

Farm Business Resilience Program

Taking Control: Building Sustainability and Resilience on 'Francvillers', Cunnamulla Qld (Part 1)

Follow the story of 'Francvillers' in this mini case study series



Don Dunsdon on 'Francvillers'

Don and Debbie Dunsdon are the proud owners of 'Francvillers,' a family-run property located in the Lower Warrego River Floodplain, approximately 40kms south of Cunnamulla.

Comprised of alluvial floodplains and wooded, sandy ridges, 'Francvillers' hosts dorper breeding ewes and some cattle for the Dunsdon's meat enterprise. But as the Dunsdon family know, life on the land is not without its share of challenges.

Drought and Water Security

The recent, decade-long drought was a huge challenge for the Dunsdons, lasting from 2013 to 2022. Their livestock and landscape suffered for these years to devastating effect.

As Don recalls, "Drought [was] really tough. Then we would get flooding and all the water would just drain away; the old bore drains were channelling that water away, causing erosion."



Open bore drain taking water from the landscape, March 2022

Unfortunately, if the landscape isn't prepared, major weather events like floods can be detrimental. In these cases, such a high volume of water often does more harm than good, running off the bare ground and leaving erosion in its wake.

"Over the years we've noticed a lot of our country shifting and knew we had to do something about it. "We had to take back control," says Don.

Since they couldn't control the weather, Don and Debbie focused on what could be done. This meant incorporating change into their business practices, including improved fencing, water and erosion management, and feral pest control, with particular focus on conservative stocking and environmental sustainability.

To assist them with these landscape restoration techniques, Don and Debbie were fortunate to attract some funding through Southern Queensland Landscapes.

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Landscape Recovery

For the Dunsdons, managing recovery areas is a critical part of their strategy to restore resilient perennial pastures. Their use of spreader banks to slow the flow of high velocity water runoff and increase infiltration has led to a remarkable recovery of native groundcover and pastures, while also improving erosion and water quality. Having grown up in the area, these positive changes mean everything to Don, who says:

“Francvillers has been home for many years, looking after our land remains [our] highest priority. That’s why we made changes, and farm according to what the season is telling us.”

Taking a holistic approach, Don and Debbie remain vigilant in their ongoing monitoring of weed and pest populations, including managing total grazing pressure with exclusion fencing and fencing off riparian areas to protect creeks and rivers, which allows valuable ecosystems to regenerate.



Fencing riparian zones allows total grazing pressure management and spelling of pastures on ‘Francvillers’

Looking to the Future

While their primary goal is to set ‘Francvillers’ up for the future and leave the land in better condition, succession planning is integral to Don and Debbie’s operations, with their son Ben and his wife Sarah transitioning to take over ‘Francvillers.’



Before and After: ‘Francvillers’ March 2022 vs December 2022. Spelling from grazing pressure has enabled the recovery of pastures.

Learning from previous challenges, Don and Debbie take a more conservative approach to farming and see the benefits of their work. Don understands that although drought declaration for their area has been lifted, the next drought could always be just around the corner. As Don tells us, “While we could be in a position to increase stock numbers, we continue to take a conservative approach; it’s important we manage our natural resources sustainably to greatly reduce impact of drought by adopting whole of business practice change.”

Learn more about the practical implementation of these works on ‘Francvillers’ in Part 2 of this mini case study series

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