

Living Sustainably

The introduction and transition to sustainable living and permaculture practice elective this year has seen the first class experience a very busy and productive first semester so far. Based on the twelve guiding principles of permaculture, students initially planted out the garden beds with the intention of rotating main crops to ensure key nutrients are either replenished or utilised with each rotation, reducing the need for synthetic fertilisers. Students selected key vegetables and herbs that will compliment their chicken dinner later in the semester. Yes, that's right we're raising both egg laying and meat chickens who were kindly donated to the school by Kaz's Googs at Heywood and Humpy Creek Produce. The ten egg laying Isa Browns should begin laying eggs shortly and the meat chickens, which arrived during May Race week will be ready for production in the next month just in time for students to also harvest their vegetable crops and create their chicken dinner. By doing so students learn how they can be self-sustaining, reduce the energy consumption required to do so and produce a yield with little external input e.g. fertilizers.

In addition to the chickens, where students have created a deep leaf litter system in the coop to create compost, which will then be utilised throughout the school for adding nutrient rich soil to the gardens, we have continued with a focus on nutrient cycles by exploring aquaponics. Aquaponics is a fusion of hydroponics and aquaculture, which harnesses the nitrogen created by the fish in the water to feed the vegetable and plant crops in the adjoining growing beds. Students began with a small scale version using goldfish, herbs and ornamental plants and have most recently upscaled to rainbow trout in an identical large system. We hope to harvest the fish at the end of year in addition to the vegetable crops this system produces throughout.

With a focus on consuming what you produce students have created herbal teas, dehydrated apples making apple chips, brewed kombucha and flavoured it with the fruits they already grow at home, and finally they have tried their hand at making their own yogurt, which was a complete hit! Most recently we visited the Warrnambool Community Garden to gain further knowledge and ideas as to how we can continue to develop our skills and add to our garden. This has led to the creation of an assessment task that will see the students work in groups to develop a proposal for a committed permaculture garden as part of the continued works in the development of the McAuley and future



9@Rice campus. Students will consider how our elders at Mercy Place and the wider school community could access and use the garden to benefit their health and wellbeing and studies. This task will challenge students and encourage them to take all they have learned throughout the unit and apply it to a real life situation knowing the benefits to people and places by following the principles of permaculture.

Suzie Wellens - Science & Laboratory Coordinator

