

Carbon cross-regional collaboration

Western Australia



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A cross-regional collaborative approach focusing on carbon farming has achieved greater reach and significantly more impact with local communities and farmers in Western Australia, than a single region approach.

Collaborative effort

The Carbon Farming Awareness Project, funded by the Western Australian State Government's Royalties for Regions (R4R) Program, saw the Department of Agriculture and Food WA (DAFWA) and five of the Western Australian Natural Resource Management (NRM) groups—Northern Agricultural Catchments Council (NACC), Rangelands NRM, South Coast NRM, South West Catchment Council (SWCC) and Wheatbelt NRM—working with the community to show the profitability, productivity and environmental co-benefits of carbon farming as well as associated risks.

It also aimed to support communities to responsibly manage their natural resources.

The project established demonstration sites and ran public events including field days and workshops to showcase a diverse range of carbon farming activities. Rangelands NRM was also responsible for the key coordination tasks including contracting other groups, compiling reporting, undertaking evaluation and assisting with communication.

Dr Henry Brockman, Project Manager Carbon Farming at DAFWA said the way the system was set up with one organisation taking the key coordination role was crucial to the effective delivery of the awareness campaign and to the highly successful collaboration. "The success achieved with this system shows that the Regional NRM groups can deliver a coordinated state-wide delivery of extension and can serve as a model for a future way of working," he said.



Reps from each NRM groups in WA (L-R) Mike Christensen (SWCC), Peter Russell (RNRM), John Silver (RNRM), David Broadhurst (SCNRM), Wendy Wilkins (SWCC), Sarah Jeffrey (NACC), Henry Brockman (DAFWA) & Jo Wheeler (WNRM).

Demonstration sites across WA

Since the project was initiated in 2012, 27 diverse demonstration sites have been developed across WA. In the high rainfall regions of the south west, sites were established evaluating the benefits of adding compost to dairy farms for pasture growth rates and soil organic carbon, while another trial looked at the use of biochar as a carbon sequestration tool. In south coastal regions, soil organic carbon increases under biological farming techniques and reducing emissions from livestock with perennial grazing systems were key carbon farming activities. Across the central and northern Wheatbelt, on-farm examples of carbon farming looked at brown manuring crops, sandalwood plantations and forage shrub plantings for carbon storage. Across the rangelands, sites demonstrated just how much carbon is stored above- and below-ground.

Sharing learnings and better dissemination

Linking the work of the regional NRMs has undoubtedly increased awareness of carbon farming among farmers across all of the NRM regions by taking advantage of existing partnerships and networks and leveraging value from the extensive extension programs and on-ground activities each region is delivering in partnership with growers, community groups, and the broader agricultural industry.

Having a carbon farming contact in every region has allowed people to ask questions about carbon farming and what this might mean for their enterprise. Thousands of people have been involved, talking carbon farming with project team members at hundreds of events held across WA.

The project improved collaboration amongst the groups and resulted in better sharing of information. It allowed input from different perspectives on matters relating to project implementation to be gathered and learnings from other regions to add value to projects happening in their home patch. As part of the program, DAFWA also analysed and captured current and emerging information on carbon farming related policy, legislation and science, to identify carbon farming opportunities and associated risks. This information was captured in a series of fact sheets, and was then delivered to land managers.

Connecting the 'coalface' of agriculture

Rangelands NRM Operations Manager John Silver said through collaboration, the community now has a better understanding of Carbon abatement and sequestration opportunities.

"The Carbon world is complex, burdened by shifting policy and vested interests, but it is also exciting," he said.

"Changing practices and new information have the potential to produce both an environmental and economic benefit. There are a number of exciting opportunities in which NRM organisations are supporting land managers to incorporate proactive carbon management with business management applications."

More information at www.agric.wa.gov.au/climate-land-water/carbon-farming and www.agtrialsites.com.



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