

BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB Newsflash – 18/12/09

This Newsflash email is funded by [Australian Wool Innovation](#) and [Department of Primary Industries](#).

Visit the BWBL website - an audio recording of the latest BWBL Phone seminar "Feed and Water for Sheep over Summer" has been loaded.

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[Managing Climate Variability](#)

The Managing Climate Variability Program has been helping Australian farmers to manage climate risk on-the-ground for over a decade, providing them with practical tools to incorporate weather and climate information into farm business decisions. The program aims to help farmers and natural resource managers manage risks and exploit opportunities given Australia's variable and changing climate by

- improving forecasting accuracy, lead-time and ease of use
- providing tools and services for managing climate risk
- increasing adoption of climate risk management

The Strategy focuses on investments which increase forecasting accuracy, builds the predictive capability of key attributes such as soil moisture, and develop tools which translate climate forecasts and resource attributes into decision support tools for primary producers and natural resource managers. **SO**

Are you a farmer who believes that managing climate risk is an important part of managing your farm business? Are you interested in getting early previews of research in this field, offering feedback to researchers and being supported to share information about the research with other farmers in your region?

Managing Climate Variability, the country's leading research and development program tasked with helping farmers and natural resource managers manage climate variability risks, is seeking to better communicate its research and to involve farmers in every step of the research process. Up to 15 grains, sugar, grape, cotton, dairy, beef and sheep farmers from across Australia will be selected to be 'Climate Champions' and supported through training and resource kits.

As a Climate Champion, you will benefit from having access to the latest weather forecasting tools. You will also be able to share experiences with other progressive farmers who are adapting to our increasingly variable climate. You will have opportunities to:

- * review research outputs and tools relevant to your location and farming system
- * present information about climate research activities to your industry networks
- * showcase the practices and farming systems you use to manage climate variability
- * speak to the media about relevant research outcomes
- * participate in and lead online discussions with other farmers

"Farmers are great observers," says Managing Climate Variability Chair Ian McLelland. "They understand the full effects of drought, and have learnt to use water efficiently. By nominating for 'Climate Champions' they can share their experiences more broadly, and we'll all be better off."

Farmers interested in nominating to become a Climate Champion should complete a short form at www.climatechampions.net.au or call Econnect Communication on 07 3846 7111 for a hard copy form. The form should only take about 10 minutes to complete. **The closing date for nominations is 14 January 2010.**

[FEEDTEST Now with Australian Wool Testing Authority Limited](#)

FEEDTEST is now licensed to the Australian Wool Testing Authority Limited (AWTA), through its Agrifood Technology division, at Werribee.

FEEDTEST was established in 1987 as an outcome of research conducted in the 70s and 80s when there was a gap in the market and there were few laboratories providing this particular service. The FEEDTEST service provides a rapid turnaround, nutritional testing service for animal feed, measuring dry matter, crude protein, digestibility and metabolisable energy in all stock feeds including fresh pasture, hay, silage, grains, pellets and by-products.

AWTA have commenced operating the FEEDTEST service in a year of high demand for the testing service due to a large hay season. During this period of high demand DPI centres will continue to distribute sample bags for clients until the New Year.

[Be on the Lookout for Heliotrope Poisoning](#)

The Department of Primary Industries (DPI) is advising producers of the possibility of copper poisoning or 'yellows' in livestock, especially sheep, during the coming season. DPI District Veterinary Officer Dr Chris Wernert said that the toxic plant heliotrope has been present in unusually large quantities in northern Victoria in the past few summers. Heliotrope contains toxins known as pyrrolizidine alkaloid which alters the liver's metabolism causing the liver to hold abnormally high levels of copper.

The liver damage caused by digesting heliotrope is cumulative, in other words, the liver damage increases each time the animal consumes heliotrope. When the liver becomes saturated with copper there is a rapid release of copper leading to kidney failure and death. 'Yellows' usually does not occur until sheep have been exposed to heliotrope for more than one summer and often 3 occurs after the exposure to heliotrope has gone, when sheep are later put on lush pastures, which is rich in copper such as clover. The lush pastures that are present in spring were most likely to lead to the condition.

Sheep are primarily affected since they are most often grazed in the locations where heliotrope is commonly found. British breed and cross bred sheep are more commonly affected more than merinos due to their different grazing habits. Other livestock such as cattle and horses are also susceptible to the effects of heliotrope but unlike sheep the liver damage associated with heliotrope poisoning and large losses of stock rarely occurs.

A homemade drench containing molybdenum can be made to prevent copper poisoning. For the formula and guidelines or for further advice please **contact your local veterinarian or DPI Veterinary or Animal Health Officer**

[Turn Down the Heat with Wool](#)

The Wool Carbon Alliance applauds world leaders serious about mitigating climate change, particularly those leading by example by wearing wool at the United Nations Climate Change Conference, COP15.

