Food into Asia

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The land
... our livelihood

Western Australia's soils are amongst the oldest and most infertile in the world. Yet, from these soils, and with smart agricultural research and management, the State's 14,000 plus primary producers yield profitable, quality food and fibre crops.

This production, though, is not without some heartache. Not only are Western Australia's soils naturally infertile, but some are naturally saline, and others have become so through inappropriate management practices since European settlement in 1829.

Despite these hurdles, the State's research scientists and primary producers have developed smart sustainable ways of managing the land, as three new books from the Department of Agriculture show.

Each book covers a different aspect of agriculture, but their contents reinforce Western Australia's scientific reputation as amongst the world's best in the management of dryland agriculture.

"Reading the rangeland, with its definitions of good, fair and poor condition for various country types, will form a basis for future discussions on the arid shrubland," he said.

This book will help West Australians develop a better understanding of the rangelands and the processes that shape them. Management has to be guided by the capability of the land, its long term condition and the impact of the varying seasons.

The rangelands can change from a sea of wildflowers to bare ground in a matter of months, and it's important that people recognise the plant elements of stability and long term productivity.

The guide also warns that tourists, travelling throughout the outback for a few brief days, may not realise their impact on an apparently tough environment. It gives an example of a wheel rut cutting through a crusted soil surface, leading to an erosion gully that could divert the natural water flow and result in the water starvation of many hectares of country.

Reading the Rangeland
- a Guide to the Arid Shrublands of Western Australia
$25.00 plus $5.00 postage

By Don Burnside, Alec Holm, Alan Payne and Georgina Wilson

This 144-page, full colour, easy-to-read book is a significant bridge-builder between scientists and conservationists, city and country dwellers. It should also interest mining companies, communities and everyone with a love of the land.

It distils, in layperson's language, the accumulated wisdom of scientists and pastoralists into a valuable tool for all land managers, and makes ample use of coloured photographs, keys to country types and range condition.

Six user-friendly chapters discuss the following topics: Introducing the arid shrublands; soil and vegetation processes; main types of country; mulga shrubland; saltbush and bluebush; sandplain; and how the land is managed.

There is also a useful glossary.

Eminent West Australian historian, Professor Geoffrey Bolton, said:

"Reading the rangeland should play an important role in helping many people get to know their outback country better. And to be better Western Australians, we need to know the State better."
Saltland pastures in Australia – a Practical Guide

$30.00 plus $5.00 postage

By Ed Barrett-Lennard and Clive Malcolm

Australia, with 32 million hectares of saltland, is the most salt-affected continent in the world. Most of this is naturally saline land occurring in the rangelands areas, and is called primary salinity. Secondary salinity occurs in agricultural areas, and is caused by rising watertables and the movement of salt stored in the soil towards the soil surface. Every Australian state, bar the Northern Territory, is affected by secondary salinity.

But all is not lost with salt-affected land. The authors advocate the extra-ordinary view that salt-affected land should be regarded as a potentially useful agricultural resource, and that saltland can play a part in the production of valuable pasture.

The well illustrated, full colour, 118-page book describes how land managers can gain productive, as well as aesthetic value, from salt-affected pastures.

The authors discuss why conventional agricultural plants won’t grow on saltland; the best pasture plants to use, how to establish salt tolerant shrubs and grasses; productivity of such pastures; and halophytes as forages for sheep. The subject index is extensive and the reference list of equal value to primary producers and scientists.

The book summarises the results of the latest national research and gives examples of farmers using these results to improve their land.

The authors also examine the controversial value of saltbush-based pastures, concluding that many farmers will continue to see sound economic arguments for such revegetating.

The Barley Book

$12.00 plus $5 postage

Compiled by Kevin Young

The foreword of The Barley Book describes it as the first comprehensive book on barley production and management in Australia. Buyer specifications and the highly competitive export market for malting barley mean this cereal can no longer be thought of as the poor relation to wheat. It requires its own highly specific crop management practices.

The future of the Western Australian barley industry is tied to the rapidly developing Asian economies.

The state produces about 1 million tonnes of barley a year, and exports about 95 per cent. Some 60 per cent of total WA barley production is used for malting, with about 10 per cent of this exported as malted barley.

We have many advantages over our major competitor, Canada. These advantages include geographic location, barley production capabilities and climate – we can produce bright coloured grain.

This book will be an invaluable aid to barley growers everywhere. It gives them the latest facts on barley production, agronomy and marketing. In this age of rapidly changing technology and increasing costs, growers need to be aware of the latest advances in production and management to ensure maximum profitability.

From the producer’s point of view, the book looks at how to achieve yield potential for the variety planted and sowing date.

The book’s 114 pages contain clear illustrations of the growth and development of the barley plant; photographs of the main diseases and insect pests; and management techniques for harvesting and grain quality. It draws on the research of many people over the years in the Department of Agriculture, University of Western Australia and The Grain Pool of Western Australia.