

Our farm is dry. Pretty much always dry. I've only ever seen the creek run twice. But it's where I call home and this is my story.

My name is Jack. I'm 10 years old. I'm named after my great, great grandfather Jack Sharkey who in 1920 settled out on the open plains at Balliang East, 50km west of Melbourne.

With an average rainfall of just 400mm and shallow top soil it's not the easiest place to grow grain. I'm not sure why my ancestors picked here to farm. Maybe they knew only the tough farmers could.

Machinery at our place has to be built well. With volcanic stone buried just below the surface in some places around the farm it can be hard on the machinery. I've just started to learn to drive the header with Dad. I reckon I spend more time driving around stone heaps than going in a straight line!

I'm really proud of my family's history of growing grain, especially because it's not always easy at Balliang East, but I think it brings out the best in really good farmers. When I walk around the yard I see all sorts of farm equipment Pa has built over the years, like the seed and fertiliser bin he built to load the air-seeder. This was back in the late 1970s when most farmers were still loading with bags. My Pa is really good at designing, building and fixing things with his welder.

Whilst Pa is great at building stuff, Dad is the technology bloke. Dad often has people out doing trial work and measuring lots of things so we can improve our soil health and grain production without impacting on the environment. Dad is always reading.

I like farming and love growing things. I have a small patch of lupins outside the kitchen window. Mum keeps an eye on it when I'm at school.

Harvest is my favourite time. I find it really rewarding when the grain comes in. When harvest is over my little brother and I surf down the grain stacks on our bogie boards. It's the best fun.

In two more harvests it will be the Sharkey's 100th harvest. I think my great, great grandfather was right. Whilst Balliang East isn't the easiest place to be a grain grower it sure brings out the best in the ones that are here.



Jack Sharkey, 10 years old, Balliang East, VIC