

# GRASSROOTS

## MAGAZINE



### BLADE BY BLADE

How 13 landholders have improved land condition on their central Queensland properties



The Grassroots Project is funded through the Queensland Government's Reef Water Quality Program, Reef Catchments, RCS and Fitzroy Basin Association Inc.

FREE!



The experiences and personal stories showcased in this magazine highlight the value graziers have seen from being a part of the Grassroots Project. Grassroots was designed by Resource Consulting Services (RCS) with funding support from the Queensland Government. The project provided a pathway and resources for land managers to improve their bottom line while also improving their land condition, with healthy, productive pastures leading to cleaner, healthier waterways flowing to the Great Barrier Reef.

The project provided whole-of-business training and practical grazing land management advice to more than 20 grazing businesses across the central Queensland Reef regions of the Fitzroy and Mackay Whitsunday regions. It also provided support to improve property infrastructure in addition to tailored advice and tools to improve commercial decision-making based on the unique circumstances of each family and grazing operation. Adopted land management practices included closer monitoring of paddocks, forage budgeting, sufficient resting of paddocks for improving pasture growth and matching stocking rates to the carrying capacity of the land.

In many cases, more watering points were installed and fences built for greater control of cattle and mitigation against over-grazing paddocks.

Graziers cited improvements in land condition including greater ground cover, better quality pastures, and healthier soils that are more able to capture rain, grow pasture and produce healthy animals. Better land condition means a more resilient production base, and a more sustainable operation with less risk of valuable soil being lost in run-off to rivers and creeks flowing to the Great Barrier Reef.

The Grassroots Project ran from 2018 to 2020 and was funded through the Queensland Government's Reef Water Quality Program.

# GRASSROOTS





*There was movement at the station, for the word had passed around, that the way we've been doing things has to change.*

My apologies to Banjo Paterson for adapting his famous opening line, however it sums up what we are seeing in agriculture now. There is increasing interest in regenerative agriculture as producers are asking themselves: “*is there is a better way to do things*”.

Unfortunately, this has led to an influx in regenerative ‘silver bullets’ hitting the market all claiming to be the secret to regenerative agriculture. It has also led to people trying to label certain practices as being regenerative or not. This isn’t helping us as an industry as it creates division. The truth is that regenerative agriculture comprises of doing the **right things well** at the **right time**. It is not about whether it is the right or wrong ‘tool’. It is completely related to how the tool is being used.

Everyone has a different definition of what ‘regenerative ag’ is. For me, it is quite simply a case of profitably leaving your country in better condition. If we can successfully do this then we have a good chance of that business still being around in a hundred years. If it isn’t profitable or leaving our land in better condition, then, quite simply, it will disappear. Taking the analogy

of the three legged pot that RCS uses, we need to balance the three legs being land, production and business management to support our people management.

A good starting point in your business is to define what outcomes you want to achieve. Yes, I’m talking about visions and goals. What does success look like to you?

Here are some great case studies of people in our industry creating their own path to a better future for their descendants.

David McLean  
RCS Chairman

ROOTS  
PROJECT





*The Fitzroy Basin has one of the most variable climates in the world and the best risk managers caring for it.*

Eighty per cent of our vast region is managed by farmers and graziers. Their land is their home, their business and their legacy. They are connected to their land and, as this magazine shows, when it thrives, so do they.

With rapidly evolving climatic and industry conditions outside their control, turning a profit while caring for the environment is no small feat. Changing with the environments around them, our local landholders are mitigating risks through regenerative agriculture.

When to feed, when to sell and when to buy weigh heavily on the minds of our landholders.

It all begins with planning for the dry before the wet seasons ends.

Fitzroy Basin Association (FBA) delivers timely, practical solutions to landholders, promoting action over what is within their control, to reduce the impact of the things that are not.

FBA applies global knowledge at a regional level, arming our local landholders with evidence-based, productive and profitable actions to help them buffer the risks that are innate with farming.

In this magazine, we learn about these solutions, from the mouths of landholders who have successfully applied them to improve land condition – despite persistent drought.

Moving away from how things have always been done, these landholders are healing central Queensland one paddock at a time and thriving.

We here at FBA meet farmer after farmer who wants to leave their country and land in a better condition, for their long-term viability and legacy.

Listen to these personal stories of Fitzroy landholders who have taken the first step to regenerating their landscapes. Then, contact FBA to learn how we can help you.

Elyse Reithmuller  
Chief Executive Officer, Fitzroy Basin Association





# BEFORE



# AFTER

Through the Grassroots Project,  
participants have collectively installed...



15 Fitzroy properties with two land managers from each, participated in the Grassroots Project.



# BOONAL DOWNS

You'd be hard pressed to find producers with more gratitude to be managing their own land, than the DeBoni's, from Capella in central Queensland.

Andrew and Leonie have been the proud owners of 'Boonal Downs' for five years, moving to the area from the Mackay Whitsunday region in 2015 and say they are now fulfilling their lifelong dream of working and living on the land.

"Coming off a very small farm before, coming here was like drinking from a fire hose," Andrew says.

"Sometimes I think we've made it already. The kids have a great start and a good future ahead of them."

Boonal Downs is a 2,273 hectare property comprised of a desirable balance of softwood scrub and open downs black and brown soils supporting highly productive grain growing and cattle grazing enterprises. The property is nestled on the base of the Peak Down ranges, overlooking Table Mountain, with Magenta Creek transversing the property.

Living on the land was never going to be the end goal for the DeBoni family – rather, their future is heavily centred around caring for the land, being responsible farmers and delivering upon a premium product without depleting their resource base.

"It took us long enough to get this property, we don't want to lose it.

"Managing our land from a holistic perspective makes perfect sense to us." It's a principle reinforced by the several RCS courses they have eagerly attended.

Previous management on the property had taken advantage of the highly productive soils, resulting in degraded areas of grasslands and soil, which became an immediate focus for Andrew and Leonie to remedy. The first step was decreasing their herd size to well below carrying capacity at 1/3 of that which was run by previous owners, with the intention of improving ground cover and regenerating soil health. Converting a 1,200 hectare allocation from run down country populated with prickly acacia into fertile land with productive sorghum and chickpea yields was the second.

The initial steps for the new owners were to fence off riparian areas around Magenta Creek and introduce a rotational grazing system for their 300 head of cattle. Like all management decisions, this simple step was a catalyst for many other positive effects, including the prevention of soil erosion down the bank and eliminating the risk of bogged cattle.

Building their understanding and their connection to their land at Boonal Downs is a genuine joy for the DeBonis, who continue to invest in themselves through education and look ahead to the next step, the next project, or the next rung for the family operation.

"We have always really appreciated what we have here, and going on holiday overseas has only made us more appreciative. The holiday wasn't needed."

*"We have matched stocking rates to available feed and estimated future feed so as to maintain a minimum of 15cm ground cover. We have also created multiple water points which can be turned off so country can be rested."*





Leonie and Andrew DeBoni

Andrew has been working towards his current reality for many decades. After retiring from his job of 25 years at a retail supermarket, Andrew knew that owning his own property was always the next step. Heading off to work in the mines has supported their central Queensland move, with setting up a future for their two sons Hayden and Corbin always front of mind. Quality of life for the entire family has improved, but particularly for Andrew, who freely admits running his farm 'doesn't seem like a job'.

Looking to the future, Andrew and Leonie are also prioritising their drought resilience and preparedness in light of sporadic past wet seasons. As a first step, this has included improving water infrastructure across the property, with a "big focus on water retention".

Climate adaptability and resilience is a principal factor for the long-term sustainability of Boonal Downs for the coming generations.

