

Bruce Hicks



In 1995 when Bruce Hicks and his family purchased their dairy property near Tooperang, any area that could be accessed by a bulldozer had been cleared of vegetation. Bruce then made it his aim to mend the land management damage that had been done, and return the land to a more productive and sustainable capacity.

Bruce and his oldest son Perrin's first project involved fencing off the creek to restrict stock access and to remove willow trees, which grew along the creek banks. The creek beds were then revegetated using local native tree species and grasses. A central laneway was constructed to provide stock with a safer and controlled way of entering the steep hilled paddocks.



In 2001, Bruce started to plant tree lines that ran in an east to west direction to provide stock protection from prevailing winds, but also the tree lines acted as corridors, linking native vegetation which was on neighbouring properties.

In 2006, a Flora survey was conducted by a group auditing swamps on the Fleurieu. The survey identified the swamps that were located on the Hick's property were of significance and provided habitat for rare coral ferns and sedges. The swamps provide a protective home for hopping bird species such as the blue wren and, even though they have not been sighted, Bruce believes Emu Wrens are also present. The wrens act as natural predators on the mites which are a pest species in pasture.



Bruce believes there are many benefits from taking an active role in land management on farm. Bruce is happy knowing that he can contribute to conserving some of South Australia's natural heritage and believes that bare earth is not good stewardship.

"Seven to eight years ago we fenced off a gully area which had slumped to protect it from stock and to prevent further erosion. This area was not productive land, but now it supports native gums and even native cherry trees," Bruce said.



Students from the Murraylands Christian School have been actively involved in strengthening the land conservation message, by planting native trees on Bruce's property which have been propagated at the school.

"It is important that the children have a hands on education as it assists in developing a community minded culture towards land management issues," Bruce said.

Bruce participated in the Creekcure and later Landcare programs, whose assistance has helped him to achieve some of his land management projects on farm. While the funding assistance was useful, it was the technical support that he valued.

"It was great to have someone to discuss the pros and cons of a project idea. It was also good to establish a relationship with a consultant who also takes an interest in what you are trying to achieve and therefore also sharing in the successes," Bruce said.



Bruce has recently participated in the DairySAT program. Through this program he was able to access the assistance of the Goolwa to Wellington LAP officer, who was able to provide advice on future projects that Bruce wishes to progress and identify potential future funding.

"Dairy SAT is a great reference of the different agencies that are available to assist producers. I will also use it to assist my on farm trainee learn about different parts of farming," Bruce said.

Over the next 5 years Bruce plans to continue plant wildlife corridors, linking neighbouring remnant vegetation areas, up grade and rubble the central laneway to control pugging, and revegetate and fence an area which is dammed to create a water reserve for native wildlife.

Acknowledgements

Funding support for the project from the Australian Government and Dairy Australia.

Dairy SA and Dairying for Tomorrow would like to acknowledge the efforts of Tarsha McGregor, Rural Solutions and Monique White, Price Merrett Consulting, Lower Murray Irrigation and Amy Williams who have conducted Dairy SAT reviews with farmers. Dairy Farmers National Foods Warnambool Cheese and Butter and Murray Goulburn Co-op for assistance with promotions.

For further information contact Dairying for Tomorrow, Monique White 0400 972 206 or monique2@internode.on.net or Dairy SA Verity Ingham 8766 0127 or dairy.sa@bigpond.com