

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.

Hi there,

What a fabulous spring!

New resources alert:

The Department of Environment and Water (DEW) have recently published two new technical reports

1. Trends in water use efficiency of wheat in South Australia 1961–2024

This report, produced in collaboration with PIRSA, provides a 60-year snapshot of South Australian wheat farming, showing how effectively our cropping systems have converted available water into grain over the decades.

The overall story is a good one:

- Wheat water use efficiency (WUE) has more than doubled since 1970.
- Statewide WUE increased by 115%, from 7.3 kg/ha/mm in 1970 to 15.7 kg/ha/mm in 2024.
- 84% of this increase has occurred since 1992, highlighting the substantial gains made in recent decades.
- WUE has increased across all South Australia's cropping districts, although the rate of improvement varies between districts.
- The report links these gains to decades of changes in agronomic practices, wheat genetics and soil management.
- The analysis also provides an interesting picture of how some of the factors limiting production have changed over time, and where opportunities remain to improve WUE.

2. Soil acidity and management in the Yorke Peninsula district

The report was produced in team collaboration with SARDI Soils and brings together soil monitoring, mapping and economic analysis to better understand where acidity is occurring across the Yorke Peninsula and the potential area it could expand to in the future, the potential impacts on crop production and management options.

Key findings from the report include:

- Around 66,000 ha of agricultural land on the Yorke Peninsula is estimated to be currently affected by soil acidity, with a total of 109,900 ha potentially at risk.
- Soil acidity was estimated to result in around $6.3 million in production losses across the region in 2020.
- The importance of regular soil testing and timely lime application to maintain productive soils and reduce future acidity risk is highlighted.
- Further management approaches are considered, including spading, delving and clay spreading, where these are suited to local soil conditions.

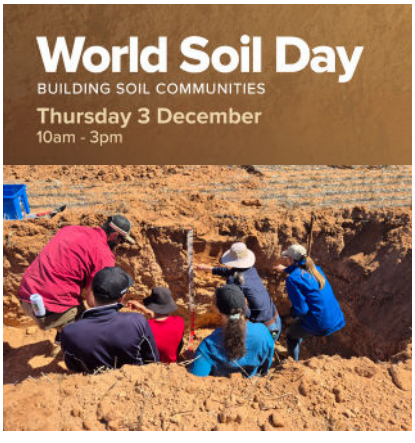
Local activity:

Upcoming Soil Networking event - World Soil Day

This World Soil Day, celebrate with us at our Building Soil Communities networking event on Thursday 3 December at Adelaide University's Waite Campus.

The day is all about demonstrations, networking and building stronger connections across the South Australian soil and agricultural communities. Hear the latest research, connect with others working in across the local agricultural sector, and explore the links between research and practice that better support sustainable farming and land management systems.

Visit our website for more information and to register.



Program Launch - Stress Testing Regenerative Agricultural Practices (STRAP)

Ag Excellence Alliance and CSIRO have launched a major five-year research collaboration to test regenerative agriculture practices under southern Australia's dryland farming conditions.

The Stress Testing Regenerative Agriculture Practices (STRAP) project will combine long term trials, regional demonstrations, detailed soil and environmental measurements and advanced modelling to drought resilience, sustainable productivity and long-term farm viability.

Check out their website for more information.

Sandy Soils Masterclass

Growers and advisers came together at Bowmans for the CSIRO Sandy Soils Masterclass held in early September to explore how to identify, understand and manage soil constraints impacting sandy soil performance.

The day included soil focused elements including a soil pit interpretation and demonstrations on identifying soil constraints, and discussion on practical amelioration options including deep ripping, spading, mixing and inversion.

The program combined research with grower experience, with producer Brett Roberts discussing the challenges and lessons learnt managing the property, followed by agronomic discussion explaining responses to different amelioration practices and their impacts on crop establishment, water use, nutrition, root growth and yield. The afternoon focused on the practicalities of "making it pay", discussion around the costs, risks and expected returns of amelioration.

Sandy soil management fact sheets and resources are available online.







National Activity

The Regional Soil Coordinators joined the National Sustainable Agriculture Facilitators (SAF) Conference in October at the National Museum of Australia in Canberra on 20-21 October.

The conference focused on sustainable land management across the country, exchanging knowledge, experiences and best practices across the SAF network. Under the themes of extension, tools and technology, carbon and natural capital, and Australian Government programs, we heard from Bureau of Meteorology and Reefwise facilitators about putting climate data and precision tech to use on the ground, as well as farmers, advisors and consultants on the latest programs and initiatives.



Day 2 of the conference focused on First Nations led approaches in sustainable agriculture and food security and the circular economy, before embarking on field trips to Gibraltar View in the Tidbinbilla Valley, hosted by ACT NRM, Landcare ACT and local farmers.





