

In my winter paddock.

This winter of feeling cold and wishing for real rain is nearly over, without any fun sloshing in muddy gumboots. The ground is dry and hard. The clays are already starting to crack. Our biggest winter rains have only been of 8mm at a time. The signs are worrying again this year, but if you heard Dale Grey's talk on our weather at Speed Mallee Machinery Field Days, you might be more aware of the statistical chances for making it through spring ok.

Lambing



In our paddocks, winter is lambing season. It's a challenge, but a delight, to safely deliver a stuck lamb before there is a real problem, save one who has got too cold, and help reluctant first-time mums to allow their lambs to feed! I love watching little lambs jump on four legs in their first days and then run with each other for fun after a couple of weeks.



We have two noisy demanding cross-breds, Hou and Dini, who are always eager to greet us- bottle or not. They were banished from the paddock beside the house after they ate the tops off my bulbs before they even flowered. (I am not impressed to be left with only one jonquil flower this year- I miss that late winter beauty from my soil.)

Soil Ed



Out in my regional paddock, Soil Education incursions in eight primary schools for 200 children and their teachers has kept me busy. Have you introduced your children to your soil, especially as it's the International Year of Soil?

In July, we discovered the many (brown) shades of our soils, signs of health in where they come from, and the most important values the children held for them. In August, we investigated the soils with physical and chemical tests as National Science Week events.

It is wonderful to see children's reactions to seeing grains of soil under a magnifying glass, how soil reacts when water is dropped onto it, if water forms a clear or murky layer on it in a simulated rain event, and how to separate the sand, silt, clay and plant matter into layers.

Wimmera stories to the world

Out in my global paddock, in mid-winter I was at the World Environmental Educators Congress in Gotenburg, Sweden. It was an amazing experience with educators from 70 countries, and the focus on advancing sustainable practises across the globe in the face of many environmental challenges.



I brought the Wimmera to this global forum in a workshop using the suite of books, written by children with me at St Joseph's Hopetoun y3-6 class, Beulah F-6 and Rainbow y5/6 PS under the 2012-2014 "Sustainability and our Farmlands Environments" project - they were wonderfully received. It's a privilege to share some information about farming and our environment here with other people in the world, especially in the context of sustainability.

Swiss/Dane learnings



We also had the privilege to visit some Texel sheep farmers in Switzerland and Denmark. It was exciting to discover how their farms on the Swiss Alps and hillsides and Denmark's flatter lands were managed and what they were doing with their breeding and why.



We discovered shared farm issues: the loss of young people from farming, the loss of good agricultural land to urban growth, actions to restrict foreign ownership of farmland and low farm gate prices for produce. One response we had not anticipated was the preference to go organic and sell as local as possible directly to users.



We felt the great pride in local produce in the places we visited, paraded at Denmark's Herning Ag Show, as local produce in town markets and on restaurant menus which declare their meat/fish source even down to each dish. With all the interest in cooking shows on TV, it makes one wonder what effect it might have on urban folk if our restaurants started to do the same?

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