

# on the farm

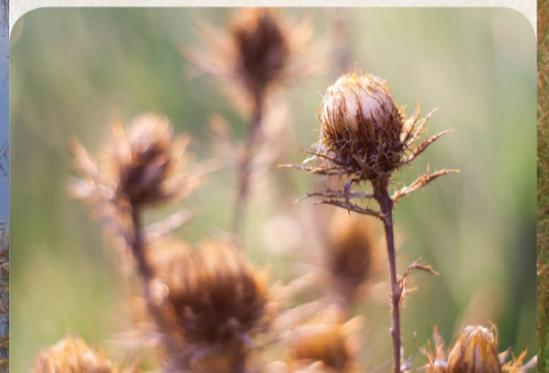
August – September 2019

beef | cropping | dairy | sheep

Soil specialists  
to help  
dairy farms



Smart weed  
control takes  
centre stage



Increasing  
pasture growth  
over winter



WD NEWS  
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# Soil specialists to help dairy farms



Andrew Gray (COLN), Geoff Rollinson (HDLN) and Karen O'Keefe (Corangamite CMA) with a soil sample. 2019E

A NEW project on six Heytesbury and Otway dairy farms will bring in leading soil specialists to help farmers improve their soil, plant and animal health.

As part of the drive to advance Australian agriculture to a more sustainable form of farming, Kim Deans from Integrity Soils will lead a collaborative team to help farmers improve their soil health and farm productivity by activating soil biology.

The project will identify soil and animal health constraints associated with a lack of soil health and develop strategies to improve soil health and ecosystem function.

The joint Heytesbury District Landcare Network and Central Otways Landcare Network project is funded by the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources Smart Farms Small Grants and will engage more than 100 farmers in south-west Victoria at field days, workshops and on-ground activities.

The work will build on the success of HDLN's Keeping Carbon on the Farm project and COLN's Gellibrand River Sustainable Dairies Program to improve run-off efficiencies and develop an ecological check list for farmers.

HDLN Landcare co-ordinator Geoff Rollinson said the project would support farmers to use regenerative farming techniques such as applying biological stimulants, adaptive grazing management and revegetating paddocks to improve soil health.

Tests will quantify soil and pasture improvements over the next two years.

"There is a consumer-driven desire for food to be produced with less or no chemicals, herbicides, pesticides and synthetic fertilisers," Mr Rollinson said.

"What happens at the point of production flows through the whole food supply chain.

"Improving soil health will improve root

depth of pastures, nutrient uptake by plants and pasture growth. This will help farmers to cut back on costly inputs which will be good for the soil and for their budget."

COLN Landcare co-ordinator Andy Gray said farmers would work with the consultant to test some of the actions they could take to improve their soil and ecological systems.

Mr Gray said dairy farmers test for cell count, calcium and fat but should also value the mineral content of soil.

"If we valued what is coming through the soil to the cow and the milk and make available as many nutrients as possible, we would see better land values," he said.

"Other grazing enterprises have come up with regenerative farming programs to improve the mineral density of their soil by using natural biological inputs as opposed to synthetic fertilisers. We aim

to get dairy farmers understanding the role of soil biology, so they no longer need to use synthetic fertilisers."

Kim Deans, supported by Integrity Soils team leader Nicole Masters, will visit twice during the project to work with the farmers and run workshops.

The project is in conjunction with Corangamite CMA and Agriculture Victoria.

For an expression of interest form contact Geoff Rollinson on 0427 983 755, email [geoff@heytesburylandcare.org.au](mailto:geoff@heytesburylandcare.org.au) or Andy Gray 0414 560 296, email [andygray@coln.org.au](mailto:andygray@coln.org.au).

To register for email updates about the program and to get involved in field days email [geoff@heytesburylandcare.org.au](mailto:geoff@heytesburylandcare.org.au) with the subject title 'Add me to Activating Soil Biology mailing list.'



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# Rabobank land price outlook

THE country's land prices have been "on fire" over the past five years with a compound annual growth rate of seven per cent but are set to cool off due to drought conditions, according to a Rabobank report.

The recently released Australian Agricultural Land Price Outlook document, which was titled More Smoke, Less Fire, also estimated growth would slow over the coming 18 months.

Rabobank agricultural analyst Wes Lefroy said the growth would slow due to vendors starting to lose patience with riding out the drought-affected areas along the east coast.

