



CARING
FOR
OUR
COUNTRY



**GOULBURN
BROKEN**
CATCHMENT
MANAGEMENT
AUTHORITY

Beyond SoilCare



Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority Land Health co-ordinator Rhiannon Apted said strong industry partnerships and self-directed learning underpinned the success of the Beyond SoilCare project.

“The industry representatives included resellers, consultants and contractors, all providing their specialised knowledge to assist farmers to grapple with the challenges of managing soil to maintain its health in the long term and generate income in the short and long term,” Ms Apted said

“Focusing on issues that matter and looking at the science behind those issues, discussing the solution with landholders and getting them to share their experiences has been crucial to the success of the project.”

Ms Apted the program had taken on a life of its own. “These initial groups of farmers are continuing to build their knowledge and understanding of soils, instigating soil pits and farm tours of local properties,” she said.

Project snapshot

Beyond SoilCare received \$600,000 of funding from the Commonwealth Government’s Caring for Our Country initiative.

The project aims to improve landholders’ knowledge and skills in soil management, as well as promote the importance of healthy soils and the work farmers do to the wider community.

The program is delivered in partnership with the Department of Environment and Primary Industries, Landcare and farm production groups.

In the past 18 months, more than 600 landholders, managing an estimated 77,700 acres, had participated in the Beyond SoilCare project, completing 896 soil tests, and attending one or more of 16 workshops, three farm tours, seven field days and a forum.

Where to from here?

Feedback from program participants indicates that farmers are keen to fine tune their understanding of the “how to” of soil management. The focus of the next component of the program is to continue to use the well-established relationships and networks to enable peer-supported learning and create on-ground change.

**The Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority greatly appreciates the support of the following industry partners in delivering the Beyond SoilCare project: Farmright Technical Services, Landmark, Mike Stevens and Associates, SWEP Analytical Laboratories, Elders, Stecher Ag Services, Fox Ag, Mackinnon Project.*

Continuous learning:

One of the most significant outcomes of the Beyond SoilCare program is the number of farmer-led trials established after landholders attended workshops.

- The Strathbogrie Tableland Landcare Group established the Strathbogrie Alternative Fertilisers trial in 2010 and is continuing to collect data to support decision-making around alternative fertilisers.
- The South West Goulburn Landcare Network at Broadford is investigating the effect of applying gypsum and foliar sprays on nutrient availability and microbial activity.
- The Upper Broken River Landcare Group, inspired by a visit to the Strathbogrie trial site, is establishing a trial at Maindample to look at how chook and pig manure, EcoMin, Seasol, gypsum and Single Super compare in improving soil health and pasture production. These products were chosen by participating farmers as they are used in the local area.
- After the August 2012 Costerfield soil test interpretation workshop, Graytown-Costerfield Landcare Group established a lime trial to test the use of compost with lime as a biological catalyst to speed up the chemical reaction.
- We are also supporting the Gecko Landcare Network to continue its soil biology work; and partnering with the Mackinnon Project to continue its work comparing poultry manure and superphosphate in Glenaroua. This trial is yielding good evidence and supporting farmers' interest in alternative fertilisers.

In their own words:

"I was not surprised at how far some farmers had travelled to attend ... for the down-to-earth property improving info we are all hungry for, but can't as owner operators afford the time to take off and attend Ag college for."

(Landholder, Creightons Creek, at the Strathbogrie soil test interpretation workshop)

"It was an excellent day, in fact I would say 'inspired'. I thought the idea of visiting the market first and then the farm ... showed an excellent understanding of what people wanted and needed to hear. The market and marketing really put the farm into perspective...The walk around the farm enabled me to add layer upon layer of the information provided. I got off the bus thinking, 'Fantastic, what's next!' There is much to learn and I do hope there will be further opportunities."

(Small farmer, Mansfield, National Environment Centre bus tour)

"Being on site was ... the best possible way to learn and to remember how to deal with both these problems which affect [our farm]. It made me realise that it is not a hopeless situation for a single operator like me ... to meet other farmers with the same problems ... gave me an opportunity to get more hands on information on what has worked and what has not. From my perspective it was better than a thousand experts reading off their white board ..."

(Farmer, Ruffy, at Whiteheads Creek – Highlands soil health farm tour)

For more information about Beyond SoilCare and other Goulburn Broken CMA programs go to www.gbcma.vic.gov.au or:

