

Agricultural small grants program yields big results

Council's environmental focus to regenerate farm health

Too often achieving environment and productivity gains in agriculture are seen as opposing concepts, but the results of a Tweed Shire Council small grants program are demonstrating they can go hand in hand.

Grants of up to \$4,000 are available as part of a new round of Council's Sustainable Agriculture Small Grants Program. The grants are to assist farmers to adopt better land management practices.

Sustainable Agriculture Program Leader Eli Szandala said the initiative provides funding for farmers to implement on-ground works and other activities to address environmental issues on their land.

"We are looking to support projects that protect important biodiversity on-farms, reduce nutrient runoff into local waterways and support farmers to improve the health of their soils and pastures," he said.

Five grants of up to \$4,000 were awarded to a range of producers in the 2018-19 financial year to improve the way they manage their farms and the environment.

Successful grant recipients, Deb and Jim Allard implemented improvements to an effluent management system at their Burringbar dairy.

"Knowing that Tweed Shire Council supported us and found small pockets of money to keep us on track with our sustainable project was comforting," Mrs Allard said.

Melanie Moss from Stokers Siding received grant funding to adopt and install an 'Equicentral System' of fences and hardstand areas to improve pasture and manure waste management at her horse stud.

"By changing the traditional way of keeping horses separately in large, singular paddocks, I now run all my horses together and implement a hardstand or 'loafing' area for the horses to congregate, with access to each paddock on a rotational basis. This system has a positive impact on my horses' wellbeing, but also on the health and productivity of the land," Ms Moss said.

While the in-kind contributions from grant recipients are often larger than the grant amounts awarded, sometimes just a small financial incentive and a little support can make all the difference.

Pumpenbil beef farmer John Quayle also received a grant last financial year to exclude cattle access to gullies and areas of high biodiversity value. The abandoned permaculture farm on the upper Oxley River is heavily infested with weeds and the controlled use of his cattle has become an important weed management tool.

"The grant has certainly enabled us to achieve greater productivity while at the same time allowing preservation of our natural ecological environment. The ongoing advice and support has been really appreciated from the Sustainable Agriculture Grants team," Mr Quayle said.

Applications open on Monday 22 July 2019 and close at 4pm Monday 16 September 2019.

Farmers who are interested in working on projects that have a direct and positive impact on the environment and the way they farm are encouraged to apply. Download the application form and grant guidelines at www.tweed.nsw.gov.au/agriculture.

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