

SCF Focus

STIRLINGS TO COAST FARMERS

AUTUMN 2024 NEWSLETTER

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STIRLINGS TO COAST





JOTTINGS FROM THE CHAIR

Sandy Forbes, SCF Chair

Hello to all Stirling's to Coast Members, Sponsors and Staff.

Welcome to a new farming season ahead and I trust you had a bit of a break over summer.

Last year certainly threw up some very different challenges from 2022 with the season cutting off very early affecting crop finishing and spring pastures across the membership area. Crop yields held up pretty well considering although in some areas this wasn't the case and quality was also affected. Looking forward to an early

break this year and hopefully ex tropical cyclone Lincoln will bring some rain down.

Livestock have certainly thrown us a curve ball continuing into this year. I don't need to tell any of you how difficult the last twelve months has been with sheep and cattle. We look forward to some stability in the markets returning this year and a nice early break to the season

The staff at Stirlings to Coast, under the guidance of CEO Lizzie, have excelled themselves in working with farmers and agribusiness delivering timely and relevant info to all our members. We have attracted a significant amount of funding over the last eighteen months for projects that will really benefit us as members of SCF. We are lucky to have such great people working with us. We farewell Sheridan Kowald who has taken a position with Southern Dirt Group in Kojonup to be closer to family. Thank you to Sheridan for all you've contributed to SCF. We welcome Liam Guthrie who takes up the Trials Officer position to assist Dan Fay with our extensive trial program using the seeding equipment we obtained with GRDC funding. Liam is from a farming background at Bolgart and has great experience with running trials and has recently been working locally so already knows the area.

Thank you to the Board for all their efforts in directing the group and supporting staff. Our Board roles are purely voluntary and the time Board members commit to the group is much appreciated. We welcome Kylie Douglas to our Board as an Independent Member. Kylie is partner in Successiv Farm Consultancy and brings a wealth of knowledge and experience in the area and a fresh approach to farming business management and the Board looks forward to her contribution.

All the best for the start of 2024.

Sandy Forbes
Chairman

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GOLD SPONSORS



Rabobank

SILVER SPONSORS





CEO REPORT

Lizzie von Perger, SCF CEO

Hello SCF Members and Sponsors,

Firstly, we hope harvest finished up okay for you all and you managed some restful time off over the Chrissy and January period.

With harvest of the SCF trials finishing up a little earlier than expected, the SCF team also managed to have some time off and we're feeling refreshed and ready to crack into 2024!

First cab off the rank for 2024 were the snail dissection workshops held on the 14 & 15 February. We were successful in a GRDC grant application late last year that is aiming to help farmers along the South Coast better time snail baiting programs. We had a lot of local adviser and farmer support in the workshops, many snails were squished and albumen glands discovered! I must say having given it a go myself, a squashed snail under a microscope is not a pretty site but it is interesting! Thanks to all the steady-handed people who have opted to continue with the program.

Dan Fay and Phil Honey are busily crunching the trial data figures and we hope to have the Trials Review Booklet to you soon. You'll get a sneak peak on many of the trial results if you head along to the SCF Trials Review Day on the Thursday, 14 March. We have a most magnificent program lined up for you (or we think so anyhow). There are more details in this newsletter – have a squiz!

Sadly, our Sheridan Kowald has left the team. Sheridan was with SCF for a little over a year and in that time proved herself as extremely capable and confident, managing both cropping and livestock projects (notably the MLA confinement feeding project). Lucky for us, Sheridan has moved up the road to Southern Dirt and we are looking forward to strong, collaborative relationship with this group going forwards.

On a happier note, we do have two exciting announcements to make! Our small plot trial equipment has arrived! SCF is now the proud owner of a small plot seeder, plot sprayer, multi-spectral drone and grain thresher thanks to a GRDC equipment grant. The second announcement is that we have employed someone onto the SCF team to operate it! Welcome Liam Guthrie. Liam heralds from a mixed family farm in Bolgart and has had plenty of small plot trial experience, having spent two years with Living Farm.

On the subject of trials, in the next few months the SCF team will be organising the 2024 trials and looking for farmers to host trial sites. We've got some pretty cool projects lined up and hosting trials is a great opportunity to learn from research located in your own backyard (or paddock in your case). Keep posted for a call out for assistance soon.

A big thank you to all our sponsors who have jumped back on board for the 2024 year. We truly value your support and we know our farming members do too. A special mention goes to RAGT, Delta Ag (previously bronze), AWI and Successiv who have all jumped on as new silver sponsors – welcome!

Finally, we wish you all the best for a safe seeding and successful year ahead. Our door is always open, so if you are in town (Albany) call in for a yarn with the team!

Best Regards,

Lizzie

Claying – efficacy, efficiency and gravel soils *p6*

Growing Faba beans on the South Coast *p8*

SCF members & sponsors squishing snails for a good cause! *p14*



Introducing new staff member - Liam Guthrie

Hello everyone, I am Liam the new Trials Officer for SCF.

Born and raised on a broadacre farm in Bolgart, Western Australia, and for those who are wondering where this place is, it is 120km Northeast of Perth, in mixed cropping and livestock country. Spending weekends behind a mob of sheep, or school holidays on the chaser bin, I developed a love for agriculture. Following my completion of Year 12 at boarding school in Perth, I studied an associate degree in Agribusiness at Muresk. This was a part time course which allowed me to work casually with Kaylx and AGT on their trial programs. After graduation, I started at Living Farm as a Graduate Research Agronomist in York, spending two seasons as a part of the field research team, travelling far and wide across the growing region of WA. This role gave me the opportunity to learn the fundamentals of field research, and management skills to take through life. I departed there in mid 2023 and moved to Albany and worked with AFGRI as a Sales Representative, primarily in the small ag sector of Denmark and Walpole. Coming on board with Stirling to Coast Farmers, I look forward to getting back into my passion of field research and being able to expand my knowledge even further. I hope to provide high quality data that can be used to help growers further develop their farming practices.



When I am not sitting on the back of a trial seeder, I enjoy spending time at the beach, playing cricket, training for the Rottneest channel swim, listening to true crime podcasts, or 4-wheel driving along the south coast.

I know some of you already, but I am looking forward to getting to know all the members and growers in the area and working alongside Lizzie and the team here at Stirling to Coast Farmers.

You've heard of Good Friday and Easter Monday, well just before both, we introduce ...

WEB
WEDNESDAY
CHECK YOUR WEATHER STATION DAY

27 MARCH 2024

A day to check that piece of equipment that tells you when to seed your crop, lets you know it's okay to spray and gives you the confidence to throw out a bit more fert.

