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Soil Masterclass
Nicole Masters
www.integritysoils.co.nz



Biological Education Specialists

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Agroecology

- **Agroecology** is the study of ecological processes in agricultural production.
- Results in novel management approaches.
- Work in a variety of agroecosystems,
- Not associated with any one particular method of farming.

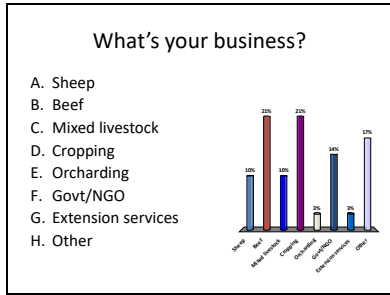
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Agroecologists do not oppose technology or inputs; instead assess how, when, and if technology can be used with natural, social and human assets.

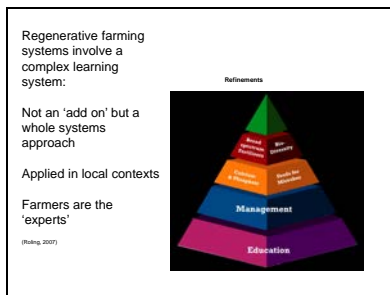
There are no 'silver bullets'

Focus on these 4 pillars;
productivity, stability, sustainability & equitability

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- ### Healthy Soils
- > Hold onto and release nutrients
 - > Hold onto and release water
 - > Have great structure
 - > Are full of life
 - > Protect against pests & disease

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Healthy soils contd...

- Decompose and detoxify
- Buffer to changeable climate
- Are full of secondary metabolites, plant growth hormones and enzymes
- Grow productive, healthy, nutrient dense crops

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Which all means...

Resilience
Productivity
Animal health
Reduced need for inputs
Reduced costs \$\$
= PROFIT!

Kenny, G. (2011). Adaptation in agriculture: lessons for resilience from eastern regions of New Zealand. *Climatic Change*, 106(3), 441-462.

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Foundations for success

There are no silver bullets here

OBSERVATION, INTERPRETATION AND ACTION

Where is your soil program at right now?

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Without measurement, there is no management

How do you know which way your program is going?
Huge instability with soil/plant tests when microbiology/humus is low

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Site selection

- Compare same site over time
- Same time of year/moisture
- Make sites easy to replicate
- Take photos
- Site-to-site comparisons (same soil type)
 - Different management/treatments
 - Problem areas

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Integrity Soils rec

- Choose smaller areas to replicate
- Take mineral (15cm), microbial and plant tissue tests for baselines
- Optional; subsoil tests (15-30cm)
- See attached field guide for other baseline measures

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How can we assess health?	
Soil indicators	Plant indicators
Soil structure/ porosity	Brix/EC/pH
Colour and # of mottles	Plant growth
Soil Colour/carbon	Legume nodules
Earthworms/dung beetles	/pests/disease
Soil smell/taste?	Plant colour and urine patches
Infiltration rates	Pasture utilisation
Surface relief	Root length and density
Temperature	Area of bare ground
Penetrometer, pH, EC	Drought stress
Soil mineral/biological testing	Input costs to maintain
Enzyme activity	Plant tissue tests
Extractable minerals	

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How do we get our nutrients?

- Biology provide enzymes and acids to help make foods smaller and pass these through with vitamins and other metabolites into our bloodstream.
- WE HAVE BLOWN OUR MICROBIAL BRIDGE; with numerous consequences for health; crohns, MS, diabetes, autoimmune, etc etc

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The key players...

- Bacteria
- Archaea
- Fungi
- Flagellates
- Amoebae
- Ciliates
- Nematodes
- Algae

} Collectively called Protozoa

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Bacteria and archaea

- Oldest, simplest, most numerous organisms
- Involved in:
disease suppression, nutrient retention, N cycle, decomposers
- Make fine Microaggregates
- Consume simple sugars; green materials, sugars

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Fungi

- ▶ Disease suppression
- ▶ Retain nutrients (calcium as calcium oxalate)
- ▶ Form soil macroaggregates
- ▶ Decomposers – complex foods; lignin, cellulose ...

