

The Pioneers

Stories of the future of agriculture



Contents

Welcome..... 1

About Project Pioneer.....2

What is regenerative agriculture?.....4

Regenerative agriculture pillars

Land.....8

Business 16

Production22

People28

Soil35

Meet the Pioneers

John & Jess Bidgood..... 6

Chris & Chantal Booth..... 9

Richard & Adele Acton 10

Russell & Catriona Murdoch 14

Pat & Prue Lonergan 17

Kale & Karin Robinson 18

Dan Carney.....23

Brett & Pip Krafft.....24

Robert & Stacey Clapperton28

Andrew & Tali Brownlie 36

Trish & Barry Christie 39

Bristow & Ureisha Hughes.....44

Adam & Jacynta Coffey.....48

Karen Smoothy52

Regenerative agriculture pioneers

The Coonabar story 29

The Mt Pleasant story 41

Project Pioneer ambassadors

Kerrie Sagnol40

George Stacey 47

Angus Dunne.....54

Partners..... 56



Great Barrier Reef Foundation

Project Pioneer is funded by the partnership between the Australian Government's Reef Trust and the Great Barrier Reef Foundation.

Welcome

Australian producers do an incredible job of feeding our nation and the world, and we have developed our training programs to guide and support them in growing their businesses for generations to come – by looking after their land.

As an industry, we are constantly developing new and better ways to produce food. We challenged our Project Pioneer producers to go beyond being sustainable, and supported them to move to regenerative agriculture practices to create a prosperous and ecologically responsive farming future.

The ultimate goal of Project Pioneer was to improve water outcomes for the Great Barrier Reef but the benefits of this program extend far beyond this. It was our mission to help producers achieve profitable agribusinesses through farm management practices that promote soil health and biodiversity, and reduce sediment run-off.

Project Pioneer set our producers on a new path by looking at their business holistically. At the heart of our approach was a shift in the relationship we share with the natural environment from one of working against it, to working with it. We did this by applying robust economic and strategic business management practices, which result in more profit in the business, better ecological outcomes and happier, healthier families.

Project Pioneer was built upon the tried and tested Resource Consulting Services (RCS) teaching platform, one which has transformed thousands of businesses and individuals over more than 30 years. Despite having spent three decades working in this



space, I am continually in awe of what people can achieve within their enterprises, their environment and themselves, through regenerative agriculture.

Our Project Pioneer producers should be incredibly proud of the positive impact they are having on the Reef, their business, their families and the broader grazing industry.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Terry McCosker'.

Dr Terry McCosker OAM
Founding Director
RCS

Dr Terry McCosker OAM

Terry McCosker is the Founding Director of RCS, and is highly regarded for his outstanding contribution to the evolution and development of agriculture practices in Australia. His innovative career began with the Queensland Department of Primary Industries in 1967, and he has since worked as a Rural Management Consultant across almost all segments of agricultural production. In 2014, Dr McCosker was recognised by Central Queensland University with an Honorary Doctorate of Agribusiness for his contribution to Australia's agricultural sector. In 2021 he was recognised for his services to primary industry with an Order of Australia Medal.

About Project Pioneer

Project Pioneer has supported hundreds of producers throughout the Great Barrier Reef catchments to transition to regenerative land and business management practices that grow profitability, while enriching the natural environment and the wellbeing of producers, families and communities.

Since 2016, Project Pioneer producers have learnt to increase and maintain ground cover and soil health to contribute to the improved quality of water entering the Great Barrier Reef, all while growing the prosperity and resilience of their businesses.

The Project allowed producers to take the health of the business, the health of the farm and the health of the Great Barrier Reef into their own hands.

Project Pioneer was built on RCS 30 years' experience partnering with more than 10,000 producers to transform management practices for better business, environmental and personal outcomes.

The concept for the Project originated when RCS and WWF struck up a conversation around the health of the Great Barrier Reef and the role producers play in its health. Since inception, the Project has been supported by industry and environmental groups because of the outcomes being proven to be 'win-win' for the producer and the Reef. Project Pioneer was most recently funded through a partnership between the Australian Government's Reef Trust and the Great Barrier Reef Foundation.

Through Project Pioneer, producers have engaged in the RCS learning platform, with more than 220 graziers completing Grazing for Profit™ (GFP) where they are introduced to a new regenerative approach to managing their business. The regenerative movement in agriculture links biodiversity to healthy soils, healthy businesses, healthy animals, and healthy people.