Be it a 'fancy pants' weather station or a humble rain gauge, we encourage you to get on board and dedicate this March 27th to cleaning out the cobwebs, calibrating, straightening or simply replacing your weather station to give you the best data this year!

to find out more head to:

SCFARMERS.ORG.AU/WEBWEDNESDAY



meet the member

Ben Webb

Region: Kojonup

Farm name: Marbarrup

Farm size and soil type: 2250 arable hectares, forest duplex gravels

WHAT YEAR DID YOU JOIN STIRLING'S TO COAST FARMERS AND WHY?

2023. Stirlings to Coast were running some interesting trials and collaborating with Southern Dirt

WHAT SORT OF ENTERPRISES DO YOU RUN? (EG. CROP/LIVESTOCK, SPECIES/BREED, FLOCK SIZE)

Continuous crop 1450 ha

Merino ewes 800 ha

WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR BIGGEST PASSIONS AND WHY?

I enjoy Kids sport, catching marron and V8's

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT CONSTRAINTS TO ACHIEVE HIGHER PRODUCTIVITY ON YOUR FARM? – NOT INCLUDING RAINFALL!!

Low water holding capacity, non-wetting, water logging and high PBI.

IS THERE ANYTHING THAT YOU DO ON-FARM THAT IS SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT TO THE SO CALLED 'NORM' THAT IS INTERESTING?

Trying some claying of gravels. Slotted pipe drainage. Using a plozza plough.

WHAT TECHNOLOGIES ARE YOU USING ON-FARM? IF SO WHAT IS IT (EG. YIELD MAPPING, VR APPLICATIONS, SECURITY CAMERAS, TANK SENSORS ETC.) AND HOW HAS IT SHAPED YOUR FARM?

DNA testing the merinotech ram breeding flock. Improve ASBV's, sire and dam records, sell any HH. (Horney sheep/rams)

ARE YOU CURRENTLY TRIALLING ANYTHING YOURSELF?

Claying

Drainage

Winter wheats

IS THERE ANYTHING THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO TEST OR TRIAL IN THE NEXT 2 YEARS?

More slotted pipe and claying

WHAT DO YOU THINK THE NEXT BIG THING IN AGRICULTURE WILL BE IN 5 TO 10 YEARS?

Small incremental changes to help increase yields.

DO YOU ATTEND ANY AGRICULTURE FIELD DAYS OTHER THAN SCF?

Southern Dirt





Claying – efficacy, efficiency and gravel soils

Dan Fay, Research and Development Co-ordinator, SCF

For the last two seasons Stirling to Coast Farmers have been leading a claying project in collaboration with Southern Dirt and with investment from GRDC. The project was initially set up to look at improving the efficiency and effectiveness of claying on the south coast of WA but took a minor detour to look at claying non-wetting gravel soils too!

Under this project we have established four trial sites along the South Coast and in the Great Southern, and also ran a series of workshops in October 2023, to provide farmers with data driven information on how to take a precision approach to claying.

2022 Farm-scale Trial Sites Implemented – Kojaneerup & Scotts Brook

The two farm-scale trials implemented in 2022, focused on application efficiencies and the relationship between clay quality, application rates and application methods, and how to best tailor a claying program to ameliorate your specific soil constraints. Soil and environmental conditions at each trial site (Kojaneerup and Scotts Brook) varied significantly.

Kojaneerup – getting the rate right!

The trial site in Kojaneerup was located on a shallow sandy duplex, which is typical to the region and where claying has been proven to be a very effective amelioration technique when the clay content can be increased to above 5%. Three rates were used in the trial, 140 t/ha, 270 t/ha and 350 t/ha.

The winner was the 270 t/ha treatment which achieved the 5% clay content threshold without over doing it (Figure 1) Only marginal yield gains were seen in the 350 t/ha treatment and as a result was not economical. The 140 t/ha treatment failed to raise the soil clay content above 5% and did not have a significant impact on yield compared to the other two treatments. This highlighted the importance of precision claying (where possible!).

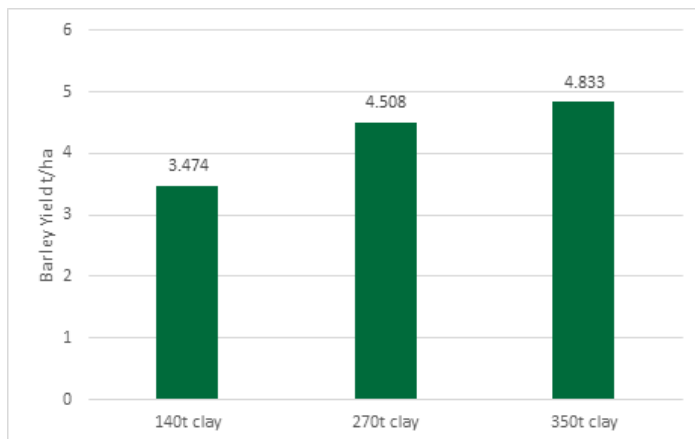


Figure 1: Grain yield results (t/ha) for the Kojaneerup trial in 2022.

Scotts Brook – could we reduce non-wetting on forest gravels with clay?

The second site implemented in 2022 in Scotts Brook was located on a heavy forest gravel soil, with 70% gravel by weight. Although forest gravel soils are equally prone to non-wetting, claying on these soils has been extremely rare to date, likely due to these soil types being responsive to light tillage, soil inversion and wetting agents to combat non-wetting. However, these amelioration techniques don't provide the permanent solution to non-wetting that could possibly be gained through claying – and hence our curiosity!

In 2022, the Scotts Brook trial showed a promising result (Figure 2), whereby there appeared to be a response to the claying and tillage/incorporation over and above the tillage only (plozza plough). However, it was very evident further investigation (over time) was required to confirm these results before we started shouting from the rooftops!

So, this is what we did, and in 2023 were successful in being granted funding to continue the work with two trials to be located on gravel soils – Onto to 2023!

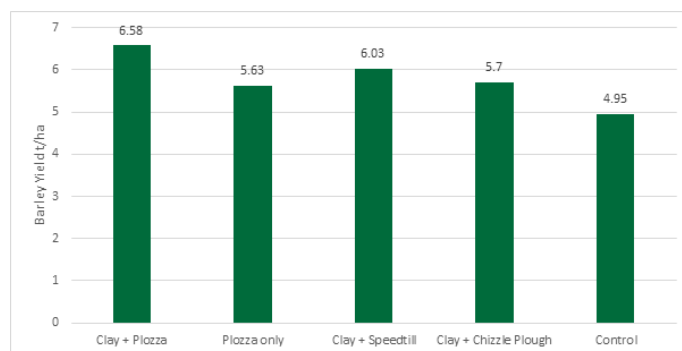


Figure 2: Grain yield results (t/ha) for the Scotts Brook trial in 2022.

