

COUNTRY LIVING

INSIDE

GARDEN Sleepy cyclamens awake 88

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Dry times, drought is part of farming life for Mallee farmers such as Yvonne and Robert McClelland from Sea Lake.

Climate OF CHANGE

A three-year study into the drought has revealed a major shift in the perceptions of farmers. **Monica Jackson reports**

When it comes to drought, dust storms and pest plagues, Mallee farmers are an authority.

These destructive forces have, after all, been part of farming life for generations.

Farmers have simply learnt to "get on with it", gradually adapting their farming methods to best suit the land and environment.

But now there is a new unknown — climate change.

After years lurking in the shadows of theoretical science, this unassuming phrase finally grabbed the headlines — and public imagination — in the past 12 months.

And its arrival has signalled a major shift in how people think about drought.

For the past three years, PhD candidate Deb Anderson has been asking Mallee farmers about their experiences of drought and their perceptions of climate change.

She has conducted 30 interviews since September 2004, talking with dryland farmers, an agronomist, an agricultural consultant, women involved in off-farm work and community welfare, as well as farmer spouses.

She also interviewed members of local government, drought counsellors and town business people. At each interview, the candidates were asked about their experiences with drought.

For most, drought meant much more than a lack of rain.

Greg Brown, a cereals and sheep

farmer and former Mildura Shire councillor from Underbool, for example, says drought is not felt just by the farmer.

"It impacts on the total community we've lost over the years. We've lost our bank, we've lost our general store, we've lost people, we've lost services."

Andrea Hogan, a former editor of the *Hopeoun Courier*, says drought is more about the drying up of resources than actual lack of rain.

"People feel they've lost control," she says. "(When) you give people back some sort of control, they immediately then pick up the reins of their life."

"More and more it's becoming a drought of people. Each time there is a drought or a bad season or a tough season, you lose people."

"You have less people for your committees. You have less people to help with the working bees. You have less football players."

Deb says her research witnessed a rapid and striking shift in public discourse on climate change, particularly in the past year.

"Increasingly, interpretations of drought are being shaped by perceptions of climate change both as an abstract, scientific concept and as an historical, lived experience," she says.

This shift is significant for farmers because drought is no longer seen as a periodic, albeit unpredictable fact of life, but something that belongs to broader rural environmental change, cultural survival and socio-economic struggle.

"Climate change projections have



Concerned: Bev Cook from Nandaly measures the cost of drought and climate change on the wider community.



Survival: Anthony (Hubbie) Sheldon from Ngallo is adapting his farming techniques to best cope with climate change.

the potential to make what is already a divisive argument about rural futures even more divisive," Deb says.

Issues of sustainable agriculture, environmental costs and social costs have to be taken into account when the impact of climate change on farming is analysed, she says.

Ironically, Deb's research was interrupted last year by cyclone Larry, which wiped out her family's dairy farm at Innisfail, in Queensland.

"We lost much of our house and had to shut down the farm. The ranfeforest was flattened. It was harrowing," she says.

"For three years, my life had revolved around stories of drought, of a country crying out for rain. But

Llife took a detour. And in the months after the cyclone, people up north were praying the rain would let up so they could get on with rebuilding their lives."

While scientists are debating whether cyclones such as Larry are examples of global warming, Deb says she learnt a lot about the climatic uncertainty and the hardships farmers are dealing with.

She says that although there were many different views on drought and climate change among the interviewees, most farmers are attuned to information on climate change and commodity markets.

"In some ways they are bombarded by too much information, which they have to sift through, but remain desperate for

understanding, for new knowledge on drought," she says.

She says farmers worry about political isolation and the loss of control over their industry because of global policies and deregulation. They also worry about the loss of local services and infrastructure as well as rising costs, especially fuel.

But in all cases, the underlying feeling is one of optimism.

She hopes to complete her research by July. The project, which is jointly funded by The Australian Centre at the University of Melbourne and Museum Victoria, will then become part of the museum's collection.

Deb can be contacted by emailing deb@unimelb.edu.au

Poets to prove their words' worth

Budding and established bards are invited to enter one of regional Victoria's most lucrative poetry competitions, the Reason-Brisbane Poetry Prize.

