



2014 International Year of Family Farming

“Feeding the world; Caring for the Earth”

Settling a farmlet, Darling Downs, Qld

Our Family

Hi there! Welcome to our family farm.

It's a **little rural block** which we're building into a 'farmlet', or 'hobby' farm, two hours west of Brisbane, in **Queensland**. We are a **couple**, myself and my partner, both **sharing** the gardening and 'chicken care' **work** pretty evenly.

Our Farm

We farm in an area of **small scale farms and urban development**, 5 km from **Highfields**, the nearest town, north of **Toowoomba**, on the **Darling Downs**.

The **native vegetation** was originally **Eucalypt** woodland and open forests, before clearing for **grazing**. This land was recently converted into semi-urban blocks, i.e. rural 'hobby' farms. Our block was relatively **bare** when we moved in.

When you consider we are relatively close to the Lockyer Valley (the salad bowl of Queensland) and the huge cotton and grazing farms out further west, **our half-acre block** is **very small** for a farm here.

*As you can see in the photo on the right, our place is halfway down a hill, so has a **slight gentle slope**.*

Our soil is **sticky black clay**, which is great if you can get it working for you! We need to take measures to get it right for growing – a lot of hard work! It **erodes** quite easily, so will need some **drainage works** soon.



The climate here is **warm temperate**. Most **rain** falls in **summer** for our 750mm yearly average.

In our front yard, we have been **planting** lots of **natives**, including **grevilleas**, **banksias**, and **paperbarks** (*as shown in photo on the previous page*). We want to get some native bees soon, so will need to do some research into what they like.

So far, our backyard family farm is the **7 veggies** in the patch, an **olive** tree, a **lime** tree and **five hens**.

Our produce - 'Feeding the world' means 'Feeding ourselves'

It is a great feeling to grow your own food and then make something delicious with it, like the *pavlova from our eggs in the photos right*.

We have **all the eggs we can eat** and some seasonal **vegetables**, but we definitely both need to work as well. We **buy most other foods**, from local farmers' markets or supermarkets in Highfields.

Our **hens and chickens** are an **ISA Brown breed**. We **feed** them layer **pellets**, a **seed** mix and lots of our **leftovers** – they especially love left over stir-fry!

We have made them a **safe home** from **foxes** and **birds** in the backyard (*notice the fence in the photo right*). They roam out of it when we are home in the afternoons and on the weekends. We have just bought a new fence that will give them extra roaming room during the day.

Our veggie patch is protected by chicken wire also, *as you can see in the photo next page*. From front to back, we are growing **corn**, **pumpkins**, **zucchini**, **peas**, **eggplant**, **lettuce** and **tomatoes**. They taste so much better straight out of the ground! Since the photo, we have put straw mulch on the soil to protect the plants as they grow. We are learning when the best time is to harvest each vegetable.



Sustainability - 'Caring for the Earth'

Improving the soil

Mulch, Mulch and more mulch! We have used a variety of mulches in our veggie and native gardens: **used straw** from a friend's farm; **used chicken bedding** and **free mulch** from the station in town.

We also have a **compost system** set up that we use when we plant new plants and to give the veggie garden a bit of a natural fertilizer.

Using water wisely

Rain!! We like to grow our own veggies, but this can be hard when you have a **dry season**.

We have a **water tank** on the house- it's used for everything! Although we are connected to town water, we are rather proud that we have not had to use it since we moved in. We don't want to use too much of our precious tank water to keep the veggie garden alive, so we reuse the bath water to water the plants.

(We also have **solar hot water** and try to use as little mains electricity as possible.)

Native habitats

We have planted **native bushes** (photo right) onto our land and already have a good array of **birds** that visit. Some **Masked Lapwings*** (*Vanellus miles*) **nest** in our backyard each year. **Skinks** are in the garden and we hear the occasional **frog** after rain.

* see <http://birdlife.org.au/bird-profile/masked-lapwing> and <http://www.birdsinbackyards.net/species/Vanellus-miles>

Low food miles

Low food miles are important to us – **our produce** has the **lowest** food miles. We always try to look for **local food** to purchase especially from the **local farmers' markets**. We are also quite lucky in Toowoomba in that there are lots of different shops that have **local gourmet** food as well – yum! When at larger supermarkets, we check where the item comes from, and go for the **Queensland or Australian made products**.

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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 sites