2023 - A deeper dive into claying gravel soils

With the additional investment from GRDC, Stirlings to Coast Farmers was able to implement another two claying sites on gravel soils to assess the viability and effectiveness of ameliorating non-wetting in gravel soils.

Although both sites (Woogenellup & Scotts Brook) were located on gravel soils, the site characteristics were completely different.

Woodgenellup – gravelly sand over gravel

The site at Woogenellup, was a gravelly sand over gravel, very unlike the loamy forest gravel site that was explored in 2022. Sand component at the Woogenellup site had an extremely low clay percentage of 1%, and extremely low OC content, however, contained around 40-60% gravel within the non-wetting zone. Two clay rates 100t/ha and 200t/ha were applied across two zones, a deeper sandy zone with 40% gravel content, and a shallower sandy zone with 60% gravel content. Also included in the trial was a tillage only strip and a nil treatment zone.

Although to many seasoned clayers these clay rates might seem low, we took into account the gravel content of the soil, with the theory that less clay would be needed to increase the clay content of the sandy on a volume basis (once gravel volume taken out).

In 2023, the first year yield results showed the site to be very responsive to claying, with a significant yield improvement resulting from both the 200t/ha and 100t/ha rates compared to the nil control (Figure 3).

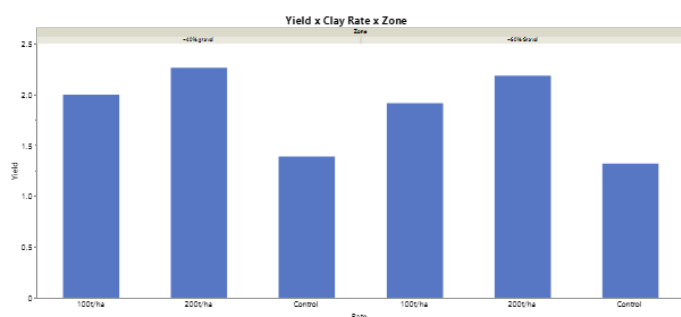


Figure 3: Grain yield results (t/ha) for the Woogenellup trial in 2023.

Scotts Brook – Heavy, loamy forest gravel

The other 2023 trial site was located again in Scotts Brook, on a heavy forest gravel, with a gravel content of around 65-70% by weight. The soil in-between the gravel was a loam with a clay percentage of between 4.8% and 7.2% clay.

Now you might be thinking, those clay percentages are high, why would this site need clay amelioration? Let us explain somewhat.....

In sandy soil with low organic matter, this would be the correct assumption. However, the site at Scotts Brook had an organic carbon content (OC%) of between 1.79% and 3.83% and it is

this high OC % that drives the non-wetting in these soil types. Research conducted by DPRID shows that in paddocks with an OC of about 1.5% the standard rule of 5% clay in the non-wetting zone (0-15cm), is enough to eliminate non-wetting soils. However, with an OC above 1.5% more clay is needed in order to dilute the non-wetting components of the soil. These being the polymers that are components of the organic matter that coat the sand particles and make them non-wetting.

With this in mind, this Scotts Brook trial site had three rates of clay: 100 t/ha, 150 t/ha, 200 t/ha, as well as a tilled control and a nil control.

The crop yield results from the claying trial at Scotts Brook were a lot less clear. While each clay treatment resulted in a marginally higher yield than the control, the tilled control outperformed all the clayed treatments. Interestingly, the 70 t/ha of clay marginally outperformed the 100t/ha and 200t/ha rates (Figure 4).

Complicating matters, the site at Scotts Brook was seeded into very dry conditions and this was followed by periods of high rainfall in the early growth stages. As a result, there was uneven canola emergence across the whole site. This site will continue to be monitored next season to see if there is a legacy effect of the claying, that provides a benefit beyond the tillage only treatment.

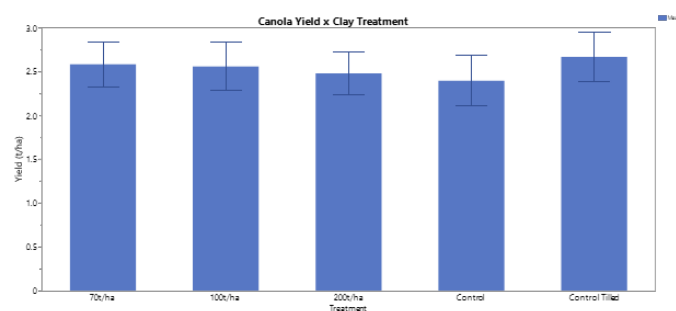


Figure 4: Grain yield results (t/ha) for the Scotts Brook trial in 2022.

Conclusion

Claying sandy gravels that have low organic matter and low initial clay content looks to be very promising. What is also good news, is that it is likely that depending on the volume of gravel, you may also be able to drop your clay rates to suit volume of sand.

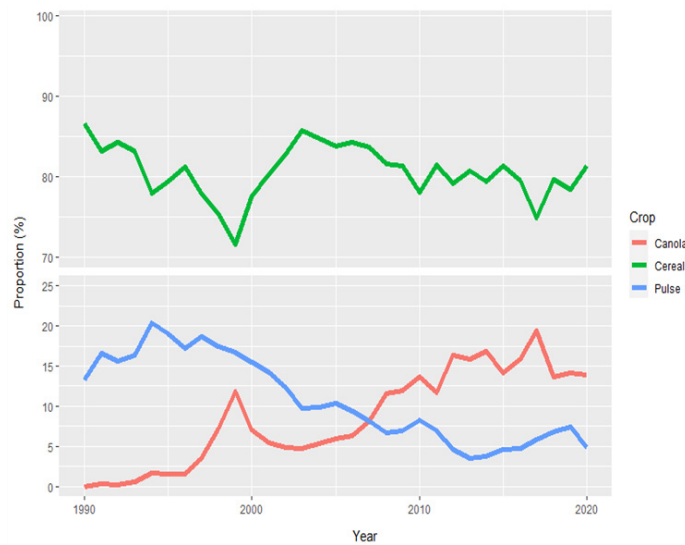
Claying forest gravels needs more research – the results in 2023 were not all that convincing and we look forward to continuing to monitor the site throughout 2024 to get a better understanding of claying on these soils over time.



