

For immediate release 12/10/2020

How can a survey help support and build resilience for West Australian Farmers?

This week, one and a half thousand farmers and landholders on the Northern Wheatbelt of Western Australia will have received a survey booklet in the mail.

The surveys are part of a Soil CRC (Cooperative Research Centre) project to understand what farm management practices are being undertaken, and why farmers choose the farming methods that they do.

They also aim to determine what information and technical support farmers are seeking.

Led by Southern Cross University's Dr Hanabeth Luke, the project is a collaboration with local farming groups the West Midlands Group and the Liebe Group, as well as the Wheatbelt Natural Resource Management Board and WANTFA, West Australian Farmers No Till Association.

It has been funded by the Soil CRC and will be repeated in five years to measure any changes. We have so far surveyed North Central Victoria, the Eyre Peninsula of SA, and now the Wheatbelt.

"We're gathering a national data set to gain an understanding of what's happening for Australian farmers and for soils across our farming systems," said Dr Luke. A report from our Victorian survey can be found here:

http://www.nccma.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/north_central_cma_soil_crc_social_benchmarking_report_final_march_12.pdf

"To be able to better support farmers and farming systems to become more resilient, we need to understand the important challenges faced by farmers; their goals and what support they need to reach those goals."

"We also need to understand the decision-making behind why they operate as they do: are they adopting best practice and new innovative approaches? If not, we need to understand what the barriers to this may be. For example, are barriers economic or a knowledge issue? Or to what extent do they relate to things like values and trust in local organisations?"

"All of these things come together to help us to understand the complexities driving these systems so the partner organisations and scientists from the Soil CRC can best target their efforts."

The survey has been co-designed by Dr Luke and partners to guide strategic directions of the West Midlands Group, the Liebe Group, Wheatbelt NRM and WANTFA, with support from the shires of Moora, Dalwallinu, Wongan-Ballidu, Dandaragan and Coorow.

Nathan Craig, the Executive Officer of the West Midlands Group, who has been closely involved in developing the survey, says that "this is a really important opportunity for landholders to have input into future activities and the way farmer are supported in the Northern Wheatbelt."

David Minkey of WANTFA says that “Of all the surveys you’re sent this year, this is the one you should do, because for our association we’re all about managing the soil because it is the most valuable resource we have. So, we need to have a sound understanding of our soil management practices so we can improve together.”

“The end goal of the project is to ascertain how to best engage and support farmers moving into the future. We need to be developing resilience now more than ever across our farming systems,” said Dr Luke.

The survey will be mailed out with a postage paid return envelope and Dr Luke would be grateful if it were mailed back at the earliest convenience.

For more information contact Dr. Hanabeth Luke at: Hanabeth.luke@scu.edu.au, or call 1800 317 503.

END

For further information or interviews contact:

Karin von Behrens, 0407725344

scumedia@scu.edu.au