

Northern Rivers Farms

CASE STUDY

Property Snapshot

In December 2016, Kristian and Wendy Randall sold up everything in Brisbane and bought a property in the Northern Rivers of NSW to fulfil a long-held desire to live off-grid as sustainable primary producers. The property has some degraded areas and the Randalls want to transform it into a fully functioning, sustainable farm. They have developed a business plan for an integrated operation comprising cattle, goats, honey and timber production. The plan is to ensure the property is viable for the long term while following best practice in all areas including fencing, water, soil management, tree thinning and felling and to work with the natural environment.

Location: Sextonville in the Kyogle Local Government Area

Size: 242 hectares

Enterprise: Mixed beef, goats, honey production and Private Native Forestry.



Challenge

The property needs a lot of work to get it to a productive and environmentally healthy state. It was previously harvested under a Private Native Forestry Property Vegetation Plan but has become overgrown. Ironbarks, which were once a dominant species, are now under threat from competition. The grazing areas need to be expanded to ensure the enterprise is commercially successful and existing paddocks need good shade for stock. Biosecurity is a concern, particularly for the goat and apiary operations, with the threat of disease and pest incursions from neighbouring areas and the Richmond Range National Park and State Forest.

"From the first time I engaged with Local Land Services two years ago, I have had nothing but positive interactions. From the biosecurity experts, to the livestock officer who advised us on stock numbers and water availability to the Sustainable Land Management and Private Native Forestry officers who helped us work through approvals, they have been always informative, providing free advice that was qualified. For Wendy and I, without this advice we would have made a lot more mistakes."

Kristian Randall, owner, Northern Rivers Farms

Fact file:

- 242 ha Northern Rivers property made up of grazing land and timbered country
- Diverse income streams including beef cattle, goats, honey production and Private Native Forestry
- Use of the Pasture Expansion section of the Land Management Code to thin nearly 40 ha of forested country to provide additional grazing paddocks with good shade
- Sustainable harvesting on 100 ha of Private Native Forest. Selective thinning designed to help return it to a more natural state

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Work being undertaken

39.4 hectares of dry sclerophyll forest will be thinned under the Pasture Expansion Part 3, Division 2 section of the Land Management Code. The forest will be thinned to a minimum of 150 stems per hectare to provide increased pasture as well as shade for cattle. The landholders have purchased a forestry mulcher which will be used to process the younger thinned trees to create a mulch layer on the ground to improve soil health and encourage natural grass growth. Thinning the trees will also provide space for others to become large and produce optimal canopies for shade.

The work will produce six paddocks each with a quarter area of shade. The landholders are purchasing fertiliser and earthmoving equipment from Northern Rivers' suppliers and will prepare and fertilise the paddocks before buying around 80-100 Limousin cattle. Stock will be rotated through the paddocks and excluded from water courses to allow natural regeneration of native trees in order to reduce erosion.

The landholders have also worked with Local Land Services to obtain a new Private Native Forestry plan over a 100 hectare section of the property. This will provide several income streams through timber, apiary operations and an initial herd of about 30-40 goats.

The Randalls have investigated the historic make-up of the forest and are keen to return it to a more natural state. Under the Forest Operation Plan, the Ironbarks will be retained and other species thinned to promote natural regeneration of Ironbark as the

dominant species.

Using the Allowable Activities provisions of the Local Land Services Act 2013, the landholders will clear some native vegetation in order to build an access track and 1.6 metre high boundary exclusion fence to reduce biosecurity risks. A section of the track along the western edge of the fence will be used to house up to 500 beehives located on semi trailers. This will allow easy access and removal of the hives in case of fire. The bees will also help with pollination and thus regeneration of native plant species.

"We think that with our investment of time we could actually return this to a healthy forest. This was very much a predominantly Australian hardwoods diversified forest and that's what we plan to leave it at. Really the underlying part of it is to make the property better than when we found it."

Kristian Randall, owner, Northern Rivers Farms

