she says.

“At the government level I would love to put some funds into public interventions and community based training and education that work, not just Band-Aid approaches or feel good things that don’t create lasting change.”

A shortage of medical resources also means that a new approach is needed.

“

If a picture paints a thousand words, what is the picture of farmer mental health that we want to paint?

”

Steph Schmidt

“

It doesn't have to be complicated or what social media says you need to do. You don't need to go for a night away. It might just be hopping in the ute and going for a drive. Make a space to have a conversation, just listening.

Steph Schmidt

wife. He could see she was going through something, but just didn't know how to help.

Relationships are at the heart of our farms and families and can make or break them.

“No one else knows what your context is and what your debt level is. It is in our at-home relationships that we can support each other,” she says.

Steph says that advice for city-based families - or advice found on social media - for couples doesn't always work for farming families and instead she offers a simple approach to connection.

“It doesn't have to be complicated or what social media says you need to do. You don't need to go for a night away to connect. It might just be hopping in the ute and going for a drive. Make a space to have a conversation, just listen.”

Children

During the most recent drought Steph's children used all their wishes to hope for rain.

“They were exposed to so much. How do you let them keep their childhood?”

She doesn't have an answer, but suspects it rests in having open conversations but having “family conversations” and “adult conversations”.

It's also important to find time for those little moments so kids can be kids.

Many who were teenagers during the millennial drought are now parents themselves, which means that the trauma of that time is still fresh, but they also have a close perspective on how their children may be currently feeling and what they need.

Steph encouraged everyone to get behind the campaign, either by following along on social media or by having the conversations around kitchen tables about farmer mental health.

Visit the campaign at www.changethepicture.com.au, follow along at [@stephschmidt.farmlifepsych](https://www.instagram.com/stephschmidt.farmlifepsych) on Facebook and Instagram, and use the hashtag [#ChangeThePicture2023](https://www.instagram.com/ChangeThePicture2023)



“Going to the GP when feeling bad can't be the answer anymore,” she says.

Skills like psychological flexibility have an important role to play in achieving positive change.

Psychological flexibility skills are learnable strategies to help us to adapt to stresses outside of our control, and choose actions that are in line with what really matters to us.

Events

When communities are brought together to discuss natural disasters and resilience, women are often not involved because someone has to stay home with the kids.

To counteract this, Steph says funding would be well spent on creche facilities.

It's a better spend than booze, which is often used to lure farmers to these events, and importantly by facilitating the attendance of a couple they both go away with the language and skills to have the conversations they need to be having at home to give each other ongoing support.

Relationships

Steph recently received an email from a man reaching out to get some help for his



Dr Mary Retallack, Agroecologist/Viticulturist, MD, National EcoVineyards Program Manager.



Shanna Whan, Australian of the Year, 2022.

Stop the towers

People power was on show earlier in mid-2023 as Victorian farmers descended on Parliament House steps to oppose the VNI West line project. Our next generation of farmers were amongst the crowd. This is just one of the faces caught up in the fight to preserve our farming future.





Varroa mite in Australia: A looming threat to honey bees and agriculture

Australia's unique ecosystems and agricultural landscapes have been remarkably free from many destructive pests and diseases. However, the threat of the Varroa mite (*Varroa destructor*) looms large over the country's honey bee populations and agricultural industry.

WORDS
Staff Writer

PHOTOGRAPHY
Sourced

This tiny yet devastating parasite has the potential to cause significant economic and environmental damage if not adequately managed. In this article, we will explore the Varroa mite issue in Australia, its potential impacts, and the measures being taken to mitigate its threat.

The Varroa mite: A Silent Threat

Varroa destructor is a parasitic mite that preys on honey bees (*Apis mellifera*) by attaching to them and feeding on their hemolymph (a fluid similar to blood). It reproduces in the brood cells of honey bee colonies, significantly weakening the host bee. This mite has caused devastating damage to honey bee populations in various parts of the world, including North America, Europe, and Asia and now has been detected in parts of Australia. It is a vector for honey bee viruses and can lead to colony collapse, which has profound implications for both honey production and crop pollination.

