

The SA Soils Scoop

with LUCY PORTER

Building networks and sharing knowledge about the health and management of South Australian soils

The SA Regional Soils Coordinator role is part of a national network of Regional Soil Coordinators (RSC), *supported by the Australian Government through funding from the Climate-Smart Agriculture Program under the Natural Heritage Trust.*

The Regional Soil Coordinators work across all levels of industry to understand stakeholder needs and engage with regional and national networks to build the knowledge base and capacity in soil management. The RSCs aim to help inform, protect and develop healthy soils within agricultural systems.

Water Use Efficiency Workshops

In October we hosted a series of four collaborative workshops across South Australia, bringing together more than 60 growers, advisors, and soil researchers to explore opportunities for improving soil and plant water use efficiency. Groups reflected on what agronomic practices work well, identified knowledge gaps, and drafted project ideas tailored to local needs. Key themes included peer-led soil training, managing soil constraints, improving pastures and crop rotations,



refining nutrient management, and assessing the economics of soil amelioration practices. These workshops have laid the groundwork for future soil extension projects, with outcomes now being refined for



partner feedback and next steps. For more details see the article published on our website: Collaborative workshops shape future soil research projects focused on improving water use efficiency - SA Drought Hub

National Soil CoP

On Tuesday November 25 the Regional Soil Coordinators and Smart Soils Community of Practice convened in Armidale for their second face to face meeting of the year. The group collaborated on group tasks and goals, spoke with a panel of Soil CRC members (Cooperative Research Centre for High Performance Soils) toured the facilities at ICT international ICT International to learn of the latest in scientific plant sensing and soil moisture technologies. The group visited two cattle properties in the



Armidale districts to speak with Sam and Mitch about their farming enterprises, the challenges of managing soil on leased land, herd management and seasonal variability.

Soil Science Australia Soil Judging Competition – Armidale NSW

The 2025 Australian Soil Judging competition was held in Armidale by the University of New England from November 26 - 28, and this year I was fortunate enough to participate.

You may be thinking, what is soil judging and why is it a competition? The soil judging competition provides an environment for learning through a unique hands-on experience with a group of enthusiastic, like-minded people, where you can ask questions, learn from one another, network and upskill to national standards. Soil judging is a three day event, where teams of students and early-mid career professionals from all over Australia (and a couple of teams from New Zealand) work with a coach to learn how to describe the characteristics of soil and how to classify it to the Australian standards across two jam packed days, and then on the third day they compete among themselves and as teams to see how much they have learnt.

Now, you may also be thinking why would anyone want to do that? Well, soil judging competitions provide valuable training and networking for upcoming soil researchers and young professionals working in agriculture, natural resource management, sustainability, forestry, viticulture, horticulture and even mining. Understanding the properties of soil, such as identifying its texture, structure, soil horizons, mottles, coarse fragments, landscape features, chemistry and physics allows us to better understand what makes soils







different from one another, which can help us make better informed land management decisions and obtain a deeper understanding of the systems that our food and fibre are produced on.

This year more than 200 participants, volunteers and professionals made the event possible. This was the largest competition to date, and the largest soil competition ever to be held outside the US. We had two Regional Soil Coordinator teams, Sallys Angels and RSC team 2, both coached by the incredibly knowledgeable and patient Sally McInnes-Clarke of NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy and the Environment. Whilst it was Sallys first soil judging event, she not only coached our two teams, but also participated in the competition as part of a wild card selection of coaches names pulled from a hat on the morning of competition day and did extremely well. Thanks for being a great sport and sharing your wisdom with us Sally! A huge congratulations to my fellow South Aussies where the teams did exceptionally well taking home numerous trophies including the South Pacific Soil Judging Trophy (Overall Winners), the Walker Family Trophy (Best Early Career Professionals), the social media award, two of the top three early career professionals individual categories (2nd and equal 3rd), and 3rd in the university student teams. Also a huge congratulations to my regional Soil coordinator colleagues, the RSC Team 2 who placed equal 3rd in the early mid-career category.

The next soil judging competition will be held in Western Australia in 2026 right before the SSA conference. Keep an eye on their website for further information Home - Soil Science Australia

World Soil Day

December 5 is World Soil Day, an international day to celebrate and focus attention on the importance of healthy soil and to advocate for the sustainable management of soil resources.

This year to celebrate the occasion, we hosted Cultivating Connections, a networking day hosted at the Waite campus on December 4, with the goal to better connect researchers with agricultural professionals working with farmers across South Australia's regional communities. With over 50 attendees, spanning research organisations including: CSIRO, South Australian Research and Development Institute (SARDI), University of South Australia, The University of Adelaide, Flinders University; government agencies such as Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF), Department of Primary Industries and Regions (PIRSA), Department for Environment and Water (DEW), Alinytjara Wilurara Landscape Board, Hills and Fleurieu Landscape Board, Northern and Yorke Landscape Board, as well as consultants, agronomists, and resellers we had a great mix of expertise, skilled professionals and information being shared in the room.

After brief introductions from myself as Regional Soil Coordinator, Amanda Schapel from the PIRSA Soil Collaboration Centre and Erinne from the Soil Science Australia Local branch, we jumped into ice breaker activities to mingle and meet people in the room.

The morning consisted of rotations through eight information and demonstration stations which highlight a range of local research, resources





and expertise available. Groups spent 10 minutes at each station to learn about topics and ask questions, before rotating throughout the room. Stations consisted of demonstrations from:

1. Young in Soil and Earth Sciences Group: Soil hand texturing and field testing
2. Coopers Farm Supplies Mt Torrens: Pasture plants and roots from field trial
3. DEW: NatureMaps and soil data
4. Northern and Yorke Landscape Board: Soil Ute guide extension resources
5. SARDI: Phytophthora research
6. PIRSA Soil Collaboration Centre: Soil factors influencing carbon estimates
7. The University of Adelaide: Soil technology near-infrared spectroscopy (NIR) research
8. Soil Alumni: Red brown earths and soil erosion management

At lunch, we celebrated by cutting the World Soil Day cake which had been made by local Young in Soil and Earth Sciences / University of Adelaide student Stephanie Lokan,



demonstrating a soil profile cake complete with mottles, segregations and abrupt boundaries. The afternoon session consisted of a panel discussion led by soil alumni and farmer Mary-Anne Young, with panellists Stephen Lang of the University of Adelaide, Bonnie Armor Hills and Fleurieu Landscape Board, Adam Krahnert of Coopers Farm Supplies Mt Torrens and Lynne Macdonald of CSIRO discussing ideas on how research and industry organisations can work together to provide up to date information to better equip farmers with data and knowledge relevant to their local conditions and environmental challenges (such as low rainfall here in SA).

Calendar

Harvest and holidays are here, so the Soil event calendar will kick off again next year when newsletters start again – have a Merry Christmas and stay safe on your break.

CONTACT ME FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:
Lucy Porter, Regional Soil Coordinator, SA Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub, Adelaide University
E: lucy.porter@adelaide.edu.au

SMART SOILS FOR AGRICULTURE

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