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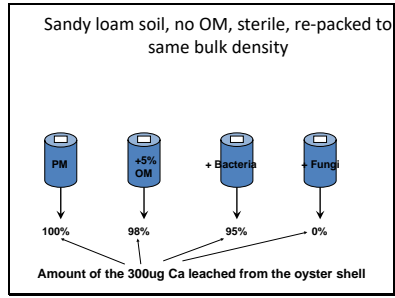
Sandy loam soil, no OM, sterile, re-packed to same bulk density

Bag with oyster shell on surface of each replicate of the following treatments

Small bag of crushed oyster shell: 300gm Calcium

Applied 1 litre of water through oyster shell, measured Ca in leachate

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Why calcium?

- Balance minerals in the soil/plant
 - Resistance to many weeds
- Lift pH
- Reduces salinity
- Improves water movement
- Cell wall strength
 - Resistance to pests and disease

= PROFIT!

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Fungi and Soil Structure

- Fungal hyphae (threads) help hold soil granules together
- Fungal exudates (goo) help cement soil particles together

Active Fungi Present -
Soil structure is maintained
= Aggregation

Fungi absent -
Soil structure is not maintained
= Sludge

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Erosion and WATER holding

- Soil microbes and humus help to build soil structure, water holding & increase resilience to erosion

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Protozoa

- Smallest single-celled animals
- 3 main groups
- Ciliates
- Amoeba
- Flagellates

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Protozoa

- Food source for higher organisms
- Soil Structure
- Eat 10,000 bacteria in a day

Vital - nutrient cycling = PROFIT

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Protozoa Tea

- Soak GOOD lucerne hay or sweet meadow hay in water for 3 days
- Apply between 5-50 litres/ha – trial!
- Release 60% of N and P held by bacteria

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Nematodes

- Non-segmented worms
- 95% are beneficial
- “Root body guards”

Could be 1000 nematodes in a teaspoon of low fertility soils
Up to 1,000,000 in healthy soils!

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Nematodes contd

- Vital in nutrient mobilisation
- Feed on the primary decomposers (bacteria, fungi, actinomycetes) plus algae and each other
- Central in maintaining F:B ratios – can eat 5,000 bacteria in an hour!

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Nematodes are awesome

- Release nutrients (N, S, P) contained in microbes bodies
- Vulnerable to disturbance;
 - Salt fert, soil structure loss
- Quality compost and vermicast are good sources

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95% from air/water

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Carbon

- Element of Life
- Bio-active forms are key
- Carbohydrates; CHO
- Organic Acids
- Humus
 - Water holding capacity
 - CEC
 - Bio-food sources
 - Soil structure/aeration

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Carbon – for stability

- Soil carbon is the foundation for soil health
- Linked to N cycle
- Buffers soil temperature
- Food for microbes

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N & C

- Nitrogen and carbon are intimately linked.
- Protozoa grazing lifted plant N by 75%
- Systems high in bacteria, without protozoa = immobilisation of N

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Solar Farmers

- Our success as farmers is governed by how well we support plants in capturing sunlight energy; converting it to sugars



$6\text{CO}_2 + 6\text{H}_2\text{O} \xrightarrow{\text{Light}} \text{C}_6\text{H}_{12}\text{O}_6 + 6\text{O}_2$

Carbon Dioxide Water Sugar Oxygen

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Refractometers

- The function of plants is to produce sugar which lead to the manufacture everything which goes out the farm gate!
= PROFIT
- Refractometers are a simple tool which help to quantify how well photosynthesis is working.
(see attached information on the use of refractometers)

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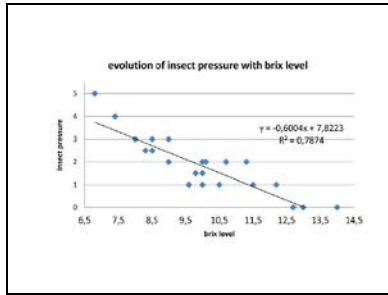
Brix