Growing Faba beans on the South Coast – what have we learnt in 2022 and 2023?

Dan Fay, Research and Development Co-ordinator, and Lizzie von Perger, CEO, SCF

Legumes in our cropping system are in decline with data from the past 35 years in WA, showing canola has taken over from legumes in terms of area sown (see graph below, CSIRO, 2023). Canola has proved a very profitable break crop much to the detriment of the poor legume which often can't compete with canola prices and local delivery options.



SCF has been involved in a Grower Group Alliance-led GRDC project 'Closing the Economic Yield Gap for Grain Legumes in Western Australia'. Although this project has not been able to sort out the prices or local delivery (although we are trying to work on this in the background!), there have been some interesting agronomic results that have come out of the project.

SCF chose to focus on faba beans as they have shown the greatest propensity for withstanding waterlogging which is a common challenge in our part of the world. Faba beans, however, require more protection from disease than any other common broad-acre crop grown in WA. In 2021, local Frankland farmers recorded up to five different fungicide applications during the season to protect faba beans from chocolate spot, *Botrytis fabae*.

So, we completely understand why many farmers may be put off growing faba beans!

2022 FABIA BEAN DISEASE MANAGEMENT TRIALS

West Cranbrook, Preston Family

The trials developed in 2022 were aimed to look at various

agronomic levers that could be pulled to reduce the burden of disease in faba bean crops.

Here are the trials we designed and the disease results.

A small plot trial was designed and implemented, and included the following treatments sown across two times of sowing (22 April 2022 & 9 June 2022):

- PBA Amberley faba beans sown on 25mm tyne spacing
- PBA Amberley faba beans sown on 50mm tyne spacing
- PBA Bendoc faba beans sown on 25mm tyne spacing
- PBA Bendoc faba beans sown on 50mm tyne spacing
- PBA Jurien lupins sown on 25mm tyne spacing
- PBA Jurien lupins sown on 50mm tyne spacing

An additional farm-scale demonstration was co-located with the small plot trial to investigate the role of seeding rate in disease management. The treatments were:

- 120kg/ha PBA Bendoc
- 150kg/ha PBA Bendoc
- 180kg/ha PBA Bendoc

Table 1 - Small plot legume average disease assessment score

Legume	TOS1	TOS2
Faba beans- Amberley	2.84	1.00
Lupins -Jurien	0.915	1.17
Faba beans- Bendoc	2.98	1.47

Table 2 - Broadscale average disease assessment score

Bendoc seeding rates	Average disease assessment
120kg/ha	1.5
150kg/ha	2
180kg/ha	1.8



2023 ACID TOLERANT INOCULANT FOR FABA BEANS

Excel Farms, Frankland River

In 2023, there was still a bit of money in the kitty to be able to run another farm-scale trial, this time focussing on the soon-to-be-available acid tolerant inoculant for faba beans.

Why?

Lupins have been widely grown in the Albany Port Zone, with cultivars such as Jurien lupins proving particularly popular. These cultivars are bred for sandy, low pH soils with improved disease packages, making them ideal for the high rainfall zone (HRZ).

However, there has been a move away from the production of lupins in southern WA, due to a combination of market risk, susceptibility to waterlogging, and the overall reduction in livestock numbers reducing on-farm utilisation of the product.

Switch from lupins to faba beans in the HRZ

While there has been an overall decline in legume production across WA, as mentioned earlier, there has been an increase in production of faba beans in the high rainfall zone. There is still a difficulty associated with the marketing of faba beans, however high yield potential, high biomass, reasonable economic return, and the ability to handle waterlogging has made faba beans an increasingly popular legume break crop.

Once considered “failure beans”, the production levels of faba beans have historically been low in southern WA. This was primarily driven by a combination of high disease susceptibility, lodging issues, and unsuitability to the soils typical to southern WA.

It is likely that the lack of suitable soils has been the main driver of the low adoption of faba beans over time. Low pH is very commonplace in the sandy duplex and forest gravel soils that typify the WA HRZ. Faba beans typically require a soil pH of 5.5 to 8 to effectively nodulate, compared to 4.5 – 7 for lupins. Paddocks with a consistent soil pH above 5.5 are traditionally very rare in the HRZ of WA. Soil acidity mapping conducted by DPRID in 2013 showed that around 84% of agricultural soils were below the desired pH of 5.5. It should be noted that in the 10 years since this study was conducted, extensive liming programs have been undertaken across the WA HRZ by local farmers.

Soil pH at depth still an issue

An extensive study conducted by the NSW DPI showed a direct link between increases in soil pH through liming and nodulation score, plant biomass and yield. Nodulation supports legume plant growth, providing the plant with a source of nitrogen that drives the highly N enriched plant and seed. The ability of farmers to shift soil pH from 4's to 5/6's, has allowed farmers in this region to produce faba bean crops on land that was previously unsuitable and produce yields that were previously unattainable.

While liming has led to a significant improvement in faba bean production, the barrier posed by acid soils has not been completely overcome. The stratification of acid soils within the critical root zone for nodulation (0-20cm), poses a difficult issue. Surface applied lime is excellent at neutralising the top 5cm of the soil profile but it has limited effect on soil below this zone. The incorporation of lime is the obvious solution, however this requires large quantities of lime applied over time with an even dispersion of the lime source within this zone to lift the pH of the whole incorporation zone. As a result, liming has led to inconsistent pH within paddocks, and areas where the subsoil pH is still below the optimum level. This means that not all paddocks will achieve a pH suitable for faba bean production, and where crops can be grown after liming, there is still an issue with inconsistent crop growth within paddocks because of the localised variability.

New Elite Inoculant Strains – Acid tolerance

The issue of variable pH has potentially been overcome by new advancements in rhizobia. Group E and F rhizobia strains which are commercially available in a combination pack inoculate Faba beans, field peas, lentils and vetch, have an optimal pH range of >6, and are sensitive to soils with a pH <5. These products have recently been replaced by two new strains of group E and F, which have been developed by SARDI specifically for acid soils. These new strains lower the level of optimal inoculation to a pH of 5, and the effective nodulation to a pH 4.5, allowing faba beans to be grown anywhere lupins were previously successful.

2023 Acid Tolerant Inoculant Trial

In 2023, SCF set up a trial to examine the effectiveness of the new group F strain in a paddock scale demonstration. The treatments in the trial included the new acid tolerant group F inoculant, a



single rate of the standard inoculant, and half rate of the standard inoculant. The paddock chosen for the trial site had a pH of 4.8 from an aggregated sample taken across the site.

