

Sustainable grazing in the Tweed

A Sustainable Grazing education program in 2015/16 brought together a group of Tweed commercial livestock producers to improve the environmental sustainability of their farming enterprises.

The project built farmers' capacity to manage soil health, productive pastures, on-farm biodiversity and practical farm planning as essential components of a functional livestock production system. Sustainable grazing practices lead to more productive pastures, less erosion and runoff, healthier livestock and a healthier environment.

A good understanding of farm soils enables production within land capability and helps identify strategies to improve soil health and pasture productivity.

How to achieve sustainable grazing

Sustainable grazing in the Tweed is achievable with:

- A sound understanding of the physical, chemical and biological characteristics of your soil the effects different management practices have on these characteristics.
- Periodic additions of organic inputs to pay back the soil for over-utilisation of the land in the past. This could include: adding lime to correct acidity, freeing up phosphorous by promoting soil mycorrhizae and establishing legumes in pastures.
- Practices that ensure pastures are not overgrazed. Ensure sufficient feed availability during winter, based on flexible stocking rates and rotations.
- Tools to monitor pasture availability, develop feed budgets, assess soil health and the condition of vegetation along waterways. They can include Meat & Livestock Australia's feed calculators, the Northern Rivers Soil Health Card and tools for riparian assessment.
- Fencing to limit stock access to waterways, in conjunction with off-stream watering points that provide clean drinking water for stock, shade and shelter and habitat for native fauna, including beneficial predators and pollinators.
- Protection and enhancement of natural resources, including isolated paddock trees, native remnant areas and water courses, to enhance biodiversity. This can bring benefits for productivity and ecosystems.
- Industry best management practice programs to self-assess and continually improve the condition of the farm.
- Networking to exchange knowledge and ideas and develop solutions to shared problems.



Participants developed skills in soil sampling and assessment using the Northern Rivers Soil Health Card, a simple tool for monitoring the physical characteristics of the soil. Participants identified production limiting factors in their soils through mineral testing and physical assessment and were given strategies for improving soil health based on biological farming principles.



Measuring feed availability and using feed budget calculators to make informed decisions about stocking rates.

Dung beetles play a crucial role in recycling livestock manure, improving soil health and reducing nutrient runoff into waterways but are affected by seasonal conditions and some pesticides.

Farmers' comments

“Agricultural education is the key to future sustainability ... Maintaining sustainable agricultural practices is caring for future generations.”

“Thank you for organising these professional resource persons to come to our ‘neighbourhood’ and educate us about our ‘patches’.”

For further information or to participate in future projects, contact Council’s Program Leader – Sustainable Agriculture on (02) 6670 2400.

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