- A measure of sugars & dissolved solids
- Optimal photosynthesis and plant health occurs when the brix is 12 and over
– with unrolled sample

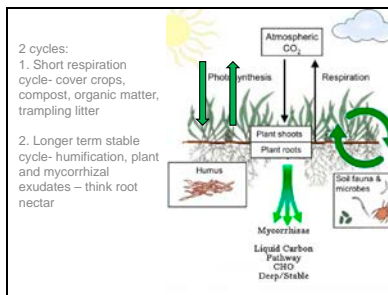
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Pests, weeds and diseases are influenced, either directly or indirectly, by nutrition and brix

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Regenerative farming captures sunlight...

...and turns it into soil


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Two neighbouring orchards

Integrated system
No compost application, herbicided rows, irrigation,
→ 2.6 kg C/m² (top 0.1 m)

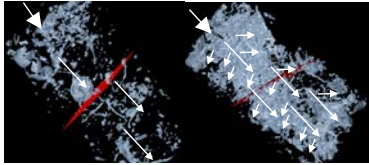
Biological system
Compost application, pasture in rows, no irrigation,
→ 3.8 kg C/m² (top 0.1 m)

Soil carbon management: A recipe for a healthy macro-porous soil structure
M Deurer, B E Clothier, K Müller, 2006



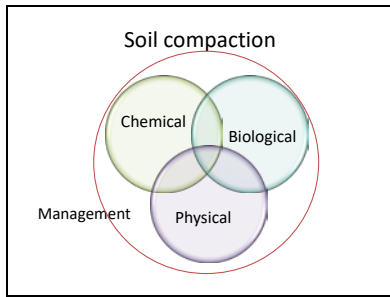
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Macro-pores enhance the mixing of nutrients and contaminants



= better buffering of nutrients and filtering of contaminants

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Two camps

- "All you need is biology"?
 - Sometimes...eventually...with optimal management?
- "All you need is X, Y, Z?"

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Reams Testing (La monte)

- Indicative of plant available element
- Mild extraction process
- Gives a more thorough indication of soil health and biological activity
- Functional ratios important

Reams test offered by Environmental Ag Labs, Southern Cross University

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Reams test

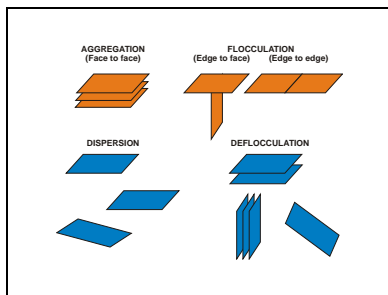
- Ca:Mg ratio -maintain soil structure and encourage soil microbes
- Functional Ca:Mg 5 - 7:1

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Ca:Mg ratio

- When Mg is high, soils tighten which;
 - impacts on micro-organisms
 - reduces the N, C and water cycles
 - reduces availability of other nutrients

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What can we do for compaction ?

Slow and steady

- liquid limes (see recipe attached for whitewash)
- Cover crops; chicory, brassicas, tillage radish, sunflower...diversity!
- Feed biology
- How much time?...

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For faster results

- Add calcium (with C) to lift Ca:Mg ratio
- Add gypsum to drop high Mg
- Rip and drip with bio foods and liquid limes

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Too much of a good thing?

- Avoid overdoing...anything!
- High Ca to Mg- light soils, prone to drying up quickly, leaching increases
- High Ca soils can lock up or release other nutrients in excess

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'Perfect' soil test numbers?

