

The latest news from the Barossa Improved Grazing Group

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Natural Resources  
Adelaide and Mt Lofty Ranges



Natural Resources  
SA Murray-Darling Basin



# The BIGG Bulletin

May 2015

## BIGG members win travel grant to US

Congratulations to Ian and Fiona Koch, Moculta who have recently been awarded a study grant from the AW Howard Trust, an organisation which aims to promote and support pasture research.

Supported by BIGG, the Koch's successfully applied to travel to the US state of North Dakota to work with and learn from sustainable farming pioneer Gabe Brown.

Gabe Brown, who spoke at the Angaston Agricultural Bureau "Farming Resource Forum" in 2011, is world-renowned for his sustainable agricultural practices, and is considered one of the pioneers of sustainable and conservation agriculture. His operation, a 5,000 acre ranch in Bismarck, North Dakota, integrates no-till cropping, cover crops and grass-fed livestock, with a focus on regeneration of natural resources ([www.brownsranch.us/](http://www.brownsranch.us/)).

Ian and Fiona will visit Gabe to learn more about his farming techniques, including the use of poultry for snail control, optimisation of polycultures (crop/pasture species mix), as well as drawing on Gabe's experience and innovative mind to identify new NRM ideas and techniques that are applicable locally. They will also meet like-minded producers in the region and assess the commercial success of Gabe's meat products.

The Koch's will travel in October and when they return will report on everything they

learnt!

## Soil Moisture Project Completion

During 2013 and 2014 the Barossa Improved Grazing Group conducted the project, *'Monitoring Soil Moisture to Improve Productivity and NRM in Grazing Systems'*.

At the heart of the project was the establishment of demonstration weather stations that were located in three pasture paddocks on representative soil types throughout the Barossa region, in Flaxman Valley, (pictured), Keyneton and Koonunga.



project was the establishment of demonstration weather stations that were located in three pasture paddocks on representative soil types throughout the Barossa region (Flaxman Valley, Keyneton and Koonunga).

This is the first time a farming systems group in Australia has demonstrated soil moisture monitoring in pastures, a practice that has proven invaluable in other agricultural industries such as horticulture and cropping.

The three weather stations provided near real-time data on soil moisture, plant available water (estimate of the amount of water that can be accessed by the pasture), temperature, rainfall, relative humidity and wind speed. This data continues to be recorded and is available via the [BIGG website](#) until the end of 2015.

The project also delivered a soils forum (in 2013) and a soil moisture monitoring workshop (in 2014) with industry experts sharing their knowledge. These and other learning events introduced producers to the concept of soil moisture monitoring and improved their understanding of its use as a decision-making tool, such as when to de-stock. This essentially comes down to knowing the amount of soil moisture available for pasture growth and the rate which plants are using it.

The project demonstrated the variance in plant available water capacity between the three pasture paddocks. It was estimated that Flaxman Valley is able to store 112mm -

more than double the plant available water of Keyneton (47mm), while Koonunga's was 75mm. The higher plant available water at Flaxman Valley could be attributed to its elevated organic carbon levels (5.8%), which encourages greater soil water (and nutrient) holding capacity.

BIGG would like to acknowledge the support of the National Landcare Program (formerly known as Caring for our Country) in funding the project and EnviroPro Dielectrics, Natural Resources AMLR, Rural Solutions SA, Farmer Johns, Coopers Farm Supplies and North Rhine Sheep Group for additional financial or technical support.

The final project report can be found at the [BIGG website](#).

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## Save the Date - BIGG Grasslands Pasture Update

BIGG, along with the Grasslands Society of SA and MLA, will be hosting a pasture update Tuesday 25 August, in Nuriootpa.

The speaker list and agenda are currently being finalised, so save the date now and stay tuned for further details!

You can also register for for the Grasslands Annual Conference (see 'From the Inbox').

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## Pasture Cropping Trial in Cambrai



The Mid Murray Local Action Planning Committee Inc. has been supporting a component of the Natural Resources SA MDB 'Marginal to Mainstream' project run by Dr Elisa Sparrow.

This project is exploring the concept of pasture cropping and involves sowing crops into living perennial pastures and growing them symbiotically.

In a mixed farm enterprise it seeks to combine cropping and grazing into one land management method where each benefits the other. This type of farming avoids the need for all vegetation to be killed prior to sowing, groundcover is maintained at all times so that erosion by wind and water is avoided, soil structure is not destroyed by cultivation and chemical input.

'No till' cropping also minimises soil disturbance, often with direct drilling of seed, however it is not performed in combination with a perennial pasture, but more usually into the stubble of previous crops.

Sowing a crop using the pasture cropping method also stimulates perennial grass seedlings to grow in numbers and diversity. This then produces more stock feed after the crop is harvested and totally eliminates the need to re-sow pastures (Source: [Case Study 12- Winona NSW](#)).

A trial site has been selected in Cambrai, with an average annual rainfall of 320mm; the 13ha paddock is relatively flat and has been previously cropped.

The site is currently dominated by patches of couch, annual weeds and some colonising native species, this project aims to establish a native perennial pasture with an annual cereal crop in combination with sheep grazing.

The native species mix that will be used is produced by local distributors and includes Wallaby grass, Windmill grass, Brushwire grass and Weeping rice grass. Permanent quadrats have been established across the site that will be monitored throughout the project. In addition to this trial a native grass seed orchard will be established to provide seed for other projects in the region.

More information: Aimee Linke, Mid Murray LAP Project Manager, 08 8564 6044, [midlap@internode.on.net](mailto:midlap@internode.on.net)

## From the Inbox...

- The Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences (ABARES) regional update is being held in Strathalbyn on 10 June 2015. [Read more online.](#)
- The Mid North Young Guns are running two bus tours in June: [Preparing Sheep for Market](#), featuring a tour of TFI and Thornby's feedlot, on 11 June, and [Sustainable Sheep Production](#) with Natural Resources AMLR, looking at sustainable practices in the Mid-North on 29 June.
- MLA Producer Forums will be held in Clare and Bordertown on the 16th and 17th of June. These forums are an opportunity to have input to the future direction of MLA's activities. Read more at the [MLA website](#).
- The Grasslands Society annual conference will be on 21-23 July in Naracoorte. Early bird registration closes 19 June, [so register now!](#)
- Carbon farming Workshops will be held in Kadina (22 June), Kapunda (24 June) and Karoonda (29 June) to assist farmers who want to learn about the opportunities presented by the Carbon Farming Initiative. [Read more](#), or register at the [CFI website](#).
- Acid soils workshop with Brian Huges (PIRSA) and Greg Butler (SANTFA) presented by Natural Resources AMLR: Wednesday 24 June at the Barossa Bushgardens. [Read more.](#)
- [Nuffield Scholarship](#) applications are now open, and close 30 June.
- Got a 'dam' good idea? Natural Resources SAMDB are running a competition with up to \$20,000 in prizes if you can design a water flow solution for Mt Lofty streams, closing 17 July. More details in the [flyer](#).

## Your BIGG Contacts

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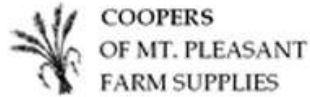
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CARING FOR OUR COUNTRY



**Government of South Australia**  
Department of Environment,  
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