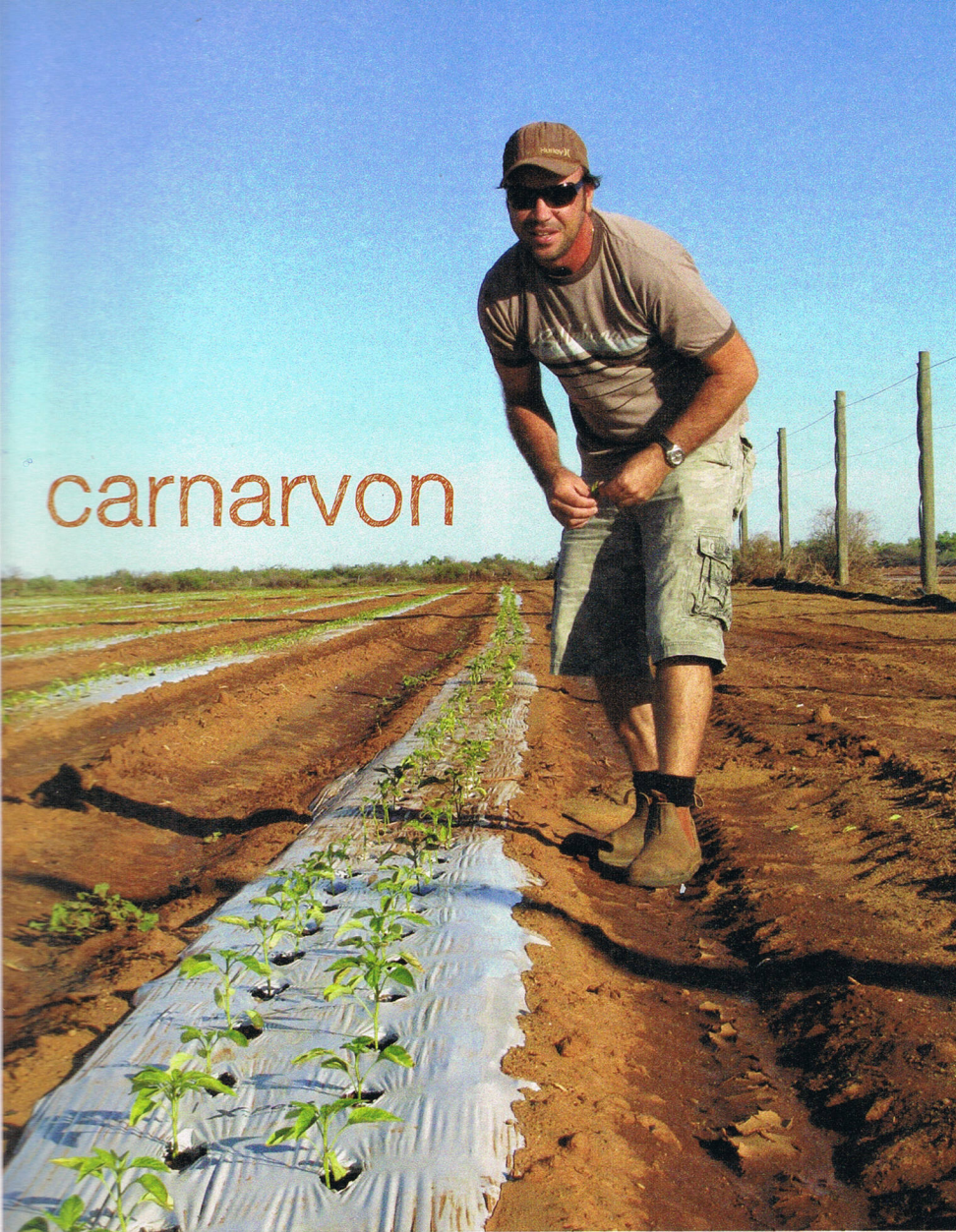


carnarvon



"We received 250 millimetres of rain in a day which proved to be too much for our crops. We lost 1.5 hectares of eggplant, 50,000 capsicum plants and 5 hectares of butternut pumpkins. Four days later the flood came through and destroyed everything else."

"Back in early December we had put a planting program in with the seedling company for capsicums and eggplant to arrive on the 26th January. So it has been all stops out getting the paddocks prepared and ready for the start of the new season."

It appears that the unachievable has been achieved. Just 2 months after the devastating floods growers are getting back on their feet and Robbie estimates that between February to mid March he will have his whole property replanted with 12 hectares of capsicum and 2.5 hectares of eggplant.

"We will start to pick our green capsicums by the 10th April and the reds by the end of April to beginning of May. When we get into full swing in late April we are probably looking at 15-20 tonnes per week, weather permitting."

"We are on track as to where we were last year, maybe a week late. However, we have lost a large portion of our turnover, which is the general feeling along the river."

The crops over the summer months become the cream for most growers after they work all year to cover their costs, so to lose the December/January income is a big financial burden for them. However, the Gascoyne growers have been very fortunate to have the support of the Government, banks and the suppliers.

Robbie said that "the suppliers have revised their terms of trade so growers don't have to pay bills for 3 to 4 months. This is a huge help as it will be tough for the region up until at least May or June. One positive thing out of the flood is that everyone is able to get a fresh start and once the recovery process is completed on the properties, growers can focus on replanting."

ALEX HARPER OF THE GASCOYNE FOOD COUNCIL EXPLAINS HOW TWO CARNARVON FARMS HAVE DEALT WITH THE RECENT FLOOD.

In the week before Christmas last year, Carnarvon received almost a year's rain in a day and the worst flood in fifty years resulted. Much of the damage was to the town's abundant farmland that supplies much of the state's fruit and vegetables. The damage was extensive and disastrously timed but progress is happening and the area is moving forward.

Be careful what you wish for

It was looking like a long, dry summer ahead for Carnarvon. The willy willys were picking up the top soil and taking it for miles across the dry, parched flats. The vegetable crops on the river delta were struggling under the

water restrictions and you would be forgiven for thinking that the Gascoyne River was merely a long stretching sand bed.

Then, the week before Christmas, the Gascoyne's prayers were answered. Gently at first and then furiously it came – the rain and then the river.

Robbie Kuzmicich is a second generation farmer on the Gascoyne river delta and a director of Gascoyne Gold, a major packing shed in Carnarvon. He believes that although most of Carnarvon's growers are struggling financially after being hit by viruses and then major flooding, the crops for this year will be very fruitful.

Photos: Alex Harper