The learning journey continued for 95 grazing businesses with Next Steps, a six-month coaching program where producers are mentored in the application of principles learned through the Project. Many producers then went on to further their professional development with the three-year ExecutiveLink™ program.

Producers were not only given the knowledge to make change, but are supported by dedicated advisors who provide ongoing support to embed learnings back on-farm, and to provide a clear direction for the future.



The evolution of Project Pioneer

The Project Pioneer concept originated from discussions between RCS and WWF about their shared desire to see farm practices change in order to demonstrate the connection between the ecological sustainability and financial success of grazing businesses.

2014

With funding from WWF and RCS, ten producers from the Fitzroy and Burdekin catchments were studied to document the attitudes, approaches and outcomes being achieved from their participation in RCS programs. The study found these producers had adopted more sustainable practices on-farm, increased the profitability of their business and were happier.

2014
to
2016

Discussions between WWF and the John T Reid Foundation secured funding to perform on ground works for positive reef outcomes.

2016
to
2019

Project Pioneer was officially rolled out and more than 750,000 hectares (ha) of land came under its management. Fifty grazing businesses from across Cape York, the Burdekin, Fitzroy and Burnett Mary catchment areas joined the Project and adopted practices to reduce erosion in grazing lands and improve the quality of the water entering the Great Barrier Reef lagoon. The Project was then extended to offer the Grazing for Profit™ School to a further 50 grazing businesses.

2019
to
2021

The Project turned to focus on high priority areas of sediment loss. An additional 50 grazing businesses entered the program. This extended the land area impacted to more than 1.3 million ha.

Producers were also given the opportunity to develop specific skills through RCS Grazing Clinics, Business Fundamentals Workshops and Soil Solution Workshops.

After an impactful seven years, the Project culminated in June 2021. In this time, it transformed the lives and business of almost 300 producers, while positively impacting more than 1.3 million ha of grazing land.





What is regenerative agriculture?

Regenerative agriculture links biodiversity to healthy soils, healthy businesses, healthy animals and healthy people.

For producers, the practices not only improve their bottom line and increase paddock productivity, they also ensure a farming enterprise can exist in harmony with the natural landscape.

As Australia's leading provider of regenerative agriculture education, training and consulting, RCS offers a highly integrated program which works in close cooperation with industry groups, financial specialists and leading primary producers. This formed the framework for Project Pioneer.

Project Pioneer has demonstrated that a regenerative approach to agriculture:

- reduces cost of production
- reverses land and water degradation
- improves communication skills within the business and family
- increases biodiversity on-farm
- reduces the impact of commodity price variability
- provides a robust framework for property development
- supports succession planning
- supports carbon sequestration and carbon farming.

John & Jess Bidgood

Tingle Hill, Baralaba



Property names: Tingle Hill, Mount Cooper, Round the Bend

Location: Baralaba, Central Queensland

Size: Tingle Hill, 630ha; Mount Cooper, 1,341ha; Round the Bend, 559ha.

Operation: Backgrounding and finishing beef cattle

John and Jess Bidgood at their property, Tingle Hill, Baralaba, Queensland.

Regenerative agriculture practices have allowed John and Jess Bidgood to achieve their business and family goals ten years ahead of schedule.

When John and Jess Bidgood took over 630ha Baralaba-district holding 'Tingle Hill' from John's family a decade ago, they did so with the aim to finish steers on grass for the organic market.

However, they soon realised that to achieve their goal of making the property their primary source of income, they needed a different approach to operating the business.

The couple found the solution in 2016, when they discovered RCS and the transformational change regenerative agriculture could bring to the way they managed their Brigalow country.

Based on their RCS learnings, John and Jess began to implement time-controlled grazing straight away. They were enthusiastic to extend their practice change, so jumped at the chance to join Project Pioneer the following year.

"We started Project Pioneer at the start of 2017, and it had a huge impact on our business," Jess said.

"It showed us how to create a clear vision for our business and family which has grown our profitability while at the same time achieving our ecological goals. This included improving ground cover, biodiversity of plant species and soil health.

"The Project really suited where we were at that time."

Implementing regenerative land management practices has not only made 'Tingle Hill' more productive and profitable, it's also allowed John and Jess to fast-track expansion of their business. Within two years of commencing Project Pioneer, they purchased 'Mount Cooper' (1,341ha), 35 kilometres to the east of Tingle Hill and leased 'Round the Bend' (559 ha), also in the Baralaba area.