Potential Impacts on Australian Agriculture

1. Honey Production: The Australian honey industry relies heavily on honey bees for pollination and honey production. If Varroa mites establish themselves in Australia, honey production could be severely impacted. Infected hives often produce less honey, and the stress on honey bee populations can lead to a decline in overall bee health.

2. Crop Pollination: Beyond honey production, honey bees play a critical role in pollinating various crops, including fruits, vegetables, and nuts. A decline in honey bee populations due to Varroa infestations could lead to reduced crop yields and increased production costs.

3. Biodiversity: Australia is home to unique flora and fauna, some of which rely on pollinators like honey bees for their reproduction. A decline in honey bee populations can disrupt these ecosystems and impact native plant species that depend on pollinators.

4. Export Markets: Varroa mites could affect Australia's reputation as a reliable supplier of honey and pollination services to international markets. The presence of the mites may necessitate strict quarantine measures that could hinder trade and market access.



Mitigation Efforts and Biosecurity Measures

Given the current concern, several strategies are being employed to mitigate the Varroa mite issue in Australia:

1. Surveillance and Monitoring: Continuous monitoring of honey bee populations and regular inspections of hives are essential to detect the presence of Varroa mites early. These efforts help to contain and prevent the spread of infestations.

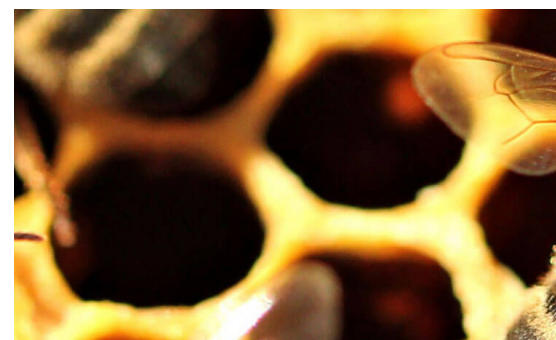
2. Strict Quarantine: Biosecurity measures, including strict quarantine regulations and inspections, are in place. The Australian government works diligently to ensure the safeguarding of its borders from further incursions of biosecurity breaches.

3. Research and Development: Ongoing research into Varroa-resistant honey bee breeds and mite management strategies is essential. This research aims to develop tools and practices that can help honey beekeepers maintain healthy hives in the presence of Varroa mites.

4. Public Awareness: Educating honey beekeepers, farmers, and the general public about the threat of Varroa mites and the importance of early detection and reporting is crucial. Increased awareness can help ensure a rapid response to any potential infestations.

The Varroa mite issue in Australia is a serious concern for the honey bee industry, agriculture, and the environment. The potential impact of Varroa destructor on honey bee populations, crop pollination, and biodiversity cannot be underestimated. Monitoring, research, and public awareness are essential components of a comprehensive approach to mitigating the threat of Varroa mites in Australia.

Protecting Australia's honey bee populations is not only a matter of economic significance but also a matter of ecological importance. As Australia continues to face the challenges posed by this invasive pest, the collaboration of beekeepers, researchers, government agencies, and the broader community will be essential in preserving the well-being of honey bees and the vital role they play in the nation's agricultural and natural ecosystems.





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Future of agriculture is in good hands

The agricultural industry is in safe hands if it's filled with young farmers like Katherine Bain, 28, of Stockyard Hill, Victoria.

WORDS

Chelsea Ashmeade

PHOTOGRAPHY

Katherine Bain



“Take any opportunity you see, you do not know where it could lead to.”

Young Farmer Feature

The agricultural industry is in safe hands if it's filled with young farmers like Katherine Bain, 28, of Stockyard Hill, Victoria.

Miss Bain is paving the way for young women, and men, in agriculture and is working hard to make positive change where possible.

She's a fifth generation farmer and works alongside her father David, mother Deb and Toby, the farm employee.