The competition is part of Hepburn Shire's Words in Winter celebrations and offers prizes of up to \$700.

Competition patron and published poet Joy Brisbane says she understands the difficulties faced by poets when trying to find outlets for their work.

She hopes the competition will encourage poets to continue developing their talent.

The Reason-Brisbane Poetry Prize

is named in honour of the late Len Reason, a much loved Daylesford poet, and Jeff Brisbane, Joy's late husband, a lover of poetry and once the district forester at Ballarat.

The competition closes on July 16. Kevin Brophy, poet, author and

teacher, will judge the entries.

Winners will be announced at Daylesford on Saturday, August 4.

For competition rules, visit www.geocities.com/wordcomp or send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to Rules, PO Box 439, Daylesford 3460.

Coming up

To May 13

Bright Autumn Festival

Activities include golf days, a bowling carnival, card party at Cannis' Cafe, picnic, dancing and a ball, as well as tours of Bright and districts.

Ph: (03) 5755 0520

May 11-22

Needing to Stitch

An exhibition of traditional and contemporary embroidery created by members of the Bairsdale creative embroidery group. East Gippsland Art Gallery, Nicholson St, 10am-4pm daily.

Ph: (03) 5157 5471

May 12

Puckapunyal Cup Day

Racing at Seymour Racing Club, children's activities include an animal farm, jumping castle and play ground. Entertainment from the Armed Forces Band and military equipment on display. Adults \$10, children under 17 free, pensioners \$5.

Ph: (03) 5799 0233

May 12-27

Patchwork Quilt Exhibition

Handmade quilts of all sizes on display in the large drying shed at Warratina Lavender Farm, 105 Quayle Rd, Wandin Yallock, 10am-4pm.

Ph: (03) 5964 4650

May 13

St Arnaud Country Music Club

Evening with guest artists, St Arnaud Sporting Club, 6pm-10pm. Admission \$5 or \$4 for members. Special dinner menu available with nothing over \$10. Bookings necessary.

Ph: (03) 5495 1647

May 19

Historic Gulf Station's Empire Day

Queen Victoria's Birthday, with a bonfire and fireworks, the good Queen herself will be present, barbecue-sausage sizzle.

Refreshments available or bring your own picnic, children's activities, music, 3pm-10pm, Gulf Station 1029 Melba Hwy, Yarra Glen. Adults \$10, children \$5, family \$25. National Trust members \$8.

Ph: (03) 9730 1286

Send details, at least two weeks before the event, to *The Weekly Times* Calendar, PO Box 14995, Melbourne 8001, fax to (03) 9292 2697, or email to countryliving@theweeklytimes.com.au

COUNTRYLIVING

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School spirit kicks in

For the cause: Tylden Primary School parents Liz Collins, Susan Davie and Sandra Bowman.



They might be few in number but the Tylden community, near Kyneton, is big on spirit and support.

The town has dozens of active committees operating at any one time, taking responsibility for the care of children, sport, fires, entertainment and the environment.

Parents, teachers, friends and students are gearing up for the Tylden Primary School Annual Fair and Vintage Tractor Pull on Saturday.

The event is a major fundraiser

for the 130-student school, helping to upgrade school computers and sporting equipment as well as setting up a fully equipped kitchen.

Liz Collins, who has two children at the school, says the kitchen is part of the Future Foodies of Tylden initiative that began two years ago.

Its aim is to enable children to learn culinary skills as part of their curriculum, develop hands-on cooking skills and encourage healthy eating habits, from the vegetable garden to the kitchen.

Liz says the Vintage Tractor Pull, in its 10th year, attracts many grand old tractors, trucks, cars and steam engines.

Most of the tractors are pre-1955 vintage but one which often takes out the winning trophy for pulling a sledge the furthest in the Chamberlain Class is a robust 1959 Super Seventy Chamberlain.

Other tractors include a Farmall H, 1945 LA Case, E27N Fordson and an early 20th century hay baler in full working order that shows how it was done all those decades ago.

The event will also include stalls with fresh produce, barbecue, cakes and preserves.

There will be children's activities and amusements, an animal farm, chook lotto, shoe shine and football clinics.

