

SOUTH COAST ENVIRONMENT SOCIETY INC.



ANNUAL REPORT August 2015

We are finding increased demand for our services and increased interest from stakeholders keen to partner with us. It is our enthusiastic and skilled volunteers, staff and committee who make it possible for us to continually rise up and keep us going.

In our strategic planning for 2015-2020 we identified that the “buzz” of the Harvest Festival was something we would like to achieve with all our projects. People getting together with enthusiasm for learning and sharing.

For us, 2015 is about gearing up for increased interest in all that we do. We have a roster of people to help with opening and closing the centre, and we have a new financial officer, and another new staff member to help with projects funding. We refreshed our online presence with a new website, and are looking at how we can use technology to make our back office and front of house smarter so we can cope with increased enquiries and media interest. We are also keeping an eye out for sponsors and other ways to ensure our projects are funded to succeed – because they are so important to the sustainability of our region.

Support for local individuals and groups:

Over the last year we have been increasingly busy giving support and advice to people through-out the wider Southland area; some days in the Centre can be quite intense with back to back requests. These requests are through visits to the Centre, as well as through phone calls, emails and letters from people all over Southland and beyond.

We visit homes, gardens, farms, and schools by invitation and give advice on the full range of topics and issues we are knowledgeable in. We provide speakers for local community groups and schools. We hosted a “friends of sharks” talk in April and an Oxfam morning tea fundraiser in May.

We publish our monthly magazine, “Coastline”, which now gets delivered in a ‘mobile device’ friendly manner. Our regularly updated website, www.sces.org.nz, averages 200 visits a week and has just been redesigned. Our website is ‘linked-to’ by many other organisations and with any wider media exposure we get its use increases further. We also have an active Facebook page!

Support and base for local groups

We continue to make available the Centre and its facilities for the Organic Food Co-op, Riverton Estuary Care Incorporated, and any other local 'environmentally ethical' groups that need a venue or display space that's suitable and appropriate to their various aims.

We are very appreciative of the symbiotic relationship with the Organic Food Co-op, a not-for profit 'shop' run by volunteers, who staff the whole Centre for many of the opening hours and are always willing to help out with other projects when we are very busy. We continue to have 250-300 visitors to the Centre each week.

Providing inspiration via national media:

-  Our National profile continues to increase and we are now regularly seeing and hearing about the positive results of this. Not a week goes by when we don't have a visitor calling in to the Centre, from a far flung corner of NZ, telling us about their own project, that they say, was inspired by reading or hearing about what our Society is achieving in the far South.
-  Our Centre is widely recognised as one of the best Environment Centre in NZ and along with our many successful projects we are inspiring other groups all around NZ to work similarly for a more sustainable, environmentally sensitive and resilient Aotearoa. With the Centre in its 19th year of operation and with many successful programmes running, we are now able to mentor other groups and share our knowledge and resources. We believe that this grass roots network is creating ripples of change on so many levels not only in Southland but around NZ.
-  This year's national media exposures have been:
 - Our Open Orchard Project has been filmed for TV One's 'Rural Delivery' programme that screened on Saturday 16 May 2015.
 - Country Calendar show to be screened on 22 August 2015.

Information and education at events though out Southland and beyond:

-  Tapanui Garden Club July 14: Talk on Heritage Fruit trees and Permaculture.
-  Invercargill Eco Fest, October. We had three 'stations' at the Eco-fest: one for promoting growing heritage potato & garlic varieties, one for Environment Centre eco information and products and one on homemaking.
-  'Alexandra Thyme Festival' November. Workshops and talks on heritage fruit trees and Permaculture
-  Te Anau Healthy Lifestyle Expo, November we had 4 stalls: Home Gardening, Homemaking, Healthy consumer options and we promoted a potential Organic Food Co-op to be based in Te Anau.

Heritage Harvest Festival:

The 7th festival was even bigger than those before with thousands attending! This year we had Country Calendar down to film our projects and the festival. We are looking forward to this airing in spring 2015.