*"Sometimes I think we've made it already. We have made our dreams come true just by owning this place."*

*"Our children are achieving their goals and they have a good future ahead of them with a good start. We are slowing watching our lives get better and in four to five years, we hope to be solely on farm. Beyond that, we are looking forward to when the boys will take over from what we started."* 🌿

## Property achievements

### Completed:

- GrazingforProfit™ School
- RCS Next Steps program
- RCS ProfitProbe™
- Property planning and mapping
- RCS Soil Health workshop

### On-farm change:

- 1.5km of fencing to divide cropping and grazing
- Purchase of a rock picker
- Purchased crush scales to accurately monitor LSU (Livestock Unit)





# BELAH HILLS

Fifth-generation cattle producer, Annie Donoghue and her husband Rob run 47,720 hectares of grazing country focusing on performance, not tradition.

Realising that their productivity could be improved through better ground cover, the couple signed up to the Grassroots Project in 2018.

The Donoghue's 47,720 hectares of land is spread across four properties in Bauhinia, central Queensland. For the Grassroots Project, the couple decided to focus infrastructure improvement on Belah Hills, their 800 hectare property that they had been running predominantly under set stocking. Identifying the need to improve their grazing management system, Rob and Annie attended the RCS education sessions with open minds.

*“The most valuable aspect of the program was being shown the grazing principles and understanding how these can be adapted to different situations. This gave us confidence we could make it work for us, our country and cattle,” said Annie.*

With their newfound knowledge, Rob and Annie formulated a plan and set out to spend their awarded \$10,000 to improve water accessibility by installing a new tank, nine troughs and polypipe on Belah Hills. With this infrastructure in place, the couple were able to use existing fencing to safely exclude stock from areas of land to enable rest during the growing season. Installing additional water points also helped to spread out grazing pressure, with cattle grazing areas that had been previously underutilised.

In late January and February of 2020, the Donoghues enjoyed multiple falls of rain to enable good pasture recovery after the devastating impacts of significantly below average rainfall in 2018 and 2019.

*“The response has been the greatest where the pasture growth was not impacted by grazing stock.*

*Generally, we've seen the quickest response and the widest range of diversity in the paddocks that were in the best condition, with spelling opportunities having a significant impact,” Annie added.*

With such a large amount of land, Rob and Annie report that doing the Grassroots Project has provided knowledge to better implement spelling in their grazing program and a clearer goal of what they are aiming to achieve, but they still have a way to go. “We're still at the stage where it's taking more effort and time to implement the new grazing practices. However, I do believe that in the long run, we can make this more efficient,” said Annie. Encouraging them to keep going is the network of other Grassroots participants.





Harnessing the power of technology, the Grassroots Project participants keep motivated, informed and connected through an online group messaging platform.

“The ability to converse with people who are seeking similar outcomes for their land and business is a real boost and highly motivating,” says Annie.

*“The network that we have become a part of by joining this project has proven to be a useful tool. There is tremendous inspiration possible from sharing experiences and things we have learnt, from a very broad range of collective knowledge. Events and opportunities are also shared and there is a real sense of support for each other.”*

“During the drought it also worked as a great tool to check in on everyone to make sure they were doing okay and not struggling alone,” Annie said.

While the Donoghue’s are still on the journey, developing a grazing system that works for them has helped improve their clarity of the roadmap to become more productive and sustainable landholders. With the support of their peers and the RCS team, the Donoghue’s are on their way to fulfilling their grazing business vision and goals. 🌱

## Property achievements

### Completed:

- GrazingforProfit™ School
- RCS Next Steps program
- RCS ProfitProbe™
- Property planning and mapping
- RCS Soil Health workshop

### On-farm change:

- Installed 9 watering troughs
- Put in 1 water tank
- Started wet season spelling



Annie and Rob Donoghue



# DORSET

Communication is the key ingredient for success at Dorset in Guluguba, not just between owners of 30 years Paul and Majella Erbacher, but with their connection to the land, through their ability to understand the visual cues of health on their property.

*Renewed business direction, well-defined goals and a recharged focus have surfaced as a direct result of the Erbacher's involvement in the Grassroots Project.*

"Mostly, we are now thinking outside the paradigm," says Majella.

"I think we were a bit too conservative, but we have pushed ourselves and now we have the courage to take the next step."

Following succession from Paul's parents, land management at Dorset and the couple's three other properties have been evolving through the decades. Between this husband and wife duo, grazing has always been a part of their lives.

When they assumed management roles, Paul's parents were breeding Hereford, and Majella's parents Angus. While a lot has changed over the decades, the breeds have not, with Angus and Hereford herds still grazing at the Guluguba properties.

The Erbachers haven't always been in a position of confidence, which makes this stage of their ownership all the more sweeter.

"When we got married 30 years ago, we were paying 25% interest. We had a \$500,000 loan, we were paying more interest with less assets. Both Paul and I were working away because we couldn't afford to be living here too," explained Majella.

Nowadays, not only have they been living on their farm for decades, the Erbachers have the confidence to leave for holidays.

"Holidays always used to be an issue for us,"

"We now have the capacity to be able to employ our son Adam full time and with this comes the assurance that the property is in good hands when we are away.

"By increasing the water flow and putting in more troughs, we can leave the property in confidence, knowing there is water here. Our cattle barely have to walk 500 metres to water."

So, after 25 years of management, what was it that propelled the Erbachers to consider a new method of agriculture?





Paul and Majella Erbacher

## Property achievements

### Completed:

- GrazingforProfit™ School
- RCS Next Steps program
- RCS ProfitProbe™
- Property planning and mapping
- RCS Soil Health workshop

### On-farm change:

- 6 kilometres of polypipe
- 3 troughs
- Rotationally graze paddocks with bigger cattle numbers



Majella says seeing a flyer for a Grazing BMP workshop was the moment everything changed.

“Going to that course was the best thing we ever did,” she says.

*“In every business there’s somewhere or someway of moving forward. The big change for us was taking the guesswork out of operations. Everything we have done since has given us the courage to take another step. We are backing ourselves with our figures.”*

Building confidence in their decision-making has had an expansive impact on all aspects of their lives, including where they choose to bank.

Majella says that only two years ago, she would never have dreamed of changing banks after 40 years. However, when the Erbachers began to build a solid understanding of their figures, a difference of 1% between banks suddenly meant thousands of dollars being wasted.

“We were more profitable paying the break fees with our former bank than staying with the bank we had been with for 40 years. Confidence carries over to all aspects of the business,” says Majella.

“At a glance, we can assess our business, and it makes those conversations with our bank manager easy and straightforward. It shows that we as landholders have a clue, we are in control and we are aware.”

Through the Grassroots Project, Paul and Majella have focused on cutting down the distance their cattle have to walk to water.

The results are speaking for themselves, say the Erbachers.

“Everybody who comes to our place either says we are doing a good job – or that we are so lucky we got the rain. Some people are still living with tunnel vision. We didn’t get any more rain than anyone else.”

*When you ask Paul and Majella what they wish they knew earlier, they both agree “all of it!”*

This realisation in itself has been a change in land management for the business, as they invest in their son Adam, 24, to participate in as much education, as early as possible.

“When we are all moving in the same direction, we feel like we are succeeding,” she affirms. 🌱



# KURRAWONG

Matt and Libby Hampson are a young couple who are certainly not new to the land. Having both grown up on grazing properties in central Queensland, the 30-year-olds are old hands at running a breeding enterprise. When they became partners on Matt's family property (Kurrawong), instead of sticking to what they've always done, they redesigned their grazing practice.

Matt and Libby both enjoy a challenge and it's evident that they know how to set one. Once part owners of Kurrawong, Matt and Libby convinced the other partners (Matt's parents) to change how the property was run – all while their first son Max was on his way!

Kurrawong is a 3,333 hectare breeding and fattening enterprise that has been in the Hampson family for 60 plus years. Located in Dawes Hall area, central Queensland, the property backs onto Koorombit Tops National Park and boasts of softwood scrub, ironbark ridges, black soil and a variety of native and improved grasses.