"This will leave the market exposed to the underlying reduced demand for property, particularly where the run of profitability is now coming to an end in many regions due to drought," he said.

However, the report suggested a fall in prices was still unlikely, with farmers' balance sheets remaining generally strong across the majority of sectors and regions.

The report also used a new method to track the Australian agricultural land prices – the Rabobank Farmland Index (RFI).

"The RFI weighs agricultural property sales based on production value at a state and at a national level, to ensure these variations are properly accounted for," Mr Lefroy said.

The RFI found agricultural land prices increased 15 per cent over the 2018 calendar year, with a six per cent jump in Victorian prices.

Mr Lefroy said the report showed a 'liquidity squeeze' in the market as a low availability of properties drove down profits.

"This is typical of what happens in drought years and we have seen land sales down by more than 50 per cent over the last five years in drought-affected states," he said.

"Looking ahead, regardless of whether the drought breaks in the next 18 months or not, we expect liquidity in agricultural

land will increase as some farmers grow tired of waiting out the ongoing drought conditions and begin placing properties on the market. This will release the squeeze that has been driving up prices up on the east coast during 2018."

In terms of foreign investment, the report indicated the majority of foreign interest was in livestock production.

"Pastoral grazing land is however of less value compared with other production types such as cropping and horticulture," Mr Lefroy said.

"Foreign and corporate investment, rather than family farms, have tended to be more focused on horticultural production, underpinned by positive outlook in permanent crops and the scale and high capital costs involved in some of the new developments."

Foreign ownership interest has accounted for 13 per cent of agricultural land by area and about seven per cent of agricultural land by value.

The outlook showed agricultural land

has grown in value at a faster rate than the majority of other types of land, with its draw for investors set to continue to increase.

"Looking into the medium-term, we also see a number of factors that will support the attractiveness of agricultural land for corporate investors," Mr Lefroy said.

"Larger parcel sizes, which are resulting from ongoing consolidation, will make it simpler for investors to purchase the land they need to meet investment parameters, while technological research and development will make it simpler for investors to replicate management systems across regions.

"In addition, we see the attractiveness of other asset classes to be decreasing relative to agricultural land, with global and local economic growth slowing and no long-term conclusion to the trade war in sight. Most notably, we don't expect agricultural land prices to be impacted by forces pulling local house prices lower."



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# Farmer pleads guilty to animal cruelty charges

A CATTLE farmer from Mooroopna North was last month convicted of animal cruelty charges in the Shepparton's Magistrates Court for failing to appropriately care for his cattle.

The farmer pleaded guilty to two charges of aggravated cruelty, three cruelty charges, and two charges of failing to comply with notices under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986.

The farmer received a conviction and was fined \$12,500.

Agriculture Victoria district veterinary officer Hannah Delahunty said the farmer had received a warning letter from Agriculture Victoria for a single similar offence occurring a few months earlier.

The magistrate said the inaction in response to the investigation was extraordinary and the farmer failed to meet his obligations, resulting in his animals suffering.

Dr Delahunty said all farmers have a responsibility to maintain Victoria's reputation in farming practices and the livestock industry.

"Throughout the period of offending, these cattle continued to suffer and were not provided with appropriate treatment, leaving no alternative for Agriculture Victoria officers but to euthanise several cattle that were severely injured," Dr Delahunty said.

"This case serves as a strong reminder that it is an offence for livestock owners to fail to provide for their livestock's welfare."

## New lamb marking products and advice at hand



AGRICULTURE Victoria is keen to demonstrate and discuss the latest animal health and welfare products available for lamb marking.

Animal Health and Welfare senior veterinary officer Dr Robert Suter has taken stock of some of the latest products to hit the Australian market this winter and is available to discuss and answer questions about their use.

Dr Suter said in the past few years new pain management products had become available to use during procedures such as castration and tail docking.

"It has been a major effort to ensure these products are available involving innovation by drug manufacturers and the co-operation of regulators, led by the demand for such products by industry," he said.

Dr Suter said one particular demonstration kit he could show farmers was a rubber ring which injected local anaesthetic into the tail and scrotum of ram lambs before the ring was applied.

"Research by the developers shows that injecting local anaesthetic halves the measurable chemical pain reaction within the lamb's body, and practically abolishes the behavioural reactions to the application of the rubber ring," he said.

