

2014 International Year of Family Farming

Feeding the world; Caring for the Earth

Family Farm Snapshots

<http://familyfarms.enviroed4all.com.au>



Primary Production in Bangerang

Our Family

My **husband and I** both love living and working together on the farm. We have been working together in Primary Production for 32 years already and want to continue farming until we are 70 years old.

My husband has lived here in the **Wimmera** in our Bangerang farmhouse for all of his life – over 50 years.

We have raised **five children** here. (They are now all grown up.) They travelled to the nearest main town, by bus each day, to go to primary and secondary school. Home on the farm, they learned a lot of practical skills growing up on the farm and to work safely. It is often hard physical work and long hot days. But they, and their friends, have had lots of space to fly kites, build cubby houses, go camping, ride horses and bikes and learn to drive vehicles in the paddocks!

The children help as us as part of a **family farm team**. They helped care for the animals. They learned to milk our house cow and grow vegetables for our table. As teenagers and adults, they still help us at busy times, when they are not at school, university or work. **Harvest** is when we most need their help with driving headers and chaser bins (photo right), trucks and utes to get the crop off quickly in the best weather and get it to the silos. ... and to keep meals coming! When we are working these very long hours daily, so many workers are needed that we also employ a couple of friends.



Family history of the land:

Both my husband and I are 4th generation Wimmera farmers. Our forebears came to farm in the **dry land** area of **North Western Victoria** in Australia, about 140 years ago. They purposefully chose the site for the house and garden in a **slight hollow** so that the rain water ran towards the garden. They had to clear the land so that primary production could begin.

They **raised families** here, without the aid of cars and many things we have today. Their children walked, or rode horses, across the paddocks to small rural schools. We and our parents also attended these schools. But in the 1980's Wimmera farms grew in size leaving less people on the land, and the last of the small rural schools closed.

Our farm yard, machinery sheds, animal sheds and yards, along with our home, remain situated in the hollow, amongst a beautiful native **Buloke timber** (winter photo right) benefitting from this wise choice over a century ago. The timber surrounding us provides:

- **shelter,**
- **shade**
- **windbreak** for our cattle, sheep and horses
- as well as a **lovely setting** for our home.



Parts of our home are over a **century** old! It was built from weatherboards (wood) and corrugated iron (tin). Other parts are of varying ages as our sons, my husband, his father and grandfather all have built onto the original house over the years, renovating and extending it.

Our Farm

Introduction: We proudly work in **Primary Production**. It is the first step in growing **foods**, to feed **people** and **animals**. There are two parts. It starts with planting **seed** and nurturing it. Breeding and growing livestock is the other part. The photo below shows the main crops we produce:

- **grains**
 - **wheat,**
 - **barley** (see photo right),
- **oil seeds**
 - **canola,**
- **pulses**
 - **chick peas**
 - **lentils.**



We also produce **cattle** and **sheep**, in small herds of breeding livestock. They need daily checking, feeding, clean water in their troughs and other health care. We also have **horses**, farm **dogs**, and an emu.

On the farm, there are a large variety of **jobs** to do from cooking and home duties, bookkeeping in our small business, repairing and maintaining machinery, caring for breeding and growing animals, maintain fences, planning our paddock production, and carrying out the operations to prepare the ground, sow the crop seed, reduce weeds selectively and harvest the ripe crop of seed. It is a yearly cycle which my husband and I share.

This area is **very flat** with trees on the horizon in many directions, as you can see in the photo right. Our family farm is about 2,500 acres, or **1000 hectares**, of **arable (workable) land**. Today, it is enough land to provide **income for one family** to live on, and continue working the farm, but it is huge compared with the past when our land was settled in the 1870's.



Farming in the 1870's.

Our ancestors came to the Wimmera in the 1870's, at the time of the **Selection Act**, which opened this region for agriculture, in place of squatter's grazing it. They worked as a **family group**, **clearing** some of the scrub and trees by manual work, with hand saws and axes, to reveal good soil for growing crops of seed. They walked behind ploughs pulled by horses to sow the seed into the worked soil. Apart from horses, they also raised **cattle**, **sheep**, and **hens**. Part of their farming work was to grow the **vegetables and fruit** they would also eat.

The Selection Act allowed them a 320 acre, or **130 hectare**, **farm** originally, which was later increased to 640 acres. This is still part of our farm today. Today there are **fewer farmers**, each holding **larger farms**. Where there would have been 10 farmers with their families, there is now one farming family. But **family groups** still work together and with today's **large machinery**, they can work many thousands of acres together.

How we are 'Feeding the world'

Australia's primary production in grains rates highly in the world. On farm, crops are planted, nurtured and harvested. Then the **food chain** continues off-farm ending in cereal-based foods (like flour, pasta, bread, photo right) bought in food shops, here and globally.