Starting with RCS's GrazingforProfit™ School, Matt and Libby were overwhelmed with the options available to them.

*“Completing the education was difficult, it put us way out of our comfort zone and challenged our way of thinking. It showed us that there are a million ways to do something,” reiterated Matt.*

Undiscouraged, Matt and Libby embraced their learnings, identified what they needed to do and got started.

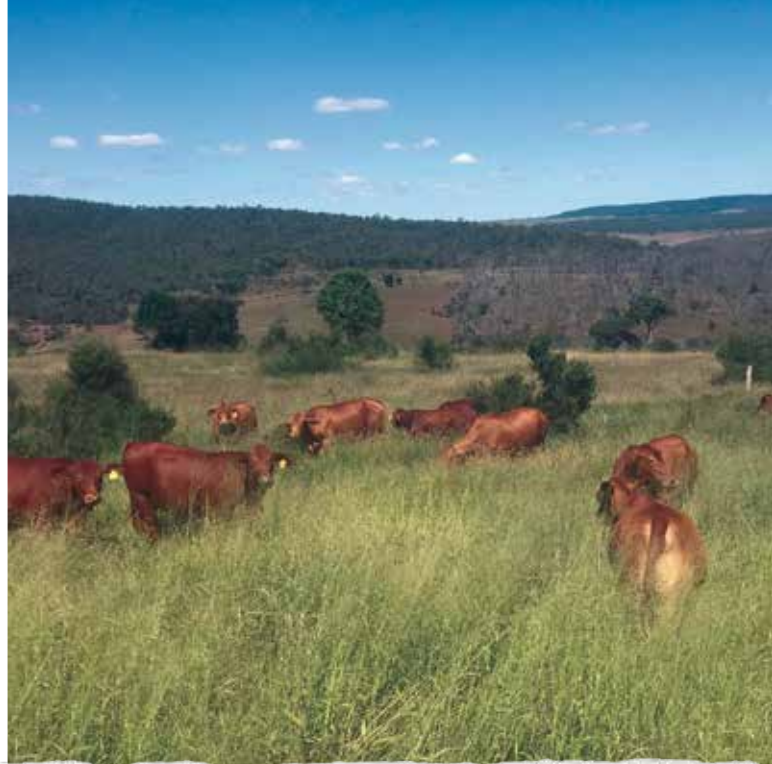
Due to the drought and having fixed stock rates on the property for many years the land was in poor condition. “We had to decrease our stock numbers, but the land was still not improving. Learning about the three phases of grass, using it at the right time and resting with rotational grazing was a real game changer for us,” said Matt.

“We've now split up our big paddocks and combined all our breeders into one mob. Now we're rotational grazing and we've pushed our mating time back, so our calves drop when we have our best chance of rainfall (over 50mm). These small changes have saved us a lot of money already as normally we would be putting out a lot of lick to get the cows to that day,” Matt stated.





Matt and Libby Hampson



*“Learning the business side of things, especially account keeping through profit probe, has given us a much better understanding of the economics of our business.”*

So much so that this has helped us recently purchase new property. I was able to create a five-year plan and the bank loved it – it really helped us get a loan,” Libby added. To date, the couple list reducing their running expenses as their biggest achievement.

After many dry years, the recent wet season that rolled over Kurrawong has shown Matt and Libby that all their hard work has been worthwhile. Their land is full of feed and the young family are on their way to their “magic number” of breeders.

Although young, Matt and Libby strive toward getting the country back to the condition it was when Matt’s grandfather bought it. When asked, what excites you most about the future of your business, the couple answered, “the next generation coming along”. 🌱

Newly installed water infrastructure



## Property achievements

### Completed:

- GrazingforProfit™ School
- RCS Next Steps program
- RCS ProfitProbe™
- Property planning and mapping
- RCS Soil Health workshop

### On-farm change:

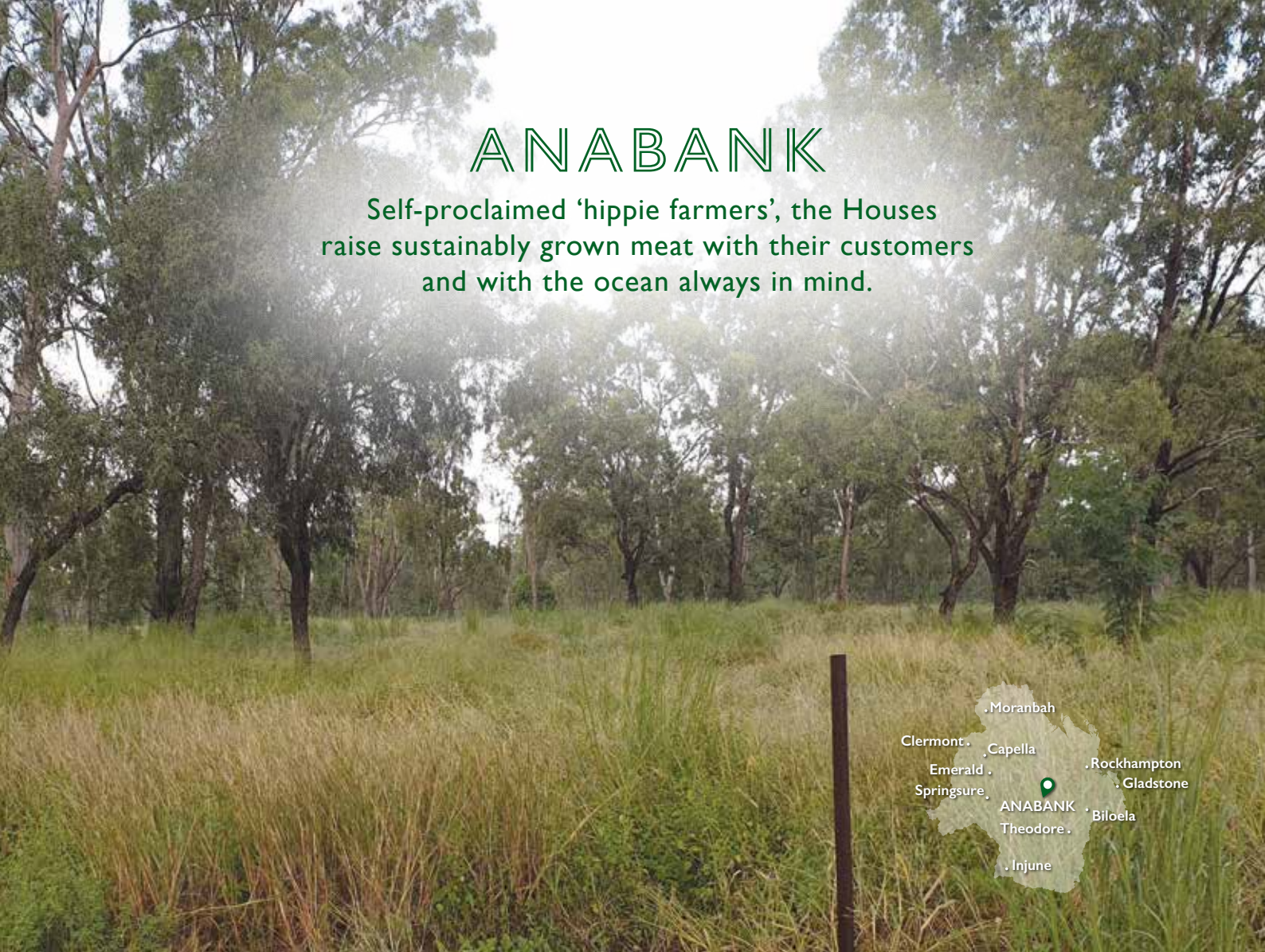
- Installed watering troughs
- Split large paddock into smaller ones
- Implemented rotation grazing
- Started controlled breeding
- Split livestock into breeds





# ANABANK

Self-proclaimed ‘hippie farmers’, the Houses raise sustainably grown meat with their customers and with the ocean always in mind.