"We are fortunate to have these products become available, however they must be used correctly, which is why I'm keen to talk to as many producers and answer as many questions as I can.

"If possible, it is preferable to use a combination of treatments that, between them, address both the immediate pain and any pain that might occur during the healing process.

"It is important to closely read and follow the label directions, unless the product has been prescribed by a veterinarian, when their instructions must be followed."

Dr Suter encouraged all local farmers to discuss lamb marking with their veterinarian.

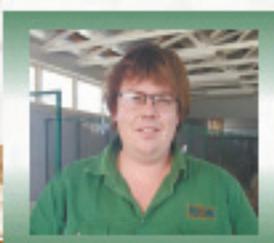
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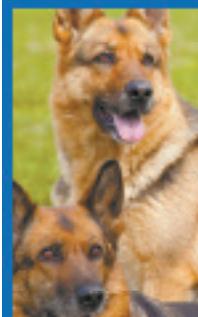


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# Smart weed control takes centre stage

GRAIN growers and farm advisers keen to learn more about the sustainable use of herbicides and effective long-term weed control are encouraged to attend 2019 WeedSmart Week at Horsham.

It is the first time the event has been held in Victoria and, with the theme of 'Diversify and Disrupt', the focus is firmly on arming participants with the latest information about integrated weed management.

This hands-on approach to knowledge sharing translates into a three-day practical program starting on Tuesday, August 27, with an interactive forum featuring leading growers, farm advisers, agronomists and researchers, followed by a series of farm visits.

The conference is being facilitated by WeedSmart, an industry-owned initiative committed to delivering practical, validated information that promotes the use of multiple on-farm management tools to encourage 'more crop, less weeds' and keeping herbicides working for the long-term.

The Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC) is supporting this event as the major WeedSmart stakeholder.

Birchip Cropping Group (BCG) is co-hosting the week.

Lisa Mayer, who heads the WeedSmart

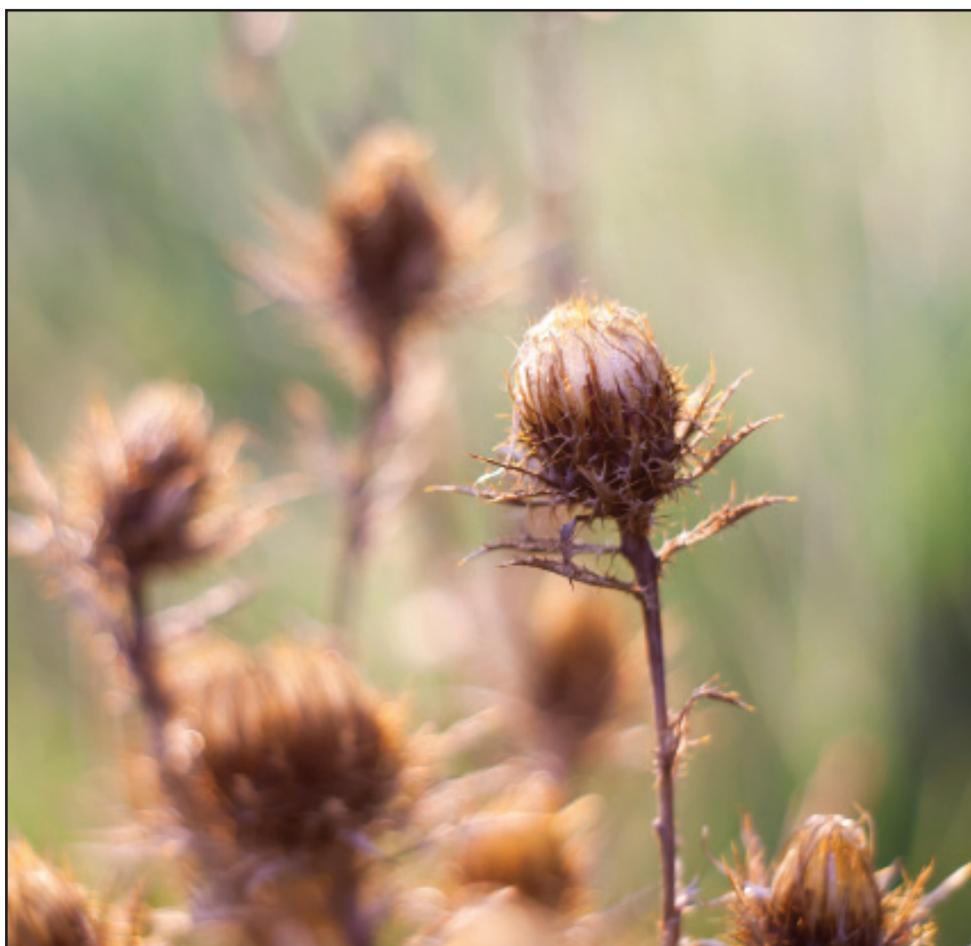
team from her base at the Australian Herbicide Resistance Initiative (AHRI) at The University of Western Australia, said Horsham WeedSmart Week will offer attendees a chance to see first-hand how some growers are tackling problem weeds through strategic management tactics such as crop competition, narrow row spacing, crop rotation and harvest weed seed control measures.