Checklist

The Tylden Primary School Annual Fair and Vintage Tractor Pull, on Saturday at the Tylden Primary School (10km south of Kyneton), 10am-3pm. For more details, phone Ross on 0428 176 996, or the school, on (03) 5424 8244.

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Hot prizes for autumnal prose

What does autumn mean to you? Is it your favourite time of the year, or do you feel melancholy about the approaching winter?

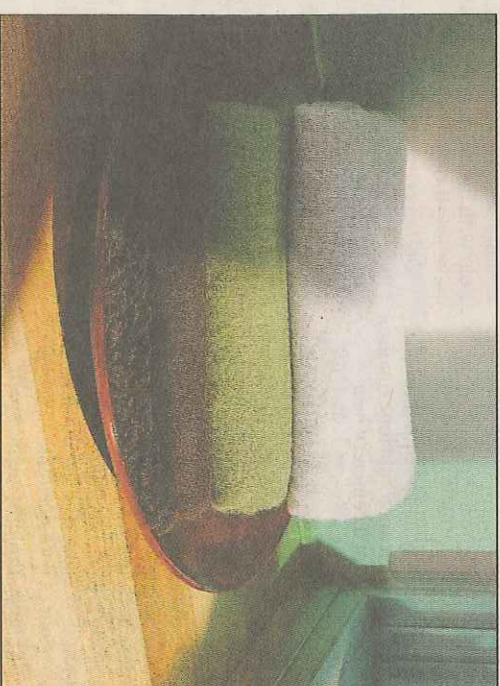
The beautiful colours that autumn brings are an inspiration to gardeners, poets and artists, as well as to those who just enjoy life.

Country Living readers have

a chance to win one of 10 St Albans Textiles alpaca throw rugs, valued at \$199 each.

Simply tell us what autumn means to you. Send your letters to *The Weekly Times* St Albans Textiles Competition, PO Box 14681, Melbourne 8001.

The competition closes on May 18 and winners will be announced on May 23.



Softly, softly: readers have a chance to win alpaca throws.

► **PEST DISCOVERY**

Beetle outbreak averted

By **PETER HEMPHILL**

AUSTRALIA has narrowly avoided a potentially devastating outbreak of one of the world's worst grain pests.

Khapra beetles have been discovered in furniture and clothing imported into Australia in a shipping container by two Scottish emigrants.

The "near miss" has prompted quarantine authorities to revisit their inspection processes after the beetles were discovered in a Fremantle house.

Khapra beetles not only eat grain, but contaminate, posing a threat to human health.

The Scottish couple spotted the beetles as they unpacked the container's contents.

They promptly reported it to Western Australia's Department of Agriculture and Food, which took quick action to kill the pest.

Last week, the couple's house was wrapped in a gas-tight tarpaulin to fumigate it with methyl bromide to kill the beetles.

The department's director of biosecurity and research Rob Delane said traps were set up around the property to ensure the beetles had not spread.

If the beetle had made its way into Australia's grain handling systems, the consequences could have been devastating.

"The beetle cannot fly, but tracking surveys are also being undertaken to provide reassurance that the beetle has been contained," Mr Delane said.

A spokeswoman for the De-

partment of Agriculture and Food said authorities were confident the threat of an outbreak had been averted.

AQIS spokesman Carson Creagh said authorities were now investigating how the beetles escaped detection.

Mr Creagh said the container had been physically inspected by AQIS officers but not deemed to pose a pest or disease threat to warrant fumigation.

Khapra beetles are common in the Indian subcontinent, Asia,

the Middle East and African, Mediterranean and South American countries.

It has also been reported in a number of European countries.

The beetles break or turn to powder more grain than they can eat, but also contaminate it with body parts and bristles.

These body parts can cause gastrointestinal irritation in humans.

