

*Practical information, resources and opportunities for  
north-west Tasmanian farmers and agricultural service providers.*

## **Welcome to the April edition of *Our Natural Advantage*, Cradle Coast NRM's monthly climate-smart farming snapshot.**

The theme of this edition is:

### **Nutrient Use Efficiency**

Fertilisers, particularly urea and nitrogen products, are currently seeing disrupted supply and a rise in price which is impacting farmers nationally. With availability no longer guaranteed, now is a great time to learn how to most efficiently manage your soil nutrients.

Read on to consider different ways you can improve how you use nutrients on your farm.

#### **Look after your soil biology**

A healthy soil is the backbone of an efficient, resilient farming operation. By looking after your soil biology, increased diversity of soil fauna, microbiology and root systems will lead to tangible benefits like improved structure and drainage and increased abundance or availability of soil nutrients. This could mean you will need less additives, like nitrogen fertilisers, to maintain the same amount of nitrogen within your soils. To create healthy soils on your farm, you can start to think about:

- Implementing multi species pastures or multi-species cover crops: including a variety of species within your pastures or as a cover crop between 'cash crops' can provide a significant boost to soil health. Having a diverse range of roots encourages microbial diversity, with some commonly used species able to pull nitrogen from the atmosphere and fix it into the soil. To find out more about multi-species cropping, check out Soil for Life's practice guide [here](#).
- Looking after the critters beneath the ground, including worms, can also provide a range of benefits. Worms can increase soil porosity, break down organic matter, and contribute to phosphorous cycling. Listen to Cradle Coast NRM's Sustainable Agriculture Facilitator Tom O'Malley talk about their benefits [here](#).

- Consider Dung beetles: these insects feed on moisture and bacteria from the cattle pats by breaking up and burying the dung. They follow this by placing nutrients and beneficial microbes into the root zone of pasture plants. In doing so, dung beetles reduce soil density and improve water infiltration, delivering significant benefits to both agricultural production and the environment. Making your farm more suitable for dung beetles by reducing drenching and chemical use can encourage their presence.



*Diverse species in a multi-species cover crop encourage nutrient cycling.*

### **Explore alternatives to supplement fertilisation**

As an alternative or alongside fertiliser application, effluent is an inexpensive, valuable resource which increases soil nitrogen when used effectively. Managing your effluent effectively can create increased nitrogen immobilization in the soil (meaning nitrogen stays fixed in the soil), reducing nitrogen loss. When managing your effluent application, consider the following:

- Spread your effluent efficiently: just like when applying fertilisers, ensure you follow the 4 Rs and don't apply too much or too little. With effluent, it's generally more favourable to spread a lower rate across a greater area rather than overtreating one paddock. Try to move effluent application around to different areas of your farm, so that over time each paddock receives a share.
- Effluent is considered an 'unbalanced' product, meaning it may not contain a balanced ration of key nutrients and micronutrients. When using effluent, consider conducting either regular soil testing or testing of the effluent product itself to determine which nutrients and micronutrients may need an additional boost across your property. Find out more about effluent application management [here](#).
- Consider using your effluent plus other on-farm wastes, such as calf bedding, straw waste and sawdust to create compost. By composting with some of your effluent, you can reduce other farm wastes while creating a final product which has higher organic materials and carbon content. This means that when applied to your land, nitrogen is more likely to have a higher uptake and to stay in the soil for longer. Spreading compost will also improve soil structure and can add more microbial diversity to your soils, making future application of other nutrient products more effective. Find out more about composting on-farm [here](#).

There are also other alternatives to fertilisers available, including:

- Foliar applications: bio-stimulants, microbial inoculants or dissolved nutrients can be sprayed onto crops during critical growth stages to deliver targeted nutrition and support. To find out more, check out the [Foliar Applications Practice Guide by Soils for Life](#).
- Biological inputs: In addition to composts, other biological inputs can enhance soil health and add nutrients to soil, including seaweed products, fish waste derived products and molasses derived products. These products can increase nutrient cycling, promote microbial diversity and increase soil organic matter and water-holding capacity. In turn, this leads to reduced reliance on synthetic fertilisers, bringing potential cost savings and reducing exposure to fertiliser price volatility. Find out more in [Soils for Life's Biological Fertilisers Practice Guide](#).