"Practical information on how growers, farm advisers, agronomists and researchers are implementing 'The Big 6' tactics to target specific weed species and reduce herbicide resistance in southern farming systems forms the basis of the interactive workshop at the Horsham Town Hall on day one of WeedSmart Week," Ms Mayer said.

"Day two of the program includes workshops looking at mechanical harvest weed seed control options and harvest efficiency with leading experts at the Wimmera Machinery Field Days site, followed by on-farm optical spray technology demonstrations.

"Day three (Thursday, August 29) will incorporate visits to farms in the Horsham area where growers have put in place integrated weed management programs to minimise the impact of herbicide resistance to their farming systems."

GRDC Southern Region Panel Chair



John Bennett, a Wimmera grain grower, believes WeedSmart Week will offer insights into which herbicides are still effective in the region and practices growers can implement to preserve herbicide life.

Weeds cost growers \$146/hectare on average in control costs and lost yield.

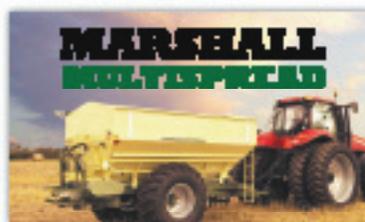
"In terms of yield loss and input costs, weeds have a most significant impact on grower profitability, and the challenge to manage weeds effectively continues to

mount due to the pressure of increasing herbicide resistance," Mr Bennett said.

"WeedSmart Week provides a unique opportunity for growers and farm advisers to hear from experts at the forefront of Australian weed and herbicide resistance research, and to see best practice weed management in action on-farm."

For more information contact Lisa Mayer 0414 841 862 or email [lisa.mayer@uwa.edu.au](mailto:lisa.mayer@uwa.edu.au)

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# China mission reveals opportunity for jersey farmers



AUSTRALIAN Jersey farmers could be major beneficiaries from China's need for more dairy product while addressing many of the issues confronting the country.

China needs 109 million tonnes of dairy to meet current nutritional targets but last year Australia exported only 840,000 tonnes.

A recent dairy trade mission to China has identified Jersey as a potential growth opportunity and has sought to clear-up misconceptions about availability of the breed.

Jersey Australia general manager Glen Barrett, who was part of the delegation, said Jerseys could be the answer to many of the challenges facing dairy in China.

"Their dairy herd is starting to get too big and has fertility, feed efficiency and heat tolerance issues – all things where Jerseys would be far superior," Mr Barrett said.

"It is mostly a Holstein market at the moment but the demand for Jersey is growing, particularly in southern China where the climate is warmer and the Jersey heat tolerance is beneficial."

Fifteen companies joined the fifth Austrade co-ordinated dairy mission to China.

The program included industry briefings, site visits, business promotion, roundtable discussions and participation in the Australia's National Pavilion at the 2019 China Expo.

Jersey Australia was invited by Genetics Australia to join the Austrade mission to develop and expand export opportunities and Mr Barrett said Jerseys could be a significant player.

Australia exports an average 10,000 Jerseys per year but Mr Barrett said some exporters were telling Chinese buyers they couldn't buy Australian Jerseys.

"That is incorrect. By weight of numbers, we are a smaller breed but Jerseys are available," he said.

Mr Barrett said having a consistent market would encourage more Jersey breeders to enter the international market.

