

FLOWER POWER

FROM THE CHILL ROOM TO THE HOT HOUSE, FLOWER FARMERS WHO CHEAT NATURE.



Flower Production Manager Dale Barker

The business of flower production has become a very high-tech operation these days, with farmers producing out-of-season flowers all year round.

John and Jan Sadler run a successful cut-flower operation situated at Flowerdale in the state's north-west. Concentrating

on lilies, they grow more than 30 varieties of Asiatic, Oriental and Longiflorums for the Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne, Adelaide and Hobart markets.

Production starts at Southern Bulbs, a complementary business based in Wynyard that is jointly owned by the Sadlers and an



Jan Sadler checks stored bulbs

interstate flower production enterprise.

Under the watchful eye of John and Jan's daughter Pip, it is here that bulbs are imported from the Netherlands and then divided up and grown to flowering size over the course of two years.

Continued Page 2.

ISSUE NUMBER 7
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WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE



BRANCHING OUT. PAGE 4.



'SAY CHEESE'. PAGE 7.

PLUS A COMMENTARY ON THE BRIDPORT SEMINAR BY AURORA'S DONNA BLACKWELL. PAGE 4.

SMARTER IRRIGATION YOU CAN SLEEP EASY WITH THESE NEW PUMP AUTO-RESTART SYSTEMS



Momentary power interruptions are one of the main electricity concerns facing farmers when it comes to irrigation, as they switch off pumps and often make a manual restart necessary.

This typically occurs in the middle of the night when irrigators are running and can be a major headache for farmers, especially if it affects several pumps spread out over many kilometres.

Irrigation Tasmania has just designed and released a new device that automates the restarting of pumps after momentary power interruptions. Called Irrisys SmartStart, the device sits in the pump control

box and quietly monitors the power supply. If the pump shuts down due to power failure, the SmartStart will wait for five minutes before attempting to restart the pump once the power is restored. If the power fails again, it will wait for ten minutes before attempting a restart. Should it fail a third time, the system will lockout any further attempt to restart and a manual reset will be required (Note: these times can be changed and up to five restarts can be attempted).

This achieves reliable restarting of pumps after momentary power interruptions, while still protecting them from the dangers of burnout. **Continued Page 2.**

F06/07
FINANCIAL PLANNING FOR THE NEW YEAR
We ask an expert. Page 5

Save big bucks

BORE FLOW RATE TESTING

3

What was that?

FARMERS' MOST FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

7



Flower Power continued from cover

They are then dug, washed, graded and supplied to the two cut-flower businesses. A proportion of the 175 tonnes produced each year are even sold back to the Netherlands during a small window when the northern hemisphere cannot produce a sufficient amount of quality bulbs.

"Some varieties of Liliium bulbs can last for a maximum of ten months in storage, after which they run out of reserves, so there's a two month window we can exploit by supplying the Netherlands and other northern hemisphere countries," Pip explained.

As lilies naturally flower during summer, out of season production requires some clever intervention on the Sadlers' behalf.

"We force our bulbs by chilling them at 4°C, then storing them at

freezing point until progressively bringing them out to plant," Jan said. "The temperature has to be just right; too warm and they won't receive sufficient cold to trigger them into growth, and too cold and they'll be killed by frost."

The bulbs take from four to six months to flower - depending upon the season and variety - and are then cut, graded, bunched, boxed and freighted around the country.

Winter production requires supplementary heating, which is achieved by placing 18kW heaters at the bottom of the poly-houses. The heaters run on off-peak power, blowing air through a series of slitted polythene tubes to keep the night-time temperature above 12°C.

"Our biggest consumption of power is in refrigeration," Jan said.

"As well as chilling the bulbs before planting, the flowers need to be kept cool between packaging and transport so they arrive in the best possible condition."

John and Jan have installed a number of cool rooms with movable walls that can be moved in or out depending on the capacity of the cool room required. This saves energy and allows maximum flexibility as the refrigeration units are only cooling the minimum space required. They have also adapted the movable walls, adding a series of fans and vents so that different sections of the cool room can be held at various temperatures.

