

Diversifying reaps profits for graziers at Gayndah field day

Reducing stocking rates to make way for tree production may not sound like a profitable management plan for many graziers, but for 45 landholders at an AgForce Projects field day in Gayndah last week, the opportunity to integrate forestry and grazing for long term profitability became a reality.

AgForce Projects technical leader Graeme Bell said landholders have a number of opportunities to value add by integrating timber production and offsets into their grazing operation.

“Whether it is to allocate land as an offset through a trading system or revegetation around riparian areas, it is about being smart about property management and understanding that these opportunities can actually increase the productivity of your land and provide long term profits,” Mr Bell said.

Jim Burgess of Timber Queensland said the future shortfall in timber availability provided significant opportunities for private landholders with native forests to diversify into timber production to service the growing demand for timber. The sale of carbon could also improve the viability of private plantations, even if they are used for timber production.

Diversification has well and truly paid off for local grazier John McLaughlin who has successfully integrated native forest timber production with cattle grazing on the family’s 5156 hectare ‘Mounefontein’ property.

“To get the best out of our land we need to consider ourselves not just cattle producers but land managers; and that means managing the cattle, the trees and the pastures to all work together to create a sustainable, resilient and economically successful property in the long term,” Mr McLaughlin said.

Mr McLaughlin said he believes most properties in the region would benefit from integrating native forest timber production into their farm production system.

While John said the development of timber farming has reduced the stocking capacity on parts of his land, the long term profit from trees partnered with more sustainable land management practices far outweigh any loss of grazing capacity.

“I strongly believe the loss in grazing potential has been more than compensated by growing timber. We had to deal with 100 years of continuous grazing, which brought about a decline in soil and land condition and grass species decline. We now look at our property in productivity areas – and understand that part of our property is good for growing trees, part of it is good for grazing cattle and the two can coexist both from an economic and land management point of view.”

He said he was lucky enough to have an understanding of the value of timber from very early on, and attended AgForce Projects workshops that helped him gain the knowledge required to holistically manage his land and get the best out of it.

“I observed that if we didn’t maintain some young timber we were not going to have timber in the future – even for farm use. I was also lucky enough to attend property management workshops which got me

thinking about timber production working alongside cattle grazing and today we have 500 ha of spotted gum forests, with the view to long term production.”

John said a timber management plan and a Property Map of Assessable Vegetation (PMAV) helped them identify areas of greatest productivity in order to split up their property.

Speakers at the field day included representatives from Timber Queensland, Private Forestry Service Queensland, Biosecurity Queensland, AgForce and the Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation (DEEDI).

This field day was delivered free to all landholders through the Australian Government’s Caring for our Country Carbon on Farm initiative, with support from the Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation.

Producers interested in receiving more information about vegetation/forestry management can attend upcoming free vegetation management workshops at Gin Gin, Monto and Mundubbera, 7-9 June.

Producers will be supplied with their property’s latest vegetation maps (version six regional ecosystem and version two regrowth map) and will receive assistance with interpreting the maps’ colours and codes, what farming activities are exemptions under the legislation and what activities require permits and more.

To attend contact (07) 3238 6048 or visit www.agforward.org.au/calendar.htm and download a registration form.

For comment call Graeme Bell on (07) 3238 6016 or 0428 157 086.

Media contact: AgForce Projects Communication Officer Madeline Cooper (07) 3238 6060 or 0488 002 091.