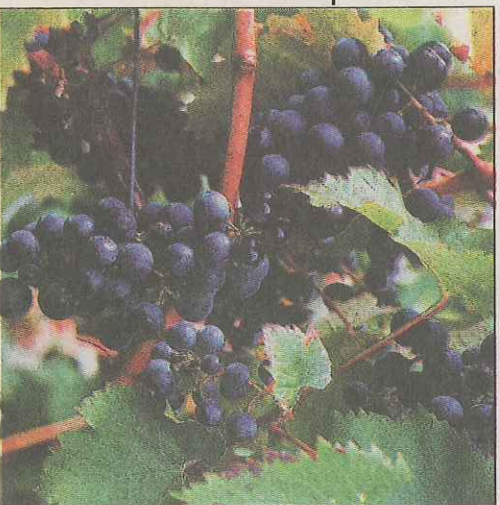
Losses generally amount to 5 to 30 per cent, but have been reported as high as 70 per cent.

Khapra beetles thrive in warm, dry climates and can multiply rapidly.

According to US authorities, if left uncontrolled, the insect can "make the surface of a grain storage appear alive with crawling larvae".

An AWB Limited spokesman said a number of countries had quarantine restrictions relating to khapra beetle in grain.

● **A real pain in the grain,** Page 103



Free flowing: wine exports are at record levels. Wine sets record

THE wine industry has again set a record for the volume and value of its exports.

Australian Wine and Brandy Corporation figures show the export volume rose 12 per cent to 797 million litres in the year to April 30.

The value of those exports also increased 6 per cent to \$2.94 billion.

The average bottled

price also rose slightly to \$4.88 a litre, but the average price of bottled and bulk exports fell 5 per cent to \$3.69 a litre, due in part to growth in bulk wine exports.

The value of exports to the US exceeded those to Britain for the second month in a row, although Britain remains Australia's biggest export market by volume.

Top teachers set to cash in

NOMINATIONS are now being sought for the *Herald Sun's* Victorian Teacher of the Year Awards.

Now in their 14th year, the 2007 awards will feature a new category — the School Innovation Award — and have a larger overall prize pool of \$78,000.

Parents, teachers, students, school councils, and anyone else who knows an outstanding teacher can nominate principals and teachers who should be recognised for their commitment, excellence, innovation and leadership in teaching.

The awards are open to all qualified teachers in the Victorian state, Catholic and Independent school systems.

The Preschool Award is open to all qualified pre-school teachers in State Government-funded pre-school programs.

The nine categories cover all sections of the teaching fraternity.

Winners of the Primary and Secondary Principal or Deputy Principal, Primary and Secondary Teacher of the Year and Primary and Secondary School Innovation Award categories will each receive \$6000 in prize money.

The Primary and Secondary Graduate and Pre-school winners will each receive \$3000.

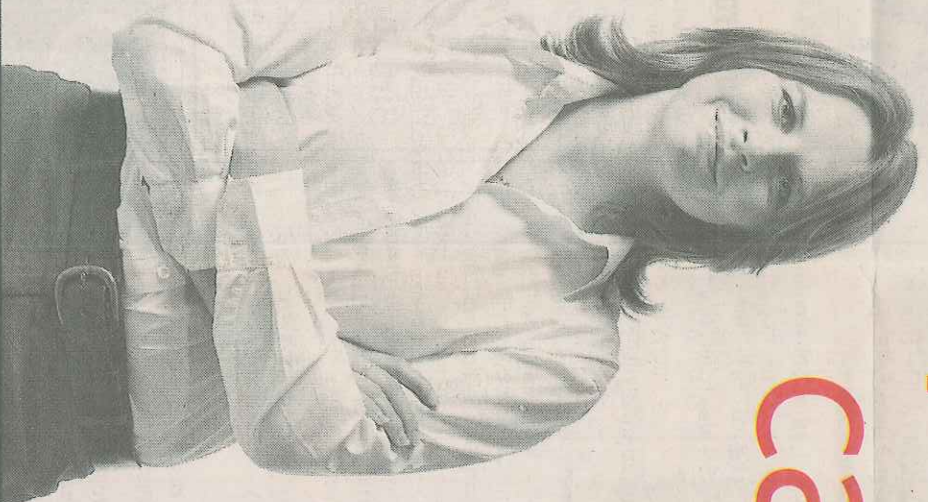
Winners' schools and all finalists will also receive a cash prize.

The *Herald Sun* Victorian Teacher of the Year winners will be announced at a gala dinner at the MCG Member's Dining Room on August 31.

Nominations close at 5pm on Wednesday, May 30.