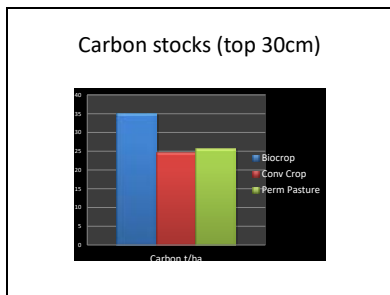
- You can still have soil and plant nutritional issues.
- No numbers are perfect, unless all numbers are perfect
- What is functional?
- Management will trump numbers

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Ian & Di Haggarty
Prospect Pastoral Co, Wyalkatchem
Sheep and cropping
8 inches average annual rainfall

Post grazing- seed drilled with biological
brew: 5 litres vermi-liquid, 10 litres
compost extracts and 4 units N
Year round groundcover as much as
possible

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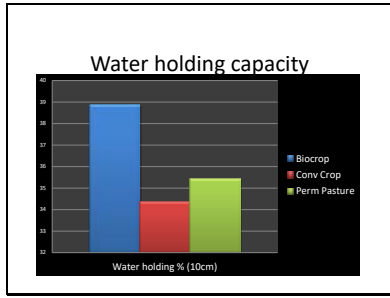
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Carbon sequestration

There was a **41.46%** increase in soil carbon
stocks (t/ha) (top 30cm) = **10.26 t/ha extra C**

Australian National Soil Carbon Research Program (SCaRP) data

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Haggerty's soil test results

% increase compared to neighbour

Soil carbon	41.5%
Soil nitrogen	27.7%
SWHC	13%

(SWHC = soil water holding capacity, CSIRO data)

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Carbon and nutrients

- ↑ Increased C =
- ↓ - decreased pH, CEC
- availability of P, Ca, K, S, Cu, Zn, Fe, Mo, B
- ↑ availability of Na, Al

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The improvement in soil carbon was more pronounced at depth

Increment	% increase
0-10cm	36.9%
10-20cm	40.5%
20-30cm	53.6%

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Haggerty's have

- i) Increased photosynthetic capacity
- ii) Increased soil biological activity

Brix levels in wheat up to 25
Brix in conventionally grown wheat commonly 2 or 3

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OUTCOMES

- Less use of acidifying/high salt index fertilizers
-reduces need for liming
- Improved **Soil Tillth** = Decreased Fuel Usage.
- Improved **Water Holding**
 - Improved Resilience & Recovery during prolonged dry spells.
- Improved Grain-Fill, Hectolitre Weight, Decreased Screenings/sprouting.
- Nil crop residues at harvest

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Soil Carbon and Water

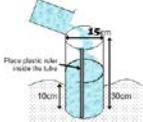
How much water does 1% C hold in an acre?
(to 12 inches depth)

15,600 gallons per acre
Est 30% loss C =
866,000 gallons/acre???

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Infiltration test

- Cut a piece of downpipe 250mm long.
- Bevel the edge
- Bang in with a mallet 100mm deep
- Pour in 25mm water. Time.
- Pour in a 2nd 25mm. Time.



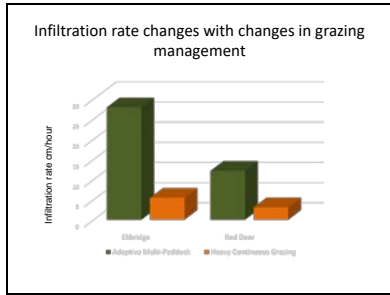
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Infiltration test

- If the water takes longer than 2mm/min to absorb, your soil is in trouble!

= soil loss, water loss, loss in production

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- 5 tools to kickstart water cycle
- Feed underground workforce
 - Maintain greencover
 - Optimise grazing
 - Buffer any chemicals
 - Diversity, diversity, diversity

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- Non-wetting soils
- wax isolates are consumed by *Serratia marcescens*, *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, lots of *actinomycete spp* and *Bacillus subtilis*.

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Frost resistance

- Relationship with free N, brix and microbiology
- *Pseudomonas fluorescens*
 - Naturally in healthy env
 - Down to -5 protection
 - 2 months after application

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pH is a symptom

- Hydrogen
- Mineral balances
- Microbial balances
- Moisture

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pH and rhizosphere

- Plants with a healthy root biosphere can modify the pH e.g from 5.5 to 6.8 pH
- N-fixing bacteria require a pH of 5.8-7

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Cation Exchange Capacity CEC

CEC = number of negatively charged sites on a colloid that are able to hold cations
Colloid – soil particle surface
Cations - have a positive charge
Ca²⁺, Mg²⁺, K⁺, Na⁺, H⁺, Al³⁺

