



enviroed4all® - Family Farm Snapshots-

an educational resource at <http://familyfarms.enviroed4all.com.au/> for the

2014 International Year of Family Farming

“Feeding the world; Caring for the Earth”

Crops, Yabbies and Tourism, Kukerin, WA

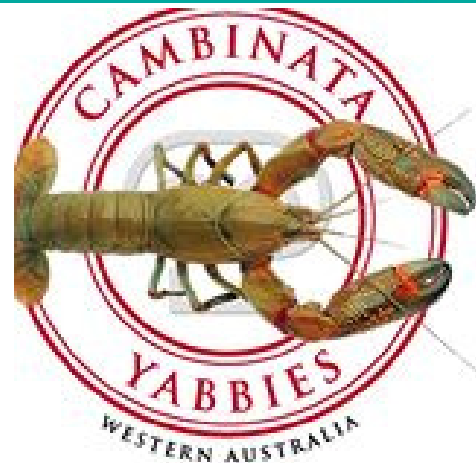
Our Family

Our amazingly **diversified family farm**, in the West Australian ‘Grain Belt’, supports 13 members of our family in **three generations**, living on our farm at Kukerin, about **300 km from Perth**:

- My husband and myself,
- three sons and their wives,
- and five of our twelve grandchildren

Our three **sons, my husband and I work full-time** in the farming business with our three **daughters-in-law**, all teachers by profession, **working part-time**. Each son manages a different area of our business: agronomy, commercial kitchen value-adding and yabby production- our speciality (*photo right*). Our **three daughters** don’t live on the farm, but call it ‘home’. They earn their livings off-farm while contributing to the business by assisting in marketing activities, at functions, major events and promotions, purchasing and mentoring me. Their **seven children** love visiting and **helping out** – and coming to take their gap year. **Ours is a great place!**

We also have **paid employees**: one **full-time** and half a dozen **part-time**. Our **on-farm accommodation** will add at least **four part-time** employees. That’s up to about 25 people working here on this farm! We have lots of different farm-based produce we grow and sell (*see photos right*) - **making ours a big enterprise for a family farm!**



Our Farm

Our land is generally **flat** with some **gentle undulations**, *(as you can see on the photo to the right)*. Our farm has been in our family for over 100 years, but it has grown in size from its original 1000 acres to over 2000 hectares today. Ours is an **average size farm** for one family in our district, but **not in what we do!**

Most **Mallee trees** were **cleared** for agricultural production at the time of settlement, but they **left** the big trees. These are the beautiful **Salmon Gums**, *Eucalyptus salmonophloia*, which are a favourite feature of our farm. *(See photo right as a silhouette, and visit www.florabank.org.au for more about this most common species of W.A. croplands)*

We also have **gravel ridges** which are home to beautiful wildflowers *(see photo right)*.

Up until about the 1970s /80s, **broad-acre** farmers in the Australian 'Wheat-Sheep' belt **grew cereals**: wheat, barley, and oats. Then, under a world-wide effort to grow more food for the growing population, **Australian farmers began to replace fallows with legumes**. Why? Legumes put **nitrogen** back into the soil, cereals take it out. So they do the job of 'resting' paddocks with a fallow year. This management also **grows more food for the world**.

We **diversified into legumes** with **lupins** in the early 1970s. They came direct from our Australian Sweet White **Lupin plant breeder Dr John Gladstones**. These lupins were **bred** here in WA specifically for our **sandy soils**. Later we added **field peas**.

As our family grew, we needed to find more ways to make money from the farmland to keep our family farming here as a unit. We put in **hives for honey** *(See photo right, 'smoking' before collecting honey)*



Yabbies

Yabbies are a native **crustacean** to Australia. (See *photo right and on first page for their 'prawn' shape.*) They grow in water places. During droughts, they 'hibernate' deep in the ground waiting for rain and water to return. Most farm dams have them, and farming families enjoy catching them for food.



A workman introduced **yabbies** to 3 of our **dams**, built for watering stock, so that he could have some to eat. I had come from the coast, where I loved catching and eating crabs and prawns, so was delighted to find such delectable creatures in our dams. (*in the middle of the photo below*) So, in 1970, we distributed them around the farm dams for our food.

But what about farming them? We started **feeding** and **selling yabbies wholesale in 1981**. They are grown in dams where they live in the mud and naturally feed on whatever is around – creature or plant. So we **feed them** on what we grow (**lupins, oats or barley**) and **buy (crayfish pellets)**. They take about 2 months to grow to an eating size.

We were in a new field of farming, and helped by **Dr Craig Lawrence, a yabby researcher**. Yabbies taste better when they have had some time to get the mud out of their systems. In 1991, we diversified into **processing** with some large '**purging tanks**' to do this – we now have 6 as part of our processing plant (*see grey roofs in right of photo*). Within months, friends and neighbours asked us to sell their yabbies and so **Cambinata Yabbies** was born. During the 1990's we ran **annual field days** to share the latest innovations and practical knowledge on yabby farming with other farmers.