"Lilies are expensive flowers to grow per stem," Jan explained. "If we can reduce our costs in any way, we'll be more competitive and have a more sustainable business."

CASE STUDY

PUMP AUTO-RESTART

With eight pumps located around his 350 hectare property at Flowerdale, John Sadler doesn't have time to manually restart his pumps after every momentary power outage. That's why John was among the first farmers to install one of the new SmartStart devices.

"I bought a new 75kW pump at the start of last season but I didn't initially have it auto-restarting," said John. "But at the start of this year, we had a number of power interruptions, so I got them to install this new auto-restart device. Since then, we've had no trouble. It simply brings the pump back on safely after the power has returned."

Growing a range of high-value and high water-demand crops, including potatoes, maize and lilies for cut flowers, John can't afford to miss too many scheduled irrigations.

"If the pump shuts down due to a power interruption and I miss most of a night's irrigation, that puts me behind and I'm forever battling to keep up," John said. "Over a long dry summer especially, it's vital that each pump is running to full capacity - and that means managing these short power interruptions."

Smarter irrigation continued from cover



Large pumps draw massive currents when starting, creating heat that needs time to dissipate before another restart can be safely performed. If they were to come on automatically after every power interruption, the time between the interruptions may not be long enough to allow the motors to cool down.

The SmartStart avoids this danger by programming in a waiting period after each power interruption, giving time for the motor to cool down. If too many restarts have been attempted in a specified period of time, the lockout will trip and no more restarts will be attempted.

Safety is always a priority with any automatic machinery. The SmartStart incorporates an

audible alarm that alerts anyone nearby that the pump is about to automatically restart. Warning posters that can be prominently placed in the pump shed have also been developed for use with the system.

With the SmartStart installed, farmers can sleep easy knowing that they won't have to get up in the middle of the night to restart pumps, or that their irrigator run will be cancelled partway through.

The SmartStart, which can be retrofitted to any pump and is easily installed, can be obtained from Irrigation Tasmania for \$550 (plus GST and installation).

For more information please phone Irrigation Tas on (03) 6435 1073.

NICE ICE

**DOUBLE-STAGE
PRE-COOLING
WORKS A TREAT
ON THE DAIRY.**



Duncan Sadler with cooling tower



Duncan Sadler with Heat Exchanger

On a larger dairy farm, cooling milk quickly and efficiently can be achieved with a double-stage pre-cooling system. Such a system has the advantage of delivering milk into the bulk vat at close to 4°C – which results in better quality and allows the bulk of the milk to be cooled using OffPeak power. This in turn reduces operating costs and spreads the demand for farm electricity use.

In a double-stage pre-cooling system, the first pre-cooler uses cool water from a bore or dam, while the second stage uses chilled water or glycol to cool milk down to within 4°C. The chilled water/glycol can be produced on demand, or it can be produced overnight using OffPeak power and stored to save electricity costs.

For example, milk enters the first stage at around 35°C and is cooled to within 2°C of the water temperature from the bore

or dam (typically at 15–17°C). It then enters the second stage and is cooled to within 2°C of the chilled water/glycol (typically at 0–2°C). This means it will then enter the vat at or below 4°C.

Chilled water can be produced by a variety of means:

i. Cooling Towers cool water by transferring heat from water into the air. When run in the early hours of the morning they can be highly effective, but this method also requires a large tank to store the cooled water (see Electric Farm Autumn 2006).

ii. Thermal Stores cool water overnight using off-peak power and store it in large insulated tanks for use the next day.

iii. Ice Banks generate ice along evaporator coils at night using OffPeak power. During milking, water is circulated from the ice

bank to the pre-cooler back to the ice bank where it is chilled once more. Ice banks use less space than thermal stores.

iv. Instant Chillers chill water or glycol using a refrigeration system for immediate use in the pre-coolers. They can take up a lot less room than other systems, but don't take advantage of OffPeak power.

Double-stage pre-coolers are often used on larger dairies where the capital costs of the water-chilling units can be recouped through the lower energy costs associated with using OffPeak power. To find out whether a double-stage pre-cooling system is suitable for your dairy, contact your dairy or refrigeration specialist.