We again featured local live acoustic music throughout the event, and we ran 40 workshops over the weekend. We had 596 workshop registrations; many people attended more than one workshop and came from all over the country. Topics ranged from propagating plants, to keeping chickens (refer to list under Adult Education below).



This year's festival was larger than previous years; we needed a marquee and several tents in addition to the school hall to accommodate an increased number of stall holders and displays.

Special features of this year's festival included talks from Jo McCarroll editor of NZ Gardener Magazine, and Steven Barstow author of Around the World in 80 Plants. We also had Bill Blair, Trug maker from Oamaru demonstrating. This all in addition to our displays of apples, potatoes, garlic, pumpkins, pears and this year heritage beans too from Mark Christianson food scientist.



Southland Seed Savers Network

We are taking a fresh look at our seed saving project looking to collaborate with other stakeholders. So far Ag Research and our economic development agency Venture Southland have offered assistance with this project.

Part of this work involves looking at how to best establish an enterprise so that income can be generated to financially incentivise more growers.



Open Orchard Project

Annual Heritage Fruit Tree sale

Our Open Orchard fundraiser was once again highly successful and resulted in the dispersal of more than 660 heritage fruit trees in the Southland region over three days, along with the information needed to care for them successfully. The trees are priced very reasonably at \$27.50 or 4 for \$100, to enable more people to have their own orchard. Many people come back year after year and even though they have no more room on their land they are buying them for gifts or spreading them out into roadsides and wastelands. This year we had some great media coverage with Southland Times: <http://www.stuff.co.nz/southland-times/news/70888344/southland-heritage-fruit-trees-on-sale>

We hold pruning and grafting workshops each year - this year Tokonui hosted its first pruning workshop which was very well attended by those folk from the area who have been planting fruit trees the last few years. We still get requests to speak about the Open Orchard Project from near and far. Several grafting workshops are planned to be held during spring.



Heritage Orchard Park project

Through many years of work and research our Society has visited over 100 of the oldest orchard remnants of Southlands 19th Century and early 20th century orchards and now have 600 trees grafted and growing in a nursery situation ready for transplanting back into the communities from which they came. These trees are cleared around bi annually and pruned every winter. This year we trenched around them to enable them to be shifted more easily.

We are looking for permanent long term 'safe' homes for the fruit tree varieties we have gathered from these early settler orchards, half acre sheltered fenced section in each ward on average. These will be planted in that areas original family 'orchard sets' in rows and total approximately 60 mainly apples but also pear and plum trees. These trees will live for 80-120 years so it will be a lasting and fruitful gift to pass on to future generations.

After dealing with a hiccup whereby the council policy did not allow planting of fruit trees on

reserves, submissions on the Open Spaces Policy at Southland District Council now allow mean council policy allows for planting orchards. We have decided to focus on just two locations for this winter, and have another 10 to focus on in coming years.

Riverton Heritage Orchard Park

Riverton established the first Heritage Orchard Park in NZ in 2013 with trees planted in it that we grafted from old Southland settlers trees. In September 2014 the families were invited back to clear around the trees and plant wildflowers we had 12 people helping that day. We are grateful to Riverton Estuary Care who bought the land on our behalf and given us an interest free loan until we secure funding (they had made money some time ago on a land sale).

Food Forest Project

Our quarter acre community food forest on the main street of Riverton is now 6 years old and flourishing. This year we had a working bee to tidy up and have a new welcome sign “Entrée”, and displayed information during the Harvest Festival. We used some great Perspex displays showing the layers of the forest ecosystem. As requests to view food forests increase, we are looking for funds to have the information displayed on more permanent panels so that visitors year round can learn about what they are looking at.



The centre regularly books tours of The Guyton's 19 year old Food Forest as a way to generate funds for the society. Several food forest tours are held each month.



