



Snapshot 2015/16

Supporting sustainable agriculture

Regional Landcare Facilitator

The Port Phillip & Westernport CMA employs a Regional Landcare Facilitator funded through the Australian Government's National Landcare Programme. In 2015/16, the Facilitator worked with a range of agricultural industry groups across the region to advance the understanding of profitable, sustainable agriculture techniques and further develop existing and new demonstrations and trials.

Mornington Peninsula Vignerons Association

In 2015/16, the 'Compost Under Vine' project entered its second year of operation. The trial, in partnership with the Western Port Catchment Landcare Network, seeks to show how using compost under grape vines in vineyards can lead to improvements in water use efficiency and soil health, reducing herbicide use and reducing sediment and nutrient run-off into waterways. The second year of the project saw a significant increase in the number of vineyards trialling or adopting the practice of spreading compost mulch under vines. A mid-project results day was held in May, attended by Federal Minister for the Environment, Hon Greg Hunt MP, and over 70 local landholders.

Fruitgrowers Victoria

In 2015/16, compost trials were established in two pome fruit orchards, with a view to reducing water and herbicide use, improving soil health and reducing sediment and nutrient run-off. With a dry spring/summer in 2015/16, early observations have shown that the mulch layer can be very beneficial in protecting the topsoil and ensuring greater water infiltration. At one site, the control row (using herbicide under the trees) showed that water from drip irrigation was simply pooling and running off into the inter-rows, rather than being absorbed into the soil and benefiting the tree. A preliminary results day is planned for July 2016.

Australian Native Food Industry Australia

Five Bush Food Workshops were held across the Port Phillip & Western Port region during 2015. The workshops focused on identifying, growing, harvesting and marketing bush foods, with over 100 landholders attending. Many landholders were seeking information on how to diversify their business through emerging opportunities, such as bush foods. Another feature of the workshops included discussing how bush foods can be used within existing farm forestry design.

As a result of the success of these workshops, a demonstration site is proposed to show how bush foods can be grown on farm, offering a diversified income as well as increasing biodiversity through native revegetation and the creation of beneficial insectariums. It is anticipated that the demonstration site will be established in August 2016.



Minister for the Environment, Hon Greg Hunt MP, Owner of 100Hunts Vineyard, Joe Vaughan, Western Port Catchment Landcare Network's Peter Ronalds and PPWCMA's Regional Landcare Facilitator, Karen Thomas at Compost Under Vines trial site



'Bush Foodies' at the Bush Food Workshop held in Mt Martha

Vegetable Growers

In 2015/16, the Port Phillip & Westernport CMA worked with Veolia and vegetable agronomist Stuart Grigg to establish a trial site for the Soil Wealth project, funded by the Australian Government's National Landcare Programme. The trial site was established in the Werribee Irrigation District and is working on reducing cultivation practices in the vegetable industry by demonstrating a more sustainable approach to production using cover cropping, compost and minimum or no tillage practices. Preliminary observations have been very promising, with some test rows showing increased yields at harvest. A farm walk to discuss the results is planned in 2016/17.

Victorian Strawberry Growers Association

After holding a number of regular meetings between representatives from the Victorian Strawberry Industry Development Committee, Melbourne Water's Rural Land Program and the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources, the Environmental Best Management Practices Manual commenced an update in 2015/16 and will be ready to receive industry feedback once the new Industry Development Officer is in place.

The manual will also form part of an industry project proposal on sustainable farm inputs which will incorporate information from the updated environmental best management practices manual in a modern communication format for growers to easily and readily access.

Balliang Food & Fibre Group

The Port Phillip & Westernport CMA, through the Regional Landcare Facilitator project, has provided funding to the Balliang Food and Fibre group to support their nutrient budgeting trials. Precision Agriculture is conducting the trials and the results will be communicated to the Balliang cropping farmers during a workshop in 2016/17. It is anticipated that many of the Balliang croppers will adopt the practice of varying nutrient rates across paddocks as an outcome of this project. This ensures that nutrient application is matched to the different soils and their requirements and reduces the use of fertilisers.

Farmer capacity-building events

The Regional Landcare Facilitator worked with various partners to help run 15 farmer capacity-building events in 2015/16, which together attracted over 355 attendees, including:

- Five Bush Food Workshops across the region in partnership with the Australian Native Food Industry and the Australian Agroforestry Foundation which attracted 175 people;
- Two 'Preparing for Dry Conditions' Workshops in partnership Agriculture Victoria which attracted 50 people; and
- A 'Results Day' to highlight the results gained from the second year of the 'Compost Under Vine' trial on the Mornington Peninsula. The event was held in partnership with Westernport Catchment Landcare Network and the Australian Organics Recycling Association and attracted over 70 people.

Case study - Native grasses improving soil stability in orchards

In partnership with Native Seeds Pty Ltd and the Red Hill Cherry Farm, a native grass seed trial site was established at the Red Hill Cherry Farm on the Mornington Peninsula. The trial involved seeding two species of native grasses in between the rows of cherry trees with the aim of improving soil stability, particularly in the winter months, and integrated pest management ecosystem services.

Added benefits of using native grasses in the inter-rows is that, being drought tolerant, they can be grown right up to the trunks of the fruit trees without competing for water with the trees. This lessens the need for under orchard herbicide use and also reduces the need for ongoing maintenance, such as regular mowing. Native grasses have a period of dormancy over the summer months, when the orchard is undergoing fruit harvest. This also reduced maintenance requirements for farmers during this busy period.

A farm walk will be held in early spring 2016 to show the progress of the trial and preliminary results.



Port Phillip & Westernport CMA's Regional Landcare Facilitator, Karen Thomas, sowing native seeds at Red Hill Cherry Farm

Looking ahead

The Regional Landcare Facilitator role and associated activities will continue in 2016/17 and 2017/18 with funding through the Australian Government's National Landcare Programme.