– See *Electric Farm No. 8* for case study on Duncan Sadler's Farm.

Contact Us

**Business line
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(7 am to 7 pm Monday to Friday)

Call this number for all business enquiries regarding electricity. This includes advice and information on:

- heating and cooling
- hot water
- lighting
- payment options
- easements
- energy costs
- private powerlines
- pole queries
- new supply.

**Natural gas
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**Dial before you dig
1100**

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13 2004

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**Electricity product
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1300 13 2006**

**New supply
1300 13 7008**

Web address

www.auroraenergy.com.au

Correspondence

GPO Box 191, Hobart Tas 7001

Payments by mail

Locked Bag 4, Hobart Tas 7001



The Asthma Foundation Golf Day is to be held at the Launceston Country Club Casino on Wednesday 15 November!

The prize includes breakfast and lunch at the venue, a golfing pack, use of the practice range, entry for a team of 4 into the event and sponsorship of a hole or green for your business.

To be in the draw, all you have to do is register your small business* for online services at www.auroraenergy.com.au/online-services/. If you're already registered, just go online and update or confirm your business's details to be in the running.

* Competition is open to small businesses consuming less than 150 Mega Watt hours per annum

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WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

Aurora's own Donna Blackwell addressed the recent 7th Women on Farms Gathering at Bridport. The event is part of the Australian Women in Agriculture (AWiA) calendar of events. This year Aurora sponsored the dinner, which was attended by about 150 women from all over Tasmania, as well as delegates from interstate and overseas.

Donna's talk about Electrical Safety on Farms created quite a bit of discussion among the delegates.

"The main point I wanted to get across is that it's not just yourself you're putting in danger: it's your children, your employees, your visitors...everyone that steps onto your property," Donna said.

"And it's not just the obvious things like irrigation pipes and farm machinery coming in contact with overhead wires. The disturbing

thing is the large number of unreported incidents relating to poor earthing.

"If you get a 'tingle' off your water tap, or any other metal surface, you need to report it to Aurora immediately. It could indicate a very serious problem with the earth wire that could be fatal... and not just in the house, but in sheds and outbuildings as well. Don't assume that Aurora knows there is a problem - even when the power goes off. You must report it so that we know about it and can fix it." Read more about Aurora's community safety campaigns on page 7.

Rural women have always been an inspiration to Donna. She grew up in the country and her family currently run a 2000acre property at Elderslie. "Ours is a third generation farm (on her husbands side), and like many farmers we've seen a lot of diversification",

said Donna. "We used to milk a hundred cows but realised we had to significantly increase the size of the herd to make a go of it, so we got into cropping... poppies, spuds, mostly feed like grey peas and barley. Currently we are building up a herd of beef cattle."

Does Donna still work the farm? "It's a real shame that my job as a Small Business Segment Manger at Aurora, means I often get home too late to help on the farm. Although I did have to dig spuds while on two weeks holiday recently!"

The future for the Blackwells' enterprise is looking good with two of their eldest sons expressing an interest in running the farm into a fourth generation. One is a horticulturist and the other a bit of a gun panel-beater... both pretty useful traits on a farm these days!



Donna Blackwell from Aurora Energy

Donna's tip for small business? "Have a look at Aurora's new website. There's lots of really useful stuff on there, plus some chances to win some great prizes."

BRANCHING OUT



Sandra Tracey is a big fan of Women on Farms Gatherings.

In a competitive market-driven industry, diversification and adaptation are key to farming success. After dairying together for more than 15 years, Sandra Tracey and her husband Don are moving into beef production.

While the shift from dairy to beef will result in decreased irrigation and equipment use, Sandra says

power management remains an important consideration. Instead of re-fencing the entire property, the Traceys hope to continue strip grazing. In preparation for this, electrified holding paddocks were recently installed to educate the weaned yearlings on arrival. "We believe that it is better for pasture management and stock will be a

lot calmer. Of course issues such as correct earthing and equipment installation will still need to be monitored," said Sandra.

