**Media Release**

**FARMERS WAGE WAR IN THE PITS**

10\(^{th}\) April, 2006

Farmer groups are fighting back to protect their most valuable asset, the land, but before growers can wage their war, they need to know what they are fighting with.

They therefore sought intelligence through a series of workshops that identified salinity, poor subsoil structure and acidity as the most common constraints reducing crop growth, limiting productivity and hindering WA’s $3 billion grain industry.

The Managing Hostile Subsoils team, Bob Gilkes, Tania Liaghati and Daniel Evans, all of the University of Western Australia (UWA), joined forces with DAFWA researchers and the Local Farmer Group Network (LFGN) to run the Soils in Depth workshop series.

They visited 15 WA grower groups, with 300 growers, 70 agribusiness personnel and Department of Agriculture and Food (DAFWA) researchers attended.

Professor Gilkes said major constraints affecting productivity included salinity in the Esperance region, subsoil acidity in the northern wheatbelt and alkalinity and poor subsoil structure in the central wheatbelt, which resulted in discussions on deep placement of gypsum and rooting depth.

“The soil pits allowed for a thorough investigation of soil structure, texture, pH, salt levels and root growth in the profile and helped explain the impact of soil properties on root growth and water holding capacity,” he said.

The 2005 workshops highlighted the extent of subsoil constraints across WA and the 2006 series promises to expose more farmers.

Funded by the Grains Research and Development Corporation and based at UWA, LFGN helped locate and co-ordinate the 105 soil pits in cropping paddocks with high and low productivity.

Dr Liaghati said crop rooting depth was of major interest and ranged from 20 cm in shallow duplex soils, to more than 200 cm in ‘earthy’ sand.

“Various techniques were used to investigate the pits, ranging from universal pH indicator spray to growers visually examining root growth,” she said.

Due to the success of the 2005 workshops, the Managing Hostile Subsoils team were invited to investigate several sites in the high rainfall zone, near Kojonup.

LFGN Co-ordinator, Paul Carmody said many farmer groups unable to participate last year had now booked for workshops planned for this August. “Others interested can contact me on 0427 997 878 or visit our website and go to project opportunities to download a subsoils expression of interest form”.

[www.lfgn.org.au](http://www.lfgn.org.au)

Authorised by LFGN and issued on its behalf by Brendon Cant & Associates, Tel 08 9384 1122

Media Contact: Paul Carmody, LFGN Co-ordinator, Mob 0427 997 878

Lisa Mayer, LFGN Administration Officer, Tel 08 6488 7937