Located in Baralaba, central Queensland, Anabank is an organic cattle and grass-fed, free-range goat enterprise that has been cared for by the House family for over 27 years.

Kim and Lucy House are no strangers to RCS and regenerative farming ideologies. In the early 2000's the couple completed RCS's GrazingForProfit™ course which led them to break their land up into smaller paddocks with watering points and commence rotational grazing. Since then, Kim and Lucy's daughter Chloe has taken over the running of the property, although they are still very active with day-to-day operations.

For the last five years, Chloe has dedicated herself to running the property with an ethos passed down to her from her parents -

*to provide the market with meat that is grown to protect the environment rather than harm it.*

‘Wire, water and management’ are the tools that the Houses have used to manage their ground cover for

over two decades. However, recognising that there is always something to learn and wanting to do better Chloe signed up the RCS Grassroots Project.

Located on brigalow country, the Houses have always left a large area of their property to native vegetation. In recent years, they noticed that this land was in poor condition with no grass, no weeds and nothing on the ground but leaf litter.

## Property achievements

### Completed:

- GrazingForProfit™ School
- RCS Next Steps program
- RCS ProfitProbe™
- Property planning and mapping
- RCS Soil Health workshop

### On-farm change:

- Test site – selectively opening brigalow country to create productive pastures



Chloe made it her mission to improve ground cover in the brigalow country and create productive paddocks through the Grassroots Project.

Starting with a test site, Chloe, with the help of her family, opened up a section of brigalow country. "We didn't clear every tree. The larger trees whose skirts had lifted stayed and the smaller vegetation came out," said Chloe.

*"Immediately we noticed the land starting to heal. First, a heap of weeds emerged, then grass started growing with no rain, now we have buffel grass covering the top wire of our fence."*

"Removing some of the brigalow allowed moisture back into the soil. While we were expecting some sort of response, we weren't expecting such a huge transformation," said Chloe.

The land that was once in D condition is now in A condition and bursting with biodiversity. With the use of wire and water, Chloe plans to continue to improve the health of the country that is grazed.

"We can always do better".

With this big win under her belt, Chloe is looking forward to the next big challenge.

"The wheels are now going, and we are headed in an exciting new direction, I am very excited to see what the business achieves in the next six months," reiterated Chloe.

While over 200 kilometres away from the ocean, the Houses have always prioritised the health of the Reef and their land above turning a profit. After completing ProfitProbe™ Chloe feels that reaching these two goals is more attainable than ever before.

"I want to be financially stable and satisfied that I have done the absolute best for my local environment. We've still got a way to go and there is always something new to learn but we're on the right track," Chloe remarked. 🌱



Chloe in a rejuvenated paddock



Lucy and Kim House



# CROYDON HILLS

A 'moonscape' is how Andrew Iwers and Rosalie Lucke described Croydon Hills when they took over in 2008 from Rosalie's uncle.

The past decade has been an investment into their future and that of the country at their 3,001 hectare allotment at Springsure, a property which had only one watering point, an old house with no water or power and no internal fences when they moved in.

The family readily agree that one of the most exciting days in their time at Croydon Hills, was the day they heard water running through the polypipe after their involvement in the Grassroots Project.

Carting water from a single bore was a nightmare until they put in additional tanks and troughs. However, the cattle were over-grazing around the watering points and under-grazing around the perimeter of paddocks. To utilize all the grass available, new watering points and infrastructure needed to be planned. Both Andrew and Rose work full time in careers at Springsure and Rolleston and the past ten years have been spent building the health of the land to a point where it can sustain itself plus a family.

A key milestone in this process was to initially destock 600 head to allow time for the landscape to regenerate and for proper planning and goal setting for their time at Croydon Hills. The next 'game-changer' decision was introducing a new breed – Nguni. Nguni are a tropically adapted Bos Taurus breed, who are an integral part of helping to even the grazing pressure and the family say the breed will form a big part of making their operation sustainable long-term.

"We are finding the Nguni are doing better on our country compared to some other breeds we have tried to date. In the dry spell in 2019, in

six months they have barely consumed any lick compared to previous seasons, and they don't seem to go looking for it. I wish we knew about this breed earlier."

The property layout has been converted from one big paddock and one watering point to four paddocks then into 14 paddocks roughly 230 hectares each, with ongoing works to further split these paddocks in to roughly 38 paddocks with a majority of them averaging 30-50 hectares. Country not suitable for further development due to land types has been excluded from the development plans. The distance cattle need to walk to water has consequently also decreased from 4.5 kilometres to 700 metres, a considerable improvement for their livestock, and for the landscape.

The family define a sustainable grazing business as getting to a point where all inputs, including time, labour and money do not outweigh the outputs. The model of farming that is taking them there is regenerative agriculture.

"We love that we know what we are doing is making a positive change, and not just for us" Rose says.

*"We are sold on regenerative agriculture. We are seeing the benefits of it and we want to continue. Our lives have been made easier and the land is healthier."*

Andrew Iwers





Nguni cattle at Croydon Hills

Looking to the future, the family are continuing fencing and splitting paddocks, after seeing a direct connection between management in the paddock and financials in the office. The aim is to have 38

paddocks in total and increase the herd size from the current 260 to around 600, whilst still remaining within the constraints of the seasonal fluctuations. We found out in 2019 that having all our eggs in one basket lifts your risk profile. Once we get the remainder of our infrastructure in place, we will look to spread our risk by purchasing in younger cattle to background and also agist if excess grass is available, rather than just breeding.

## Project achievements

### Completed:

- GrazingforProfit™ School
- RCS Next Steps program
- RCS ProfitProbe™
- Property planning and mapping
- RCS Soil Health workshop


### On-farm change:

- 15km 63mm pipe
- Installed an additional 10 troughs
- Moved 5 existing troughs
- Moved 2 existing tanks
- 26km fencing
- Upgraded 1 pump
- Installed 55,000 gallon tank
- Connected 2 existing water circuits to have redundancy in the system



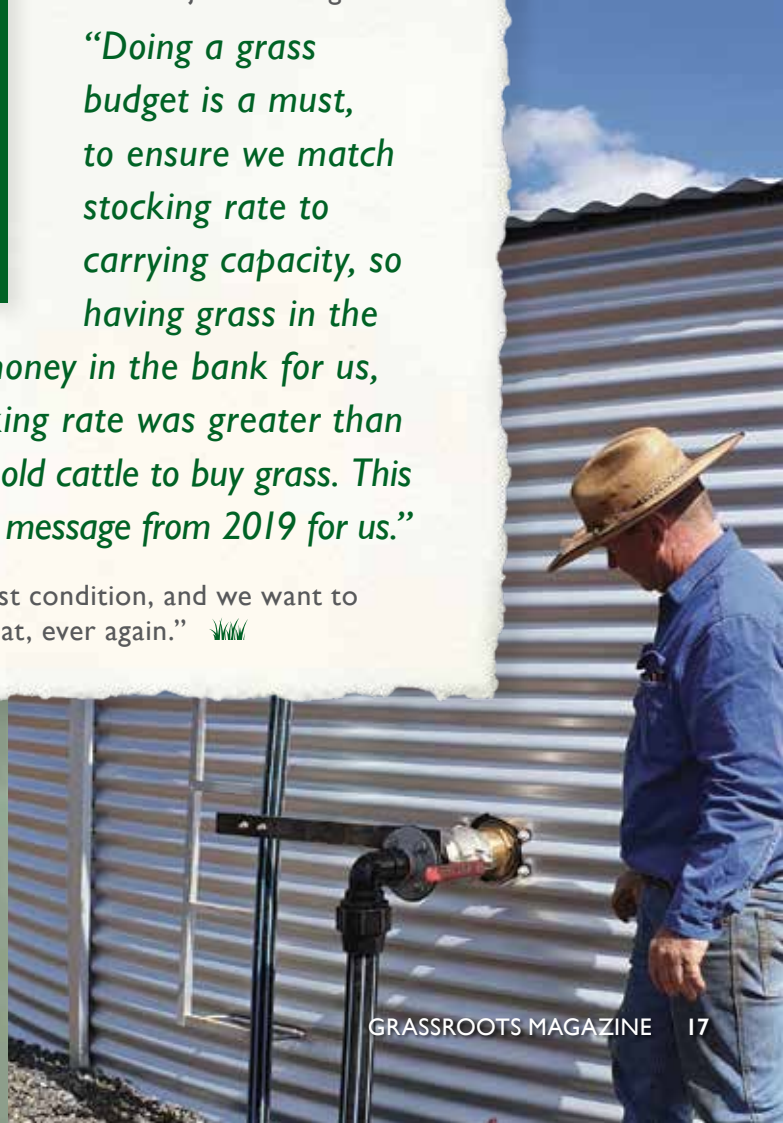
*“Doing a grass budget is a must, to ensure we match stocking rate to carrying capacity, so having grass in the*