Miss Bain was the eldest of three children who grew up on the farm and from the age of about 17, she hoped to have the opportunity to return at some point in the future.

"Growing up I was always the most active on the farm and helping out, so it was always quite likely I'd come back," Miss Bain said.

As it happened, Miss Bain returned to the family farm in 2020 and hasn't looked back since.

Prior to her return, Miss Bain studied agribusiness at Marcus Oldham College and worked in corporate, at Orange, as a business analyst.

"That set me up well for the business side of the farm. Learning the production is something we have to do as we are doing it," she said.

The family has an all-sheep

property run over about 2000ha of "fairly stoney" volcanic country.

Miss Bain said it was a bit rare to see a sheep exclusive property in the part of Victoria where they live.

"(it's) A bit rare for out here, we are in a fairly stony volcanic country and getting tractors through rocks isn't ideal," Miss Bain said.

"We are moving towards a straight Merino flock at the moment, too - most farmers out here have composite or crossbreds. The country that we have seems to suit the Merino or self-replacing Merino flock."

She said this move had been significant since her return.

They aim for a good and heavy wool clip and run about 12,000 sheep - with some first-cross lambs - and are also working towards non-mulesed.

Previously they ran 50/50 crossbreds and Merinos.

Recently, the Bains have purchased a neighbouring property, about 500ha in 2021 - where Miss Bain resides.

"We do a fair bit of conservation on 400 hectares of native grasslands that we are working to protect and improve," Miss Bain said.

They also have ecologists and biologists monitoring for Flora and Fauna species they have on the property.

Miss Bain said this was part of the reason they purchased the neighbouring property, to support pastures and manage the environment their sheep live in.

"We have some improved pastures going in, too."

Miss Bain said it had been a "huge journey" since returning to the farm - from purchasing more land, working to conserve and protect the environment around them and making changes in their sheep breeding.

It's a journey Miss Bain feels her parents wouldn't have made if it weren't for her push but it's one that will support their farm into the future.

As a young farmer, Miss Bain has immersed herself within agricultural groups allowing her to have a supportive network of friends.

Miss Bain has been part of the Young Farming Champions where she and other group members speak to children (typically in city centres) about the agricultural industry.

Members share their connection to the



Katherine on her Western Victorian farm.

sector - be it wool, cotton or beef - with the hope to inspire or encourage them to consider a future career in agriculture.

She said they educate children about the opportunities outside of the city and those if they don't want to be on a farm - there's many jobs out there where you can still have an impact and be involved with agriculture.

“I thought it would be a good way to get my foot in the door. There's so many opportunities around. From the bigger corporations... you just have to grab those opportunities with both hands as you never know where it might take you in the future”

Katherine
Bain





“There is no shortage of jobs. There’s plenty of jobs (in agriculture) if people want to get them.”

Miss Bain is also part of the Best Wool Best Lamb group for producers and said it had been beneficial to her move back to the farm.

She’s also found a number of her school friends, and people she grew up with, have started to return to their family farms.

This gives her a solid network to catch up with and bounce ideas from.

“It is a really good area to be in, specifically here, it’s really exciting and it is fun being back. I came back thinking it would be nice to be back with everyone once again.”

In 2022 Miss Bain was a finalist in the Rural Ambassador Award for Victoria, representing the Midlands Region shows.

She competed in the state final at the Royal Melbourne Show and found it has opened the door to many opportunities.

At the competition she met Danyel Cucinotta, Victorian Farmers Federation Vice-President.

This meeting led to Danyel offering Miss Bain an opportunity to join in with their annual VFF Grains and Livestock Conference.

“I thought it would be a good way to get my foot in the door. There’s so many opportunities around. From the bigger corporations...you just have to grab those opportunities with both hands as you never know where it might take you in the future.”

It’s currently mid-spring at Stockyard Hill and the busiest time on-farm.

Ewes have just finished lambing and, according to Miss Bain, the weather can either be really nice or really, really “horrible”.

They’re checking lambs and ewes and making sure their environment is comfortable.

