

# ON THE FARM – THE GOOD DIRT

## APRIL EDITION

### FROM GOLD TO GREEN WITH LAND CLASS FENCING

Hillsides of capeweed in flower may look pretty, but to farmers they mean poor grazing, high nutrient areas and erosion. In 2006, capeweed grew profusely on the hillsides of Scott and Julia McKay's property 'Habbies Howe' at Highlands in the Strathbogie Ranges. Scott needed a solution and went searching his hills for *Microlaena*, a native perennial grass, knowing that given the right conditions it could out-compete capeweed and provide good pasture and ground cover. He soon found small clumps of the nutritious native grass. Now the job was to make it the dominant pasture grass in his steep paddocks. To do this Scott needed to be able to control how long he could graze paddocks and when, so he fenced the farm to land class.

Scott then locked the cattle out of the hills from the first week of November 2006 until six weeks after the autumn break. With summer rain the *Microlaena* began to re-seed into areas that were left bare by capeweed. The difference between the paddocks where stock access was controlled and an adjoining paddock, which he kept set stocked to compare and was still dominated by capeweed, was stark.

The process was repeated the following year. The *Microlaena* pasture continued to provide good quality autumn and winter grazing. Now the pasture is well established and deferring summer grazing is only

necessary every three years.

Scott's initial move into land class fencing was in a large paddock dominated by rank stands of cocksfoot. Fencing the large paddock into three smaller paddocks meant cattle could be grazed on a rotational basis. The result is that they now have a better quality pasture that includes ryegrass and clover.



*Scott McKay standing at the junction of paddocks divided by land class fences.*

Scott and Julia have fenced their property to take advantage of the combination of hills and flats. By improving the pasture Scott is able to lift the levels of carbon and at the same time reduce the rates of acidification. By improving his hill country through

managing for better adapted native grasses Scott has been able to reduce the pressure on other parts of the farm, such as the lower flats. "In a wet year the cattle can be doing backstroke on these flats," Scott said.

"Early on," explains Scott, "when the soil was first tested everything was the wrong way round." There was high acidity, low phosphorus and high aluminium. Application of lime at 3 tonnes per hectare, 180 – 200kg per hectare of superphosphate, with some potash, started to transform the soil. Building carbon has been assisted with the application of chicken manure at 2 tonne per hectare every three years and this provides up to 40kg of phosphorus and 60kg of nitrogen per hectare.

Land class fencing has not only improved soil and pasture health but has also improved Scott's ability to control weeds. Part of the farm was overrun with blackberries when he and Julia first took it over. By using land class fencing to make the paddocks easier to manage Scott has been able to use grazing to expose young blackberries for control without overgrazing the hills.

Scott believes that so much of the property can be utilised more successfully with land class fencing. It has also allowed for fencing off and revegetation of waterways. As well as efficient movement of stock, land class fencing has meant substantial gains in pasture development, weed management, erosion control and soil health.

### WHAT'S ON

**Livestock management for small & part-time farmers**

19 May 9.30-3pm "Warra" 410 Greenslopes Rd Seymour

RSVP [janemmiller@bigpond.com](mailto:janemmiller@bigpond.com) 57970243

**Soil pits and soil management – Strathbogie Alternative Fertilisers Site**

May 25th TBC [greg.bekker@dpi.vic.gov.au](mailto:greg.bekker@dpi.vic.gov.au)  
5761 1631

**Grazing from the ground up**

1 June 9-3pm DSE office Alexandra RSVP  
Jude Hill 5772 0278 [judith.hill@dpi.vic.gov.au](mailto:judith.hill@dpi.vic.gov.au)  
by May 18

Land class fencing is a demonstration of the efforts of farmers to improve soil health with support from the Goulburn Broken CMA and DPI with funding through the Australian Government's Caring for Our Country Program. For details on the Goulburn Broken CMA Soil Health Action Plan visit [www.gbcma.vic.gov.au](http://www.gbcma.vic.gov.au).

### FURTHER INFO

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