

## Soil carbon depends on healthy growth

Farmers in the Boodua area south of Goombungee have been told that to build soil carbon, they should have something growing as vigorously and healthy as possible as often as possible.

Agronomist Ian Moss, speaking at a Landcare farm walk, said every time a paddock was cultivated, two tonnes per hectare of carbon was released.

"From a soil health point of view, grow something as often as you can, and it's good to convert cultivation to pasture for a few years," he said.

Mr Moss, a pasture specialist with the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry in Toowoomba, and Brian Johnson, principal technical officer, joined a Landcare group field day at Boodua and Lillyvale south of Goombungee recently.

The group visited the farms of Keith Neilsen at West Boodua and Evan Ehrlich at Lillyvale and attended a short seminar of soil health.

Many of the participants had been involved in three discussion groups involving the Moola Creek Landcare Group, South Myall Catchment Landcare Group and Gormaren Doctors Creek Landcare Group.

The landholders were particularly interested in:

- How to reduce the use of artificial fertilizers, how can this be done cost effectively.
- Legumes, their use in pasture and in green manure crops.
- Can more biologically friendly fertiliser improve moisture retention in soil.
- Deep ripping, the benefits and is there a right and a wrong time to deep rip.
- Getting the biology in soil right, knowing the what, how, when, where and how much.

Ian Moss explained to the Boodua field walk participants that carbon was a significant component of healthy soil and carbon and nitrogen had a special relationship.

He said the ratio of carbon to nitrogen was about 12 to one, meaning that as the carbon content increased, so to did the level of nitrogen.

He said that it was always more difficult to rebuild soil carbon from a low level than to maintain carbon at a moderate or high level.

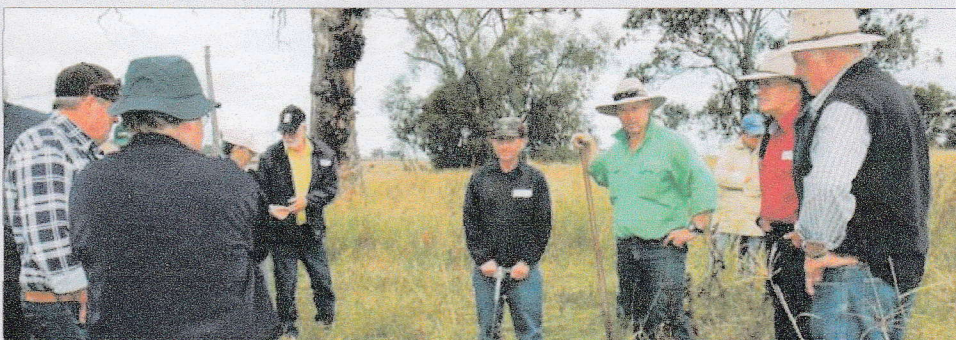
Pasture specialist Brian Johnson said carbon was being used during cultivation or bare fallow but that carbon was produced by a grass pasture.

Mr Johnson reminded growers that if a soil cannot grow a good crop, it can't grow good pasture.

He said you can never rebuild a soil to its original carbon level before cultivation commenced. Some Brigalow soils in their original state had a carbon content of 3 to 4 per cent, and he thought that rebuilding that to 2 per cent would be all a farmer could do.

"It's a long term thing to rebuild soil carbon."

A pasture phase helps. But four to 10 years was



The Landcare group visited a grassland area on the floodplain of Oakey Creek. Owner Evan Ehrlich said it was difficult controlling various types of weeds which had been washed downstream by the flooding during the past couple of years.



Brian Johnson, pasture specialist with the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry in Toowoomba, Keith Neilsen, Evan Ehrlich, and Ian Moss of FARM Agronomy.

better than just two years under pasture, he said.

Ian Moss said soils were losing their capacity to produce.

"Therefore, there needs to be change."

He said carbon produces carbohydrate which is energy and drives the biological processes in the soil, and diseases occurred because soil did not have the resilience to fight it.

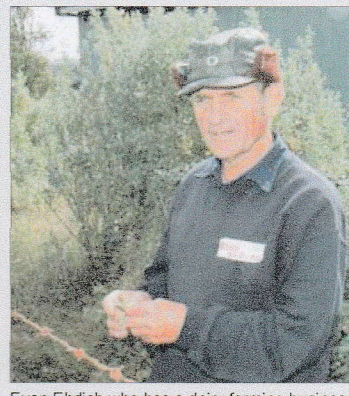
"There is no shortage of things for farmers to try in improving their soil

health. The hard thing is to know if it has worked and that comes from testing components such as pH, conductivity, soil carbon, and cation exchange."

Ian Moss said up to 40 per cent of a yield difference could not be measured by the eye, so you had to measure to manage.

"And why care? Because soil health is linked to your bank balance."

"The carbon level is linked to the money you make," he said. - MILES NOLLER



Evan Ehrlich who has a dairy farming business at Lillyvale, west of Meringandan, with a trial stand of saltbush he planted some years ago but found cattle really did not like it.

## Upsurge in cattle prices at Crows Nest



John Kuhl, Goombungee, and Gary Thorp, Groomsville.

Cattle prices are on the rise at Crows Nest, with demand for feeder steers driving the upsurge.

Livestock agent Rick Zeller said prices paid at the sale on Saturday were at least \$20 a head better than the previous sale two weeks ago, and that sale experienced

prices that had improved \$10 to \$20 per head.

On Saturday, a line of 54 small Angus/Brangus type steers, just seven to eight months old, averaged \$420 per head, which some suggested was about \$2.40/kg liveweight.

The Crows Nest sale is open auction. There was a yarding of just over 200 on Saturday.

The top price on Saturday was \$630 per head for a pen of eight Droughtmaster/Santa steers about 12 to 15 months of age.



Lyle Voll, Goombungee, and Mervyn McLean, Hampton.

Rick Zeller said there was a shortage of feeder cattle, particularly older steers in the 300kg to 400kg range.

He said the sale in two weeks should hold firm for these heavier types, but also for good lines of weaners.

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