Carbon Conference provides wealth of information for landholders from across the country

By Craig Pullman – Regional Landcare Coordinator North West

The 10th Annual Carbon Farming Conference and Expo was held in Albury from 23-25 May - with a wide range of national and international speakers. Proudly hosted by Carbon Farmers of Australia, the conference aimed to equip landholders with all they need to make decisions around Carbon and Biodiversity Markets. I attended over the 3 days and have provided a summary with some key points particularly relating to changes in the way carbon projects are set-up and how to start baselining before entering into project agreements.

Market Opportunities for Smaller Producers

Scale has been an issue for producers interested in entering the market with most project developers indicating minimum cattle herd size of approx > 1000 head or land area for soil or vegetation projects > 500 ha. The exceptions I spoke with were Agriprove that have projects registered at 40ha and also Farmers Regen Mutual – an early stage start-up developing co-operative aggregations.

A new Method expected in 2023 should change that equation of scale dramatically. The Integrated Farm Method will mean that land managers can employ multiple carbon abatement methods across a single property while keeping the administrative burden to a minimum. No matter how many methods you use, you'd only ever have to fill out one batch of paperwork. This is really significant for both large and small projects – on the same hectare of land one could generate ACCUs for the soil, livestock and vegetation – under one project. Also known as 'stacking'.

There is also the Environmental Planting Method outlined below that may be suitable for smaller holdings and/or landholders intending to undertake plantings for the production and wellbeing co-benefits.

Measuring soil carbon for productivity and/or the ERF.

Remote sensing technologies are here and developing fast but they are a work in progress. Carbon (and other) measurements for your production data or for trading, require conventional soil cores and lab analysis at this point, and especially for baselining and subsequent monitoring of the small changes in response to practice change.

The first step, a soil sampling design for your property and the collection protocol is standardised, and advice should be sought from a soil consultant/scientist type for this step. Southern Cross University have lists of suitable service providers that must be used in our area (at the farmers cost) however, subsequent costs for lab services are then subsidised heavily. $275 per test site (minimum of 4 sites on your place, up to $10,000) and also your previous tests are worth money ($50 - $150 each data set) as SCU build a national database. For further information: https://www.awe.gov.au/agriculture-land/farm-food-drought/natural-resources/soils/soil-monitoring-and-incentives/faqs

The next step would be to contact SCU who can give the service providers details (to get quotes) and information about the testing costs (including the Gov subsidies and data 'buyback').
Register at https://www.scu.edu.au/pilot-soils-program/#register
Or contact them directly
Email: PilotSoilMonitoring@awe.gov.au
Phone: 1800 900 090

A provider serving our area that was being well received by delegates is Precision Pastures offering a Carbon Starter report for $1,000.00 incl ground truthing. This is a bit of a standout.

And finally, any soil project registered with the ERF can also get a $5000 loan for soil testing paid back in ACCUs from the project.

NEW ERF Environmental Plantings Method – All landholders, streamlined for easier access.

Environmental plantings involve planting a mixture of native and local tree, shrub and understorey species to establish new and permanent forest cover. These projects earn one ACCU for each tonne of carbon dioxide equivalent (tCO2-e) stored in the project trees as they grow.

This Method has been streamlined and now appears very easy to access at minimal cost (dealing directly with the Clean Energy Regulator) and low reporting/audit requirements compared to other ERF Methods at the moment. The full information sheet is at this link: https://www.awe.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/environmental-plantings-pilot-information-pack.pdf

You can get a credible estimate from CSIRO of how many tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (tCO2-e) should be stored in plantings on your land at this link: https://looc-c.farm/farmDetails. I understand that contacting CER they will give better detail and information about your land capability and the ins/outs of this new streamlined ERF Method.

LOOC-B: biodiversity co-benefits calculator for your property at paddock scale – easy to use.

A new estimator tool (still in development) was launched by CSIRO that quantifies the biodiversity co-benefits of land management actions such as Environmental Plantings, Natural Regeneration and Plantations at paddock scale. When finished it will also display the ERF Methods most applicable to your land (like LOOC-C does currently) while including its biodiversity values. You can see what natural reveg or plantings could accomplish over the next 25 years on your property.
https://research.csiro.au/digiscape/digiscapes-projects/biodiversity-co-benefits-calculator/

Further information:

The program of speakers:
https://carbonfarmingconference.com.au/program/

Web links to each of their 15 minute presentations:

- View Session 1 speakers here: https://vimeo.com/713191198/82f493b6b0
- View Session 2 speakers here: https://vimeo.com/713645964/31448561c2