

### Case study

# Maules Creek Regeneration Ag Group

## Strong beginnings

The Maules Creek Regeneration Ag Group is a new group originally formed through the common concerns and challenges of four farming families.

Marty Beckett, Brian Dampney, Rod Woolford and Ron Ison, primary producers in the Maules Creek area near Narrabri in north-west New South Wales, formed the core of this innovative group that has gone on to hold a field day in partnership with North West Local Land Services.

There are now about 20 members who represent the varied range of farming activities in the area, from broadacre cropping to cotton and livestock production.

Erosion and water infiltration were identified as major concerns for group members, with activities targeted to increase landholders' knowledge and assist in practical ways to approach improving the land and increasing sustainable farming yields.

A recent field day, co-hosted by Local Land Services and funded through the Australian Government's Agricultural Innovation Hubs Program, focused on landscape rehydration. The event included presentations from: Figure 1.



Rod Woolford, Brian Dampney, Marty Beckett and Ron Ison at a Maules Creek field day.

consultant Ray Thompson about water spreading and water ponding techniques; consultant Craig Carter about landscape rehydration in the Maules Creek area; Amanda Graaf from Sydney University about the landscape rehydration project at Lara, Narrabri; Rob Duncan about water spreading and water ponding project initiated by Landcare around Gwabegar, Wee Waa and Pilliga; and Anne Coote about the Carbon Farming and Landscape Rehydration Project.

Marty Beckett says Local Land Services has helped the group tailor events and activities to their specific needs, and that access to information is making a measurable difference

to their farming methods, the health of their land, and the resilience of their properties into the future.



Figure 2. Consultant Craig Carter talks about landscape rehydration at a field day.

## A time for change

The Maules Creek Regeneration Ag Group was formed following the recent prolonged drought, an event Ron Ison says was a wake-up call for primary producers.

“The drought made us think about what we are doing,” he says. “There was so much erosion. So much topsoil was just being blown away.”

Rod Woolford agrees, saying agricultural techniques have seen massive change since his early days of farming. He says the traditional techniques of working the country and heavy use of chemicals are being replaced by more sustainable methods. Direct drilling is taking the place of ploughing.

Resilience, both Rod and Ron agree, is the key to a stronger future on their farms.

The activities and events the Maules Creek Regeneration Ag Group has taken part in has helped both farmers review their practices, with more confidence in the outcome.

Consultant Craig Carter has been working with landholders to assist with landscape rehydration, and they say they are starting to see the regeneration of degraded land.

Craig told field day attendants that past management of properties had worn out the topsoils of the land, resulting in a “tin roof”

effect. However, techniques already in use elsewhere could see farms go from bare ground to significant vegetation over a six-year period. Strategies included growing grasses, careful grazing management, and the use of contours to manage high water flows.

Some of the Maules Creek Regeneration Ag Group members have reported success in tightening up grazing density, using smaller paddocks and herd rotation.

“We are always taking new information away from these events,” Brian Dampney says. “It helps with a bit of experimenting.”

## Sharing the load

As well as getting together to share information and hear from experts, the members of the Maules Creek Regeneration Ag Group are taking part in an initiative known as “528”.

“A bunch of blokes in our area meet at someone’s farm between the hours of 5pm and 8pm on a Friday,” Marty says.

***‘The drought made us think about what we are doing...’***

***- Ron Ison***

“We catch up about more than what we are doing on the farm. It’s also about mental health.”

Group members feel positive about the future of both their organisation and their properties.

“Farming is constantly evolving,” Brian says. “There is no end in sight.”

The group intends to continue to facilitate events and activities that will help their operations to become more resilient.

## For more information

Contact Maules Creek Regen Ag Group members: Brian Dampney on 0427 231 584 or Rod Woolford on 0427 272 066.