

Technical advice, along with funding and support is helping farmers in the Darling Downs Young Farmers Network lift their profitability and improve the environment.

HOW IT'S BEING USED

Graham and Theresa Bourke

Glengallon Creek, north-east of Warwick on the Darling Downs

Involvement in the Darling Downs Young Farmers Network is giving Graham and Theresa Bourke access to ideas and funding to improve the profitability, productivity and natural resources of their dairy farm.

Graham started working on the farm with his parents, Bryan and Mary, in 1991 and has helped the family dairy expand to milking 150 Holstein Friesians. Graham and Theresa took over the farm from Graham's parents in January 2007 and are working to build the herd to 200 milkers.

They joined the Darling Downs Young Farmers Network to mix with other

Graham Bourke among his riparian vegetation project.



WHY IT'S WORKING

The Darling Downs Young Farmers Network was initiated by Condamine Alliance and is run by Subtropical Dairy. The network:

- helps young farmers build networks, improve farm management skills and improve decision making;
- aims to improve both farm and environmental management through farm business planning;
- includes social events, Young Farmers forums and workshops, on-farm financial assistance farm walks and an electronic discussion group;
- uses the knowledge of other farmers in each group to help individuals develop action plans for their own farm;
- links farm management to catchment management; and
- strengthens links between farmers and the organisations responsible for managing and funding natural resources.

The Young Farmers network specifically addressed triple bottom line issues (social, economic and environmental outcomes). Rather than using DairySAT, key issues were identified through a facilitated workshop at the forum that enabled issues associated with social, economic and environmental capability to be highlighted and subsequently addressed.





Graham Bourke, dairy farmer from Gladfield: improving their natural resource management is part of the Bourkes' business expansion.

like-minded farmers and learn from their experiences.

"We like listening to other people's ideas, and the group's recognition of the balance of all aspects of farming has meant that we have got a lot out of being involved," Graham said.

"The business structures day helped with our business planning and communications. We were aware of a lot of the issues but just weren't putting them in practice, especially the communication which has become really important now we have employees.

"We have also been able to do more natural resource management practices thanks to the financial assistance available through the Condamine Alliance funded project."

The Bourkes have always recognised that improving their natural resource management is part of their business expansion. They have several on-farm environment projects on the go, such as enhancing their riparian area, controlling erosion and improving their water use efficiency.

Graham was able to access financial assistance through the Network to install

3 km of underground irrigation mains that supports a travelling irrigator used to grow oats, rye grass, lucerne and forage sorghum.

"The new mains mean we save about 20% of our total water use by getting rid of leaks and improved irrigation scheduling," Graham said.

Reduced friction in the pipes has also improved the irrigation system's energy efficiency by 10%.

The Bourkes' largest natural resource project involves enhancing the riparian zone along Glengallan Creek.

Support from Subtropical Dairy helped the Bourkes receive funding through Envirofund to plant trees, fence and install off-stream watering points.

"The off-stream water points have been a major success and we have aligned the fence with the flood lines to decrease damage during flooding which has allowed us to establish a grass buffer as well," Graham said.

The Bourkes are also planting trees. Their initial efforts were a learning exercise with mixed results when they planted their first trees into soil with low moisture levels and then needed to be watered.

"We haven't been that successful in establishing our trees so next time we will try planting them into a full moisture profile and see how we go."

The Bourkes are also using a combination of permanent pastures and contour banks to control soil erosion.

"We see the integration of the contouring and the return of the country to permanent pasture as a great investment in protecting our soil," Graham said.

"We also want to grow a lot more silage and enlarge and improve our calf rearing facilities and advance our heifer rearing management."

CONTACT

Ruth McInnes, Project Manager QDO, phone 07 3236 2955; e-mail ruth@dairypage.com.au