We run Food Forest workshops on demand as part of our educational programmes. In 2014/15 we ran four Food Forest workshops:

- 🌱 15 November attended by 13
- 🌱 7 December attended by 15
- 🌱 14 January attended by 7
- 🌱 15 February attended by 12

Adult education programmes:

We ran the following workshops in the past year:

-  Chemical free food talk, 24th November (15 people)
-  Green Island garden group tour 29th November (29 people)
-  Natural Skincare - 8th December (11 people)
-  Harvest Festival Workshops (43 workshops over two days):

Workshop Topic	Attendees
Food Forests (x2)	27
Natural skincare	10
The importance of Humus	17
Living Foods' workshop (x2)	22
Willow weaving (x2)	12
Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)(x2)	26
Towards urban self-sufficiency	24
Introduction into superfoods (x2)	14
Propagating plants (x2)	32
High health fruit & vegetables (x2)	40
A Learn about Bees & how we can support them (x2)	31
Introduction to beekeeping (x2)	27
Fermenting Food	28
Flax weaving talk (x2)	15
Life as NZ gardener editor talk (x2)	27
Make your own skincare products	17
Keeping hens in an urban backyard (x2)	28
Making a willow hurdle (x2)	27
Making your own cider (x2)	22
Starting a Food Forest	20
Feed your family on a ¼ Acre Section	22
Around the world in 80 plants talk (x2)	66
Making jams jellies and more (x2)	17
Setting up a home orchard	14
Herbs and oils	18
Gardening in difficult soils	10
Permaculture/off grid lifestyle	22

ECO-EDUCATION

We have packaged up our education workshops into 6 different categories, with 10 workshops in each category. We have re-designed our brochures to suit and now have attractive certificates on completion of a course or set of courses:



We are preparing to launch these widely around Southland from Spring 2015.

- 🌱 **Living Lightly** e.g. chemical free cleaning; make your own: skin care products, gifts, children's games
- 🌱 **Bountiful Backyards** e.g. composting, vegetable gardening, keeping hens, home orchard
- 🌱 **Conscious Consuming** e.g. what is 'real' food, reading labels, eating seasonally, cooking with wholefoods
- 🌱 **Earth Crafts** e.g. carding and spinning wool, flax weaving, willow weaving, felt making
- 🌱 **Appropriate Technologies** e.g. cob ovens, solar dehydrator, rocket stoves, collecting rainwater
- 🌱 **Enhancing Native Biodiversity** e.g. growing natives, managing pests, streamside planting, attracting native birds to your garden

Children's education

We have continued to visit, by invitation, innumerable schools where we have engaged classes and sometimes whole schools, in improving their school environments with gardens and orchards.

For example Matarua, Edendale, Wyndham, Dacre, Thornbury, Wallacetown, Dipton, Riverton, Waianiwa and Isla Bank Schools have all had a free fruit trees pruning workshop this spring.



In late 2014 we had two Schools visit us for a whole day programme; St Johns Girls School (80 girls plus teachers and parents), Clutha Valley primary school (40 children plus teachers and parents). Both Schools were looking at different eco-systems: beach, native bush, food forest and also visited the Environment Centre. In December we had Waihopai Play Centre Visit. Waianiwa School visited in March to get ideas for setting up their schools garden – they visited the community forest garden.

We organised the activities for the Southland District Council LedLab Ecoblitz event, which saw 41 secondary school children take part in activities ranging from making bird feeders to gardening and beach clean ups for one day.



Green Fingers Garden Club

This project continues to offer a \$2 edible garden pack for children to grow at home. New schools and kindergartens are becoming involved. Feedback from teachers, pupils and parents shows the simple idea of providing children with seeds and motivation to garden is a winning concept. This is now becoming popular as a 'starting kit' for adults who have never gardened before and we are going to launch it in schools nationally in Spring 2015.

National Environment Centre Network

We were well represented with Robyn and Karla who attended the August 2014 Hui. Robyn Guyton is a member of the nationwide hub and our fruit tree project has been selected as the first project to be offered nationwide. We are looking forward to helping other centres succeed in this project!



South Coast Environment Society Incorporated 1996