



Janice Dowse runs the Southern Farming Systems trial plots in Forge Creek as part of the Topsoils Program. *PH*

Soil trials a good test

Hidden among the farming properties of Forge Creek is a patch of ground that has come to resemble a chessboard with alternating squares of pasture all of various lengths and condition.

The site is a demonstration plot run by Southern Farming Systems (SFS) for the benefit of the National Landcare Programme's Topsoils Initiative, funded by the Federal Government and administered by East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority.

The chess player is SFS Gippsland coordinator, Janice Dowse, who has spent the past two years trialling the addition of various soil treatments to test for productivity increases.

"We've taken the results of the Topsoils soils testing programme and we're looking at improving nutrient levels," Janice explained.

Ten treatments, including super, limes, copper and zinc amongst them, are applied in a variety of combinations over an 80m x 100m allotment in a grid like pattern.

"With everything here on the one site, different fertilisers in the same situation, you're comparing every-

thing on the one plot to see what's working," Janice said.

The trial site has been designed to compliment the trials being undertaken by the Topsoils farmer led focus groups. Where many members are low input operators, this site includes higher inputs and demonstrates the effects of multiple options.

"Southern Farming Systems is different from Landcare groups, which creates a good level of diversity for the farming community," Janice said.

While Janice acknowledges that not everything is going to work she suggests that that's the beauty of small plot trials.

"A farmer can come along and say I grow that one and it's in a similar area, they can see which one does better and think maybe I'll try that one next year.

"We're giving farmers the understanding and opportunity to push their options further with scientific rigour, it's a chance to try before they buy."

For more information about the Topsoils Program contact the East Gippsland Landcare Network.