farming for change

Case Study: Rethinking Farming Practices for a Better Future

YANDILLA PARTNERSHIP MIKE & ANITA LOMAX

QUICK FACTS

2,700 acres across two properties near Werris Creek in North West NSW

Annual Rainfall 655mm

Family owned since 1947

Farming based on the principles from Gabe Brown's 'Dirt to Soil'

Reducing chemical use

Moving to managed grazing, multi species and native tree corridors

Treating soil as the foundation of the farming enterprise



"I feel I will be better prepared for the next drought"

BY LANA ANDREWS AND PENNY MILSON

Mike Lomax and his family are cattle breeders/graziers located on the eastern and western fringes of the Werris Creek township in North West NSW. They run a breeder herd of 300 Angus cows with the intent of increasing the herd to 360 through managed grazing. Mike attended the Farming for Change - 'Managing for Better Soils' workshop on the back of severe drought conditions, with significant loss of groundcover and erosion issues. To mitigate future impacts of drought, Mike has employed a number of practices after seeking advice, researching and attending several Landcare and Natural Resource Management events in the region.



Why did you take part in the Farming for Change Program?

A local regenerative grazier encouraged Mike to take part in the Farming for Change program focused on managing soils, pastures and grazing to build resilience to the impacts of a changing climate. The program held promise as it came after several discussions and realisations over the past few years - it would form part of a larger picture for Mike. The drought was a key contributing factor (as it had been for many) - prompting a need to change thinking and practice to improve resilience. In February 2021, Mike made a key decision increase and maintain groundcover and reduce the use of chemicals, amongst other things. The Farming for Change program supported and encouraged Mike's thinking and added value to his transition process. He felt it 'established the need for where we need to get to with regenerative agriculture'. The key messages from the program for Mike were the need to establish a clear vision and values, have a good understanding of the basic principles of soil management and aim for 100% groundcover, 100% of the time. On the back of attending Farming for Change, Mike has made many changes to his farming practices.

"There needs to be a focus on soil. Treat it as the foundation of your enterprise"

> Mike Lomax GRAZIER



"Getting into regen ag. It's a new phase, it's exciting and gives me something to look forward to"

Changes to farming practices

- Holistic rotational grazing management program for the Angus herd to improve groundcover and species diversity;

- Dramatic reduction in chemical use to assist recovery and improvement of soil health:

- Planting of multi-species pastures to maintain groundcover and improve soil health:

- Revegetation/native tree planting increase biodiversity and shade and providing habitat to threatened species;

- Increase diversity in pastures improving soil health and biology; and

- Excluding livestock from creeks and flowing waterways to reduce erosion and allow for recovery.

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and quotes. Photos by Lana Andrews and Mike Lomax. Produced 2021

Grazing Management

- Livestock rotated through smaller paddocks. Previously lower and longer stocking rates of cattle over 20ha paddocks - now moving to 2-5 ha 'cells' with higher stocking rates and shorter durations

- Cattle will be less selective when using higher stocking rates, and will graze most of the undesirable plants

- Cattle (approx. 90 head) spend 2 days in a cell before being moved on to another block (and will be adjusted accordingly depending on grazing pressure and stock condition)

Native Tree Planting

- A corridor at "Yandilla" was planted in Spring 2020 - 115 native seedlings are doing very well thanks to good subsoil moisture

- There are plans to put more trees in to provide livestock shade on one of the 60 ha blocks which is currently only suitable for grazing in the cooler months.



Multi species cropping

- A multi-species crop was planted in Autumn 2021 for the first time - Mike has been monitoring a 70ha paddock which was broken down into 12 cells and strip grazed. After the first graze Mike noted a reduction in undesirable species by half and after the second graze will be applying Biocast (liquid vermicast biostimulant) at 5 litres/ha.

- The multi-species mix includes: Oats - 15kg/ha, Cocksfoot -2kg/ha, Subterranean clover - 2kg/ha Common vetch - 4kg/ha, Rape or Daikon Radish- 1kg/ha and Perennial Rye - 1kg/ha

Mike has been monitoring his pastures and soils and has noted natives coming back, increased groundcover and has taken soil samples to continue monitoring. In keeping with his vision of soil being the foundation of his enterprise, Mike has not used any chemical in the last 10 months and will be exploring options to introduce dung beetles as a way to continue to build soil health.

"Utilise your livestock as a tool to help manage soil health"