*Kelp drying on King Island*

### **Reduce nutrient loss**

To get the most out of any nitrogen you apply or the nitrogen already within your soils, there are actions you can take to reduce the amount of nitrogen lost environmentally. Consider taking action on the following:

- Manage runoff to keep nitrogen in your soils and out of waterways. Farm dam enhancement and protecting on-farm vegetation is one of many effective approaches to reducing runoff.
- Reduce soil erosion, targeting slopes and any areas of more severe erosion to maximise impact.
- Maintain soil moisture to prevent volatilisation of nitrogen. Volatilisation is a process where nitrogen in the soil transforms into a gas state. The nitrogen gas leaves the soil, reducing available nitrogen, and instead enters the atmosphere as a greenhouse gas.

To learn more about reducing nitrogen loss, take a look at this useful [practice guide by Soils for Life](#).

### **Use what you do have effectively**

The higher the price of fertiliser, the greater the plant response must be to ensure cost effectiveness. For example, if you're applying a nitrogen product to pasture in a grazing operation, the application will result in an additional quantity of feed being grown. The amount you spent on fertiliser to grow that quantity of feed must be less than the cost of generating that same quantity of feed another way, such as by buying feed in or by using alternative farming methods, in order for the fertiliser application to be cost effective.

To work out whether nitrogen application is still cost effective for you, you can include this as a line item in your feed budget. Dairy Australia has useful resources available, including this [fact sheet](#).

If you are applying nitrogen products this autumn, remember the '4 R's' of fertiliser application:

- Right source: If possible, use a stabilised or slow-release fertiliser.
- Right rate: Use soil sample data to ensure the correct rate of nitrogen is applied. If possible, sample multiple paddocks across your farm, and adjust the rate of application accordingly. To avoid under-utilisation, ensure you don't apply too little or too much nitrogen.
- Right place: Apply fertilisers only where needed, and in a way which reduces environmental losses.
- Right time: Consider split application of nitrogen to maximise uptake, ensuring your soil has adequate moisture and isn't too cold at time of application.



## Resources

**Practice Guides** by Soils for Life: While we have linked a few of these guides throughout the above article, a whole suite of Practice Guides on other topics are available [here](#).

**Nitrogen Fertilisers: Improving Efficiency and Saving Money** by Agriculture Victoria: Learn more about efficient use of fertilisers and best-practice approaches. [Visit the website here](#).

**Fertiliser Management** by Dairy Australia: Access resources to learn more about nutrient budgeting, soil health and more. [Visit the webpage here](#).

## Events and Opportunities

### Save the date: Value of Multi-Species Covers

Hosted by: Cradle Coast NRM

Date: 13 May 2026, 5:30 to 7:00 PM

Location: Forth Football Club

Hear from farmers about the value of multi-species covers and the results of our latest demonstration with Harvest Moon.

### Annual Ag Innovation Expo

Hosted by: TAPG

Date: 22 April, 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM

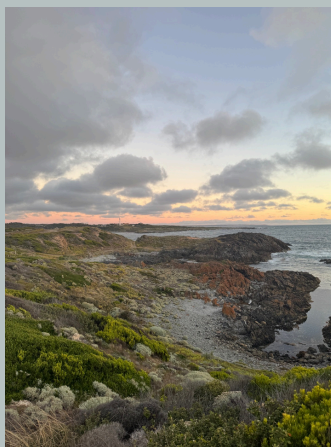
Location: Hagley Farm School

Secure your tickets [here](#).

### Find us at Agfest 2026!

Location: Carrick

Dates: 7 to 9 May



Missed a previous edition? Browse other topics from *Our Natural Advantage* below.

[View past editions](#)

If you would like to share a relevant resource, event or opportunity, please email [landprogram@cradlecoast.com](mailto:landprogram@cradlecoast.com) by 20 April to be considered for the next edition.

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