For nomination forms and criteria details, log on to www.heraldsun.com.au/learn or phone the *Herald Sun* on (03) 9292 1969.

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Soil acidity threatens agriculture

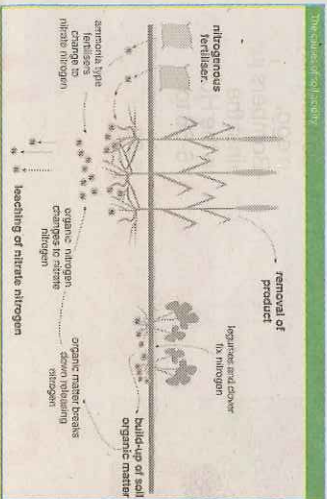
Why worry about Acid Soils?

The process of soil acidification or change in the amount of acid in the soil is a serious land degradation issue. Without treatment, soil acidification will have a major impact on agricultural productivity and sustainable farming systems.

Many millions of hectares of agricultural land in Australia are acidic and at risk of further soil degradation. Much of this land is already strongly acid [pHCa <4.8] and requires urgent action for sustainable production.

The area damaged by acidification is increasing and many soils are acidifying with current agricultural practices. Without treatment, acidification is extending into subsoil layers posing serious problems for plant food development and remedial action. For most acid soils, the most practical management option is to add lime to increase surface soil pH.

The causes of Soil Acidity



Source: NSW Agriculture

- Leaching of nitrate nitrogen - particularly under annual pastures
- Removal of product from the farm - especially legume hay
- Nitrogen fertiliser - varies with the type used
- Build up of organic matter

Most modern agricultural practices accelerate soil acidification through some soils are naturally acidic.

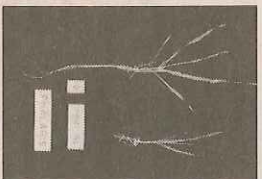
Good management can reduce the rate of acidification.

Knowing the causes helps you manage the problem!

Recognising Problem Acid Soils

VISUAL SIGNS

- Failure of acid-sensitive plants such as lucern, barley and phalaris
- Poor nodulation of legumes



Source: NSW Agriculture

DIAGNOSIS IN THE PADDOCK

- pH testing kits for initial diagnosis
- COMMERCIAL SOIL TESTS
- The only reliable method
- Provides information on major plant nutrients

- Test topsoil [0-10 cm] and subsoil [10-20 cm] for complete diagnosis

BASIC RULE OF THUMB

[for pH in Ca Cl2]

- pH 5.0 to 7.5 [little effect on production in most species]

- pH 4.5 to 5.0 [aluminium likely to become a problem- sensitive species may have trouble establishing]
- pH below 4.5 [high levels of aluminium likely. May affect productivity of even tolerant species].

Correct soil sampling and soil test interpretation requires skill - seek advice!

Lime and Lime Quality

Lime is the most practical way to neutralise soil acidity

LIME

- Raises soil pH
- Decreases aluminium and manganese toxicity
- Increases molybdenum availability
- Increases production of acid sensitive species
- Maintains high levels of production

- The use of good quality lime raises soil pH

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Lime is your Solution

Lime in itself doesn't act as a fertiliser, although some lime contains quantities of magnesium that are beneficial. The lime makes elements of plant food - already in the soil - available for extraction by plant roots.

The effects of acid soil are more obvious in sandy areas than in heavier loams, making the use of lime more critical in light soils. Unfortunately, sandy soils also revert to an acid state more easily.

Soil structure also improves considerably when limed. Sandy soil particles are bound together, giving stronger cohesion and better water holding capacity. Clay soils benefit by obtaining a good crumb structure, encouraging better drainage and aeration.

At a neutral or near neutral soil pH, micro - organism activity, the ability to break down organic material and providing plants with food, is maximised.

Low pH can reduce calcium levels in soil. This is particularly significant for fruit growers.

Adequate calcium results in firmer, crisper fruit, which stores longer.

Or, in the case of broad acre farming, low pH results in reducing clover vigour which can be reversed by liming.

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It's time for lime

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Reality check on cloud seeding

By DAVID MCKENZIE

CLOUD seeding is more likely to work in normal seasons than in drought, according to Monash University climate scientist Mike Manton.