Focus on soil and pasture

One of the Bidgoods' highest priorities on Tingle Hill was nurturing soil health to achieve a more diverse ecosystem and higher-quality pasture. Traditionally, the property had been operated over four paddocks. Two of the paddocks fronted the Dawson River and suffered erosion and had areas of overgrazing and depletion. In the other two paddocks, access to water was an issue which led to poor utilisation of pasture and the formation of clay pans.

During their time with Project Pioneer, the Bidgoods invested in 11 km of polythene pipe, and 11 troughs to improve water infrastructure and better manage feed utilisation. With the same goal in mind, they also subdivided the four large paddocks into 34 by erecting 26km of electric fence.

"Time-controlled grazing has allowed us to gain control of the stock on our properties. It creates a more even utilisation of feed and gives us the ability to plan ahead to ensure we are matching our stocking rate to our current carrying capacity," Jess said.

This shift in land management instigated from their participation in Project Pioneer now sees the Bidgoods meticulously assess the species and growth cycle of vegetation across their paddocks.

"By paying attention to pasture health and growth, we can continually adjust our stocking rate to match the quality and quantity of feed available. This ensures our pasture is left 'rain ready' to make the most of any moisture we receive," John said.

"Even through a recent extended dry, which lasted 12 months, we were able to maintain ground cover the whole way through and our pasture was in a good position to take advantage of any rain that did come at the start of the growing season, which just put us that much further ahead of the market."

John and Jess estimate they had 65% ground cover at Tingle Hill when they commenced Project Pioneer, however this now consistently sits at 80-85%. At Mount Cooper ground cover was around 50%, however, this has improved to 65-70%. The growth in diversity of plant species has been exciting for the Bidgoods.

"The seed is already there, it just needed the right grazing management to appear," John said.

A more holistic approach to management has also heightened the Bidgoods' awareness of the performance of their enterprise.

"I used to think I was good at keeping books but all I was doing was my tax accounting," Jess said.



"Now I know our economic position and our cash flow position and where we're heading. We have control over that. The fact that we're cash flow positive and we're profitable every year, regardless of the season, and we're hitting our goals of being able to achieve what we want on farm and off farm in terms of property development and investment for our future is amazing."

Changes beyond the paddock

At the real heart of what John and Jess wanted to achieve was the desire to make enough on-farm income to strip away their reliance on external streams of income, and to focus their time on beef production and their young family.

"We were trying to find a way we could make this our purpose, our income, our livelihood. We wanted to be profitable while achieving ecological goals including increasing ground cover, biodiversity of species and improving soil health," Jess said.

"Project Pioneer made us realise we had this vision and then it was a matter of chunking it down into goals. We wanted John to be on-farm fulltime and we achieved that, and I have considerably scaled back my off-farm work. Then we set really big goals which included owning 1,000 head of cattle and buying another property and we've recently achieved them too. Now it's a matter of us reassessing and setting goals for the next stage while at the same time celebrating how far we've come."

While the last few years of their change to regenerative management have been full of intense shifts for the Bidgoods, they said all changes have set them up for life, especially the adjustments to how they think about business.

"It's the mental shift into understanding that we create our own destiny. We have absolute control over what we're doing and that realisation has been incredible," Jess said.



"We now have a clear vision that is in sync with our purpose, passions and our family. We can set 'big stretch goals' that we can measure and constantly reassess to look for ways within the business to create a life that we don't want a holiday from and that we absolutely love."

Land

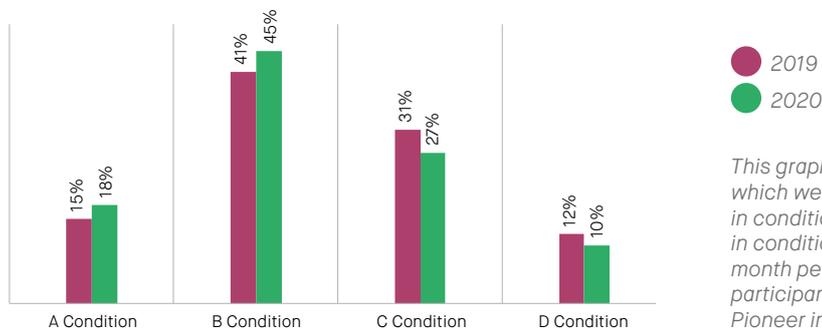
Through Project Pioneer, producers gained knowledge to better understand soil health, ecology and best practice operational methods, to improve the condition of their land.

