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# South-west farmers get busy with dung beetles to improve soil productivity

By [Barry Murphy](#)**Updated** December 17 2024 - 11:38am, first published December 14 2024 - 6:00am

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📷 Susan Finnigan, Kia Ora Merino, Winslow, said dung beetles improved productivity on her sheep operation. Picture supplied

Some of the state's southwest farmers have got busy with beetles in a bid to improve soil quality and performance.

Supported by the Dung Beetle System Engineers, the well-known Kia Ora Merino stud has boosted its productivity with the

introduction of a new species on their land.


Studies were conducted on the farm of Brendan and Susan Finnigan, Winslow, under southwest Victoria project lead Kate Joseph.

Researchers found that while there was strong dung beetle activity throughout most of the year at Kia Ora, there was a notable absence of beetles during the winter months.

The dung beetles found on the farm were also sent to the University of Western Australia to have the species identified.

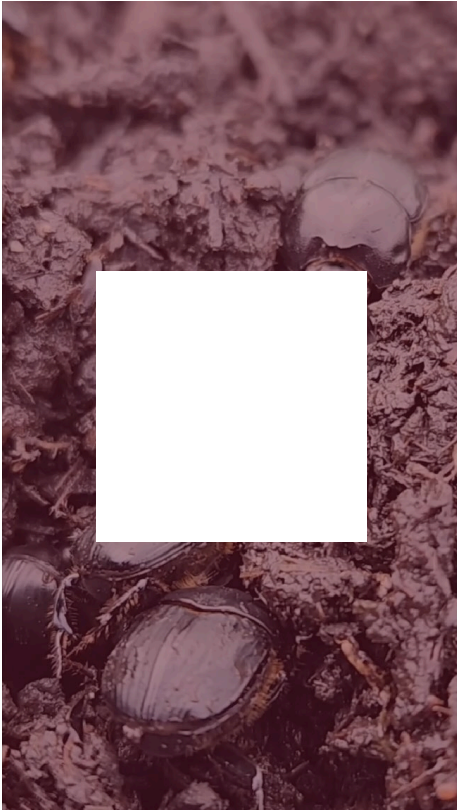
"We found we were missing them in the winter," Ms Finnigan said.

"In winter, there weren't any that were particularly active."



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Dung beetles were used on farms to break down manure into the soil, improve soil fertility and break livestock parasite cycles.

A species called bubious bison was better-suited to winter conditions and they were absent on the farm.

In order to get activity going all year round, the Finnigans purchased two 'populations' of 500 of these beetles from South Australia and released them in the middle of their property.

Ms Finnigan hoped there'd be an immediate impact and was already starting to see the results.

Dung beetle activity was perhaps most needed in winter when there was excess dung on wetter soils and it needed to be broken down.

"[The beetles] usually peak for us in November but we would really like them to peak in winter," she said.

"The ecosystem benefits are amazing.

"They clean up the paddock and bury the poo.

"Our pastures aren't contaminated so we knew they were always there but we just weren't aware there was more potential to have them in winter."

Dr Russ Barrow, Charles Sturt University, Canberra, said more farmers could avail of the opportunity dung beetles offered.

He had conducted a nationwide study of dung beetles on farms, supported by Meat & Livestock Australia and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

He said dung beetle activity varied by season and region, depending on an area's soil type and climatic conditions.

Mr Barrow said some of Victoria's sandy soils made it challenging for winter-active species.



"If they don't have winter-active beetles, it's because they have sandy soils," he said.

He said the introduction of non-native dung beetle species to Australia began in the 1960s and unlike the introduction of most non-native species it had been a "roaring success".

"They were introduced because the Australian dung beetles weren't liking the dung of introduced [livestock]," he said.

"They turned their nose up at it."

He said farmers could get a population of 1000 beetles to release on their land for approximately \$900 and this was great value for money.

He encouraged any farmer interested to learn more [here](#).

Ms Finnigan said the beetle work was an example of how farmers look after diverse ecosystems and don't just farm livestock.

"Farmers do a lot more than walking around in their gumboots, looking at sheep," she said.

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Barry is a journalist with Australian Community Media's Stock & Land where he reports on all aspects of agriculture. He previously worked in agricultural media in his native Ireland and hails from a small beef and sheep farm in the country's south-east. Email Barry at...

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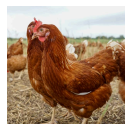
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