

‘It’s our legacy, our heritage:’ 130-year-old Limestone Coast family farm under threat as spring runs dry due to suspected water over-allocation

A crucial spring on a fifth-generation family SA farm has gone dry for the first time in 90 years, with fears about what it means for the wider region.

[Jessica Dempster](#)

3 min read

March 13, 2024 - 12:00PM

The Messenger



Joanne Feast and her son Morgan, beside the dried-up drain on their fifth-generation family farm near Mount Gambier. Picture: Jessica Dempster

[Mount Gambier](#)

A crucial drain on a South-East family farm has run dry for the first time in 90 years, leaving mother and son farmers Joanne, 52, and Morgan Feast, 24, gravely worried about the region’s water supply.

The Feasts have farmed near Eight Mile Creek for 130 years, with Morgan’s great-great-grandfather establishing the property in the late 1800s.

Joanne has worked the property since she was 18 with her late husband and Morgan's father, Stuart, who passed away 19 years ago at the age of 39 after a battle with cancer.

After Stuart's passing, the family sold half of the 3000-acre property and Joanne took over running the farm until Morgan was ready to manage it.

Last week the family made a disturbing discovery at one of the drains located on their property.

"We have two springs on the Feast family farm," Joanne said. "Both of these springs have their own drains that meet up at one point and then head out towards the ocean.

"Last Friday while I was feeding out hay, I noticed that the drain coming from our major spring was dry."



The drain running from the Feast farm's major spring has dried up for the first time in 90 years. Picture: Jessica Dempster.

"This drain has never gone dry in the 90 years since it was first dug. We're concerned for the water level of the spring as water obviously isn't flowing from it now."

Joanne and Morgan said their biggest concern was the second drain would also dry up.

"There'll be nothing pushing out into the ocean and we're very concerned that will lead to salt intrusion and a decreased water quality or even supply for our stock," Joanne said.

The Feasts said they've already lost two heifers in the past year to suspected salt intrusion and fear what could happen to their land and livestock if both springs dry up completely.

The Feasts fear over-allocation of water licences under the region's Lower Limestone Coast Water Allocation Plan has caused the drop.

"We don't have a water licence, our only use of the ground water table is for stock water," Joanne said.

"I believe that the lower Limestone Coast region has been over-allocated for its water use for a long time.

"You can't continue to deplete and drain the underground water table year after year and think there isn't going to be consequences.

"If we don't work quickly and drastically, this lack of waterflow and the water table dropping will not only be devastating for our farm, it's going to affect everybody as it creeps up – all the farmers need to be concerned.



The spring and the native vegetation that grows around it has attracted a flock of Brolgas (Australian cranes) to take up residence on the farm as well. Brolgas are considered a "vulnerable" species in South Australia. Picture: Jessica Dempster

"It's devastating to see the pristine area begin to die in front of our eyes."

Morgan said if the land became unfarmable, it would erase the Feast family's heritage and legacy.

"It's our family, it's our legacy, it's our heritage," Morgan said.

"It's what my father dedicated his life to, and what his father dedicated his life to and then what my great-grandfather and great-great grandfather spent their lives doing as well."



Joanne has been running the family farm for the past 19 years after the passing of her husband Stuart. Their son Morgan, 24, is about to take over running the farm. PICTURE: Jessica Dempster

Representatives of the Limestone Coast Landscape Board are visiting the Feasts' farm to examine the spring on Tuesday.

Board planning manager Liz Perkins said the Feasts' farm was on land home to the globally rare and unique karst springs, which are listed as threatened.

Ms Perkins said the local water allocation plan was reviewed in 2023, 10 years after it was adopted. The review found the plan needed "substantial amendment" before it was "appropriate for the region".

"The amendment of the plan – set to begin late March 2024 – is a pivotal process for the Lower Limestone Coast region as we have an opportunity to ensure a sustainable future for our region's water resources."

Joanne said the farm plays a crucial part in both her and Morgan's memories of Stuart.

"Morgan was only four when Stuart died, even though he might not have that many memories of him, he gets to work on the same fences his father put in all those years ago – there's so many things out here that represent Stuart, it's his and his family's legacy."

"This situation is critical, it is absolutely critical and something needs to be done."