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Cations (+ve charge)

- **Bases** are cations which are alkaline and raise the pH
eg; Ca²⁺, Mg²⁺, K⁺, Na⁺,
- **Acid cations** are the cations which increase soil acidity and lower pH
eg; H⁺, Al³⁺

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CEC

- Sandy soils have a smaller surface area and carry less negative charge, therefore they have a lower CEC. Therefore have less binding sites for cations and water.
- Mineral imbalances can be corrected quicker
- % Carbon can be increased faster

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CEC

- Clay soils or soils with high humus or OM have a much larger surface area and carry more negative charge, therefore they have a higher CEC. Creating more binding sites for cations and water.
- Mineral imbalances can take a lot of time and money to correct.

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Base Saturation

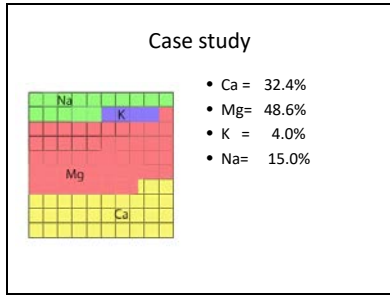
- Albrecht carried out years of study (1918 - 1974) on plant and animal health relating to Base Saturation.
- Animals preferred to graze, were healthier and produced healthier generations, where the CEC was filled with the following bases;
Ca = 60-75%, Mg= 10-15%, 2-5% K, 1.5% Na

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Ideal Base

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Calcium- the mother

- Disease and parasite resistance
- Cell division/elongation
- Cell wall binder – pectates/gene orientation
- Nature's detoxifier
 - Key for heavy metals

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Ca deficiency

- **Symptoms:** blossom-end rot, bitter-pit in apples, death of root tips, die-back of terminal buds, premature shedding of flowers and buds. Fruit storage.
- **Nature's detoxifier:** Key for heavy metals
- **Growth Energy** - slows any seesaw action between growth and fruiting energies

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Calcium

- Moves down the soil profile
- Needs boron and moisture to move through the plant
- Is held in soil by fungi
- ALWAYS apply calcium with a carbon source

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Phosphorus – the father

- A shortage of phosphorus means a breakdown of the **transmission of energy in plants** and as such prevents growth.
- **Fruiting Energy**
- Phosphorus is part of nucleic acids and phospholipids (the basic molecule of cell membranes). Phosphate essential in energy transduction (ATD, ATP)

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Phosphorus

- Deficiency
 - Phycyanins produced in plant to protect from UV= purple colour

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The WA 'P' problem

- WA has low natural phosphate levels
- Highest natural flora adapted to low P
- Only 6% of native spp in low fertility areas are mycorrhizal
- Non-AM –protea, lupins, sedges and rushes

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What does it mean if plants are non-mycorrhizal?

A. They don't form glomalin

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Glomalin

- A complex glue
- Stable carbon
- Forms soil aggregates
- Gives soil its lovely sticky dark brown colour

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Do you have all the phosphate you need?

- P is a catalyst; recycled in the plant for energy
- 90% of available P is bound in plant roots and organic matter
- Soluble P fertilizers are highly inefficient

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Phosphate

- Cover crops; faba bean, white lupins and oats use carboxylic acids and protons to release P
- Use small amounts at seeding – buffer with C
- Increase P efficiencies
 - fish, manure, adding carbon, P-solubilising bacteria, VAM
 - Use slow release P forms; e.g. guano, rock phosphate (in acid soils)

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Get more P for your buck!