*paddock means having money in the bank for us, they say. When our stocking rate was greater than our carrying capacity, we sold cattle to buy grass. This was the biggest take home message from 2019 for us.”*

“We have seen this land in its worst condition, and we want to make sure it never goes back to that, ever again.” 



Newly installed water infrastructure





# GARDEN CREEK

The Grassroots Project has saved one of the Keene family properties and transformed over 11,000 hectare of central Queensland land according to the family of four.

David and Lynette Keene with their two daughters Ellen (15) and Breanna (13) manage three grazing properties in central Queensland. Looking for a mentor and someone to bounce business ideas off, David signed up to an RCS Grazing Clinic. After one day of learning, David knew that this education was what his business needed and signed himself and Lynette up to the Grassroots Project.

When signing up to the project the family decided to focus on their Gindie property named Garden Creek. Quick to get going, the Keenes installed a bore, watering points and created 15 paddocks from the two they had originally. These changes paired with their newfound tools (forage budgeting and grazing charts) swiftly proved their worth.

“We were amazed at what we saw when we rested our country,” said David.

Excited with the results, the Keenes implemented the same changes on their other two properties. Installing fence lines, watering points and calculating exactly how much feed they had long before it was eaten. While the decision to transform 11,007 hectare of country was a huge job, David says he’s already reaping the rewards.

*“There’s a common misconception that rotational grazing is too much work, but you actually do less.”*

“I can move 160 cattle more than 2 kilometres in 40 minutes now where it use to take half a day. The cattle hear me coming and line up at the gate, they know that they’re moving into paddock with feed—the dogs are bored!”

## Property achievements

### Completed:

- GrazingforProfit™ School
- RCS Next Steps program
- RCS ProfitProbe™
- Property planning and mapping
- RCS Soil Health workshop

### On-farm change:

- 15 paddocks created from two
- Implemented rotational grazing
- 1 new bore
- Installed new watering points







***“If we didn’t do the Grassroots Project in 2018, we would have lost one of our properties.”***

“Over a calendar year the property got 98mm of rain. There’s no way we could have handled that drought without the knowledge from RCS. If we weren’t constantly looking three months ahead with our forage budgets, we would have had to sell all our cattle and eventually the land. Because we rested our country at the right time, we were buying cattle when everyone else was selling,” explained David.

The good news doesn’t stop there. During the last downpour at Garden Creek, dirt ran off the neighbouring property and stopped 50 metres into the Keene’s place.

“It looked like a sandbank with crisp edges, to keep it there I planted a cover crop of forage sorghum straight into it,” David continued. This isn’t the only inventive move that the Keenes have made since changing up their management style. Ellen and Breanna while young aren’t afraid to challenge the status quo.

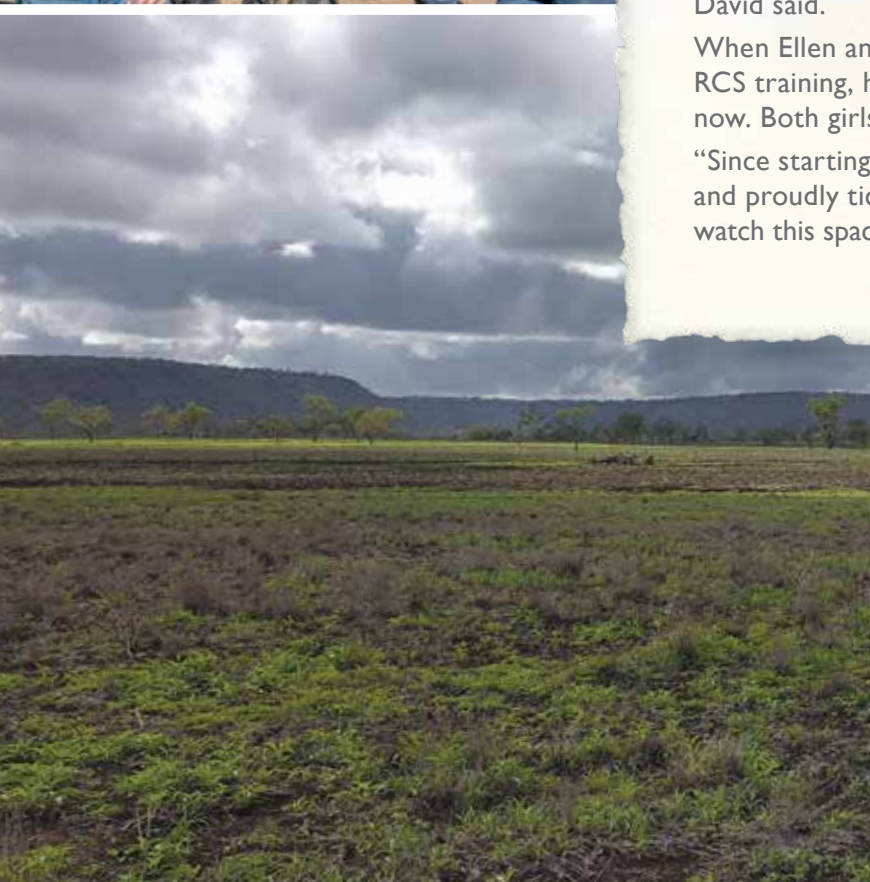
“It’s pretty confronting when you’re 50-odd and your 11-year-old tells you there’s a better way and she’s used tools to prove it,” David said.

When Ellen and Breanna are a little older, they will both undertake RCS training, however, if given the choice they would rather do it now. Both girls love the land and play big roles on the property.

“Since starting the program, we’ve sat down at the end of each year and proudly ticked off everything we set out to do. All I can say is watch this space, we’ve got even more things coming,” David said. 🌱



David, Breanna, Ellen and Lynette Keene





# GILIGULGUL

It's power by numbers for Greg and Kel Kelly in their certified organic grazing business. The property and lifestyle of the Kellys and their home block *Giligulgul* have transformed over the past decade, and they credit these changes largely to knowing and being confident in their figures.

"It's been a game changer," says Kel.

"By putting in your past data and your current data, then predicting – it's all there for us and we can start planning with confidence in our projections."

The chain reaction begins there, the Kelly's state, with data having a direct influence on their land management approach.

"We have started the process of reducing our paddock sizes, installing more watering points, boxing the cattle to get better impacts on soil and grasses and overall, minimising the damage to our land.

Now, we are using the water rather than losing it down the road."

Through having a detailed and intricate understanding of their property, the Kellys know exactly when it needs to rain, where the rainwater will travel, and when they need to destock. As part of their involvement in the Grassroots Project, a land type report, forage report, soil report and property mapping were completed. Matching stocking rates to carrying capacity is no longer a guessing game at Giligulgul.

"(The data) would've been good to have 10 years ago," Kel quips.