Producers learned that while seasons are variable, they can employ a suite of tactics to continuously enhance the health of their property by growing ground cover and biodiversity, and make calculations to optimise their feed-to-cattle ratio. Together, these measures help to ensure producers are not overstocked and, therefore, don't feel pressure to sell into unfavourable markets, contributing not just to ecological health but also the profitability of the business.

While it can take many years to achieve long-lasting improvement in land condition, producers on Project Pioneer properties were able to increase average ground cover from 77.2% in September 2019 to 80.5% by September 2020.

Producers use fixed point photographs, taken every six months, to document the vegetative progress. Layering these simple, yet effective, observations with strategic stock movement and grazing have been a game changer for many.

Land Condition 2019 V 2020



This graph demonstrates land condition across 32 properties which were assessed in 2019 and 2020. The amount of land in condition A and B increased from 57% to 63%, while land in condition C and D decreased from 43% to 37% over the 12 month period, indicating a positive shift in a short timeframe. The participants whose properties were assessed commenced Project Pioneer in 2019.



Two photos, taken at the same fixed point, demonstrate the improvement in ground cover between 2019 and 2020. These photos were taken at Chris and Chantal Booth's Central Queensland property, 'Southlands'.

Meet the
pioneers

Chris & Chantal Booth

Property name: Southlands

Location: Ridgeland, Central Queensland

Size: 1,412ha

Operation: Beef cattle and share-farming
dryland crops



16,592ha
of erosion being treated
through Project Pioneer



3,873
erosion structures installed



93%
of producers increased their
use of feed budgeting and
recording pasture data



92%
of producers boosted paddock
spelling and rotation



Chris and Chantal Booth consider Project Pioneer to have been a 'game changer' for beef operation 'Southlands', at Ridgeland near Rockhampton.

The couple were motivated to transition to holistic management practices after seeing 'before' and 'after' shots from other producers and have since used these as informal benchmarks for their own progress.

"The proof really has been in the pudding," Chantal said.

"Despite being in drought for the entirety of the project, the before and after photos of our paddocks show significant improvement in pasture density and varieties. The evidence is also clearly visual in the land improvement and the condition and quality of our cattle.

"The whole thing has been positive and an eye-opener.

"When Chris and I took over management of the property it was a monoculture of Indian Couch grass that only supported 500 head of cattle and 50 brumbies.

"We reduced stock numbers and built more small dams to increase the water security and to let the landscape recover. This gave Southlands the ability to retain moisture in the soil.

"We know the moisture is soaking in now and you can notice this in our grass quality.

"There's still a high percentage of Indian Couch, which is undesirable, but it's a huge step forward from bare dirt and exposed rock."



Richard & Adele Acton

Greenroc, Thangool



Property name: Glenroc

Location: Thangool, Central Queensland

Size: 2,800ha

Operation: Stud and commercial Droughtmaster cattle

Richard and Adele Acton began Project Pioneer in 2017.

A long-held goal of creating a sustainable cattle business that could support their family without relying on off-farm income has become a reality for Central Queensland beef producers, Richard and Adele Acton.

It's an achievement they credit to improving the efficiency of their land and grazing management practices and financials, and in turn, increasing their economies of scale.

Underpinning those significant changes has been their participation in Project Pioneer. For Richard and Adele, Project Pioneer prompted a complete re-think of how they managed their business, and has given them the confidence to make big changes that will benefit their business and ultimately their family. Crucially, the flow-on effect has been that Richard now works full-time on their cattle business, without the need for any off-farm income.



"We saw Project Pioneer as a way that we could question everything that we were doing and then really work towards being able to focus all of our energies on making changes," Adele said.

"Richard used to work off-farm as a diesel fitter and supervisor in the mining industry and one of our big goals was to not have to rely on off-farm income. We felt we should be able to earn an income off our farming business alone.

"We had a lot of ideas of how we wanted the landscape and our business to look. Off-farm work takes you away from it and you don't have the time to focus completely.

“Project Pioneer has given us the ability to give our farming business the attention it deserves.”

The Actons run a commercial Droughtmaster operation and stud, Ambleside. They performance record the entire herd and sell grassfed paddock bulls.

Until recently, they operated two grazing properties comprising 2,024ha in total. They sold both properties – one near Thangool and the other near Baralaba – and bought the 2,800ha ‘Greenroc’ at Thangool.

“The new property will give us the ability to grow some of our younger cattle out and performance record them right through as well,” Richard said.

“Previously, we sold all our steers and cull heifers straight off their mum, usually to backgrounders for feedlots. This new property has given us more scope to grow them out and have a bit more diversity and not just rely on bull sales for our income.”

