

## Farming and Christmas...as it was

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### TOP-PICS

- ◆ Fertility of soil is measured not just in chemistry alone, which is what most farmers do if they test at all!
- ◆ Carbon sequestration—the holding and storing of carbon—is best done in soil by increasing its organic matter.
- ◆ 2006 will be a big year for people who want to explore other & better ways of soil, plant and animal management.

Though this newsletter is somewhat later than intended and some of it written prior to Christmas, it still holds true even now. So here goes.... "It is amazing how people too often get carried away in the celebration of Christmas and give no thought to the part of the community who are unable, by the nature of their chosen field of work, to share that celebration to the same degree as they can in their community. Farmers and growers, just like the essential services supporting our communities, continue to work often at the expense of complete family connection. Farmers recognize that a date on a calendar does play no relevance to the natural cycle and that if hay needs to be cut and baled or crop harvesting has to take place or cows need regular milking, these

jobs must go on regardless. This is probably a great opportunity to remind you (and you most likely don't really need reminding!) that nature stops for nobody, and that throughout the year, the optimum timing to manage cultivation, sowing, fertilising, animal management and harvesting is never determined by the calendar but with the way the seasons change, by the occasion of rain, the phases of the moon, soil temperatures, the length of day and all the various conditions over which there is no control. The power to the successful farmer is to be observant and learn to properly react to these often subtle but sometimes harsh and relevant condition changes.

I want to acknowledge you for your commitment to our community

as you continue your most noble role of providing food and fibre in an unflinching way. May you take every opportunity to enjoy this Festive Season with loved ones in a most celebratory way but if unable to do so, you are recognized by those of us who know the commitment you have taken by your choice of work and lifestyle." *It is often hard to understand that many in our cities don't realize the effort that goes into producing and supplying their sustenance, and then expect to pay so little for it. Maybe it is up to each of us to not be a 'whingeing farmer', but to tell it as it is so they begin to understand. People in the country are committed to growing quality food so that others can live a healthy lifestyle. By doing what you do, you make every day Christmas and celebrate life for all.*

## Systems, naturally ~

In the last Argus I wrote about making this newsletter a regular quarterly publication and that I would be more up-to-date with reports and feedback for you. Some of you will have noticed that only a little has changed since then, but the intent is still to be more timely. Anything less is still less than satisfactory. I know that it has been frustrating—in some cases more for me

than for you. I have good news that should change this for the better—a young lady who has undertaken to spend time setting up and running office systems for and with me to enable more effective use of time. I am quietly excited by this because I realize that it is systems that enable processes to take place and is fundamental to how we operate individually and within

organizations. Imagine if you did not have a system for getting up out of bed every day, and having breakfast (or whatever) and then finish the day going to bed. It is the same for any organization and for processes such as in agriculture or even natural ecosystems. Amazing if you think about it!

Sincerely, *Gerhard*

## A 'complete' soil test by SWEP



SWEP Soils Technician, Ed is checking results from a soil analysis at SWEP Laboratories. Visitors are welcome to learn what happens to their soil samples.

It is amazing how science is gradually developing an understanding of soil processes and can measure them with some level of relevance to the soil manager. Together with the daily soil management tools of touch, sight, smell and taste (maybe not you say?), laboratories such as SWEP offer a service to put together some measures where trends in complete soil fertility can be compiled. The 'Complete Soil Test' offered by SWEP provides a very usable and practical recommendation bringing

together the 3 criteria of soil fertility—biology (life), chemistry (nutrients) and cations (structure) and graphically represent them for easy comprehension. The package that SWEP put together makes a lot of sense and allows informed decisions to be made on the criteria of the soil to focus on as a priority. It does not go into much detail with respect to biology but breaks down the analysis into functional soil organism groups that can be simply managed using various inputs and practices. If you want more detailed analysis

of the soil biology, I ask that you read the article on the back page. As for SWEP, Ted Mikhail is open to visitors but asks that you notify him before arrival so he is not inundated with visitors. I do recommend taking the time to look through this leading laboratory because you then begin to understand the commitment made to recording the fertility status of soils. If you want a soil sampling package, please contact this office or SWEP and let them know you are working through AgriSolutions for recommendations.