"We are trying to look after our land – we are trying to regenerate – it's not all about saving trees. Now that we have started down the track of regenerative farming, our ears have pricked up. We had never heard of it last year. Now, it's everywhere."

In that critical past 12 months of learning about regenerative agriculture, the Kellys have surged ahead.

"It's been a big year for us, a huge year," they say.

*"We are continuing to learn things all the time, but our driving motivation is that it is important for us to look after our land and the best way to do that is to look after your soils."*

The Kellys speak passionately about the physical changes that have been happening as a result of management change over the past two years.

A simple move like boxing cattle differently, in newly created paddocks has created a flow-on effect of positive changes for the land. Building and correcting contours allows the Kellys to manipulate and utilise the direction of water flow when it does rain. The soil grazed upon across these paddocks is markedly spongier already, meaning its absorption rate is a lot higher, and the potential for erosion has decreased significantly.

"We are getting the sponge effect happening in our paddocks with good fertilisation from the herd. We don't lose our ground cover down the road, but we are also seeing grass emerge that is better quality,"

"These days we are getting our cattle to work for us, in a natural way."





Kel Kelly with FBA Land Management Officer



Kel Kelly in rejuvenated paddock



*“What we have learnt comes down to: you have to take on board what will work for you. The biggest game changer for us was understanding the chain reaction once you begin looking after your soils.”*

The big picture goal for the Kelly's in their time managing the 1,897 hectares that comprise Giligulgul is to leave the country in a better condition than it was found. In the short term, they have their sights set on being able to spend more free time with their family, followed closely by an increased resilience to climatic and weather patterns in the future.

“There will always be droughts, there will always be flood,” Kel said. “If we continue down this road, we will be better prepared for the future. We learn from it and learn to anticipate it. The climate will always change, but we need to change too”. 🌱

## Property achievements

### Completed:

- GrazingforProfit™ School
- RCS Next Steps program
- RCS ProfitProbe™
- Property planning and mapping
- RCS Soil Health workshop

### On-farm change:

- 3000km new polypipe laid
- 1 new trough
- Moved existing troughs to better positions
- 5 paddocks created with 10km of fencing
- Contour works
- 2 new squares with panels





# BARFIELD STATION

**“Now is a golden time to be a grazier,”  
exclaimed A-class landholder Melinee Leather while discussing  
the plethora of opportunities available in central Queensland.**

Melinee with husband Rob, son Adam and daughter in-law Chloe are deeply committed to meeting growing consumer demand for high-quality ethically raised produce. Their ethos to always create new goals and aspire to do better, led them to RCS's Grassroots Project.

The Leathers breed and farm cattle for the Organic, EU, Meat Standards Australia and Grasslands markets. Their cattle are finished on natural grass-fed pastures. When the opportunity to buy Barfield Station presented, the Leathers immediately recognised the suitability of the property for their finishing operation.

Before the Leather's purchase, the historic Barfield Station had only known one owner. Like many properties around central Queensland, the land had been passed from one generation to the next for over 100 years. The purchase was an exciting acquisition for the Leather family as they immediately identified the property's potential. After operating the property for four years, the Leathers decided that it was time to discover how they could improve their enterprise and applied to join RCS's Grassroots Project.

Starting with the educational component of the program, the couple were surprised with what they discovered.

“Heading in we were anticipating that our enterprise's biggest downfall would be overheads,” explained Melinee.

“Once the numbers were crunched and the results were back, we were surprised to see our area of

concern was return on assets. Understanding this and identifying why we have those results has really helped us to dive deeper into the business and develop strategies for improvement.”

When the time came to move their focus to groundcover, learning about soil biology and the importance of soil health was the big game-changer.

***“By diving into soil biology cycles, we have a better understanding of what we need to do to improve our land management,” Melinee said.***

With this newfound knowledge, careful analysis and expert guidance from RCS, the family decided to put in additional water points, fence their property to land types, increase the intensity of their rotational grazing and continue the introduction of legume crops.

Once the watering points were in, the Leathers quickly saw a resurgence of 3P (palatable, productive, perennial) grass in their paddocks. Now that the grazing pressure is even, forage and grass budgeting is now in the forefront of their minds.

“I am envious of those who have large and comprehensive forage budget reports and we aspire to be like that one day soon,” Melinee stated.







Rob and Melinee Leather

## Project achievements

### Completed:

- GrazingForProfit™ School
- RCS Next Steps program
- RCS ProfitProbe™
- Property planning and mapping
- RCS Soil Health workshop

### On-farm change:

- Installation of water infrastructure (including holding tanks and troughs)

*“While we have always been good at assessing and scoring paddocks, we have fallen short by not committing the data to paper. The Grassroots Project re-identified the importance of monitoring and recording for forage budgeting.”*

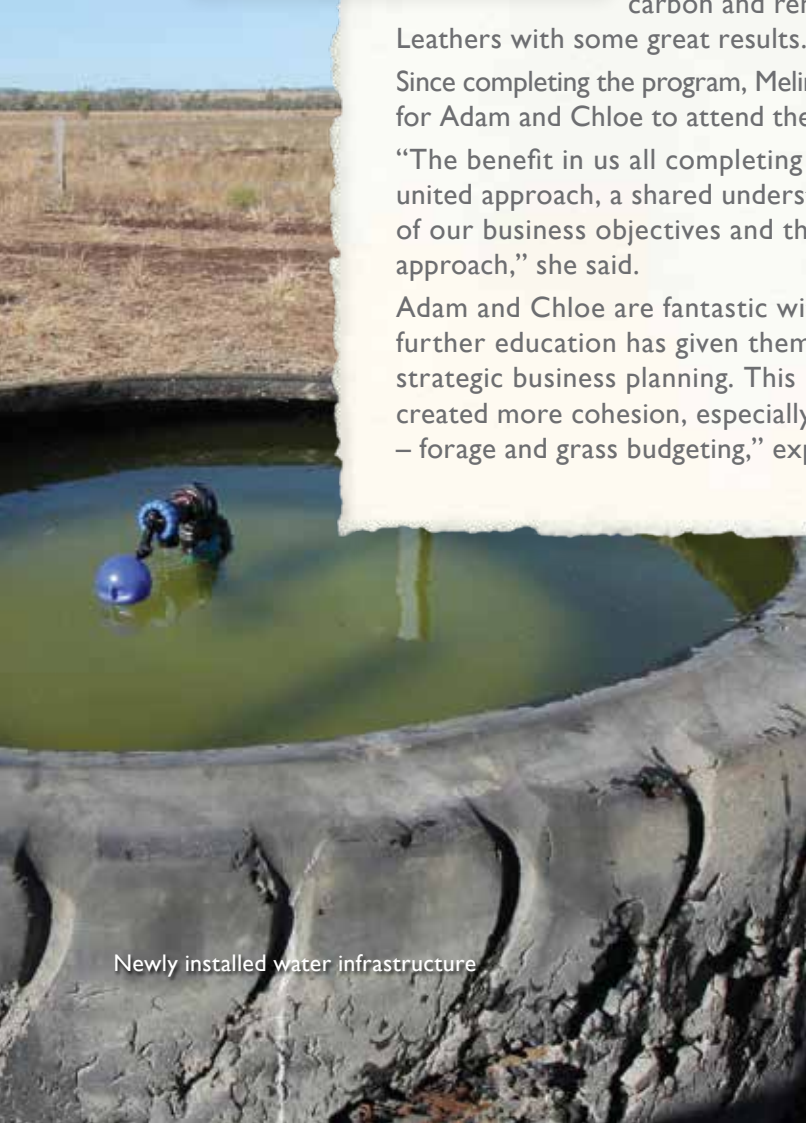
The introduction of legume crops is described by Melinee as “a miracle feed”. The woody vegetation’s productivity, ability to sequester carbon and rehydrate the land have provided the

Leathers with some great results.

