



# Farming generations plan for future farm landscapes together

## SITE INFORMATION

**Landholder:** Wendy, Geoff and Jim Holman

**Location:** Cockaleechee - Eyre Peninsula

**Annual Rainfall:** 390 mm

## Site Description:

### Enterprises

**Mixed farming:** 1200 ha Cropping (Wheat/Canola/Barley/Lupins)

300 Merino Ewes crossed with White Suffolk

**Total Area Farmed:** 1267 ha

### Soils

Soil types across the property range from saline sandy loams and ironstone gravelly loam over red clay to ironstone soils over calcareous lower subsoils.

After participating in a Property Management Planning Course 15 years ago, Wendy and Geoff Holman realised the value of management planning on their 1267 ha property at Cockaleechee. When the Holman's developed their first plan, their son Jim was still at school. Jim is now an integral decision maker in their mixed cropping and sheep business. When the opportunity presented itself to revisit their farm plan, they decided to participate with both generations.

"We are always looking to set up a better farming system. We felt that the Future Farm Landscapes program would allow us to update our farm plan and assist us in identifying critical areas that we need to address," Wendy said. "Our business situation has now changed, with Jim being more involved in the decision making and it is important to update our plans for the future."

### The Project

The Future Farm Landscapes project is funded through the Eyre Peninsula Natural Resources Management Board in partnership with Australian Wool Innovation Limited and Federal Government's Caring for Our

Country initiative. The program aims to assist producers to plan for the future by developing strategic property plans for their business and providing technical support to identify key areas that require on ground action as well as opportunities for the ongoing development of a sustainable farm business.

Producers were supported through the project by technical specialists who assisted them to identify emerging opportunities, identify risk, and changes and actions that could be addressed now as well as in the future. Plans were developed that covered agricultural productivity, carbon assessment, biodiversity and natural resource sustainability.

### Identifying the Risk

Individual property assessments identified areas of low, medium and high production and the associated risk level in these zones. Action plans were developed to assist producers to improve productivity. This included addressing low production areas with high risk as well as making sure high production areas were maximising returns.

"We identified that we needed to increase the production capability of our soils by whatever means. Having productive soils is a financial benefit to our farm, as well as increasing the future longevity of our business," Jim said. "We seem to be doing a lot of taking from the soil and now we see the value of giving back."



Saltbush planted in the low production areas.





## Action on Ground

An assessment of agricultural production on the Holman's property identified that the low production deep sandy soils were at risk of crop failure 50% of the time. To increase the productivity of these areas, the Holman's will undertake delving and clay spreading.

"We are hoping to run trials to pin point which particular method, claying or delving would best work for us," said Jim "We have delved the light country and you can see a significant difference. We planted feed barley this year on this area and you can see where we had delved and where we hadn't, right up to the last plant line."

Incorporating clay into the soil profile of these sandy soils assists in increasing the overall productive capacity as well as the percentage of organic matter, reducing the risk of production failure. If the clay option is too expensive or doesn't yield the expected results, the Holman's will trial using a green manure crop or incorporating straw into the soil profile.

The Holman's also have areas of saline seepage which they have been trying to manage for the past 50 years. Ten to fifteen years ago they attempted to address the issue through establishment of salt tolerant species such as puccinellia, tall wheat grass and salt bush.

"We do have the majority of our salt areas contained, but we have undulating country and the salt in a few areas has crept past the tree line," Geoff said. "The technical personnel who undertook the biodiversity

assessment on our property as part of Future Farm Landscapes project have suggested a few different grass species for us to try which I think we will pursue, to keep the issue under control."

## Biodiversity Assessment

The Holman's have been very active in restoring native vegetation cover to their property, with Geoff and his brother's receiving a Landcare Award for their efforts in the 1990's. A biodiversity assessment conducted as part of the Future Farm Landscapes program highlighted the need to keep stock excluded from areas of vegetation and to establish plantings to create an understory.

The biodiversity assessment identified that the current understorey is dominated by native grasses, such as wallaby and spear grass with some annual grasses. Grazing needs to be managed in these areas to reduce the seed set of weed species and reduce the build up of exotic grass dry matter. This will encourage the native grasses and herbs to naturally regenerate through flowering and seed setting.

Understorey establishment and exclusion of stock will increase the biodiversity value of vegetation on farm and encourage natural regeneration of plant species.

"We will try to keep the sheep out of the scrub as we can see the benefit from doing this now," Jim said.



Some of the revegetation the Holman's have undertaken to control salinity.



## The Carbon Story

As part of the project the Holman's benchmarked the carbon story for their farm business which identified that they are currently sequestering 75 tonnes carbon dioxide equivalent per year (tCO<sub>2</sub>e/year). With implementation of future plans to increase areas planted to salt tolerant grasses, re-vegetation around salt seepage areas and understory planting under remnant vegetation, the Holman's annual sequestration is expected to increase to just over 500 tCO<sub>2</sub>e/year.

"I had heard a lot about carbon and going into this process I was keen to keep an open mind about it," Geoff said. "Since going through the program I am more informed about what it all means and how it may benefit us on our property."

## Project Benefits

The Holman family was one of ten farming businesses across Eyre Peninsula who developed a next generation farm plan as part of the "Future Farm Landscapes" project, identifying key areas that need action and

opportunities for the ongoing development and sustainability of the farm business. All participants have a much clearer understanding of the carbon story for their farms including sequestration in their soils and the role soil organic carbon will play in the future with seasonal variability and climate change.

"The Future Farm Landscapes process has shown us that we are doing alright. The things we put in place over the years, such as fencing off vegetation and re-vegetation has all been reaffirmed," said Wendy.

"We knew some areas were a problem on our farm, but we were not really sure what to do." Geoff said, "We are now planning towards addressing these problem areas. We now have the momentum to move forward."

## References/Acknowledgements

Acknowledging the work of the landholders Wendy, Geoff and Jim Holman and Rural Solutions SA consultants in producing and implementing a management plan for the site.



Geoff inspecting their salinity mitigation.

