

ON THE FARM - THE GOOD DIRT

SEPTEMBER EDITION

GRAZING FOR PASTURE RENOVATION

Looking out from his Broadford farm window, Norm Crawford was convinced his hillside was on fire. But it was red dust, not flames that lit the slope. Concerned by this wind erosion, Brad Costin at Department of Primary Industries in Broadford contacted Norm with ideas on how to stabilise the topsoil.

In spring each year a carpet of capeweed effectively chokes out other grasses on the hillside. When the capeweed dies off in summer, the slope is left exposed to strong winds and summer storms, resulting in topsoil being blown and washed away. While spraying the capeweed was a management option, Norm was looking for a chemical free solution.

The Sustainable Farm Practices project, funded through the Australian Government's Caring for our Country program, has funds available to landholders for advice and support. Brad Costin recommended landclass fencing to improve grazing management. The hill can then be grazed during winter/spring to help remove capeweed, and rested during summer to allow seed set and germination of desired species of grasses. Deferring grazing creates better ground cover on vulnerable hill slopes and more often than not allows higher stocking rates.

A study commissioned by 'Land Water & Wool' (2005) of hill country properties in central Victoria found that deferred grazing can conservatively increase stocking rates by between 25% to 50% within three years on hill country carrying less than eight DSE (dry sheep equivalent) per hectare.



Norm and Christine Crawford with Brad Costin from DPI.

Matching land management to land capability has driven Norm and Christine Crawford's stewardship approach to their farm. They have implemented a grazing management plan, erosion mitigation and increased biodiversity through large scale tree planting. When the

Crawfords first took over the property, bare paddocks and a degraded landscape was their outlook. Tunnel erosion and rabbit burrows added to the damage.

Past tree clearance and grazing management of that time is now being rectified. Norm and Christine have worked to restore the upper and lower storey trees and shrubs that were once part of the Broadford area. Now, in early spring, glimpses of yellow wattle are shining beacons of revegetation, particularly since the end of the drought. From early on Norm was advised to 'get on to Glenaroua Landcare and get something happening'. Sonia Sharkey, the local Landcare Coordinator helped Norm and Christine to get a tree planting project in place.

Part of the Crawford's property has soil that is volcanic loam; elsewhere there is ironstone and fine grey clay, which turns into slurry during a wet year. Norm and Christine have found that understanding the soil and sensitive management of land pays off. The farm is being transformed. Varieties of box, redgum and wattles are now established on the hills. Their white tree guards look like a strangely static cockatoo flock. Rather than weeds, perennial grass cover is beginning to dominate. Smaller paddocks fenced to aspect on the hillside allow more even pasture utilisation and support improvements in pasture and soil health.

WHAT'S ON

Christine Jones: The Fundamentals of Soil - Benalla.
4th Oct, Pasture Cropping Project, Gecko CLaN
RSVP by 27th Sep, Jacci Campbell 5828 9274
office@campbellfarms.com.au

Gwyn Jones & Soil Biology - Mansfield.
8th & 13th Oct, Up2Us Landcare
Kerstie Lee 0400 613 344 info@up2us.org.au

iFarm Mapping & soil testing - Alexandra.
18th Oct, Sustainable Farm Practices, DPI.
Places Limited Greg Bekker 5761 1631

HCCC Soil test interpretation workshop - Ruffey.
2nd Nov, Beyond SoilCare, GBCMA
Rhiannon Apted 5736 0108

3rd Nov Soil recovery after fire - Broadford.
SWG Landcare
Sonia Sharkey 5734 6312
Swg_landcare@mitchellshire.vic.gov.au

Soil test interpretation workshop - Creightons Creek.
9th Nov, Beyond SoilCare, GB CMA
Rhiannon Apted 5736 0108

Gwyn Jones: Greater than gold; the search for better soil health - Graytown
13th Oct, 10-3pm. BYO Lunch, Tea and Coffee provided.
Amanda McClaren 5794 9279
amanda_mcclaren@hotmail.com

FURTHER INFO

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