



Our country, Our future.

Achievable goals

Improving land management makes long-term sense



The annual rainfall at Brian and Judy Pownall's property Leichhardt, located roughly 25 kilometres east of Dysart, is just 600 mm.

However, a month after installing new contour banks in their cultivation areas, they received almost all their annual rainfall in just 10 days. Despite the deluge, the new contour banks held, proving their value and ensuring valuable soil and moisture was not washed away into the local creek after the downpour.

Leichhardt is a 12,600 hectare mixed enterprise property, and has been in Brian's family for almost 100 years. Brian and Judy run a grazing enterprise on Leichhardt, and lease out paddocks to share farmers Brett and Renee Campbell, who cultivate grain crops.

Since the Pownalls took over Leichhardt's operations in 1995, they have invested considerable effort to improve the property's condition. They work closely with Brett and Renee to ensure their share farming operations are also sustainable.

"One of our goals is that we'll leave the place in a better biological standard than when we bought it from Brian's family. So if we can achieve that, as well as being more productive, then we'll be happy," said Judy.

Industry-led training helps

To help them achieve that long-term goal, the Pownalls completed the industry-led Grazing Best Management Practices program (Grazing BMP) in 2014 and used what they had learnt to complete three projects that improved their grazing land management and productivity.

Then in July 2015, Brian and Brett completed the Grains Best Management Practices program (Grains BMP) to learn more about sustainably managing Leichhardt's cultivation areas and improving their water retention.

Completing Grains BMP was a pre-requisite to accessing support from Fitzroy Basin Association Inc. (FBA) through funding from the Australian Government's Reef Programme for their planned cultivation improvements. Judy believes that participating in the two BMP programs was very beneficial. "You pick up something in every session. If you go in with the attitude that you're going to learn something, you will."

Preventing soil loss

Many years ago, Brian and Judy had installed farm-over contour banks and implemented zero-till cultivation in their cropping paddocks. Farm-over contour banks are designed to slow water movement across the landscape, reducing erosion. They are used in conjunction with zero-till cultivation, which retains stubble after harvest, thus increasing moisture retention and further decreasing erosion.

However, the old contour banks had not performed as well as the Pownalls had expected and they were still losing soil. Additionally, the old contour banks were breaking and needed to be re-built.





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"We don't like losing any soil—and we were still having banks breaking—and we just don't want that," said Judy. To the Pownalls, losing valuable soil meant they were losing one of their property's most valuable assets, and taking care of it was vital to Leichhardt's long-term future.

"If you look after your soil, it looks after you. The soil is the building block of everything that we do. The more productive and healthy we keep our soil, the more productive the country," she said.

Funding support

With the support of Fitzroy Basin Association Inc. and Capricornia Catchments through funding from the Australian Government's Reef Programme, the Pownalls were able to repair the existing farm-over contour banks and build new ones.

"It's going to give us less erosion and more water retention. It's going to give us more years of good farming," said Judy.

By preventing the soil loss and increasing soil moisture in the paddocks, Judy says the new contour banks have been invaluable, especially with the unexpected deluge just weeks after the banks were completed.

"The new contour banks held up really well," Judy said. "The water went through the older ones in the places where we've still got more work to go, but the new ones held beautifully. It had an immediate effect."



Further benefits

The improvements they have made to their grazing and cropping practices have benefits that extend far further than their front gate, though—they extend all the way to the Great Barrier Reef.

"The more that everyone looks after the country biologically, the better the whole country is and in effect it's going to be better for the Reef. It's a win-win," she said.

"If participating in the Reef Programme can help improve your production as well as improve your country—biologically and environmentally—which in turn improves your bottom line, it also helps everybody down the line.

"If we can do our part to protect the country around us, then that just follows on through and protects the country surrounding us, which protects the Reef, then it's got to be a good thing.

"If everyone does their part, then it makes life better for everyone."

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Brian and Judy Pownall's long-term commitment to a sustainable mixed enterprise on their property Leichhardt is starting to pay dividends.

