

PRODUCER SPOTLIGHT

with your NSW North West RALFs



Nigel and Sue Smith
Woonooka Angus Stud
'Springhill'
Piallamore
(SE of Tamworth)

Quick Facts

Farming Enterprise: Woonooka Angus Stud specialising in quiet, low weight, high growth bulls

No. of hectares: 1050Ha

Philosophy: To develop our farm and enterprise as a fully functional farm ecosystem

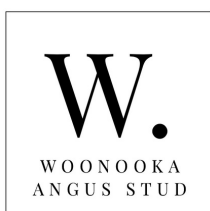
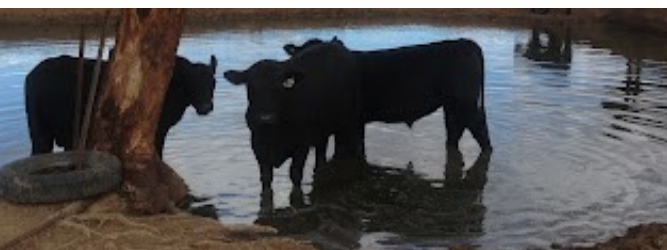


Tell me a bit about yourselves and your farming enterprises.

We are retired Science teachers – Nigel taught Physics at Farrer and Sue Biology at Oxley High. We built a house on 100 acres at Moore Creek and started Woonooka Angus Stud with 10 PTIC Bronmar stud Angus cows bought during the 1985 drought. We needed more land to run our rapidly increasing herd and were fortunate to purchase Springhill in 1999. Using low stress cattle handling techniques and good genetics we now run approximately 200 breeders and sell about 80 bulls most years.

In a recent interview with 'The Land' you mentioned that leaky weirs had been installed on your property. Can you expand on why you chose these particular structures and the impacts it has had on the landscape and your business?

The 2018/9 drought exposed the huge amount of surface rock that had always made farming challenging damaging slashers, seeders and vehicles. We took the opportunity to purchase a windrower and rock picker to clean up all paddocks. We used the rock and fallen timber to construct leaky weirs along the numerous active gullies. Leaky weirs really do work. They can be built fairly quickly with minimal cost and effort. The structures quickly transform the gully landscape by slowing down water and holding it in the alluvium for a much longer period. The most spectacular result has been the development of streams and pools that remain for many weeks after storms or floods, rather than the water disappearing within a day or two. They also allow sediment to be deposited as the water is held back by the structures which rapidly builds up the gully floor rather than continuing the scouring process. We have fenced off a number of sections of these gullies and planted them out with trees to increase habitat and biodiversity.



Nigel is happy to take enquiries.

Website: www.woonookaangus.com

Email: legin53@bigpond.com

Facebook: Woonooka Angus Stud

What is the best piece of advice you have been given?

The single best advice we have ever received was from Greg Chappell, then an Ag teacher at Farrer High school and now runs Dulverton Angus stud with his wife, Sally, who advised us to start an angus stud by buying the 10 old PTIC cows from Bronmar. Greg's advice has probably had the greatest impact on our lives by allowing our family to enjoy a real rural lifestyle with a reliable income. During the drought we also received excellent advice through a vet clinic on drought feeding cattle and early weaning. It gave us invaluable information to fine tune our herds' nutrition requirements.

Why is it important to focus on landscape rehydration in your farming business?

Springhill was a typical dryland farm in the Tamworth area with sizable gully formations that were essentially drains that carried water away from the property as quickly as possible. Leaky weirs have prevented this process and have contributed to substantially rehydrating the landscape.

Your country changes in elevation quite a bit – how do you manage your farming operations to accommodate this?

We changed the original paddock design to better suit the topography and landscape features, installed a new water reticulation system including a new bore, solar pump, tanks and trough system and constructed extensive laneways to connect paddocks and the yard complex. This allows ease of movement of cattle and security of different flocks and further subdivision of paddocks to increase pasture resting phases.



Where do you source support and information from, when making changes or improvements to your property and farming business?

After the drought, we made a decision to learn as much as we could about all aspects of regenerative farming particularly in relation to developing Springhill and our angus stud as a fully functioning farm ecosystem. In particular we needed to learn more about soil microbes and their function, multi species pastures and controlled grazing. Attending field days, workshops, webinars and reading widely have vastly increased our knowledge, especially from soil scientists such as Dr Judi Earl from her webinars and a field Day at Piallaway in 2020, as well as Dr Nicole Master's book 'For the Love of Soil'. The 'Carbon Farming Handbook' by Carbon Farmers Australia is also a great source of information. A highlight last year was a visit from Dr Judi Earl that we won by subscribing to a series of her grazing management webinars that were organised through Landcare. She gave us valuable feedback that confirmed we were heading in the right direction with our regenerative farming attempts. This information has helped us on the path to achieve our aim of developing a farm ecosystem with more resilience to drought.

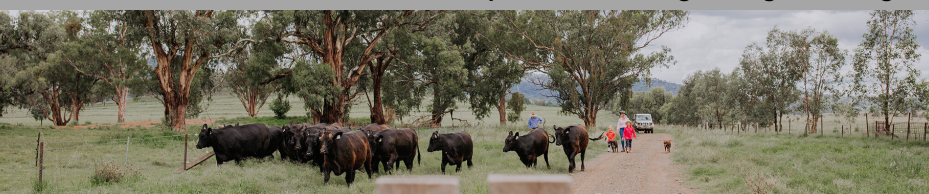
What do you base your decision making on?

Our aim is to seek the best science available and from that to decide which improvements will be cost effective and will work at Springhill, whether it is accessing the best genetics we can afford to improve our cattle herd, the best machinery for the job, or to adapt the best regen farming strategies that will suit our land and enterprise.

You are keen participants in Landcare events – how have they influenced the way you farm?

Nothing compares to attending well organised Landcare events, such as workshops and field days, where experts provide invaluable information on the latest developments and practical tips that are very relevant to participants.

Apart from being able to ask questions of the experts and talk directly with them, it is an important networking opportunity to compare our situation with other farmers in the area and to discover how they approach similar problems. Landcare webinars on interesting topics similarly provide information quickly and effectively by experts in the field. We have also been very fortunate in gaining an LLS grant that was advertised in the Landcare emails.



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