Now, more than ever, Sandra welcomes the education and networking opportunities provided by organisations such as Australian Women in Agriculture (AWiA). Since the inception of the AWiA's Women on Farms Gatherings, Sandra has missed only two - believing that the events provide a forum for learning and inspiration. Perhaps more importantly it has given women a voice that extends beyond the local community. "It is now realised that women on farms do have a voice and do have things to say," said Sandra. "They have genuine issues and are worried about things. It's not just the light-hearted stuff we talk about either, but issues that are relevant to today."

Sessions that deal with the technical aspects of farming, first aid and taxation, raise awareness and empower women to act on safety or management

concerns. These learning opportunities paid off recently when Sandra had to step into a sole management role while Don was seriously ill. With no farming background before marrying Don, and still considering herself a relative newcomer to the profession, Sandra was shocked by how well she managed. She also felt the experience illustrated a unique quality of country people. "I never had a day go by that someone didn't call in to see if I needed any help. From day one I was welcomed, and at this stage of my life I can't imagine being anywhere else," she said.

Sandra believes that the next generation in farming management will see more women taking an active role and men sharing parenting duties. "They (men) work hard but want time away from farming to be with their families," she said. This means that organisations like AWiA will become increasingly valuable to the profitability of farming communities.

FINANCIALLY SPEAKING



Tim Breward is a partner of Johnson Breward Brown in Launceston

My main exposure in recent times has been dealing with dairy farming. Over the past 12–15 years I have seen dairy farming practices change as a result of larger farms and reliance upon smarter pasture management, irrigation and feed and livestock control.

While many of the specific concessions available to the rural sector have diminished, concessions in relation to water conservation, livestock valuations and the transfer of livestock remain in place and are commonly used. Over the past ten years there has been increased investment in irrigation systems accompanied by improvements in technology and farming practices in this area. The tax incentives for such developments make them an attractive tax minimisation strategy.

HAS THE GST HAD AN IMPACT ON OPERATIONS?

Yes, it has improved the level of financial reporting of most

enterprises. This allows for more timely decision making concerning farm management and makes it easier to project and act on potential taxation issues – all of which results in improved business management.

HOW HAS THE RECENT REAL ESTATE BOOM AFFECTED THE INDUSTRY?

Farm prices have risen dramatically over the last two years, with wealth being generated from the increase in land and stock prices rather than the underlying profitability of the business enterprise itself. As businesses expand and are exposed to additional financial risks, a more corporate approach is becoming necessary.

WILL THIS CHANGE THE VERY NATURE OF FARMING?

The increase in land and stock values is definitely a barrier to entry for young farmers. The Tasmanian Government has tried

JOHNSON BREWARD BROWN CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS HAS ALWAYS BEEN CLOSELY ASSOCIATED WITH THE RURAL SECTOR. WE TALKED TO TIM BREWARD TO GET THE LOW DOWN ON TAXATION ISSUES FACING FARMERS.

to combat this by offering assistance in the form of interest rate subsidies for young farmers starting out.

As operating structures become more complex, the use of family trusts to hold land and operate companies is becoming more common. The structure needs to be tailored, balancing tax minimisation, asset protection and ease of transition between the generations.

It is important to note that some of the tax concessions available to primary producers are not available where the operations are conducted in a company. Because of this we tend to recommend multiple business structures.

Succession planning is another important consideration. The changeover of control between parents and children is happening on a more gradual basis with children taking a more active role in the management and decision making and employing a more corporate model.

HOW IS RETIREMENT BEST MANAGED?

The capital gains tax (CGT) concessions provide a number of alternatives to minimise tax on retirement or restructuring of business affairs. A lot of these concessions cut out where the net assets of the total enterprise (including related entities) exceed \$5 million. Given the increase in real estate values and the tendency

for expansion, more enterprises will exceed this threshold and therefore miss out on some of the CGT concessions.

We encourage our clients to build up non-farm assets generally through tax-effective contributions to superannuation. This means that parents are less reliant upon the children taking over the farm for income. It also provides Estate planning opportunities whereby non-farm assets can pass to children who have left the land.

IT SOUNDS LIKE HAVING FINANCES PROFESSIONALLY MANAGED IS A NECESSITY?