**“CALCIUM— THE  
KING OF ALL  
ELEMENTS— IS  
VITAL IN ALL SOIL,  
PLANT AND ANIMAL  
GROWING SYSTEMS.**

## Do the time for the lime crime..

It is amazing how at this time *every* year, it is strongly suggested that lime is applied to take advantage of the seasonal shrinkage and cracking of the soil and the enhanced opportunity for the lime to enter the cracks in the soil profile. Additionally, many spreading contractors are not as busy as when the autumn 'break' arrives, so there

is much more chance of getting small amounts of lime applied. **Now** is the time to take notice of this suggestion and not miss the marvellous opportunity provided by nature every year. Even though this all makes sense, sometimes lime application is just not possible, so using Super Fine Lime with foliar sprays of fish and kelp are very beneficial and economical. It is

very important to realise that calcium in the soil and plants and animals is fundamental to good health and production and that as a soil manager, you must factor in lime (and dolomite) to ensure optimum growth. Remember when the old timers talk about 'sweetening the soil'? How sweet is it when you get the sustained results just with lime...?



Senator Colbeck, Parliamentary Secretary to Agriculture, addressing the IFOAM Conference on the opening day.

## IFOAM Conference, Adelaide

The IFOAM Conference in Adelaide has come and gone and what an event it was! Over 1000 delegates from 70 countries and 34(!) from Gippsland alone. With the theme "Shaping Sustainable Systems" it certainly showed that we are leading the way. The Victorian contingent included several DPI staff who obviously impact on

the way that Extension and Research takes place. Also important was that the Chair of the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority spoke at the event and continues to influence the way catchment strategies are developed and implemented. All very positive really. My '15 minutes of fame' began with '5 minutes of

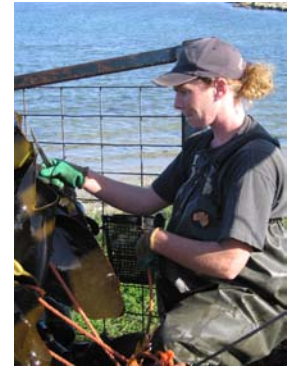
terror' from nerves as I tried to talk to the Power Point Slide show. Once a few laughs were extracted from the audience, the time went too quickly but the message raised many enquiring questions and resulted in more realizing the value of kelp. It was made easy by a preceding speaker losing everyone in 'science.'

## Seaweed 'bomb'?

Just last week I was travelling in a car with a friend who is not directly associated with agriculture but who is well read and observant. As our conversation came around to agriculture and conventional growing methods in general (as it would!), he popped the question, "Can you make a bomb from seaweed?" Now that took me aback for a mo-

ment until the penny dropped. What Geoff was referring to was the broadly accepted 'fertiliser' ammonium nitrate being used as a major component of explosives. It dawned on me that people really are stupid in not questioning the sense in applying inputs to grow food that have such a devastating effect in other ways. It is openly

known that ammonium nitrate was used during the war years in northern Australia (and other places) to create airstrips for bombers. It hardens the soil surface! The message here is that natural fertilisers including minerals, with fish and kelp to stimulate soil biology, are not known to be explosive but have a sustained beneficial effect on life.



*Kelp being prepared on King Island for shipping to the factory to dry and mill. Nothing explosive here!*

## IFOAM Congress Outcomes

IFOAM (International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements) Congress had many outcomes providing future direction for Sustainable Farming across the globe. One of the most important was the IFOAM Adelaide Declaration that was presented to governments around the world detailing what

the delegates considered critical to the future sustainability of the planet and man's increasing impact on the earth and himself. Ask me for a copy. Another good result was the global attention on Australia for a few weeks and the lasting legacy in Australian Agriculture. The SA state govern-

ment is in talks with industry to establish a state organic body and the OFA, the peak national body, is now better recognised by the Feds. Benefits of soil enhancement, less water use, less energy consumption, stronger local rural communities all stem from organic principles and will continue to grow rapidly.