"If the market is inconsistent, it's hard to breed to supply to it," he said.

"If there was consistent market year-on-year, breeders and farmers would breed heifers to meet that market. If the market is there one year and not the next, that becomes a bit of a challenge."

Mr Barrett said there seemed to be a strong shift away from US Proofs and he also rejected claims being made about Australian product.

"One of the stupidest things I heard is the Chinese are being told they can't breed Australian heifers to Australian bulls due to inbreeding from International suppliers" he said.

"That's wrong and if you want Jerseys, they are available."

Mr Barrett said there had been eight to 10 solid conversations with buyers

looking for Jerseys with a bull order already resulting from the trip

"Jersey Australia is here to help exporters find heifers if they need them and we will provide continued reassurance to buyers in China that Jersey heifers are available."

There are also good opportunities for Australian genetics and embryos.

"The feedback was that there is demand for high value cows and potential opportunities for more elite level genetics and exports of Australian semen to China," Mr Barrett said.

"There are opportunities to take a collective national approach through the different A.I. companies and it's not just China.

"There are strong sales of Australian Jersey semen into South Africa, good opportunities for Jerseys in Rwanda and just last week we had interest from South Korea undertaking an evaluation of Australian Jerseys on their suitability for their dairy industry

Jersey Australia will maintain contact with potential buyers, reconfirming Jerseys are readily available and providing support in certification and breed assessment.

Genetics Australia export manager Rob Derksen said there was a growing need for different types of milk in China.

"They have been very volume orientated but there has been a change recently," Mr Derksen said.

"The Chinese are drinking more yoghurts and wanting a higher percentage of fat and protein in their milk and Australian Jerseys can deliver that," he said.

" Jerseys are also generally more heat tolerant and better feed converters."

Mr Derksen said one farmer met on the mission had asked for 1000 A2 Jersey heifers from Australia.

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# Increasing pasture growth over winter

WITH less than favourable conditions across a lot of the state, many farmers have gone into winter with less pasture in front than desired.

Agriculture Victoria Livestock Extension Officer John Bowman said pasture growth rates can be improved during winter, through good grazing and pasture management.

Mr Bowman said in recent years a farm in East Gippsland compared grazing strategies of two paddocks side by side.

One paddock was grazed for two days, the other grazed for six days.

Both paddocks were strip-grazed, but stock were not excluded from re-grazing areas they had been the day before.

"A month later, when pasture growth rates were measured, the paddock grazed for two days had double the pasture growth rate of the one that was grazed for six days (18kgDM/ha/day)," Mr Bowman said.

"The difference in leaf size of the re-growing pastures was also vastly different between the two."

Pasture growth can be further improved by running temporary troughs off the main trough and moving the new strip, or fencing it behind, to minimise the effects of back-grazing in the system.

Another alternative to improving winter feed growth is using urea.

"With fodder costs rising this winter, urea can be a very cost-effective means of growing extra feed.

"An application of nitrogen fertiliser is most efficient when applied at rates between 60–100kg Urea per hectare. If growth conditions are moderate (soil temperature is above 12 degrees and plants have reasonable leaf area and moisture) response rates should be around 10:1.

"It is important that stock are kept off the paddock for 21 days post-urea application, as nitrate toxicity can be a

concern if grazed too early," he said.

A third option is to use gibberellic acid, which is a naturally occurring plant hormone.

Generally, the colder the daytime temperatures, the better the response.

The rapid plant growth that can occur through the use of gibberellic acid leads to plants often being lighter in colour, however this doesn't affect the quality of feed on offer.

According to Mr Bowman stock should, ideally, be kept off the pastures for three weeks after application, to allow maximum response.

"Phalaris based pastures are highly responsive to gibberellic acid with recommended rates of application of 2.5 to 10 g of gibberellic acid/100L water per hectare," he said.

Pastures that are dominant in perennial ryegrass, annual ryegrass or cocksfoot the recommended application rate is

20g/100L water per hectare.

However, it is important to read and follow the recommended rates on the label as recommended rates can differ between products.

Mr Bowman said soil moisture probes installed at Longwarry and Yarram indicate recent rains have soil moisture down to 80 cm whereas soil moisture is down to only 30–40 cm at the Bairnsdale paddocks.

