



The Cultural Ecology of Wheat Project

Relationships between plants underpin our survival, but we rarely look closely at the plants we depend on most. We aim to provide innovative new perspectives on human-plant interactions by tracing and connecting the cultural, economic and ecological networks in which wheat is embedded. We are interested to connect all the networks from production to consumption. So we start by asking, what are all the processes that together result in the loaf of bread, or packet of pasta, in the kitchen in Sydney?

Why wheat?

Wheat is the first case study in a broader project examining a range of plants. We have chosen to start with wheat because it is

- important in the history of Australian national development,
- a staple food,
- a significant agent of landscape change, and
- a major crop and agricultural export.

How are we doing it?

A particular focus for us is ethnography – interviews with people and observation of their actions at different points in the networks. We are interviewing farmers, contractors, transporters, agents, financiers, manufacturers, retailers and consumers.

Why is it useful?

In exploring these networks we hope to help urban Australians understand the social and ecological relations and processes that sustain their life today. In contemporary life, few of us have a good understanding of where our food comes from, how it gets to our table and what are the economic and environmental tradeoffs that must be made along the way. In showing the links between urban and rural Australia, we hope to contribute to debates about the sustainability of both.

The Team

Professor Lesley Head is a geographer who has worked on long term landscape change, Aboriginal interactions with environment and suburban people's relationship with their backyards. The team also includes Dr Jenny Atchison, an environmental scientist who grew up in rural NSW, Alison Gates, an historical geographer and Pat Muir.