Release bound P with:

- Some Plant Growth Promoting Bacteria(PGPB) solubilize phosphate
- Several enzymes
- Mycorrhizae
- Organic acids

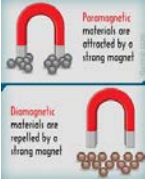
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Day 2

- The problem with Australia....
- Oldest soils on earth
- Leached out, high Al, high Na in places
- Low paramagnetism

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Paramagnetism



- Paramagnetic (soil)
 - Oxygen, carbon, silica, volcanic rocks
- Diamagnetic (plants)
 - Copper, zinc, diamonds

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Paramagnetic soil benefits

- water retention
- increase microbial action
- better nutrient utilization
- improved germination
- Pest resistance
- Buffer to env stress

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Paramagnetism

- Measured as gauss/million or cm/gm/sec
- 0-100 = not good soil
- 100-300= good soil
- 300-700 = very good soil
- 700-1,200 = excellent soil

(good volcanic rocks - 1000 to 2,000 μ CGS)

- Most Aussie soils are less than 100.

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Ways to increase paramagnetism

- Balance calcium to magnesium ratios
- Increase organic matter
- Stimulate biological activities
- Add paramagnetic rock dusts

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The further a system moves from nature the more stress it experiences

- C, N, P and water cycles working
- Locally adapted flora
- Plant specific biology
- Nutrients as/when required

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How do plants grow in nature?

- No bare ground
- Interconnected
- Collaborative and competitive
- Edge effects
- Diversity – above and below ground
- Grasslands- 80% carbon underground
- Forests- 80% carbon aboveground (90% of carbon in soil held in fungi)

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Diversity is key

Fostering diversity provides multitude of benefits...
secondary metabolites, health properties, beneficial insects/
animals, weed competition, mycorrhizal guilds, access to
water, soil microbes, nutrient exchange, humus...etc etc etc

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Cover crops

- grown between cash crop cycles or
- intercrop with cash crops,
- or plant in the absence of a normal crop.

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Cover crop benefits

- Soil health; structure, release nutrients, carbon, feed microbes, break up hardpans, improve water cycle,
- Protect soil surface
- Diversity for beneficial insects
- Mycorrhizal refuge
- Build resilience

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Modern Ag focus

- Yield, fertilizer use efficiency and disease resistance.
- Do not typically consider interactions with resilience, soil microflora or carbon.

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Root and carbon inputs/year

- Spring wheat had 2000 to 2900 kg/ha
- Grassland soils ranged from 18,500 to 36,600 kg/ha
- Wheat had less than 10% of the belowground plant matter

McGill, W.B., J.F. Dorraar and E. Reihl-Dwyer 1988. New perspectives on soil organic matter quality, quantity and dynamics on the Canadian Prairies. In Land degradation and conservation tillage. Proc. 34th Annual Meeting of the CSSS, Univ. of Calgary, Calgary AB, pp 30-48.

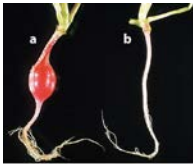
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Root development

- Encourage rapid dense root development
 - Roots need P
 - Plant growth hormones; auxin and ethylene
 - PGPR (plant-growth-promoting rhizobacteria)
- Reduce limitations; pH, aluminium, sodicity

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Plant growth promotion by a bacteria.



Roots of 17-day-old radish plants. Seeds inoculated with (a) auxin-producing *Pseudomonas corrugata* (b) without added microbes.

Lugtenberg B, Kamilova F. 2009. Annu. Rev. Microbiol. 63:541-56

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Rhizosphere

- Protection through polysaccharides, glues, mucus, fungi and bacteria
- Buffers against pH, Al, Na

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Seed treatments

- Macro and micro elements, seaweed
- Organic carbons; lignin polymers, humics, starch, worm teas, amino acids...
- Biologicals; PGPB, PSB, VAM, Trichoderma, Bacillus, Pseudomonas, Azotobacter...

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Livestock and soil

- Grasslands have evolved to be grazed
- With 'good grazing' soils respond positively to livestock disturbance, manure, urine and microbial populations
- Many food production areas are missing the vital component provided by livestock

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Grazing and Roots

Grasses have evolved to flourish under periodic grazing pressures

Amount of plant grazed	Time for root recovery	Root growth on 33 rd day
90%	No root growth for 17 days	60%
60%	55% after 5 days	192%
30%	117% on 3 rd day	250%

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Livestock and biology

- Probiotics and healthy gut systems
- Use livestock to spread microbes and seeds
- Holistic grazing principles- spread manure and urine, trample pastures

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What is the purpose of agriculture?

