



FITZROY BASIN ASSOCIATION

*Our country, Our future.*

# Grazing for the future

## Using new techniques and technologies in an age-old industry



*Dan Burnham is a fifth generation grazier, but even with his background and grazing blood, he believes there's always more to learn, more profitable ways to graze and more country to protect.*

Dan's parents bought Stonehaven in 2004, then Dan and his wife Emma-Jane bought the adjoining property, Glenroy, in 2008. Both properties are run together under the Burnham Grazing business. They can graze up to 1000 head of cattle across their 2430 hectares. As they were just starting out in their own enterprise, laying good foundations to their business was vital. In 2007, they began fencing land types before introducing rotational grazing in 2008 in an effort to improve their groundcover; however, the results were mixed.

"In the early years we noticed our country was not responding as well as we would expect it to after rain. We saw some patch grazing and that some dung was not breaking down quickly," said Dan. "We focused on fencing to soil types and improving our water system, which is how we became involved with FBA and DCCA."

### A long partnership

This involvement has since led the Burnhams to complete four projects with the help of Fitzroy Basin Association Inc. (FBA) and Dawson Catchment Coordinating Association (DCCA), easing the burden of implementing practice changes.

"It was a huge benefit for Emma-Jane and I, going into the rural business on our own. It made things a lot easier and made our business more profitable straight up because we could get in and do the jobs we wanted to get done. We've split paddocks up for ease of mustering and ease of management and in preparation for implementing rotational grazing."

Their fourth—and most recent—project aimed to stabilise gullies by preventing stock from continually trampling them and worsening the erosion. The project was possible with the support of FBA through funding from the Australian Government's Reef Programme.



*Managing their property for long-term sustainability means Dan and Emma-Jane Burnham can give their kids a bright future in grazing, should they want it.*

"There were some gullies that just needed a bit of riparian work, the cattle were just working them too much, causing cattle tracks and cattle pads," said Dan. "Any way we can stop the erosion with the rotational, time-controlled grazing is good. You can still use those areas but you're not using them 100 per cent of the time, you're only using them a few times a year."

### Increasing groundcover reduces erosion

Fencing off the erosion gullies began in November 2015 and was completed by January 2016, in time to take advantage of summer rainfall. Although the Burnhams did not receive a lot of rain, it was enough to significantly improve the groundcover on the gullies in question.



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## Grazing for the future

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"The gullies have grassed up well because there wasn't heavy rain. We did get some rain in early February there, and got some grasses growing," Dan said.

The Burnhams believe that reducing erosion relies almost exclusively on improving their property's groundcover. "Ninety per cent of it, nearly ninety-five per cent of it, is groundcover. If you can keep that groundcover up, you're going to save your soil," said Dan.

#### Protecting the Reef

Although Dan and Emma-Jane admit they have not taken their children to see the Great Barrier Reef yet, they believe that protecting it is vital to Australia's economy. Reducing the amount of sediment that leaves their property means they are doing their part to protect it.

"It's one of those things I haven't seen yet but I think that we'll take the kids to it soon and it's a big industry—the tourist industry. We've got to try to protect it, and if we can just look after the land and not over-graze our land, then it should help protect it."



*By preventing cattle from accessing the property's gullies year-round, groundcover is increased, stabilising the gully and preventing soil being taken downstream onto the Great Barrier Reef.*

#### Setting an international example

Dan and Emma-Jane embrace new ideas and technologies to improve their business. They have also started a Facebook page to amplify the sustainable grazing message to an international audience, connecting with graziers in America who are just starting the shift to rotational grazing techniques.

"We just decided that we'd make up a Facebook page and put things on there to show people what we do and all our certificates we have. I've had followers from America who've contacted me and they're very excited with what we're doing with the rotational grazing. We were so excited to connect with them, as well."

#### The future ahead

Looking ahead to the future, planning accordingly then implementing those plans step-by-step is important to the Burnhams, as they hope to pass on the property to their children.

"We have three children. The eldest, Jessica, she's nine. And then we've got twins, a boy and a girl: Zoë and Philip; and they're seven.

"It feels really good to know that we are the fifth generation and we're hoping that someday we can get another one to come through as a sixth generation and have our land in top shape for the next generation."



*Rotating cattle means the Burnhams can better manage the areas their stock graze, giving each paddock a rest, which leads to more grass, better groundcover and reduced erosion.*

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Dawson Catchment Coordinating Association Inc.