



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”

Family farm life on the Hill, Poochera, S. A.

Our Family

Hi! I’m writing about my ‘former’ home, a **full-time sheep-grain family farm in South Australia**. It stands as an incredible inspiration and grounding for me to understand the importance of sustainable farming – and family farming, both commercially producing food for the world, and for ourselves.

Our farm sat on top of a hill overlooking the magnificent **Gawler Ranges**. When people came to our farm, we used to greet them by welcoming them to enjoy the **view** and the **peace and quiet!** *(Can you feel it in our farm photo below right?)*

My **family** is my Dad, Mum, my older brother and I. My **Dad** is the typical Aussie ‘tough nut’ farmer, who is a **mechanic, scientist, mathematician, environmentalist**, etc. My **Mum** is the loving, supportive farmer’s **wife, bookkeeper, mother, gardener** and everything in between.... and works at the **local school library**. So **in tough times** like drought, mouse plagues, locust plagues, frosts, and even snail plagues, we had an **income** to buffer us.

Although we don’t have our **commercial sheep and broad-acre cereal grain** family farm anymore, my Dad still works for other sheep and grain farmers. Mum still grows her **herbs and some veggies** for their own use, so she is still family farming, just in a different place to before. I now live in Perth and my partner and I have been growing our own **herbs and lemons in our backyard**, which we also use for our cooking, so I am family farming too!



Our Farm

Our farm was in a **semi-arid** zone south of the **Gawler Ranges**. The **rainfall is low** and **soils are relatively infertile**. The landscape is a heritage of low northwest-southeast aligned **sand dunes**, on which the **natural vegetation was Mallee**. Our farm was surrounded by and interlaced with Mallee scrub. Mallee trees grow **several main trunks** (as can be seen in the photo right) to help them cope with the dry conditions. (Aren't the tree colours fantastic? Do you know what gives them this colour? The setting sun on our low horizon!)



The **nearest town Poochera** was 25km away on a dirt road where we **bought** our weekly fruit and vegetable supply from the local roadhouse, got mail, played sport, and **socialised**.

Grain growing needs **large acreages**. Our farm covered a large area - **6000 acres** – but that is an average size for this area of South Australia. How can one family work such a large area? Farmers need **large machinery!** What do you think the machine in this photo to the right does? It is a sprayer, not used for irrigation, but for chemicals to kill weeds, fungus and pests.



In the photos to the right, you can see our wide plains and the ranges in the distance.

To harvest the crops, other big machines, '**headers**', are used. In **good years**, there was so much grain to harvest that we needed **extra** workers, headers, field bins and trucks. (Look at the photo on the first page, for the field bins we needed in a good year)



Our produce - '**Feeding the world**'

Our farm produced **three key cereals (wheat, oats and barley)** and **wool** and **lambs** from our **sheep**.

Cereals are **green** when **growing** in winter and spring (See the wheat in spring in the photo above right) and turn **creamy-browns** when they are ready to **harvest** in early summer. (See the really healthy wheat crop right before it was harvested, in the photo to the right.)



Most of our grains were **sold** to the Australian Wheat Board (AWB) or other grain companies **to feed the world** as **bread, muesli, pasta**, etc.

Some wheat was kept for **sheep feed** all year round to add to their grazing on fallow.

The sheep were shorn by a **shearing team for wool**, and **sold for meat**. The **wool** was **sold** to Quality Wool, **in Adelaide**, and then sold to (more often than not) **off-shore mills** and processors to be made into all sorts of **fibre products** like knitting wool, clothing, suits etc. We ate some **lambs** and sold some to the **local butcher**.

Includes 'Feeding ourselves'

Like most farm families in the region, **we ate a LOT of lamb**, and from **home gardens**. Although, we often found it **difficult to grow** a lot of things in the garden because the soil was of such low quality and rain water sometimes scarce, **Mum's garden** did grow some:

- **Vegetables** – like spinach , beetroot,
- **Fruits**- lemons, pomegranates, tomatoes, strawberries
- **Herbs** – any you liked
- and some other things which all went in our tummies straight from the ground!

Sustainability - 'Caring for the Earth'

Fallowing – and returning the nutrients

My Dad cared for the Earth by **the way he farmed**. He **rotated** crops and **fallowed** the land, so it would not be overused. This means that every second year land was left without any crops on it. Instead he 'rotated' the **sheep** onto those fields to let their '**poo**' give back **nutrients** to the soil. *So in the photo right, the plants growing have not been planted and are not crops to be harvested.*



Saving rain water

We had and still have, **rainwater tanks** which collect the rain off our roof and to drink and run our entire house – including toilet and shower. Dad always checked the pipes and water troughs around the farm to ensure there were no leaks, so we weren't wasting precious water. *Where is the rain tank in the garden photo to the right?* It's the green round tank, the yellow is a fence, and yes, it is a date palm in the garden too.



A home for wildlife

On the farm, we had **lots of plants and animals** in the surrounding **Mallee scrub** such as:

- **kangaroos**,
- **emus**,
- **echidnas**,
- sleepy lizards (**stumpy tails**),
- the occasional **bustard** (*see photo right*),
- and **wedge-tailed eagle** (*see photo below right*)
- plenty of **spiders**,
- **insects** and much more.

Can you see the different parts of the farm, where the two birds have been photographed? Some creatures use the farmlands more than others.

For more information about **Bustards**, see:

<http://www.birdsinbackyards.net/species/Ardeotis-australis>

<http://bie.ala.org.au/species/urn:lsid:biodiversity.org.au:afd.taxon:79171df4-2fb1-44a2-a843-dc716bf7ddbc#>

For more information about **Wedge-tailed Eagles**, see:

<http://australianmuseum.net.au/Wedge-tailed-Eagle/> ,

<http://www.birdsinbackyards.net/species/Aquila-audax> ,

<http://www.zoo.org.au/healesville/animals/wedge-tailed-eagle>

http://bie.ala.org.au/species/Wedge-tailed+Eagle#tab_gallery



Being in Nature

I believe I learnt to care for the Earth by growing up on the farm and interacting with nature around me.



I recommend everyone to let their children roam free in the outdoors as often as possible so they too will fall in love with the world and want to protect it as much as my family does.

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For more information about family farming and the 2014 International Year of Family Farming 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 sites