It’s the time of year when the days just



melt into one another with marking not far away, shearing and weaning are both also on the horizon.

“There’s not a typical day at the minute,” Miss Bain said.

“We are trying to focus on getting things done in a timely manner.”

While her spare time is currently filled with renovating the homestead where she and her partner live, Miss Bain said she enjoyed riding her horses when it permitted.

“The renovations have taken up most of our spare time in the last year and a half.”

She enjoys travelling and being able to get away to different places, as well as reading and cooking.

There’s also an entourage of dogs following along her side, her four kelpies; Lenny, Carly, Podz and Zip, they’re an integral part in allowing Miss Bain to get her jobs done.

Miss Bain is an opportunist and makes the most out of every situation and said she’s learnt a great deal from those around her.

“Listen to the elders: they have been through a lot. Sit back, listen and watch, see what you can learn from those around you.

“Take any opportunity you see, you do not know where it could lead to,” Miss Bain said.





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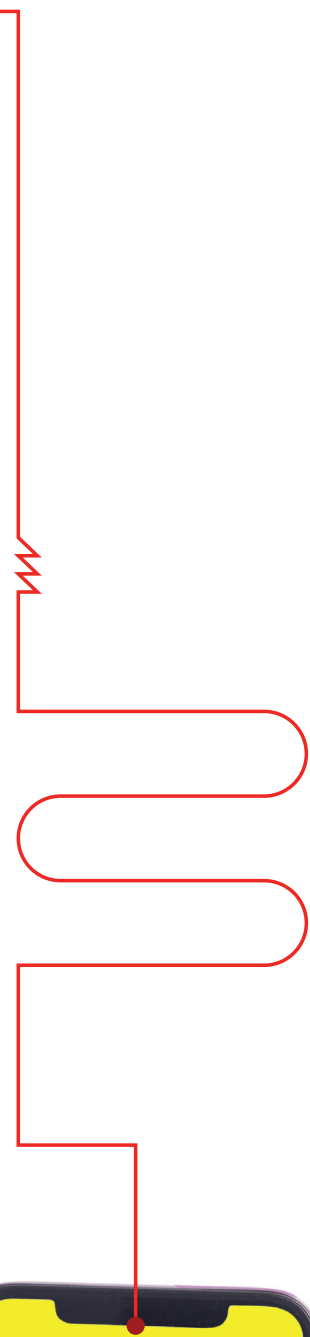
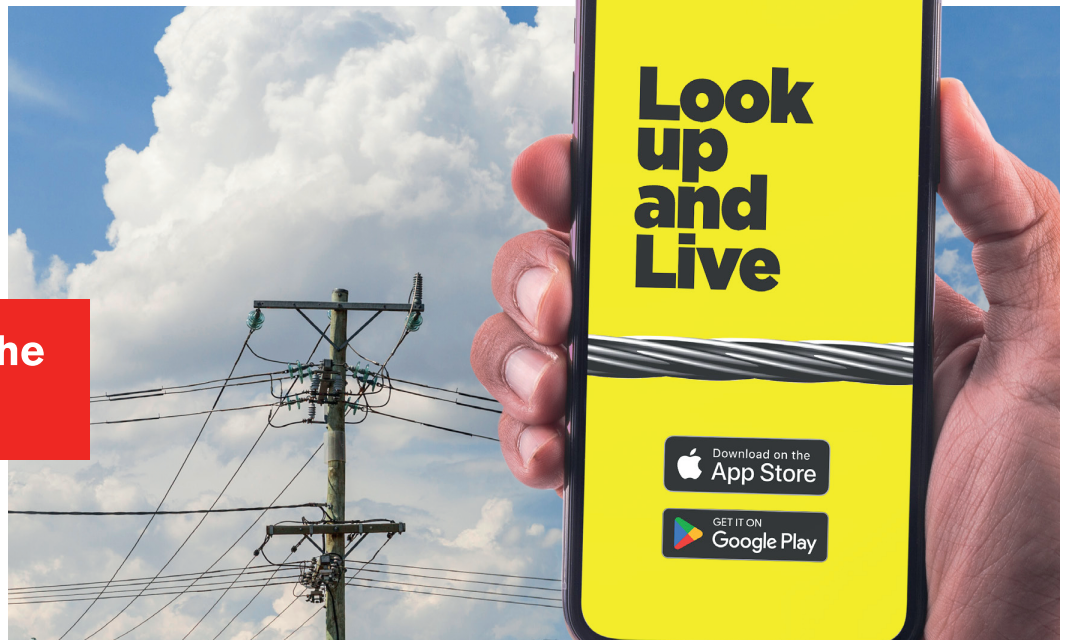