"The new 'acid-tolerant' strain will be the standard commercially available from 2024, so it is important to prove the effectiveness of the inoculant in local conditions. " ~ Dan Fay

Nodulation assessments were taken twice throughout the season on each of the inoculant treatments, an early assessment on 20 July and a late assessment on the 12 September. Both assessments showed a significant increase in nodulation score for the acid tolerant inoculant compared to the standard inoculant, both half and single rate (Figures 1 & 2). The acid tolerant inoculant also led to greater plant numbers when recorded on 20 July (Figure 3). Additionally, the acid tolerant inoculant treatments produced a much more even stand of plants when compared to the standard inoculant.

The 2023 results highlight the effectiveness of the new acid tolerant inoculant. This is good news as this is the only inoculant that will be available going forwards, phew!

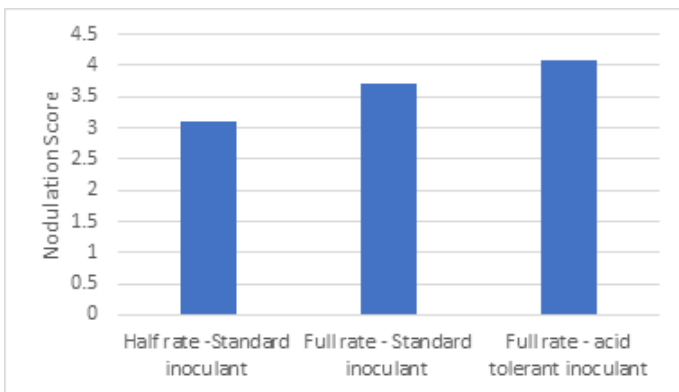


Figure 1: Early nodulation scores on each of the three treatments assessed on 20 July 2023.

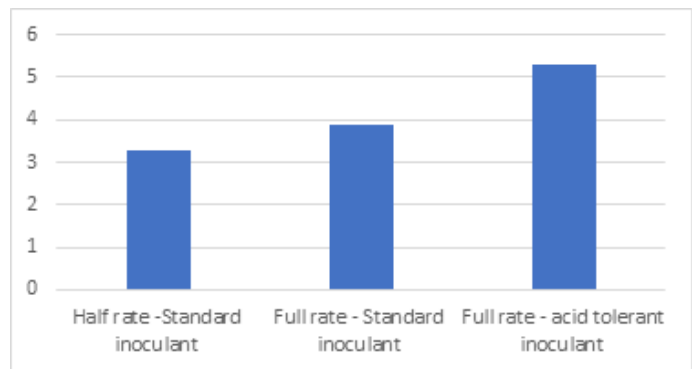


Figure 2: Late nodulation scores on each of the three treatments assessed on 12 September 2023.

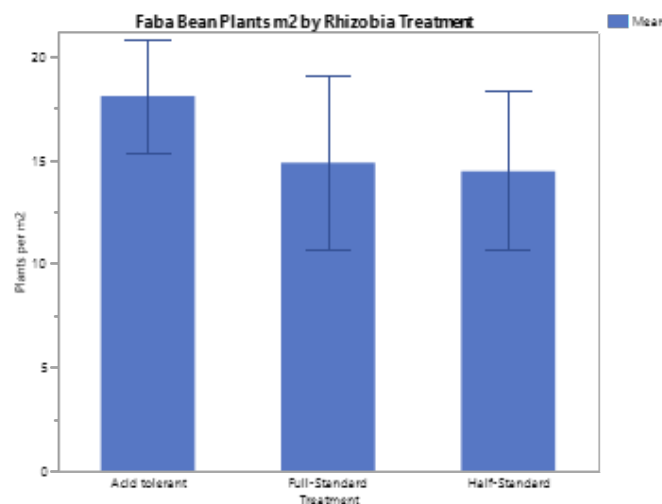


Figure 3: Faba bean plant counts for each of the three treatments.



Figure 4: Faba bean plant roots showing nodule formation with each of the three treatments (a) full rate standard (b) double rate standard and (c) acid tolerant.

OVERALL

Faba beans are proving to be a viable legume option for farmers in the HRZ of WA. SCF will continue to work with investors (i.e., GRDC) and industry to ensure agronomic issues are well-researched and viable legume markets (with local delivery options) are developed for farmers along the South Coast and in the lower Great Southern.



SW WA Drought Hub – Albany Node Update

Stirlings to Coast Farmers, as a 'Drought Hub Node', provides guidance to the nationally coordinated 'Future Drought Fund' on drought & climate resilience issues for the Albany Region.

WHAT'S NEW

'Dry Season Shorts' video series delivers practical drought resilience tips

The SW WA Hub's Extension and Adoption team caught up with farmers and industry professionals late last year to reflect on the variable 2023 season, characterised by dry conditions.

In these discussions, farmers shared valuable insights into the proactive measures they implemented to increase their farming systems' resilience to a drying climate. Agronomists offered expert advice to assist farmers in preparing for the challenges posed by future dry seasons.

- Tactics in a dry year, The use of fallow, with John Flannagan, grain grower in Pindar, WA
- Reducing costs and forward planning during a dry year, with Rod Birch, grain grower in Coorow, WA
- Herbicide carryover risk after a dry year, with Bevan Addison, Adama WA Market Development Manager
- Things to consider after a dry season preparing for 2024, with Grant Thompson, Director and Research Agronomist at Crop Circle Agronomy
- Ground cover and erosion management after a dry season, with Justin Laycock, DPIRD Research Scientist

The Hub team is gathering more insights to further build their Dry Season Resources library.

The 'Dry Season Shorts' series can be found at <https://hub.gga.org.au/resources/dry-season-resources/>

Listen to the latest podcast on 'Managing risk using head, heart and gut'

In the first episode of Season 2 of the South-West WA Hub's Dry Season Resources podcast, host Shannon Beattie chats with Cameron Weeks from Planfarm and Cam Nicholson from Nicon Rural Services about making risky decisions.

They discuss knowing about the extremes, and then managing the risks (both good and bad) around those extremes - using head, heart and gut.

The Dry Season Resources podcast is brought to you by the South-West WA Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation

Hub, funded by the Future Drought Fund.

Subscribe to the Hub's podcast on Apple Podcasts, Spotify or wherever you get your podcasts. To find out more about the South-West WA Hub's podcasts head to <https://hub.gga.org.au/resources/dry-season-resources/>

SW WA Hub's Dry Season Resources

The South-West Drought Hub provides links and access to several dry season resources for growers, grower groups, and the broader agricultural community. This information is sourced from DPIRD, R&D corporations and others and will aid in farmer's decision making to help manage farming businesses that are experiencing a dry season.