Next we diversified into **direct marketing** to **restaurants and sea-food suppliers**. The yabbies became **our major product and basis for other on-farm enterprises, on-farm and off**. For this, we needed a **large refrigerated tank** for holding the **yabbies in hibernation** prior to shipment. Yabbies are sorted and packed in cool rooms to maximize their shelf life (*photo right*). Our yabbies are very **fresh** – they leave the factory the same week they arrive.



We have the capacity to hold 3 tonnes of yabbies. However our **production varies**. **Droughts** have a huge impact in their drying of dams which rely on natural rainfall. The introduction of **canola** too has had a big effect due to the chemical sprays that are used to protect this crop, now common in the wheat belt.

Adding 'fresh local food' services

So how could we diversify more?

In 2003, we began to **value-add** to our yabbies, with the production of **other gourmet products**. We set up a **farm shop** for their sales. We later added abalone, from a farmer on the Southern Ocean.

A decade later, we turned **our shearing shed into a function centre** (*see photo right*) where we host weddings, corporate and private events. Here we can feature ours and other local foods.



Adding Tourism

Tourism is a more recent focus. We **host local, interstate and international tourists in our function centre**. Our new **farm-stay** project provides accommodation for up to 48 people. The **cottage/motel/apartment facilities** (*photo right*) are built on our property and all have farm views.



Our produce - 'Feeding the world'

All of our **grain** is sold to either the **local** market or to grain marketers for **international** markets. Some grain is held for **seed for next year's crop**. We use our cereals and legumes as yabby food too.

Some **cereal grains** become **food for people**:

- **wheat** (*growing in the photo right*), - becomes flour for bread
- **oats** - may become **porridge**.
- **barley**- is used in **beer**

Legume grains (field peas and lupins) are sold as **stock feed**, so become food for people indirectly.



We produce **speciality foods**:

- **honey**
- **Yabbies** (*Look at the photo of yabbies to the right,. What part do you think is eaten? Did you notice their big claws at the front, solid body and thick tail? These hold the 'meat'.*)



Gourmet Products

We sell **gourmet products** from our farm shop, to outlets in cities and country, at field days and food events (*see photo right, preparing a meal of local foods for our function centre*) and on line from <http://www.cambinatayabbies.com.au/> . We have a large range now:

- 🍳 gourmet **yabbies**- **live, cooked** and **frozen**, sent in shipping boxes, (*see photo below right*) to restaurants **everywhere** – within WA, in other Australian states and internationally. (*Why are they red? It's the colour they go after cooking, ready for eating.*) or bottom photo become part of a meal in our function centre)
- 🍲 yummy **yabby soups**, made from their shells.
- 🍲 **Pickled yabby or abalone** (from a farm at Bremer Bay) – **with lemon, chilli or spice.**
- 🍯 **honey** – **liquid or creamed**
- 🍷 **olive oil** – from a farm at Clackline, also in the WA Wheat Belt.
- 🍲 a range of **dukkahs** (dips), chilli, lemon myrtle, and olive oil
- 🍫 a gluten-free chocolate **panforte** (a traditional Italian fruit and nut desert),
- 🍪 and homemade **shortbread**
- 🍪 and still creating!



includes 'Feeding ourselves'

Living on farm, we love eating foods we produce: **from the farm** - especially our yabbies and honey, - and **from our home garden** - vegetables (especially garden peas) and fruits (especially mulberries). We not only grow foods to **feed ourselves**, but also **for 'the world'**.

Sustainability - 'Caring for the Earth'

Maintaining the natural environment

There are many species of **birds** on the property and **kangaroos** have a special place on our farm. **Snakes, lizards, spiders and other insects** are commonly found. We have **planted** hundreds of trees to create **corridors for wildlife** and protect the environment. Planting of trees helps keep the air clean. There are also wonderful **wildflowers** which come into bloom in spring. To protect our yabbies and bees, and other insect life, we **avoid using pesticides**, whenever possible.

Soil

We look after our soil with '**minimum-till**' practices. *(Can you see the rows of straw across the harvested field in the photo right? What benefit does this bring to soils?)* We leave ground cover on the soils so there is less evaporation and wind erosion, and if there is any summer storm, less water erosion too. Our tree plantings also help reduce water erosion.



The **cooked yabby shells** go into to the garden where they provide **calcium for the soil**.

Water

We **collect water in tanks** off our sheds and houses to supply water for our homes, the yabby processing establishment and commercial kitchen

Challenges to Australian broad-acre farmers

The biggest challenge for our farm and others, is the ever **reducing numbers of farmers across Australia** due to ever diminishing profits per hectare. We have lost 60% of grain producers in WA in just a decade. This means less people looking after the land and less people in our communities.

Free trade has not given us fair trade. We have to try to compete on international and local markets against subsidized produce from other countries – when we have none.



I am Mary Nenke, Manager Proprietor of Cambinata Yabbies, own the photographs supplied. I give permission for them to be published on line along with information that I have supplied. Map, editing and additional comments by J. Clark.

Mary Nenke is a highly regarded farm woman, winner of:
*RIRDC Rural Woman 2000, Australian Export Hero,
WA Cit of the Year for Regional Development 2007,
WA Women's Hall of Fame, & President of Farming Champions,*



For more about, and orders from, Cambinata Yabbies see <http://www.cambinatayabbies.com.au/>

For more information about family farming and the 2014 IYFF go to:

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

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