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Victorian farmers urged to *'Look Up and Live'* after rises in powerline incidents

Farmers are being **urged** to remain **vigilant** on the danger of working near overhead wires after a **rise in serious incidents involving farm machinery hitting powerlines**.

In just the first six months of 2023, there were 255 incidents across the network – almost reaching the full-year average of 307*.

To combat the rise, electricity network Powercor is directing people working near electrical infrastructure to the phone app, Look Up and Live, that provides insight into where overhead lines are located.

Korong Vale farmer, Ron Weston, has been instrumental in helping Powercor promote the app by recounting the day he received a massive electric shock after his self-propelled boom spray got tangled up in a single wire earth return line.

"I was in the middle of cropping, went to spray a paddock, unfolded the boom and got caught in the overhead powerline," said Ron.

When stepping off the machine and onto the ground, Mr Weston's body completed an electrical circuit and the force of around 13,000 volts caused multiple burns, knocked him unconscious and threw him several meters from the vehicle.

"I had burns and I had holes blown through my feet and other parts of my body where the electricity arced out. I was in a pretty bad way for a while there.

"If you go near one of those lines, they can spark a metre or more and in a split second they can put you in the cemetery - it's as simple as that."

According to Powercor, there has been a rise in incidents within 'No Go Zones', which are protected areas around powerlines where machinery, equipment, scaffolding, and load lifts are not to be used.

While the most prevalent type of incidents involved excavators and backhoes, farm machinery, trucks, and hand tools followed closely.

Powercor Network Risk and Assurance Manager, Luke Farrugia, encourages all farmers to download the Look Up and Live app, a tool designed to assist those planning works in the vicinity of powerlines.

"We want these numbers to go down, not up, and unfortunately it looks like we're heading towards one of our worst years in recent times," said Luke.

"With farming machinery and equipment becoming larger, more automated, and more sophisticated than ever, as well as the ongoing business pressures that come with running a farm, it's easy to overlook some of the essential safety requirements that come with working on the land."

"I'd encourage people to download the app, put in your job address and you'll have the information ready to navigate work in the vicinity of any overhead wires in the area on the day."



“If you go near one of those lines, they can spark a metre or more and in a split second they can put you in the cemetery - it's as simple as that.” Ron Weston

Download the Look Up and Live app on the **Apple Store** or **Google Play** now.

For information on No Go Zones and powerline safety, visit **Energy Safe Victoria** at www.esv.vic.gov.au.

*Based on the average number of incidents in Victoria over the past five years

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- ✓Commodity specific events
- ✓National Peak Council Membership and Update

+ MORE

- ✓VFF voting rights
- ✓Ability to nominate one additional voting member
- ✓Commodity Policy Council and Issue Advisory Committees
- ✓Workplace advisory services
- ✓Commodity specific events
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+ MORE

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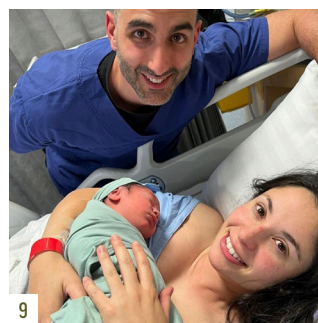
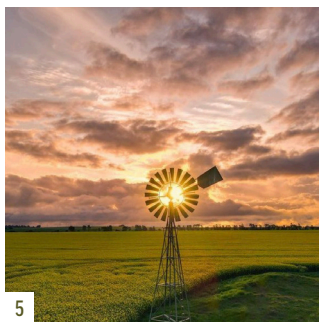
+ MORE

*EXCL. GST

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**.