**"INTERNALIZE SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL COSTS IN THE PRICES OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS AND REMUNERATE ORGANIC FARMERS FOR ECOSYSTEM SERVICES."**

a point from the Adelaide Declaration to Governments of the World. This should of course be open to all farmers.

## Fertiliser results shine

Not one to really flog anything except understanding your resources and optimising these, I reluctantly have to flog the All Natural fertiliser with added fish. What amazes me time and again is the feedback from farmers who trialled it and then done their whole farm at the next opportunity. Ron Ettery, an ex-dairy

farmer and natural fertiliser user at Trida in the Strzelecki Hills who knows his country like the back of his hand phoned only a few weeks after application to say his cattle are now grazing paddocks that they only ever walked through before! And other reports are coming in saying how the amount and continued

growth even into the dry part of the season is so different to neighbours' paddocks. If you want something that will give you long term healthy growth with a single application, this would have to be it. Contact me for details, do your own trial and be surprised at the results and low cost.



*Healthy cows from healthy pasture and healthy soil. Where is the real cost of fertiliser calculated?*



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#### IN THE NEXT ARGUS:

Review of "True Fertility—combining soil biology, chemistry and structure".

**More on the next Amazing Workshop Series planned for 2006.**

**More Beef from Pasture—**  
a useful kit of tools for the beef farmer

Topical seasonal issues.

**Your comments—and more.**

Mailing Address Line 1

Mailing Address Line 2

Mailing Address Line 3

Mailing Address Line 4

Mailing Address Line 5

## Stop being a 'more-on' farmer—and get more for less.

You may have seen this headline used in some of the newspapers leading up to the True Fertility Workshops being presented by Dr Elaine Ingham on Feb 27-28th with maybe another on 6-7th March (given the numbers). I have mentioned Dr Ingham in the past but if you want some more details on her background that is not covered in the accompanying registration form, please let me know. I (almost) implore you to consider registration because here is the best opportunity to experience one of the world leaders in research and education on soil microbiology. Elaine will show how it affects health and production and the benefits to the land manager. I am truly excited to be hosting this event and so look forward to sharing what I have already experienced from Dr Ingham's teachings on 3 previous occasions. Please check out the registration form now and let me know if you are interested in the March workshop asap so an early decision can be made whether to run it. On the matter of soil analysis covered in another article in this Argus, Dr Ingham's

Soil Foodweb Institute is offering a "2for1" deal never given before.



*Elaine just loves microscopes as they provide access to another world so important in ours.*

If you want to know exactly what the biological balance and makeup of your soil or compost is, this is the test to do. From the results, it can be determined whether the growing medium is anaerobic, the approximate basic chemical ratios and its effectiveness in supplying nutrients to plants. To get a more detailed picture of its True Fertility, nutrient and cation tests should be conducted in addition to this. The laboratory at Lismore in NSW also welcomes visitors proudly showing you the dedication taken to measure your soil's health.

This year is shaping up to be extraordinary with more workshops/field days planned so other speakers can contribute to the topic

of regenerative and biological farming. Stay tuned for the next bulletin.

Apart from formal learning, we all learn from life's experience. If you have some experiences—deemed successful or not—that you wish to share with others, let me know so they can be published in the next Argus. Be anonymous or you may be very proud of your achievements and want to tell the world (well, the Agrisol Argus is a small start anyway.)

NOTICE: Milton Bond of Yinnar (VIC) is now available for contract aeration and fertiliser spraying. Call 03 5163 1639.

*If you would prefer this newsletter emailed, please email me a message requesting to be put on the mailing list ( I have yet to learn to use PDF though.) On the other hand, if you don't wish to receive this newsletter at all, please let me know so that your request can be acted upon. If you would like to be on Vitec Fertilisers mailing list, phone 1800 622 345 telling them that you were referred by AgriSolutions.*

Are you thinking? Well, do you know that if you are thinking like everyone else, you are not really thinking!

Procrastination—no time for it in life!