He said more effort must be put into evaluating the impact of cloud seeding, which was still in doubt despite 60 years of experiments in many countries.

Prof Manton was speaking at an international symposium in Melbourne this week.

He said cloud seeding added to existing rainfall, so "it is not an effective strategy in Australia during time of drought where there is an absence of rain and even cloud".

"On the other hand, cloud seeding may provide a mechanism for enhancing rainfall in time of normal and above-normal rain-

fall," he said.

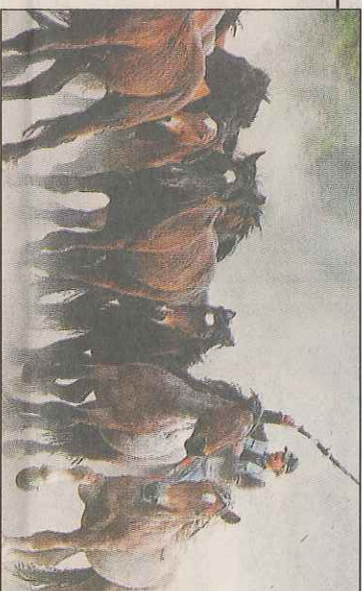
He said evaluation was difficult and it could be tempting to maximise the apparent benefit-to-cost ratio by minimising the cost of evaluation.

"This means the evaluation is based on faith rather than science," he said.

Prof Manton said current trials by Hydro Tasmania and Snowy Hydro Ltd - and soon in southeast Queensland - could provide useful information, covering both cold and warm cloud conditions.

"There is the capability in Australia to improve on past efforts to estimate the natural rainfall, collect observations of cloud processes, conduct statistical analyses and estimate the economic benefit of cloud seeding," he said.

Dr Roelof Bruijnes,



Crack rider: a rancher controls a herd of stud horses at Slovakia's State Forestry ranch in the national reserve of Muranska.

WEEKLY WORLD

Fruit frost disaster

WARSAW — Nearly 80 per cent of orchards in Poland that were blossoming last week have been damaged by frost. The head of Poland's Union of Farm Groups, Wladyslaw Serafin, said the frost had been an "absolute disaster" for the nation's growers. Poland is central Europe's biggest food producer and one of Europe's top fruit growers. Fruits damaged by frost included cherries, strawberries, currants and apples.

Bird flu confirmation

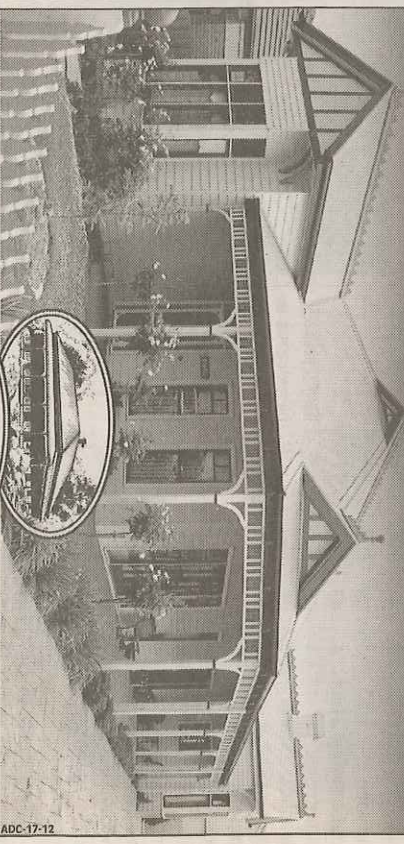
ACCRA — Ghana's first case of the highly pathogenic H5N1 bird flu has been confirmed by local laboratories and a US naval laboratory in Egypt, a World Health Organisation official said.

this week. Some 1600 birds had already been incinerated at the infected chicken farm 20km east of the capital Accra near the port of Tema, according to WHO disease prevention and control officer Dr Harry Opatia.

Fit for a fight

BANGKOK — Climate experts agreed on a UN report last week that fighting global warming was affordable and the technology was available to slow the growth in greenhouse gas emissions and stave off climate chaos. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report found there was a wide variety of technology already available to fight climate change at costs bearable by much of the developing world-responsible for a lot of the current growth.

DISCOVER



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