- FOOD PRODUCTION

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- Many agricultural scientists deny that there is any link between human health and what happens on-farm, however...
Minerals in food are declining:
30 to 60% decline in mineral values since 1940 across the developed world: Se, Zn, Mn, Mg, Ca, and vitamins (WHO data)

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Where has all the nutrition gone?

- Comparison of 19,000 feed samples, 298 biological farms had:
 - 6% ↑ Crude Protein
 - 47% ↑ Calcium
 - 16% ↑ Phosphorus
 - 11% ↑ Potassium
 - 29% ↑ Sulphur
- US Data, Dairyland Laboratories

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Nutrients

- 16 nutrients for healthy plants
- 60 nutrients for healthy animals and humans
- How many of these nutrients are routinely applied in conventional fert applications?

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Biological inputs

- Include broad spectrum nutrition in seaweed, fish products, compost extracts,
 - they also contain foods, vitamins, enzymes and hormones for plant and biology growth

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**Case Study:
Big Timber Alfalfa Program**

- 10 litres fish hydrolysate
- Manganese sulphate
- Borate
- 2 kg sea mineral

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Results: Plant tissue testing

	Conv	Bio	Supreme
Protein	21.9	29.5	>22
NDF	37.5	28.5	<34
TDN	62.4	70	>62
RFV	155	222	>185
Ca	1.99	1.77	1.71%
P	0.29	0.4	0.38
K	1.21	1.84	2.4
Mg	0.42	0.49	0.34

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Case Study: Sheep and Beef NZ

Shortlands Station, 6,500 ha South Island high country
300-400mm average rainfall

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CASHFLOW

QUALITY CARCASSES QUALITY PRODUCE

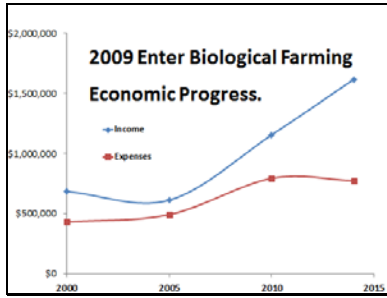
In a cutting study of over 10,000 lambs, 13% increase in meat/bone over all other lambs.

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Table 2. Shortlands Station economic and management parameters benchmarked to Beef & Lamb South Island Hill County sector average (\$/Stock Unit).

• Year	2012/13		2013/14	
	Shortlands	S. Hill	Shortlands	S. Hill
• Gross farm income	99.96	81.04	105.31	85.08
• Animal Health	2.95	5.08	2.88	5.18
• Lime & Fertiliser	8.28	7.15	11.97	7.68
• E.B.I.T*	41.24	25.36	50.88	27.63
•				
• ** Earnings before interest and tax				

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Shortlands Programme

- Apply 15 litres of Fish to all younger paddocks.
- Balanced Ca/Mg ratio: 7-1
- 20 kg D A P with 2kg Humate
- All seeds sown with a microbial inoculant:
 - mycorrhizal fungi, pseudomonas, bacillus bacteria

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If we don't foster our underground workforce, then the services they provide are paid for by the wider environment, and own our back pockets.

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Taking action

Start with reducing practices/inputs that are harmful...

E.g; pesticides, herbicides, excess manure, high soluble fertiliser, too much tillage or tillage when wet,

Then buffer remaining inputs with a carbon source

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Taking action

Positive actions for soil health:
E.g. create an armour on soil surface, diversity (above and below ground), biological stimulants, seed treatments, bio-control agents, compost extracts, treated manure, carbon inputs, shallow incorporation of crops, pasture cropping, integrated designs- keyline, permaculture, natural sequence farming ...

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Next step

- Keep up with education; read, call people, watch online clips; Gabe Brown, Dr Christine Jones, BioIntegrity Wheat, Dr Elaine Ingham, Peter Byck, Ray Archuleta, Gary Zimmer, Colin Seis, www.WIG.farm

Huge thanks to SRF, Nick Kelly and Warren Pensini for supporting this event, and to you!

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