Since completing the program, Melinee and Rob have invested in training for Adam and Chloe to attend the RCS’s GrazingForProfit™ course.

“The benefit in us all completing GrazingForProfit is we have a united approach, a shared understanding and a greater appreciation of our business objectives and the advantages of our current approach,” she said.

Adam and Chloe are fantastic with day-to-day management. This further education has given them an increased understanding of strategic business planning. This new-found understanding has created more cohesion, especially regarding our biggest objectives – forage and grass budgeting,” explained Melinee. 🌱




Newly installed water infrastructure





# HALLEVALE

Learning that an open mind will open doors has been the biggest game-changer for Alice Marks on her mission to increase ground cover of beneficial species and reduce the negative economical and environmental impact of Giant Rats Tail Grass at her property in St Lawrence, central Queensland.



Curious to see what it was all about, Alice, with her eldest daughter Olivia applied to join the Grassroots Project to learn about holistic land management. Together, the powerful duo have applied their learnings to the family's property (Hallevale) and have been excited by the results.

Alice and husband Darren manage four properties in central Queensland where they run a breeding to finishing enterprise alongside a cropping business. Purchasing Hallevale in 2014 was a new beginning for the Marks who were ready to expand their operation and recognised the land's potential. Six years down the track and Hallevale looks wildly different to the 1,035 hectare ex-timber plantation, one paddock property they originally purchased.

Alice and Darren with their three daughters have constructed dams, roads, yards, wildlife corridors and smaller paddocks. Once the smaller paddocks were set up the family started rotationally grazing according to plant growth. Their big challenge was the best way to control long established invasive species, Giant Rats Tail grass. After completing the education, careful consideration and consulting an RCS extension officer, Alice and Olivia decided to create a test site to assess the effect of controlled grazing and suppression of Giant Rats Tail Grass by creating smaller paddocks. With expert forage budgeting and a little bit of rain, Alice and Olivia were blown away with the results.

Their test site went from a condition grade C to A in a mere 12 months. This success spurred the family on to section off more of their property.

The Marks' tangible improvements are very impressive and so are the ones not visible to the naked eye.

"Grassroots has given me the confidence to make changes and given me self-awareness of my importance in our business," said Alice.

*"Everyone in the family has now identified their preferred and specific roles, we all have more authority to take charge and make positive changes."*

"For example, I've always been passionate about animal health and welfare. Now I take responsibility of ensuring that every animal has their welfare needs met."

"As a Mum of three girls who all have a love for the land, I'm passionate about showing them that they have a big role out of the home and in the business," said Alice.

"Completing Grassroots with Olivia has been such a wonderful experience for the two of us. I've seen her grow and become so much more confident. I will not hesitate to put my other two daughters through the GrazingForProfit™ course."

On completing the Grassroots Project, the Marks' walk away with their finances organised, a good understanding of regenerative agriculture grazing principles and some huge goals.

"I now have clear goals and ways of measuring change both economically and environmentally. I also understand that I will never stop learning and I look forward to what opportunity presents next," Alice added.





Giant Rats Tail on Hallevale



Alice Marks standing proudly in her improved paddock



Amelia, Olivia and Natalie Marks

## Property achievements

### Completed:

- GrazingforProfit™ School
- RCS Next Steps program
- RCS ProfitProbe™
- Property planning and mapping
- RCS Soil Health workshop

### On-farm change:

- Installed 1 water trough
- Added 1.57km of fencing
- Rehabilitation of 312 hectares of heavily infested GRT areas





# WIRRA

When asked “what do you know now that you wish you knew before” Grassroots participant Alastair Shannon replied “everything”.

Alastair and his wife Mel have run a breeding and trading property in Banana, central Queensland for a mere 12 years. However, Alastair wishes he knew more when he first purchased the land. “If I had, we would be cruising now,” Alastair emphasises.

The light bulb moment happened while completing Meat & Livestock Australia’s Business EDGE two-day training workshop. The training ignited a passion to get a better grasp on his business and gain a deeper understanding of how to better care for his soil, plants and animals. Ultimately this led the Shannons to RCS’s Grassroots Project.

For Mel and Alastair, the Grassroot Project has been a huge educational journey and the two have done an A+ job at adapting their learnings to benefit their business. Outside the classroom,

the couple have done a lot of work around setting goals and visions for themselves and their business. With these visions in mind, the pair have found focus and drive to see their goals materialise.

RCS’s ProfitProbe™, dives deep into each business’s finances, which while confronting, has proved to be a worthy exercise for the Shannons.

“Undertaking an economic analysis has been our biggest achievement thus far,” said Alastair.

“Being able to dig down into the economics of our business and learn where we are and where we are heading has really helped us focus on what we need to improve now. I want to focus on soil and environmental health, growing as much grass as possible and hopefully we will become a more productive and profitable enterprise.”

## Property achievements

### Completed:

- GrazingforProfit™ School
- RCS Next Steps program
- RCS ProfitProbe™
- Property planning and mapping
- RCS Soil Health workshop

### On-farm change:

- Installed four new watering troughs
- 27 paddocks created from ten
- Change in management style through learnings
- Implemented cell grazing
- 2 new tanks
- Added 5.7km of poly pipe
- Added 11km of electric fence







With one-on-one peer coaching, Alastair and Mel have more than doubled their paddocks, transforming 10 into 27, with four new watering troughs, 2 new tanks, an extra 5.7 kilometres of polypipe and are in the process of installing 11 kilometres of electric fence.

“We have always been rotating cattle but now we are fine-tuning the process and creating profitable and sustainable outcomes,” said Alastair.

In Alastair’s words: “The biggest game-changer for me has been learning what you can achieve when you do it well. My attitude has changed toward the scale of the operation.”

*“I was always pushing to be bigger, now I realise that scale doesn’t always mean profitability.”*

“We’re focusing on getting our business model right and working well, then we will look at expanding.”

“When it comes to profitability, we’re taking a soils up approach. By making small incremental changes that don’t cost much or take too long we are improving the health of our soil. Healthy soils grow resilient nutrient dense pastures which means more kilograms per hectare with less inputs.”

The Shannons’ appetite to grow their knowledge and improve their land is unrelenting. Through devouring books and podcasts, attending workshops and events, the couple are pushing conventional boundaries and getting more from their land than ever before.

Currently the Shannons are in the growth phase of their business with big plans for the future. With their love of animals, desire to leave a legacy for their children and passion to care for their country, big things are in stall for the Shannon family. 🌱



Alastair Shannon working with his daughters



# WILGA DOWNS

The focus at Wilga Downs has been land regeneration from the moment Greg and Donna Ashton purchased the property about three years ago. The Ashtons employ a management team led by Neil and Tina Stewart, whom share the same passion and have been making big changes on-ground.

Wilga Downs is a 4,133 hectare rotational grazing system outside of Emerald. Within six months of the new ownership, Wilga Downs had been enrolled in the Grassroots Project.

Neil and Tina are taking huge bounds ahead, but admit the learning curve has been steep, with a lot of new information to take on board.

*“We are constantly learning and adapting. Our interest has always been improving the land and the learning hasn’t stopped.”*

“It’s hard work but our kids are free and in natural surroundings. We love that we never know what the day will bring.”

Now a few years in, Neil and Tina are working towards increasing profit by improving the health of the country. Education, through RCS’ Grazing for Profit has been an all-encompassing first step for the pair.

Tina’s parents have set a solid foundation for the new generation, having begun applying RCS tools to the business 20 years ago.

Tina says that her father is so attune to the methodology that he can ‘do the financial analysis in his head and be very close to the spreadsheet results’.

Upgrading the existing run-down water infrastructure was a clear first priority, who have increased the amount of watering troughs from 15 to 34, installed 26 kilometres of pipeline, 8 new 5000 litre storage tanks and 6 new watering squares.