"Applications to boost pasture growth around Bairnsdale will use up more of that soil moisture in the upper level (as it has been doing) until more rain is received.

"With soil temperatures (in the top 10cm) now at about 8.7 degrees, pasture growth has slowed and therefore a response to urea will take longer," he said.

He said if soils aren't moist enough to support plant growth it is recommended holding off on applications until soil moisture levels improve.

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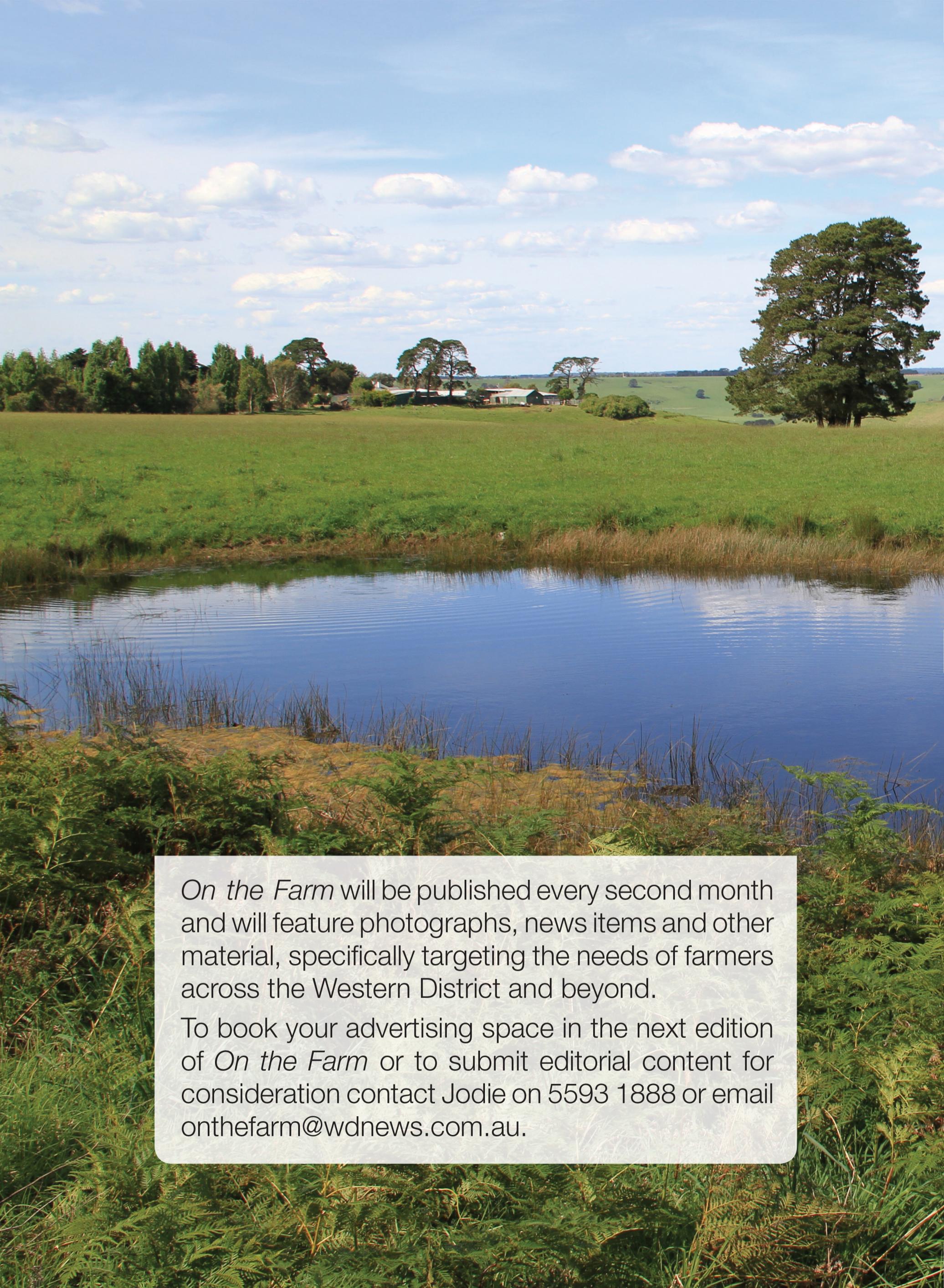
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