With the growth of farming operations and associated increases in borrowings, farmers are endeavouring to manage risk and are taking more professional advice than ever before. This isn't limited to simply accounting and taxation advice, but extends to pasture management, stock and feed advice also.

WHERE CAN FARMERS GO TO FIND OUT MORE REGARDING THESE ISSUES?

Farm accountants are always a good place to start. Otherwise, there are many good agricultural consultants operating in Tasmania and most suppliers provide specific advisors on fee. Some web-based resources that may be of interest are: www.intodairy.com www.dpiw.tas.gov.au/dairy www.agribusiness.asn.au

**STAY AWAY
STAY ALIVE**

FALLEN POWERLINES ARE DANGEROUS AND SHOULD NOT BE TOUCHED OR APPROACHED UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES

**DANGER
FALLEN
POWERLINES**

IF YOU EVER COME ACROSS A FALLEN POWERLINE, IMMEDIATELY PHONE EMERGENCY SERVICES ON 000, OR AURORA ON 13 2004

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Q&A HERE IS A SELECTION OF THE MOST FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS WHEN OUR AURORA STAFF MEMBERS TALK TO PEOPLE IN THE TASMANIAN RURAL COMMUNITY.

1. Why do you recommend that we have an observer on hand when we are working near powerlines?

We recommend that where possible you have an alert observer on hand to ensure a safe outcome—and it's not even necessary for machinery, vehicles or loads to actually touch a powerline for a fatal accident to occur. If you are at all unsure about what a safe distance is when working around powerlines, please call us on **13 2004**.

2. When I turn the taps on in the shed I get a tingle, should I report this to anyone?

Tingles from taps, shocks from appliances and power tools, and lights which vary in brightness must NEVER be ignored. You should report them immediately to Aurora's Fault Centre on **13 2004** and we will arrange for an urgent inspection. This service is usually free of charge—and more importantly, it could save a life.

You also need to call your electrical contractor without delay if: power points or light fittings are damaged; if there is excessive noise or sparking from switches or power points; if fuses constantly blow or circuit breakers trip; or your appliances are working slowly.

3. Where does the private powerline begin?

A low voltage powerline becomes your responsibility where



the Aurora powerline connects to the first pole or structure on private property. This is known as the 'customer's terminal' or 'point of supply'. This first pole or structure and all subsequent poles, lines and poletop fittings are your responsibility.

4. What is the authorisation number that I am asked for when I ring the call centre?

To help improve the security on your Aurora Business account we have introduced an authorisation system using a special identification number. You will have received your authorisation number by letter. This number acts in a similar way to the PIN on your bank account and ensures that only those transactions you have authorised

are carried out. Please distribute this number only to the people in your business whom you wish to have access to your Aurora account and details.

5. Can you explain what a tariff is?

A tariff is simply the rate at which your electricity consumption is charged.

Aurora Energy has a number of electricity tariff options for businesses that may be available to you depending on your circumstances and electricity requirements.

6. What is a combined account?

If you currently receive more than one Aurora statement, you can combine them into one statement.

With a Combined Account you can:

- bring all of your accounts together into one monthly statement;
- choose the name that best describes each connection site that will appear on your statement; and
- improve your cash flow by choosing the day of the month you would like to receive your statement.

7. How much does it cost to become a combined account customer?

It is free. There is no charge for this added service.

8. What are the payment terms for a combined account?

Payment terms are 14 days - the same as a standard account.



Aurora's new and improved online services are designed to give you complete control over all your energy account.

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Jane Bennett and her cousin Paul, the Farm Manager



Jane Bennett

FROM Paddock TO PLATE

As a 23-year-old, Jane Bennett was encouraged by her father Michael to become a cheese maker to enable Michael and his brother John to develop a cheese factory on the family dairy farm. What followed was the award-winning success of Ashgrove Cheese. Far from being complacent about her success, with the help of family and in particular her cousin Paul—the Farm Manager—Jane has continued to look for new ways to improve the business.