1. Old mob of marino ewes.
(credit @martinhavingacrack)
2. The perfect composition of canola season.
(credit @bindiw_photos)
3. Making room for what's to come.
(credit @amyschultz.au)
4. Spring in the orchard.
(credit @radevskicoolstores)
5. Beautiful time of the year in the Western District
(credit @emma_burnham_photography)
6. "Seasoned" campaign by Destination Goulburn Valley *(credit @bechaycraft)*
7. Peek-a-boo! Playing with my new friends.
(credit @lovedbylill.photography)
8. Just hanging out.
(credit @martinhavingacrack)
9. Alexander Cucinotta 6-6-23
(credit @danyelcucinotta)

Goodbye 3G. Hello to a better network experience.



We're evolving our mobile network to ensure you always have the best possible experience. This means that on 30 June 2024, we're switching off our 3G network. Our 4G and 5G networks will be available instead and offer an improved experience.

Some of your devices – including handsets, medical devices, and EFTPOS machines – may need to be updated or replaced ahead of next year's closure to ensure ongoing service.

We're here to help you with the change and answer any questions you may have.

Here are some commonly asked questions about the 3G Closure:

Why is Telstra closing their 3G network?

We are not closing our network until the 30th June 2024. When 3G launched in 2006 we used our mobile phones for calls, texting and accessing basic information online.

Today, demand for mobile data is growing by around 30 percent each year. As our technology and use cases change, you need a network that's fit for today and the future.

Once we have closed the 3G network, we will repurpose the spectrum so that we can use it to expand our 5G network. By making this change, our customers will enjoy a much better overall experience.

We started talking to our customers about saying goodbye to 3G back in October 2019, almost five years ago, to make sure that they had enough time to understand what changes they need to make.

We are upgrading areas that only have 3G coverage to ensure these areas have the same or better 4G coverage available by 30th June 2024.



What will happen to my NGWL service?

Several thousand active Next G Wireless Link Service (NGWL) services use 3G technology and will be migrated to a 4G solution before June 2024. Telstra expects most of these customers will migrate to a 4G fixed wireless solution using the third generation of our Smart Modem (with an antennae port for connections to an external aerial). We plan to start migrating NGWL customers this year and customers who already have an external antenna will most likely be able to use it with their new 4G FW solution.

Will you match your existing 3G coverage with 4G before you switch off 3G?

We have been rapidly rolling out and adjusting our 4G and 5G networks over the past few years to ensure that we have equivalent coverage available ahead of the 3G closure.

This work involves upgrading all existing 3G sites with 4G technology, adding new 4G sites and optimising others to create equivalent 4G coverage in areas that 3G coverage exists today. As we approach 3G closure further changes in network software will also be made to ensure existing 4G is optimised.

Will my network experience go backwards from 3G when it moves to 4G coverage?

Your network experience should improve, and in most cases, you'll notice a substantial improvement in speeds when you move from 3G only coverage to 4G coverage. Our 4G service accesses greater bandwidths and is more efficient than 3G, leading to higher end user speeds.

The speed you experience is determined by a range of factors including how close you are to a tower, how much traffic the site is carrying, if there's any obstructions impeding the network (i.e. buildings, hills, vegetation etc.) and what sort of device you're using. If you have any questions or require assistance, please don't hesitate to ask a team member at your local Telstra store, or Telstra dealer or contact us.

After 30th June 2024, can you guarantee I will have 4G coverage in a location that currently only has a 3G signal?

If you currently only receive 3G coverage, we're committed to providing you with 4G coverage prior to the closure of the 3G network.

More information

More commonly asked questions can be found on telstra.com/3Gclosure

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

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WE SELL MORE.
YOU GET MORE.**

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