

PRODUCER SPOTLIGHT

with your NSW North West RALFs



Mike Lomax
Yandilla Partnership
Werris Creek

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



Rethinking Farming Practices for a Better Future

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.

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.

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



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 (along with swapping chemicals for fencing materials!), Mike has made many changes to his farming practices.

Current changes to farming practice

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

Grazing Management

- Livestock rotated through smaller paddocks. Previously lower and longer stocking rates of cattle over 20ha paddocks – now moving to 2 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 weeds
- Cattle (approx. 90 head) spend 2 days in a 2ha cell before being moved on to another block (and will be adjusted accordingly depending on grazing pressure and stock condition)

Multi species cropping

- A multi-species pasture is going in Autumn 2021 for the first time – 170ha across 6 paddocks to be planted May. All paddocks have been cell grazed prior to planting.
- The choice of planter aims to minimise soil disturbance and loss of topsoil. The planter does not have a tyne but is a single (18 inch) disc seeder with gauge and dual press wheels. Current multi-species mix includes: oats, cocksfoot, clover, common vetch, rape or daikon radish and perennial ryegrass.

Native Tree Planting

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

Supporting the transition

Along with Farming for Change, Mike attended other key regional events – a film screening and panel discussion on 'Kiss the Ground' and 'Creating Resilient Landscapes to Secure our Farming Future' on the Liverpool Plains. Mike was suitably impressed with these events – he felt that hearing from like-minded farmer/grazier's really supported his efforts. 'Everybody had a vision, a plan that they executed. They were all focussed on how to achieve their vision. They had worked out what, why and how to get there'.

In line with having a vision Mike stated:

'It's about doing things for the right reasons. If we want to consider future generations we need to start now, we probably should have started years ago. I know changing these practices will mean we are better prepared for drought'.



Acknowledgements: Thank you to Mike for the interview.

Photos and words by Lana Andrews and Penny Milson

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