Ashgrove's mixed farming operation of beef, dairying, cropping, cheese and tourism has traditionally utilised dry land farming. With rapid growth from a 300 head operation on 80 acres to over 1100 cows on 3500 acres, additional irrigation is now being installed. The regulation of pasture quality will also enable the expansion of cheese making operations. "Currently cheddar is only produced through the months

of November and December when the cows are in the peak of their lactation. With irrigation this will be extended into March," said Jane.

From paddock to plate, power is integral to every stage of production. Paul describes the last three years as a period of metamorphosis. Several dams have been built and pivot irrigation installed. "This current dam will enable us to irrigate three to four hundred acres of pasture. It will also enable us to ensure optimum milk quality over autumn and late summer," said Paul. The pumps will operate using OffPeak power and centre pivots will complement 90 hectares of sprinkler irrigation. Pivots were chosen because of the smaller pumps and lower pressure required. Paul believes this is an important stage for Ashgrove Farms. "Not only will it ensure a more consistent

product but will also allow Jane to retain cheese production staff throughout the year."

Both Jane and Paul agree that family and specialisation have played a vital role in the business's success. Experts are utilised in each area rather than relying on one manager. This allows each area of operation to grow independently but together.

It would have been difficult for a boutique farmhouse operation to compete with the large, well-established Australian cheese makers. Instead, Jane sought to replace the importation of English style semi-hard and cheddar cheese. Operating with three trained dairy technicians has allowed Ashgrove to operate in a capacity most small cheese makers don't have.

The introduction of several exotic flavours has also been well

received. The popular Wasabi Cheese was the result of a close partnership with the wasabi growers of Tasmania and Japanese experts. Similarly, Ashgrove has worked collaboratively to produce both the Lavender (a great favourite with North Americans) and Native Pepper flavours. "Tasmania's size makes it easier to work in collaboration with various sectors of industry and the government," Jane said.

Jane says that while there are some fairly unglamorous aspects of the work, (such as working in a white coat with a shower cap), the past five years has seen the Tasmanian fine food and wine industry become very fashionable. This industry shift, together with media exposure and the opening of a retail outlet, has provided unique opportunities for business growth and all at Ashgrove Cheese are looking to the future with open arms.

GET SERIOUS ABOUT SAFETY

As the owner of Tasmania's electricity distribution network, Aurora believes that raising community awareness of electrical safety issues is essential. We conduct a range of information programs including:

LOOK UP LOOK OUT, which raises awareness of the incidence

of vehicles and equipment contacting overhead powerlines;

SAFE GROWING NEAR POWERLINES, which provides a guide to customers on their responsibilities in keeping trees and vegetation well clear of powerlines on their property;

HOME HEALTH CHECK CAMPAIGN, highlighting the risks of faulty

or poorly maintained domestic installations; and

FALLEN POWERLINES CAMPAIGN, which reminds members of the public not to touch or attempt to move fallen powerlines under any circumstances.

Aurora also conducts a **SAFETY IN SCHOOLS EDUCATION PROGRAM** to take the electrical safety message

to primary school children around the State. We believe that constant repetition of the safety message is essential and the earlier in life that starts, the more effective it will be!

If you would like information on any of Aurora's safety campaigns contact the Corporate Affairs Group on 6237 3341.

ASK AURORA AND GET FREE STUFF!

If you have any questions you need answered, just ask us. We have a team of experts willing to help you with your energy management, plus you never know... your question could become the topic of a future article in *Electric Farm*.

Every question printed will also receive a gift pack from Aurora and the question judged the best will win its author dinner for two to the value of \$200 at their favourite restaurant.

Either email your question to: donna.blackwell@auroraenergy.com.au
Post to: Ask Aurora, D. Blackwell, 21 Kirksway Place Battery Point 7004
Or Fax: 6234 1231 Att: Donna



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This is our seventh edition of *Electric Farm* – a publication specifically designed to help agricultural businesses manage their energy requirements. We would welcome your feedback so we can continue to improve future editions. Phone 1300 13 2045 or email business@auroraenergy.com.au

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Fact sheet: *The energy efficient dairy*

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Combined account application form

Fallen Powerlines



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