Soil in Profile

Sustainable Agriculture Facilitator: Mick Brown

Sustainable Agriculture Facilitators (SAFs) work across Australia to link farmers, landholders and community groups with information, funding, training opportunities and expertise to support producers to manage land sustainably.

They build partnerships across organisations and form a national network. Established through a $40.7 million Australian Government investment through the Climate-Smart Agriculture Program, SAFs support on-ground sustainable agriculture projects in their local regions.

In the Limestone Coast region, the role is held by Mick Brown, based in Mount Gambier. Mick brings hands-on experience in conventional horticulture, organic agroforestry and pasture dieback field research, and holds a Bachelor of Science (Regenerative Agriculture) from Southern Cross University.

At its core, the SAF role is about helping farmers make informed decisions about their soils and their businesses, backed by sound evidence.

"Input costs, seasonal variability and a constant stream of new products and practices all compete for farmers' attention," Mick says.

"Part of my role is helping farmers sort the proven from the promising and the promising from the hype, then giving them a safe way to try things in their own paddocks."

That perspective comes from experience.

"Having worked in both conventional and organic systems, I know what it's like to be the one making the call in the paddock and living with the result. That's why I do this job: I want to help farmers."



Farmer-led projects

The Limestone Coast Landscape Board supports on-ground projects through its Climate-smart Landscapes (CsL) grants, available to producers in the dairy, beef, sheep, horticulture and cropping industries.

The grants put funding back in landholders' hands, supporting projects they design and run on their own properties. Projects are tested under local conditions, across different soil types and seasons, and tackle the issues farmers themselves care about.

"Farmers trust what they see working over the fence far more than anything we could put in a brochure," Mick says.

His key message is about learning from every trial: "There's no such thing as a failed trial if you learn from it and share it. Some of the most valuable conversations in our network come from the things that didn't work."

Current CsL projects cover:

- Regenerative agriculture practices
- Soil enhancement for grazing
- WaterSmart crop sensing
- Sustainable soil improvement

The four current CsL projects are listed on the Landscape Board website.

Summaries for each project will be added soon, with case studies to follow in the coming months.

The CsL Network

Every project funded through the CsL grants is also linked to the CsL Network, a Community of Practice connecting farmers, agronomists, researchers and industry across the Limestone Coast.

This group meet online quarterly to share updates on the projects and connect with others within the community. Recent sessions have covered WaterSmart technology, variable rate inputs, enhanced rock weathering and a local farmer's soil amendment journey.

The network makes sure results don't just stay on one farm: project farmers share what they find, neighbours see it for themselves, and adoption builds from peer to peer.

Next CsL grant round opens 2 November

The next CsL grant round opens on Monday 2 November 2026, with up to $35,000 available per project. It is open to anyone on the Limestone Coast wanting to trial or demonstrate climate-smart practices on their own property, and successful projects will join the CsL Network to share their results with the wider farming community. Visit the Landscape Board website for further details.

If you'd like to talk through a project idea or be involved in the CsL network, get in touch on 0437 754 456 or mick.brown@sa.gov.au.

To find your local SAF Australia- wide, visit the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry website.

This project is supported by the Limestone Coast Landscape Board, through funding from the Australian Government's Climate-Smart Agriculture Program under the Natural Heritage Trust

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Upcoming events calendar

NOVEMBER

1-5 **Soil Science Australia** National Conference – Boorloo (Perth)

3 **Ag Institute of Australia AIA-SA Division** November Meeting & Turretfield Research Centre Snapshot - Turretfiled

20 **Hills and Fleurieu Landscape Board** Beneath the Surface: Know Your Soil - Mount Pleasant

DECEMBER

1 **Meat and Livestock Australia Grazing Fundamentals: Southern Rangelands**
Grazing Land Management Course - Holowiliena Station

3 **Meat and Livestock Australia Grazing Fundamentals: Southern Rangelands**
Grazing Land Management Course - Wilkatana Station

3 **SA Drought Hub** World Soil Day Celebration: Building Soil Communities – Adelaide Waite Campus

8 **Murraylands and Riverland Landscape Board:** Biofertiliser workshop: boost your soil health - Jabuck

7 **Murraylands and Riverland Landscape Board:** Small to medium scale farm waste composting - Lameroo

9 **Murraylands and Riverland Landscape Board:** Small to medium scale farm waste composting - Kepa

SMART SOILS FOR AGRICULTURE

Australian Government
Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry | Future Drought Fund | SA DROUGHT HUB | Adelaide University

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The network of Regional Soils Coordinators are members of the Smart Soils National Community of Practice convened by Soil Science Australia.

The Regional Soils Coordinators and the Smart Soils National Community of Practice are supported by the Australian Government through funding from the Climate-Smart Agriculture Program under the Natural Heritage Trust.

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