Wool suits, jackets and coats can all be seen at the conference, an example of a natural thermal insulator with the capacity to reduce our reliance on heating from fossil fuels.

However it is not the first time clothing has been used for such a message.

"Turn down the heating and put on a sweater" was the message from a campaign instigated by US President Jimmy Carter during the oil crisis of 1979. Its message still has great resonance 30 years on.

The European Commission states a household can cut its CO₂ emissions by up to 300kg a year and energy bill by 5-10 per cent simply by reducing its heating by just 1°C. ^[i]

'Wearing wool, walking on wool and sleeping with wool are all ways of using this great renewable fibre in our everyday lives and in doing so think globally and act locally,' Wool Carbon Alliance chairman Chick Olsson said. Produced as part of the natural carbon process of plant sequestration and digestion, wool is made of 50 per cent organic carbon by weight. ^{[ii], [iii], [iv]}

The Wool Carbon Alliance is working to fill the research gaps, investing in studies of how much carbon flows through soils, plants and animals on farm. In doing so, it explores the opportunity for such land-based (terrestrial) systems to sequester more carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. The Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists stated that a 15 per cent increase in the world's terrestrial carbon stock at a global scale would remove the equivalent of all the carbon pollution emitted by the burning of fossil fuels since the beginning of the industrial revolution. ^[v]

The Wool Carbon Alliance was formed earlier this year and consists of various state and national wool interests, working together to research and promote wool as the fibre of choice for environmentally conscious consumers.

[Give Your Soil a Health check this Christmas](#)

Healthy soils support healthy plant growth, resist erosion, receive and store water, retain nutrients and act as an environmental buffer in the landscape. Therefore, it's important we look after our soils. Do you:

- Test your soil regularly to manage inputs?
- Make decisions on soil conditions (too wet, too dry)?
- Maintain at least 50 per cent ground cover all year round?
- Minimise cultivation and traffic?
- Know how deep crop and pasture roots are growing?
- Walk the paddock and observe soil conditions?
- Think about how to invest in soil health as part of the farm business?

If you answered "no" to any of these questions, your soil may be overdue for a health check.

More information on soil health is available online at www.dpi.vic.gov.au/vro/soilhealth

[Information Note AG1389 Onion Grass](#)

Information Note 'AG1389: Onion Grass (*Romulea rosea*.) - Management in Pastures' has been updated visit the AG Notes website to read more about Onion Grass. <http://new.dpi.vic.gov.au/notes/crops-and-pasture/ag1389-onion-grass-romulea-rosea--management-in-pastures>

[Westerly Influence Determines Southern Rainfall](#) *Kondinin Group Farming Ahead Nov 09*

Traditional weather forecasters and farmers have looked to the El Nino Southern Oscillation (ENSO) as the main driver behind rainfall and drought. However a shift in thinking has revealed that Australian farmers are perhaps more at mercy of the Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) than any other weather pattern.

- ENSO in the eastern states, the Madden-Julian Oscillation - mainly in northern areas, the Antarctic Oscillation in the south and the Indian Ocean Dipole across the centre and south-east all influence Australia's weather and climate.
- Some weather forecasters claim Australia relies too heavily on the influence of ENSO effect, purported to bring drought to eastern Australia in an El Nino and rainfall during an La Nina
- During recent years the effect of the IOD on rainfall in southern Australia has been more closely examined and researchers now claim it has more impact on rainfall in southern Australia than the ENSO

"The Break" newsletter (published by DPI) describes credible seasonal outlooks, generates potential crop yields from decision support computer tools, provides links and highlights topical climate risk information. [http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au/DPI/nrenfa.nsf/LinkView/9B89785099D96DE4CA2576720074218D75D99DBA789C4628CA2573ED00090307/\\$file/The%20Break%20Newsletter%20November%202009.pdf](http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au/DPI/nrenfa.nsf/LinkView/9B89785099D96DE4CA2576720074218D75D99DBA789C4628CA2573ED00090307/$file/The%20Break%20Newsletter%20November%202009.pdf)

The latest rainfall deciles are updated at the start of each month on the DPI [decile page](#).

Christmas is nearly with us and as treat to all our members we have put together a book of all the "Smokos" from the BWBL Newsletter "Information Exchange". After 10 years the next edition of the Newsletter will be its 50 edition so celebrate with us this milestone. Print it off and put it in the shearing shed to share with others.

Enjoy

Have Merry Christmas and an even better New Year, Lyndon & Annette
BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB Manager & Administrator