The Drought Hub has pulled these valuable resources together into one location for the livestock, grains and horticulture industries and include information on manging livestock in a dry season, and crop agronomy decisions in dry seasons. These resources will be continuously updated on an as needs basis.

Head to <https://hub.gga.org.au/resources/dry-season-resources/swwahub-dry-season-resources/> to find out more.

Change in winter rain and temperature

Dr Meredith Guthrie, Senior Climate Research Scientist from DPIRD, has produced a couple of charts after recent discussions in a Hub Node Lead meeting. These maps show change in heat and rainfall for the SW land division using the RCP 4.5 greenhouse gas scenario, which shows how the globe is currently tracking (Figures 1 & 2, next page). There isn't a lot of change predicted in rainfall, although there will be less annual rainfall overall, particularly on the south coast, but temperature is the real concern with some big increases predicted across the entire south-west.

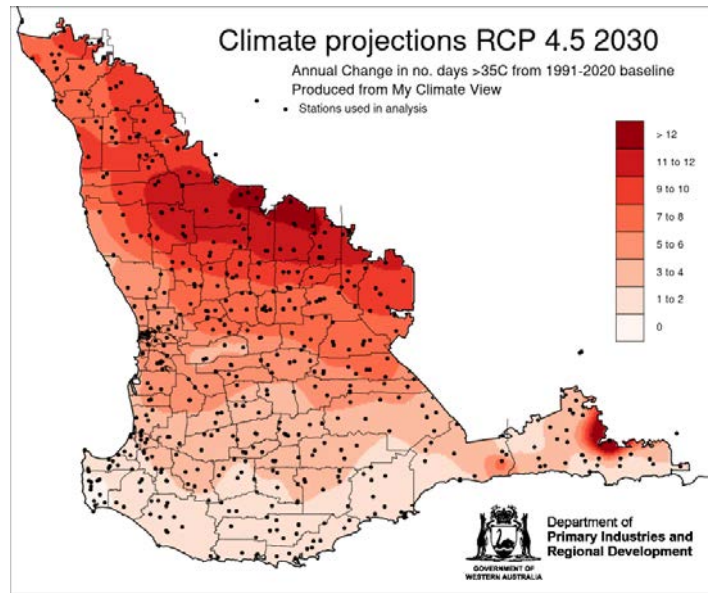
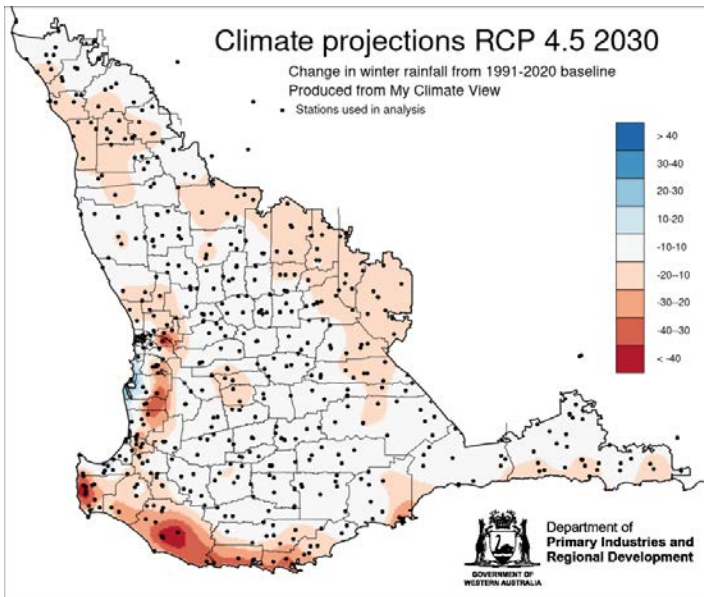


Figure 1. Change in winter rainfall under RCP 4.5 2030 greenhouse gas scenario from 1991-2020 baseline.

Figure 2. Annual change in number of days >35C under RCP 4.5 2030 greenhouse gas scenario from 1991-2020 baseline.

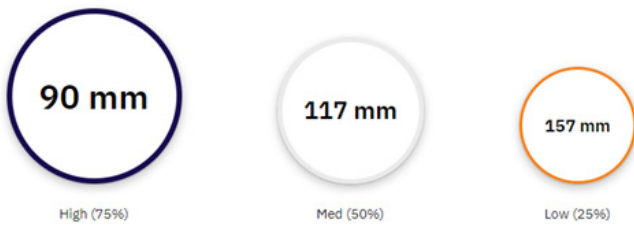
Medium Term Rainfall Outlooks for the SCF Region

The following medium-term outlooks for South Stirling (Figure 3) and Frankland River (Figure 4) have been taken from My Climate View <http://myclimateview.com.au/>. The key takeaways from the below figures are:

- Less than average rainfall is expected for the break of the season (March to May 2024) for both locations.
- The predictive accuracy is better for South Stirling than Frankland River (so here's to hoping they are wrong!).

SOUTH STIRLING - MEDIUM TERM OUTLOOK

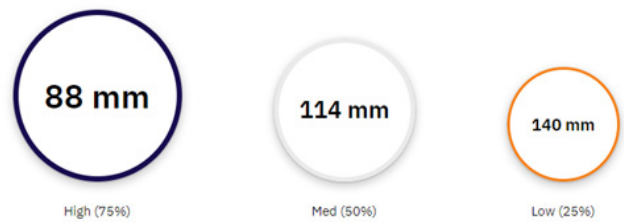
Rainfall: Chance of receiving at least.... (March 2024 to May 2024)



★ ★ ☆ There is MODERATE past accuracy for this forecast at your location. Past accuracy is a measure of how well the model has performed for this time of year in the past.

FRANKLAND RIVER - MEDIUM TERM OUTLOOK

Rainfall: Chance of receiving at least.... (March 2024 to May 2024)



★ ☆ ☆ There is LOW past accuracy for this forecast at your location. Past accuracy is a measure of how well the model has performed for this time of year in the past.

Rainfall at your location



Rainfall at your location



To keep up to date with all that is happening with the Southwest WA Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub and anything climate resilience related, check out their web page and subscribe to their newsletter here - <https://hub.gga.org.au/>

If you are interested in knowing more and being involved in project development for improving climate resilience in our local area, give Kathi McDonald (Albany Regional Node) a call on 0408 418 531 or email kathi.mcdonald@scfarmers.org.au and check out the Albany Node webpage for further locally relevant information - <https://www.scfarmers.org.au/swwadroughthub-albany>.



