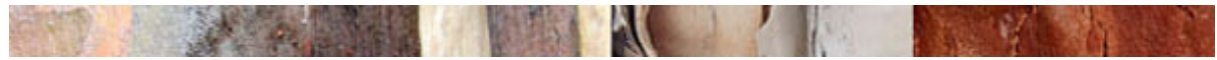


Click [here](#) if you are having trouble viewing this message.



# Oxford Word of the Month – February: field day

**noun:** (in rural areas) a day set aside for the display and demonstration of new machinery and farming equipment; a day organised for the discussion of specific agricultural problems, innovations, and techniques.

## THE STORY BEHIND THE WORD OF THE MONTH

**Field days** in Australia began in the 1890s as an educational service for farmers. The early evidence for **field day** suggests that the first one occurred in Wagga Wagga in 1894. The *Wagga Wagga Advertiser* commented on the purpose of field days:

*In all respects the ‘field days’ at the Farm were very successful and if they result, as it is intended they shall, in the dissemination of practical information which will lead to the adoption of improved methods by the agriculturist, the fruit grower, and the vigneron the object of the Department will have been achieved. (30 November 1897)*

The original *field day*, from which this term derives, dates from the early eighteenth century. It has a military sense, and refers to a day when troops are assembled for a review or exercise. Evidence for the agricultural sense of **field day** was first noted in the 1830s, with the meaning ‘a day set aside for the exhibition of crops, livestock, or agricultural machinery’ (*Oxford English Dictionary*). The later Australian sense is more specific. Here, **field days** were unlikely to include the exhibition of livestock and crops, but focused instead on equipment, skills, information, and training. From the late nineteenth century the agricultural sense of **field day** has been used chiefly in Australian and New Zealand English.

**Field days** were initially organised by government agencies and later by agricultural societies as well. The first ones often took place on experimental government farms. Agricultural experts and departmental officers gave lectures and demonstrated the latest innovations, equipment, and research. A **field day** might focus on a particular industry, such as viticulture, wheat, or bee-keeping, or it might address an issue such as pasture improvement, pest control, or carcass appraisal.

In the 1950s a new type of **field day** began—the *gadget field day*, or *gadget day*. On these days, farmers would demonstrate their own backyard inventions, large and small, to their peers:

This Gadget **Field Day** was organised by Hanwood Extension Group, and the scores of gadgets demonstrated ranged from earth-moving machines weighing many hundredweights, to handy little aids of a few ounces. (*Wagga Wagga Daily Advertiser*, 11 August 1950)

The practical, hands-on approach of **field days** made them very successful with farmers and growers, and their popularity continues today. While some **field days** remain small local events addressing specific issues, others are incorporated in the big agricultural shows in main centres, and some have evolved into major exhibitions of agricultural equipment that attract tens of thousands of visitors. But even these started out small:

Today's **field days**, where the latest in high-tech farming machinery and technology is on display, had humble origins. Most evolved from demonstration days where farmers got their local machinery dealers to show their products at work in a paddock. (*Melbourne Weekly Times*, 20 January 1999)

But whatever **field day** you attend, some things never change. As the journal *Outback* comments, '[f]or a **field day**, you need a felt hat, preferably a battered Akubra.' (June 2001)

**Field day** and *gadget day* are included in the second edition of the *Australian National Dictionary* (forthcoming 2016).

Share our Word of the Month:



Click [here](#) to unsubscribe from our Word of the Month. Read our [privacy policy](#).