

2014 International Year of Family Farming

Feeding the world; Caring for the Earth

Family Farm Snapshots

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



With trees came the birds, Langi Banool

Our Family

We have a **beautiful farm** to show you in this snapshot. My **husband and I** are passionate about **agricultural and environmental training** and ensuring the highest quality education for farmers and the rural community. We have put this into our farm for 25 years, a **grazing and timber** property in the **foothills** of the **Otway** Ranges.

Here, we have raised **three children**, who have left home now, two of which have moved into the world of agriculture like us.

My **husband** does most of the **farm work**, now with the aid of a local employee one day a week, as the children have left home. He also works two days a week off-farm in agricultural training.

I now work from the farm, to gain **off-farm income** in an animal health business.

The **kids** all come home frequently. They are quick to volunteer to **help** at busy times like lamb marking, calf marking and shearing. My **daughter** is **training** to be a **vet**. She especially helps out, like in the photo right, making a manual pregnancy test on a cow.



We enjoy time for non-farm things in our local community and further afield, nowadays.



Our Farm

Twenty-five years ago, we bought this property near Dean's Marsh, just north of the **Otway Ranges**, near Victoria's west coast. A house fire had destroyed the unoccupied homestead in the 1960's, so we created a new home here.

On a landscape of **rolling hills**, we farm **prime lambs and beef cattle**, and **trees for timber and wildlife** habitat on **500 acres**. Properties here come in variable sizes, being close enough to Melbourne to get a lot of hobby farmers and life-style people. The property size gets bigger as you head north where the rainfall drops off.

Isn't Langi Banool a pretty landscape? In the views of our farm, photo above, and to the right, can you see the Otways Ranges, our lines of trees, our sheds and home and the sheep in the paddock?

When choosing this property for our future, in the 1980's, I was determined to have somewhere with a reliable **rainfall**. Dean's Marsh was known for this at that time. It is in a winter rainfall zone. The annual rainfall used to be about 700 - 750 mm. Ironically, in all the years we have been here, we have only had three good autumns. This area, previously renowned for its rainfall reliability, suffered a long serious **drought** at the start of this century, which was completely unprecedented in this area's known history.

We used to have wonderful **spring** fed dams which were reliable in all seasons. However the **water table** has **dropped** dramatically as the city of Geelong relied on underground water pumped from the Gherang basin during this prolonged **drought**. So much water has been removed from this huge aquifer that the **springs** now work in **reverse** and drain the dams! Our peaty subsoils have dried out, causing two massive **soil issues**:

- the land **cracks and slumps** (photo right).
- The development of **acid-sulphate soils**



Hidden soil problems

When **peaty soils**, like ours, **dry** out, they get a higher oxygen content - the soils '**oxidise**'. The pH drops severely to acidic levels. This is non-reversible and makes the **soil unable to produce** anything! It also causes **rotting** of fence posts and **rusting** out of fencing wire, as well as slumped, cracked ground!

But there is more! We have to manage the sheep around our dams carefully. The **spring fed dams** can become death traps. As the water level drops, especially in summer, they develop **muddy** sides. Sheep can get stuck in the mud when they come down for a drink - a **death trap** as they often cannot escape this mud, and need to be rescued!

Our produce - 'Feeding the world'

Our farm produces for sale mainly:

- prime lamb, (photo middle right) – a composite sheep crossed to terminal sires such as **Poll Dorset** and **White Suffolk**.
- and beef cattle - Angus (photo bottom right)

This stock is sold through **sheep and cattle sales** at Ballarat, as Colac no longer has sheep sales. They occasionally go direct to the abattoir. The meat goes to **domestic and overseas markets**.

We also have dogs, poultry and horses on our farm.
Can you see three stock types in this page's photos?

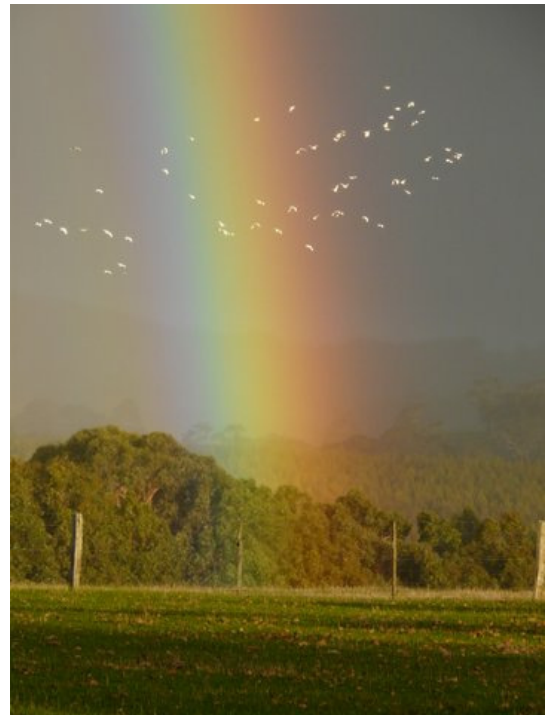
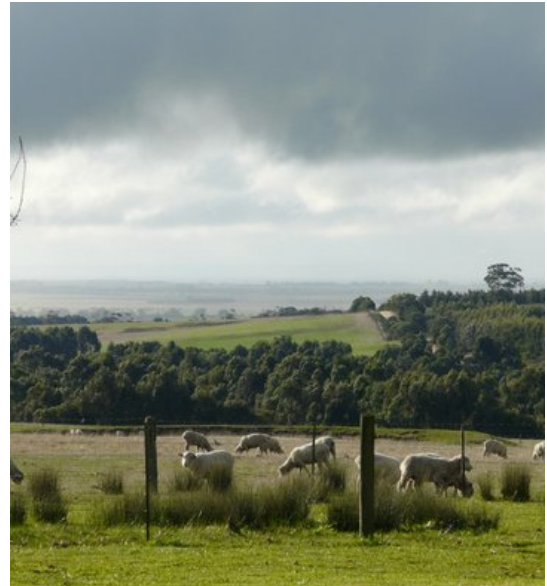
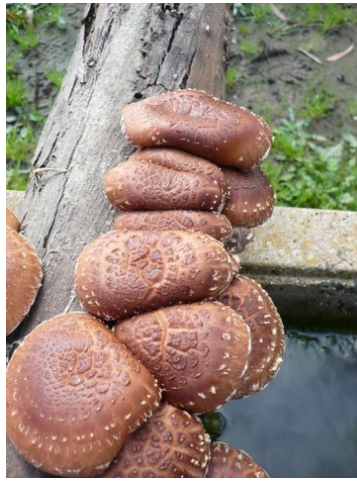
Includes 'Feeding ourselves'