SCF members & sponsors squishing snails for a good cause!

SCF was recently successful in a GRDC tender aimed at equipping local farmers and advisers along the South Coast with the tools and knowledge needed to dissect small conical snails. The aim of the dissection game is to determine if the albumen gland is enlarged as an indicator of the snail's reproductive status i.e., are they getting ready to lay eggs.

Although not news to SCF members, the small conical snails can attack emerging crops and can contaminate grain at harvest. One of the keys to successful control is a robust baiting program and the information generated by the project hopes to inform timing of baiting better.

Snail bait timing can be tricky with complications such as rainfastness of the baits, timing fitting in baiting amongst other time-critical seeding jobs, and reproductive status of the snails playing a part on deciding when to bait.

Workshops were held on the 14 & 15 February in Mount Barker, South Stirling, Jerramungup, Ravensthorpe and Esperance with our very own Phil Honey (with much help from Svetlana Micic, DPIRD) running the roadshow. Over 55 farmers and advisers were trained in the art of snail dissecting. It was not for the faint hearted or for those with shaky hands!

Thirty of those trained in the workshops have put their hands up to continue with the project. They have been given their very own dissecting microscope (for keeps – thanks GRDC!) and will be starting to collect and dissect snails across the South Coast and lower Great Southern regions in the next month or two.

The data collected, which will include albumen size and presence of green material in the gut, will be collated onto a website that has been developed by Phil. All farmers and advisers will be able to jump onto this website and view a map that provides an idea of how close the snails are to laying eggs in their local region. The information will be updated daily as the collectors enter their data in from across the South Coast. An example of what the map will look like is shown below (not real data).

Finally, we'd just like to thank all the SCF members and sponsors who supported the workshops, especially those who are continuing to assist with the collections and dissections – you guys rock, best of luck and may steady hands prevail!



Harvest wrap 2023/24



The CBH Group officially marked the end of the 2023/24 harvest in Western Australia on 15 January, with growers across the state delivering 12.5 million tonnes of grain into the network.

While the 2023/24 harvest officially started on the same date as the previous year (27 September) in the Geraldton Zone, this year's harvest was smaller and finished earlier than last year's record crop.

CBH received the 12.5 million tonnes across 104 sites in the network, with 407,000 tonnes the biggest day of receipts (compared to 603,000 tonnes in 2022/23).

Three daily site receipt records were set at Chillinup, Pingrup and Gairdner and no new site total receipt records were reached. In comparison to the 2022/23 harvest, the co-operative registered 53 sites that set daily tonnage records across the network, and 45 site total receipt records.

Chief Operations Officer Mick Daw said this 2023/24 harvest was a reminder of the highs and lows of agriculture.

"Early on in the year, it was clear for many growers that 2023 would not be a repeat of the previous two bumper harvests," Mr Daw said.

"As conditions worsened and estimates came in during June and July, we started making plans to accommodate seasonal conditions in our services this harvest.

"We anticipated this year's crop to yield higher screenings and higher protein for many growers.

"To address this, CBH introduced additional utility grades, changed quality optimisation limits and rules, and made high moisture grading system changes, to create more opportunities for growers to capture the value of their grain.

"Pleasingly our safety performance improved slightly this harvest, and our incident response continued to deliver better safety outcomes across the network.

"I want to sincerely thank all CBH employees, contractors, and growers for their tireless work to safely and efficiently bring in this year's harvest. The sustained level of professionalism

and commitment to the task is a testament to the strength of Western Australia's grain growing communities."

Zone total receipts were down across the board, with the Albany Zone taking the largest amount of 3.2 million tonnes across the network.

Zone	2023/24 Tonnes	2022/23 Tonnes
Albany	3.2 million	4.5 million
Esperance	2.5 million	3.6 million
Geraldton	1.4 million	4 million
Kwinana North	2.3 million	6.2 million
Kwinana South	3.1 million	4.4 million
TOTAL	12.5 million	22.7 million

Figure 1: Total Zone Receipts 2023/24 vs 2022/23

CBH is now focused on the 2024 outloading program, and ensuring more grain tonnes get to port in the first half of the year to help drive better prices for growers in line with CBH's Path to 2033 Strategy.

Australia’s agricultural sector is “moving confidently into 2024”, with an overall positive outlook for the nation’s farmers and agribusiness industries in the year ahead, Rabobank says in its newly-released annual outlook.

The agricultural banking specialist says a combination of better-than-expected seasonal conditions and lower input costs has helped set up the sector for a strong year. And, while agri commodity prices are “well down on the highs seen over the previous two years”, the bank’s price forecasts point to “continued positive farm margins in key agricultural sectors in 2024”.

Global economic headwinds, however, are set to continue, the bank cautions in its flagship Australian Agribusiness Outlook 2024, with ongoing concerns particularly around China’s economy and import volumes, as well as the impact of geopolitical issues on freight. While locally, a tight labour market will continue to present challenges for Australia’s farm sector and agribusiness industries.

Report lead author, RaboResearch general manager Australia and New Zealand Stefan Vogel said the “major agri sectors” were moving into 2024 with a confident outlook, after “El Nino didn’t turn out as bad as feared, with recent significant rainfall received across most farming areas except Western Australia”.

“Grain farmers are set to plan more optimistically for the purchase of farm inputs and the upcoming planting period for winter crops like wheat, barley and canola,” he said, “especially in the growing areas outside Western Australia, which was the only region that hasn’t received much rain.

“For beef and sheep producers, the outlook for farm-grown feed in the first

half of 2024 overall looks more promising, allowing them to hold on to more of their livestock and go to market with heavier weight lambs for example.”

PRICE OUTLOOK

While agricultural commodity prices remain well down from the highs reached in 2022, the outlook is overall more positive for 2024, with the bank’s Rabobank Rural Commodity Price Index pointing to prices tracking at improved levels in the year ahead and near the five-year average.

“Price developments will vary per sector,” Mr Vogel said. “Grain prices are likely to remain under pressure, as markets globally and locally battle with a supply outlook for 2024 that is more plentiful than in past years. For a significant 2024 price upside for grain, the world would need to see weather-related supply shortages arise.”

IMPROVED INPUT COSTS

Farm input costs are also set to be lower this year, Mr Vogel said.

“Farm input prices globally – for fertilisers and plant protection products – are forecast to be below last season,” he said. “As Australia imports most of those products and continues to work through local inventories, we remain confident that costs on farm will look better than last year.

