



Our country, Our future.

Contour Banks

Continual improvement the key to success



Making the most of the land he manages is the key to running a successful enterprise, according to Andrew Wedel.

Together with his wife Priscilla, Andrew runs Muidart, a mixed enterprise property about 25 kilometres west of Dysart. Taking over the 4286 hectare property from his family in 2013, Andrew runs an integrated grazing and grains operation, along with a licensed feedlot developed to 400 head of cattle. Working with Capricornia Catchments Inc. and Fitzroy Basin Association Inc. (FBA) since 2009, Andrew's family have continued to improve his land management techniques and increase his profitability over the past seven years.

In addition to his grazing and feedlot activities, Muidart has broadacre dryland cultivation areas on fertile black cracking clay soil. "That's the sort of country I've got. I haven't got just farming country and I haven't got just grazing country. So to utilise everything, that's what I've got to do," Andrew said of his decision to run a mixed grazing and grains enterprise.

Erosion-prone fertile soils

Although his fertile clay soils are well-suited to grain growing, they are also particularly vulnerable to erosion during periods of high intensity rainfall. Therefore managing and preventing soil and nutrient loss from his grain paddocks has been critical.

"Every tonne of soil that is taken off my place means I'm losing money because it's my best soil that goes, so I want to keep as much of it as I can," said Andrew.

"If it's taking the soil off my place and putting it somewhere else then it's not good for me, and it's not good for the environment, either."

"Less erosion and better soil health means you can keep the moisture there and there are more opportunities to plant."

Managing run-off to prevent erosion

Run-off and erosion have damaged Andrew's paddocks in the past, so managing surface water and diverting it away from the paddocks has been a high priority.

With the support of FBA through funding from the Australian Government's Reef Programme, Andrew has completed three projects: all have been to install contour banks.

With the help of FBA's delivery partner Capricornia Catchments, Andrew has planned, designed, surveyed and implemented the contour banks. The contour banks slow the speed of run-off, and divert it to the places on his property where he needs the water the most.

As the contour banks are 'farm-over' contour banks, they have an added benefit: Andrew can plant crops right across them, maximising the paddock areas available for planting his commercial grain crops.

"The contour banks slow the speed of the water down and divert it into the waterways where you want it to run, rather than down the middle of your paddock or down your wheel tracks, or whatever. So it stops the majority of the erosion," he said.





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Contour banks just part of the solution

Andrew's contour banks go hand-in-hand with minimum till techniques, which he implemented a number of years ago. Minimum till practices mean his paddocks are cultivated infrequently, if at all, and retain the stubble of previous crops in the paddock, helping retain soil moisture.

"In your dry years, you certainly grow better crops and that's why it helps store the moisture, because you have the stubble coverage and everything that helps keep the sun from hitting the ground, which keeps more moisture in.

"It shades your soil, so you hold moisture longer and you can plant at a later date. The more moisture you can hold the better crops you grow."

Grains BMP reassessments drive improvements

After completing the industry-led Grains BMP program some years ago, Andrew has continued to regularly reassess his enterprise against industry standards, and uses those reassessments to determine his future priorities.

"One of the reasons [for completing Grains BMP reassessments] is to see how we stand, compared to someone else, to see what everyone else is doing and whether we're doing everything as good as we could be, or you know, whether we should be doing it better," he said.

Andrew recommends the Grains BMP training program to any farmer who is considering getting involved. "It was well worth my time and I think it's well worth their time doing it.

"You only take out what you put in, I suppose. If you're willing to learn, you always learn something new."

Erosion has noticeably reduced

Andrew said that stopping the erosion and wash in his paddocks has stopped the production losses from eroded areas and has halted the soil and nutrients flowing downstream and into the Great Barrier Reef.

"There's definitely less erosion on this place than in the last five to ten years. It's a lot better than what it was 20 or 30 years ago."

"Farmers like to look after land. The last thing we want to do is wreck something. We always want to leave it as good, if not better, than the condition we found it."



Andrew Wedel and his wife Priscilla believe long-term planning, reassessment and continual improvement are the key to increasing their enterprise's productivity.

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