They label the extensive works as one of their biggest achievements.

*“Improving our water infrastructure has pretty much made the place.”*

“It’s made our whole operation easier and more productive. We are now able to graze the whole place as before there was no water in some of the paddocks.”

The Stewart’s have slashed the distance their cattle have to walk to reach water, from 4 kilometres in 2017 to now just 800 metres.

“We used to drag polypipe and troughs around the paddock to reduce the distance, as a short-term fix”

*“The water infrastructure has bought us peace of mind. We know our cattle have water and it’s cut down on labour costs and pumping. We are saving so much time and money. Now, we feel we are able to go away from the farm for short periods because we have water security.”*

The Stewart’s participation in the Grassroots Project has enlivened the enterprise, with many new ideas and plans for continuing to improve ground cover into the future at Wilga Downs.

What began as a shift in attitude, an investment in training and an evolution of land management on the property has overflowing benefits into the personal lives of the Stewart family, who are planning their first big holiday as a family.

“It’s nice to have money in the bank, but if your country looks rubbish, it’s not worth much.”

“We are so thankful we have Donna and Greg to guide us along the way, we are so lucky they let us run the show, and offer amazing support. They have put some steps in place for succession.” 🌱





Greg and Donna Ashton with their daughter



## Property achievements

### Completed:

- GrazingforProfit™ School
- RCS Next Steps program
- RCS ProfitProbe™
- Property planning and mapping
- RCS Soil Health workshop

### On-farm change:

- Water infrastructure
  - 26km 63mm pipeline
  - 19 new troughs
  - Installed a bore
  - Solar pump (project budget)
  - Nutridose
  - Farm bot
  - 8 new 5000 gallon tanks
  - 6 steel watering squares



Installation of new water infrastructure





# BELLARINE

**“You can replace cattle, but you can’t replace your country”.**

Golden words spoken by Collin Valler, in light of the way the country has bounced back following rain in a period of relentless drought. Collin credits the changes in property resilience to his involvement in the Grassroots Project, gaining a ‘wealth of knowledge’.

***“Having seen the depravity caused by the drought, it became important to me to find ways to cope better in the future.”***

The importance of having a drought plan cannot be understated by Collin, who says watching others almost ‘give away’ their best stock in drought was difficult.

In 2014, when Collin Valler and co-owner Glenda Henry took over the management of Bellarine, the property was infested with parthenium and wild sunflower, with only one 70 gallon per hour bore and a 10,000 gallon tank servicing four paddocks. Following the Grassroots Project, cattle now walk less than one kilometre to water.

Animal welfare, land condition and improved biodiversity are the most important elements of farming to Glenda Henry. Through her education, she realised the three elements are largely co-dependent.

A business that maintains its resources both financially and ecologically is the business model which Bellarine aspires to.

Nevertheless, the joy of installing every new fence or piece of infrastructure at Bellarine is another step closer to this vision. In the Grassroots Project, this has meant 7 kilometres of additional fencing, 3 kilometres of gravity fed water pipe installation and a new trough and tank.

As a result, the productivity gains are irrefutable. “We are now able to do all of the cattle work between the two of us, we are

achieving more now than when we had two ringers working for us,” Collin said.

“Our cattle handling skills have certainly quieted the herd down. We can see visible improvements in the health and happiness of the animals, which feeds through to the people in the business too.”

Fencing has formed the largest strategy in improving ground cover and land condition for the Bellarine team, combined with a herd of goats.

“Goats have been a new addition since the beginning of the project, to be used as a land management tool for weed management and regrowth control,” Glenda said.

***“The project has given us a new focus and the ability to be able to think outside of the box.”***

Currently, Bellarine runs 110 head of breeders across seven 105 hectare paddocks, well under the carrying capacity of the land. Glenda states that the variable seasonal conditions have meant keeping the herd size to a conservative amount.

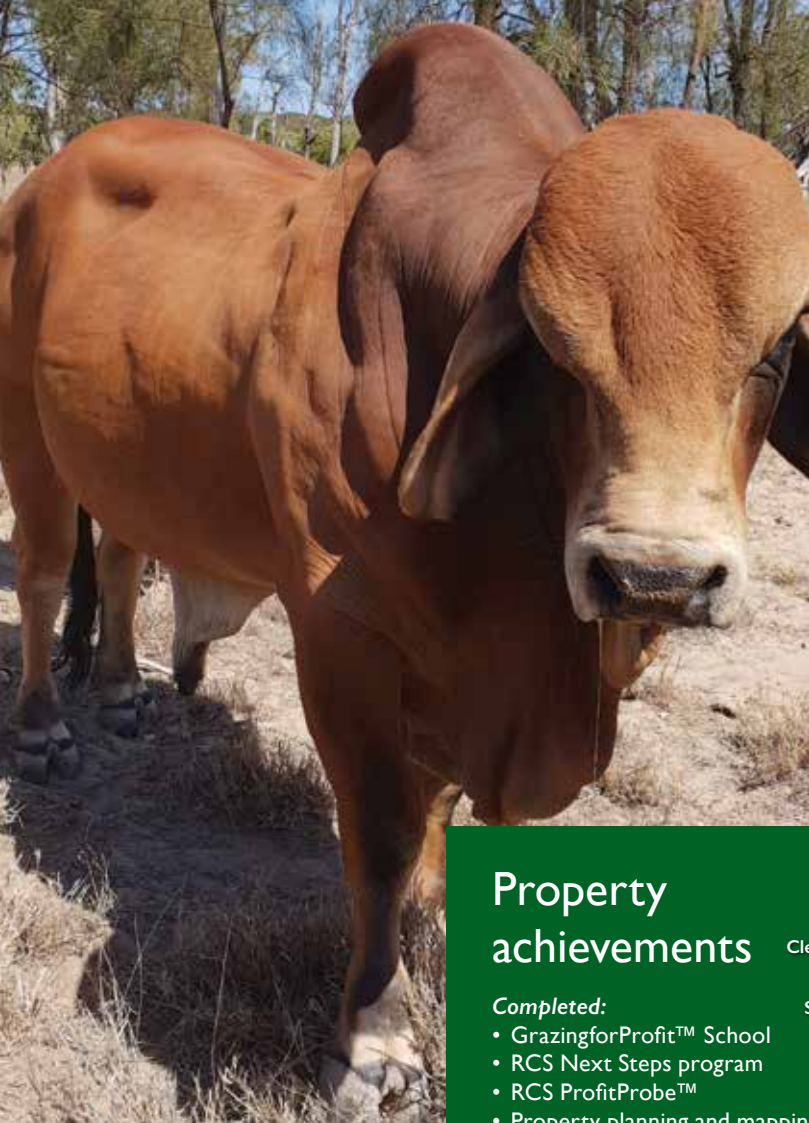
“Unfortunately, when it comes to drought, we have learnt the hard way,” she said.

***“We are placing a big focus now on planning and preparing for the next drought.”***

Learning how to implement management tools such as maintaining a paddock book, a monitoring system and collecting robust data throughout seasons has empowered the Bellarine management team to understand and work with their landscape, despite climatic influences.

“I wouldn’t change it for the world.” 🌱





Glenda Henry and Collin Valler

## Property achievements

### Completed:

- GrazingforProfit™ School
- RCS Next Steps program
- RCS ProfitProbe™
- Property planning and mapping
- RCS Soil Health workshop

### On-farm change:

- 2 fenced off dams
- Laneway
- 7 kilometres fencing
- 3 kilometres 50mm polypipe
- 1 trough
- 1 tank



Goats are being used for weed management and regrowth control



New fence infrastructure





The Grassroots Project is funded through the Queensland Government's Reef Water Quality Program, Reef Catchments, RCS and Fitzroy Basin Association Inc.

For more information visit our websites:

[rcsaustralia.com.au](http://rcsaustralia.com.au)

[fba.org.au](http://fba.org.au)