

Consuming from our paddocks

From May, moving into June, we have had about 2/3rd of May's 1969-2010 average for Warracknabeal. Does it herald another dry winter? Will the ground stay hard underfoot, or will there be 'good' times when it's slippery from a muddy surface? Will young trees be able to go it on their own over winter, or still need watering? Do we have enough feed for the stock? Will the crops grow well it's not just about us, our food and incomes, this has global implications as the Wimmera-Mallee provides food for the world.

This time of year brings anticipation, a looking forward to the disappearance of the browns in our landscape and their replacement by greens, especially when bright greens of new growth sprout up from our soils. It is always exciting to see how a good rain will be consumed in the ground. May gave us two 'rainy' days of 7mm, followed by one with 15 mm. For a day following that, Mallee Spadefoots croaked around our backyard telling us there has been enough rain to soak down and re-awaken them. A day or so later, the bare soil in the backyard regained its green cover. In the paddock out my window, the barley crop my husband sowed, just before the third rain, had its barley shoots emerge several days later. The bulbs came up ... and weeds. I transplanted some more Saltbush hoping it will take. Our Texel ewes have been on the home paddocks on dry feed and hay awaiting the return of green pastures. Having picked the pumpkins in the backyard, we have already consumed several pots of lovely soup- my favourite use for them- with the scraps going back to the soil. Driving around the Wimmera, I look for the pleasurable greening of the roadsides – if they haven't been graded away too much.



Regionally

My regional paddock extended to eight schools in May, as I visited with an introductory soil session supporting the International Year of Soils (IYS) and its slogan "*Healthy soils for a healthy life*". There have been two main resources for this- what the children know already and can share with and teach to each other, and the up-close and in-use photos of the 'Soil Selfies' project. The Soil Selfies photos had such a range of plants growing in soils from our Wimmera and eastern states that they could help the children see that, while many plants give us food, there are also many others that contribute fitness and pleasure for our health. We need to consume both groups for our healthy lives, and both need to consume things in healthy soils to grow. How you thought about how this IYS theme reveals itself in your life?

Global



My global paddock extended to Berlin in April where the Soil Selfies photos had their first use on display at the Global Soil Week Forum. The first day the three boards and table featured the Wimmera, the next was for Victoria and the third for the eastern states. It was an amazing experience sharing our soils, their uses and issues with people of other countries. I especially enjoyed talking to people about the Wimmera, so that it became more than a word to them.



The discussion sessions focussed on soil in the new global Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's). The SDG's have been written to apply for all countries, not just 'developing' ones. Healthy soils are needed to achieve most of them. While climate, water and biodiversity issues have been in the news for many years now, 'soil' has not been so upfront. This needs to change quickly, for it too is a basis for life. Maintaining quantity and quality of soils has links to other issues and is part of holistic systems of the Earth's environment. GSW's theme *Soils – the substance of transformation* was thus on two levels: the paddock; and SDG's.

Global



Going back to the global paddock in June, what can you do for World Environment Day June 5, with its 2015 message "*Seven Billion Dreams. One planet. Consume with care.*" Perhaps think about your food that day, and the impact your consumption of it has on the planet? What about discovering food in another country? For example, I have just added a Snapshot to my Family Farming website at <http://familyfarms.enviroed4all.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/SaanapuSamoa.pdf> . Visit the cooking and growing of traditional foods as shown to me by a Samoan boy last year. In easy-to-dig basaltic soils, natural or recycled materials are the main farming tools. In the **umu** oven, only local materials from the ground or banana trees are needed to create delicious meals, which have little impact on their environment. It is also a great example of healthy soils providing a healthy life.



I hope you may celebrate your soils at this time of year, for its health contribution to your life.