Recently, the primary production on our farm has covered:

Grains

- **Yitpi wheat** (photo below right) - a hard wheat- for **bread flour** (photo above right)
- **Barley**
 - **Gairdner** - (see photo right) - a high quality malt variety used to make **beer and Milo** – drinks
 - **Hindmarsh barley**- a medium quality variety used for **drinks, food or stock feed**



Pulses

- **Garnett canola** seed – used for table oil and margarine,
- **Genesis 090 chickpeas** – a food grade variety for soup mix, curries, and salads
- **Flash lentils** – a food grade variety also for **soup mix and curries.**



On average, **one acre of land produces** about:

- one to one and a half tonne of wheat (see photo right) or barley
- half a tonne of canola, chick peas or lentils.

The different types of grain and pulses are **carted** to the local grain silos at Warracknabeal in **truck** bulk haulage (see photo right). From there, it can go to the domestic or export markets.



Domestic wholesalers truck the grain or pulses to their processing plants for cleaning. Then it is prepared, processed and packaged as **food products**. These are **distributed** to retailers where people purchase them, especially at **supermarkets**.

Grain and pulses for **export** are taken by truck or train to a sea port at **Geelong or Portland**, mainly. It is shipped overseas in **large container** ships to countries mostly from **Asia to the Middle East**. They prepare and package it for their food needs and it is sold through their retail distributors.

Any left-over grain or “**seconds**”, cleaned out of the good quality grain for sale, become ‘scraps’ fed to our cattle and sheep.

The livestock, **Murray Grey Cattle** (photo right) and **Texel-Cross Sheep**, which we breed and grow, are then sold to local butchers to prepare the meat for their shops and the supermarkets.



Includes 'Feeding ourselves'

Primary production is not just for income- we grow some food for our family too, e.g. our plentiful supply of **home grown beef** (see photo above) and **lamb meat**. When our children were young, we **milking a cow** to provide milk for our family, and ground our own wheat seed to make flour for our **home-baked bread**. We make tasty **soups and curries** with our barley, chick peas and lentils. We use only a few 10L buckets-full of grain each year - very little of the huge quantities of grain and pulses we grow! We grew **vegetables** in our garden and always have juicy mulberries from our tree, which is about 100 years old (see photo right).



Our family 100 years ago

Twenty km was a long way to go to the town at Warracknabeal with a horse and buggy, for the grocery stores, so our forebears **grew as much food as they could** for themselves:

- their own meat:
 - beef from cattle;
 - lamb from sheep;
 - chicken from chooks;
 - and pork from pigs.
- milked a cow for their own
 - milk supply
 - and with the cream,
 - they made butter
 - and cheese.
- eggs from their hens
- grew their own vegetables in season.
- ground wheat seed into flour to make bread.
- collected fruit from the trees they had planted like mulberry and fig.

If they had more produce than they needed for their family, they would share or sell to neighbours or occasionally take it to town to sell.

Primary production of wheat has always been for **income**. It was carted in hessian bags. These were very heavy for one man to lift. These bags were loaded onto a solid wagon (see photo right) and pulled by strong work horses to the nearest grain storage silo on a rail line –to Warracknabeal.



How we are 'Caring for the Earth'

We are entrusted to care for the land so that we can **pass it on** to our children and future generations to continue as primary producers.

On our farm, by **rotating** the different types of seed **crops** that we grow, they help to sustain the health and nutrition of the **soil** and control **weeds**. We sow the grain seed in the prepared ground in the winter time and harvest it in the early summer. Each year, there is one crop grown in each paddock, then the paddock is rested or grazed by livestock for the rest of the year.

Can you see three different paddocks in the photo on the right taken in Spring? The yellow is the canola, a main money making crop. The green is the pasture of a 'rested' paddock, which will be grazed by the livestock. To the left of the fence are some Buloke trees in the timber paddock – preserving the native vegetation of this area.



Our seed crops are only watered by the rain that falls from the sky. The **rainfall** in our region is **limited**, about 12 to 15 inches per year. Some years we have droughts, when there is not enough rain to grow crops to sell, but maybe just enough to grow seed to plant for the next year. We have to be very **wise in selecting** the varieties of crops that grow in our climate and the numbers of animals that we allow to graze in the paddocks.

Water is delivered to our farm **from storages** in the **Grampians** Mountains, about 125 kms away. It used to come via a channel system (photo left) and be stored in dams. In the last five years, a pipeline system (photo right) has replaced this and it is now stored in tanks. The water is critical here in this **semi-arid climate**, and we **use it very carefully** in our home, garden and for animals and spraying in our primary production family farm business.



Written by D. Liersch, edited J. Clark. Photos by D. Liersch and J. Clark (water system from Jeparit Museum display). I give my permission to Jeanie Clark for this to be used on the web under a cc licence. 16/2/2014

For more information about the IYFF go to:

<http://familyfarms.enviroed4all.com.au> for more in this series of snapshots

<http://www.fao.org/family-farming-2014/> <http://www.familyfarmingcampaign.net> for the official IYFF sites

<https://www.facebook.com/InternationalYearOfFamilyFarmingIYFF> for the facebook updates.