“A good part of farm inputs available in Australia last season were still reflecting the cost of Covid and Black Sea war price shocks, but now lower global prices should make their way through to be reflected in Australian inventory.”

GEOPOLITICAL RISK

While geopolitics and the escalation of international conflicts could result in a big upward swing in energy prices – which would have a knock-on increase in the cost of farm inputs – for now, crude oil prices have remained “surprisingly subdued” despite heightened Middle East tensions, the bank says.

GLOBAL ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

The global economic outlook – while better than in 2023 – is still subdued for the year ahead, the Rabobank report says, and this will continue to create headwinds for Australia’s agricultural exporters.

LOCAL ECONOMIC DRIVERS

Locally, there is more positive news on the economic front, the report says, with interest rates forecast to plateau for most of the next six months before rate cuts are expected to come in towards the last quarter of the year.

The Australian dollar – which since the end of December has seen a reversing of strong gains recorded in the last quarter of 2023 – is expected to strengthen modestly again towards late 2024.

SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability – and especially emissions reductions – will remain a key theme for the year ahead and into the long-term future, the report says, as Australia and the world continues to work on reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

To find out more about Rabobank, contact Rabobank’s Albany team on (08) 9844 5600 or subscribe to RaboResearch Food & Agribusiness Australia & New Zealand on your podcast app.

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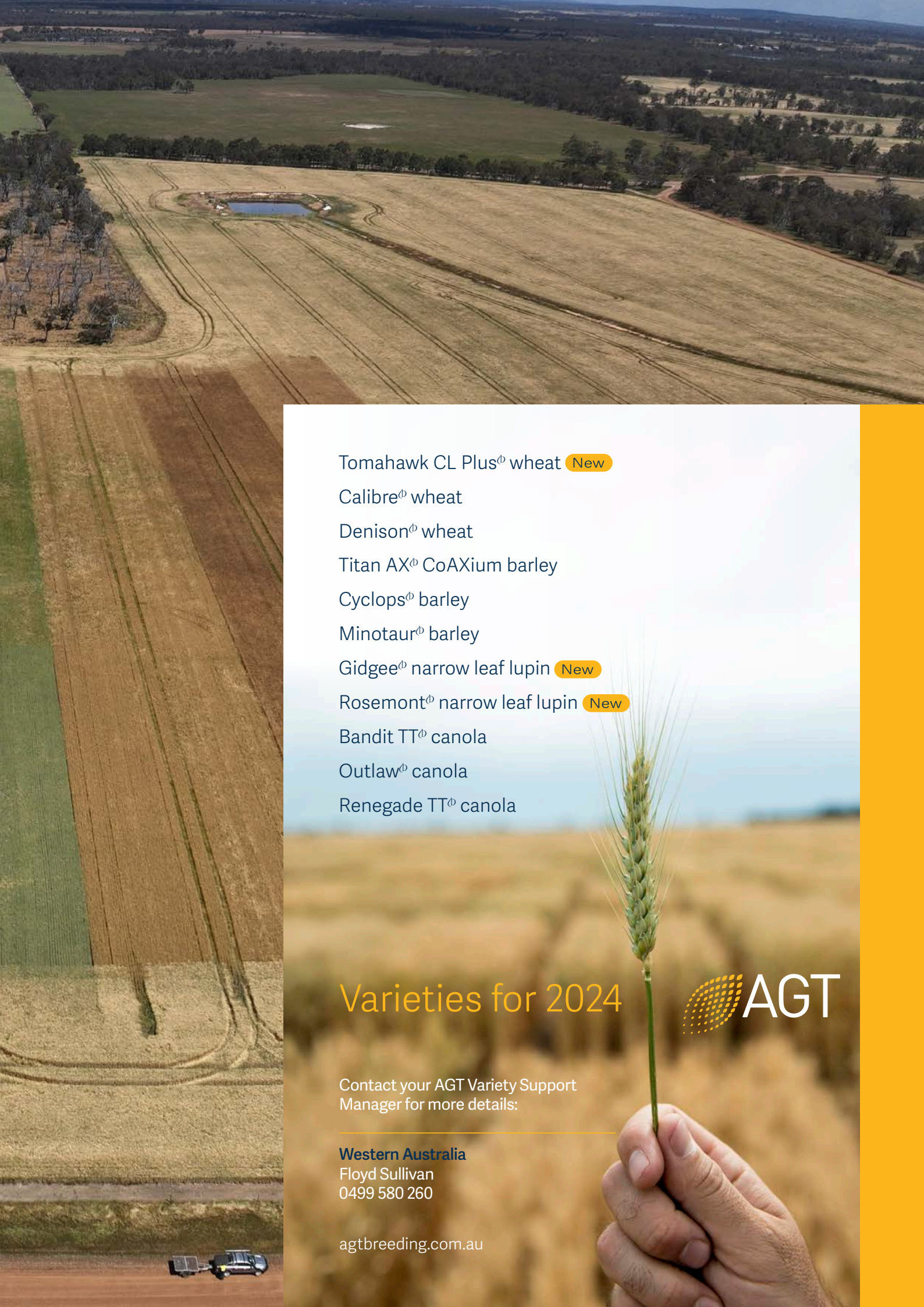


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SCF out&about



In December, SCF said a big thank you to our sponsors in the way of a Bus Tour. We took them around some of our member farms to introduce them to the happenings on the farms as well as pop in at a local cellar door.



Our newest su-purr-visor inspecting the newest delivery - a brand new plot sprayer!



Dan processing data in a sea of harvest samples.



Lizzie was out with Kym Perry, Kate Muirhead (SARDI) and Svet Micic (DPIRD) installing nail monitoring cameras in March this year.



The whole team together for our end of year planning session for 2024.



The SCF team had a chrispy BBQ and send off for Sheridan down at Middletown Beach,



The SCF team popped up to Perth for the 2024 GRDC Crop Updates with newcomer, Liam Gutrie.



STIRLINGS TO COAST



Community Calendar

20 MARCH 2024 -

On the Road to Carbon Neutral Farming - Albany Workshop
to find out more head to South Coast Natural Resource Management

23 MARCH 2024 -

Dancing in the Dirt Gala Ball
to find out more head to dancinginthedirt.org

24 MARCH 2024 -

Western Beef - Rumen8-Beef Training
to find out more jeisane.alis@gmail.com or 0403 327 216

25 JULY

SCF Community BBQ Kendenup

26 JULY

SCF Community BBQ Manypeaks

11 SEPTEMBER

SCF Spring Field Day South Stirlings

12 SEPTEMBER

SCF Spring Field Day Perrilup