

Community Participation

LP-010-003

Saving Soil Health & Hydration

Southern New England Landcare Ltd



Variations on Natural Sequence Farming

The issue

Past practices on many farms have reduced our ability to capture water and slow run-off. The consequence is a dehydrated landscape with vegetation, soils and riparian areas unable to hold water.

Instead, rain that does fall is largely lost as either evaporation or run-off, taking valuable soil and nutrients with it and causing erosion or unwanted nutrient enrichment downstream. This is bad for business as costly inputs are lost and plant growth is way less than optimal and it is also bad for downstream biodiversity.

The solution

Using National Landcare Program Funds, we investigated 'variations' on Natural Sequence Farming, and demonstrated what some local landholders were doing to improve on-farm results, though two events attended by 70 local farmers:

1. **Regenerating Rural Landscapes Bootcamp** with David Hardwick and Damon Telfer on 16-17 September 2020.
2. **Rehydrating Roumalla Creek Catchment, an Introduction to Natural Sequence Farming** with Stuart Andrews on 22 October 2020.

The impact

Restoring hydration to farms comes from supporting healthy, diverse perennial plant communities on all areas of the farm and using management practices to slow water flow naturally, especially high in the landscape. A diversity of plants builds soil during good times and protects soil during difficult times. 'Groundcover, grass and more grass' and 'Slow water at the top before it creates a problem at the bottom' were common reflections among participants.

In the New England, we can strive to maintain 100+% ground cover and substantial herbage mass so that rainfall infiltrates rather than running off. Conditions in 2019 were challenging but the higher the diversity of plants, including unpalatable ones, the more likely there are strong perennial grasses that respond quickly when rain falls, slowing overland flow and holding water in the landscape.

Participants learnt to see their farm as a mosaic of patches. 'Even though I had divided my place into a patchwork of systems, I hadn't really noted it and so by noting it, it is easier to see the benefits and use those benefits to improve further' (participant).

People were enthusiastic about some of the more physical interventions, but recognised they need more knowledge and experience before implementing. 'Depends on cost of creating contours', and 'Would need to do the full course to be confident to carry out major changes in the landscape' were typical comments.



Key facts

- Two events supported 70 local farmers to better understand landscape rehydration.
- Supporting diverse and healthy perennial plant communities restores hydration to farms.
- There exists a clear desire for deeper understanding in group settings, perhaps through demonstration sites.
- 'Landscapes can be regenerated and it's not as expensive as you think' (participant).
- #traptherain

Project Partners



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