For our own use, as well as the meat, **lamb and beef**, and **eggs**, we grow just about everything in the most beautiful surroundings!

- **berries**
 - American blackberries,
 - Boyson berries,
 - Ever berries,
 - raspberries,
 - strawberries,
 - Youngberries.
- Shataki **mushrooms** (photo below)



- **herbs**
- **fruit trees**
 - apples,
 - pears,
 - Mulberry's,
 - lemon and
 - lime trees
 - quinces,
 - plums
 - nectarines,
- **grapes,**
- **passion fruit.**
- **many vegetables**
 - asparagus,
 - beans,
 - beetroot,
 - broad beans,
 - broccoli,
 - cabbage,
 - carrots,
 - eggplant,
 - garlic,
 - Jerusalem artichokes,
 - onions,
 - parsnip,
 - peas
 - potatoes,
 - pumpkin,
 - rhubarb,
 - rocket lettuce,
 - shallots,
 - snow peas
 - spinach,
 - sugar snap peas,
 - tomatoes,



We also enjoy the spoils of the **wild**, by gathering

- **(edible) mushrooms,**
- and the occasional **blackberry** – a weed!

We have a **Blue Gum** (fast growing Eucalyptus) plantation that has been harvested once at 15 years of age, and is continuing to grow towards its next harvesting. We also use the **timber** for our own needs for **heating, cooking and hot water**.



Count how many different types of foods grow on Langi Banool- we have great diversity!

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at <http://familyfarms.enviroed4all.com.au/snapshots/trees&birds-Otways>



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environmental education for everyone

Sustainability - 'Caring for the Earth'

The timber

When we moved to this property, you could count the number of **trees** on your hands! By **planting about 2,000 trees per year**, for many years, the farm is now well timbered, and:

- **increased in wild life** over the years
- has fantastic **shelter for the stock**
- **supplied fire-wood** for our wood fired stove
- is a far more pleasant and **pleasing outlook**.

The district as a whole had been very severely cleared in the early days. Now the local community has banded together to change the face of this district to a far more sustainable and beautiful scene, as you can see in the photos in this snapshot.



The wildlife

We now have **amazing biodiversity**! We are lucky to have **echidnas** commonly on our farm. **Kangaroos** are here, not yet in plague proportions. **Snakes and lizards**, once rarely seen, are now common place. While I am pleased to see this balance in the environment, it does make me fearful for my dogs when we find snakes in the garden! We enjoy these as well as **fabulous bird life**, which has moved in with the increasing tree coverage. *Count how many species we have from this list, naming just some of them!*

- Blue Wrens,
- Bower birds,
- **Cockatoos and Corellas** - Their numbers have grown hugely, in the time we have been farming here, and become a **significant nuisance**. *Did you notice them in the rainbow photo on the previous page?* They cause massive damage to trees and pasture!
 - The **Sulphur Crested Cockatoos** like to peck the ground, (photo above right). This prevents us from growing any cereal crops or feeding out grain.
 - **Gang Gang Cockatoos** (photo right)
- ducks – of many types



- Hawks,
- Herons (like the **White-Faced Heron** sitting on the fence in the top photo on the previous page)
- King Parrots,
- Kites,
- Kingfishers,
- Kookaburras,
- many types of owls,
- Red Robins,
- Rosellas,
- Silver Eyes,
- **Swallows** (sitting in their nest , photo right)
- Swans,
- Thrushes,
- Water Hens,
- Wedge tailed eagles,
- **Willie Wagtails** – These lovely babies in the photo right, have a nest in the Golden Elm just outside our bedroom window. So wonderful!



Nutrient recycling

We have recently released **3500 dung beetles** onto the farm (see photo right). They will bury the cattle and horse dung, improving **soil fertility**, and preventing manure being washed into the waterways and parasite build-up on the pastures. Using **dung beetle friendly anthelmintics** (sheep and cattle wormers) ensures that these insects will survive.

Improving urban-rural understanding

I come from an **animal welfare perspective**. I have long been concerned about the urban rural drift and the lack of understanding on the part of our urban cousins about what it is that we do and why we do it.



I hope you now have a better understanding of farming after reading our snapshot of our grazing and timber farm.

I, SS, am happy for you to use any of this information and photos on your web site and would be pleased to do anything I can to further link rural and urban communities. 23/4/2014 (thanks) Edited by J. Clark. Map by J. Clark (cc) 2014.

For more information about the IYFF go to: <http://www.familyfarmingcampaign.net> for the official IYFF sites
<http://familyfarms.enviroed4all.com.au/snapshots/> for more in this series of snapshots
 or contact J. Clark enviroed4all@gmail.com