Adele said Greenroc’s diverse country has been an asset. “It has forest country for our breeders but then we’ve got good scrub country for finishing our bulls and carrying through our steers to help with our performance recording, and increase markets we can access,” she said.

“It also has some black soil downs country that we can put into cultivation and grow our own forage and oats.”

The case for change

The Actons had successfully implemented a range of new land management practices on their previous properties through Project Pioneer, and are now applying the same principles at Greenroc.

Those changes include time control grazing – rotating cattle through paddocks to allow for country to be spelled at the right time and prevent overgrazing – and careful consideration of water and fencing infrastructure to prevent soil erosion and run-off, and boost pasture growth.

“We joined Project Pioneer in February 2017. At that time, we were experiencing an extremely dry



wet season and had a 12-month rolling rainfall of only 340mm.

This was about 300mm less than the average rolling rainfall that we would usually be experiencing at that time of year,” Adele said.

“Through our experience with RCS Grazing for Profit, we realised we needed to act immediately. During March 2017 we weaned all of our calves three months earlier than normal (aged three to five months). The average weaning weight of the calves was 180kg with the lowest weight being 128kg. In comparison, our overall average weaning weight for 2018 calves was 252kg (aged six to eight months).

“This reduced our grazing pressure immediately by reducing our total livestock units (LSU) by 16%. These weaners were fed in the yards until they were weaned and then were sent away on agistment.

“The other measure we took to reduce our LSU, and hence grazing pressure, was to pregnancy test all of our cows early. The vet foetal-aged all cows so that anything that was not detectably pregnant or less than six weeks pregnant could be sold immediately. This measure reduced our total LSU by a further 9.5%. Overall, these measures reducing total grazing pressure by 25.5%.

“We received rain in March 2017, however it was too late in the season to achieve useful grass growth, so we did not restock our properties. By the time we received useful rainfall from October to December 2017 we had decided to sell our properties so did not restock the properties.

“The standing grasscover models show that in March 2017 our property cover levels dropped to 45.77%. Due to our management actions, these cover levels picked up to 74.78% by end of October 2017 and then by March 2018 were up to 92.4%.”

A blank canvas

Adele and Richard say they’re excited about implementing change at their new property because it’s largely been untouched and is like a blank canvas.

“We have some essential habitat areas here and some beautiful biodiversity we can manage for,” Adele said.



The Actons are the second owners of Glenroc since 1930.



The Actons plan to preserve the aspects of the property such as remnant vegetation and its population of birds.

“The property was settled in 1930 and we’re only the second owners of the property, so there’s a heritage with it as well which we think is quite exciting going forward.

“We have a few remnant vegetation areas still on the property and a couple of little patches of scrub vine forest. Through the creek area, there are a few volcanic rock areas with waterfalls that run when we do have water in the creek. There’s also a population of bettongs and a big population of birds.

“Obviously we need to make a living off the land but our challenge is to do that in a way that can preserve a lot of these natural aspects.”

Grevillea Creek runs through the property, flowing into the Don River which feeds into the Dawson River, then into the Fitzroy River and out into the Great Barrier Reef lagoon.

“We’re only about 10 km away from the head waters of Grevillea Creek so obviously whatever we do up here impacts further downstream and the Great Barrier Reef,” Richard said.

Adele said their black soil can be very erosive, depending on how the infrastructure is set up.

“At our previous properties, some of the troughs had been positioned so the cattle had to walk downhill to access them and that would open up erosive areas,” she said.

“We owned those properties at a time when we had really damaging rain off a number of cyclones that caused erosion on those areas. So, we worked to change where those water points were located and change the water flow so the sediment would drop back down into those areas and it would grass up again and stop the sediment coming out.”

Richard said there are a lot of places on this new property that do the same thing. I’d say at some stage in the last 15 years, it’s been grazed heavily and we can see where there’s been run-off and erosion and created a mess. We’re starting from scratch here but at least we know what works and

what doesn’t work,” Richard said.

“At our previous place, the fencing allowed us to cell graze more often. We could move our cattle around as soon as our ground cover was getting down to the threshold that we like to, enabling us to move them on and spell areas a lot more.

“We’re moving towards rotational grazing here, and we’re looking at setting up our waters to make sure that we’re utilising our pastures without overgrazing any areas.

“At the moment, all the water points on the new property are all very centralised at one spot, so one area is getting really hammered. We’ve got a lot of work to do with our fences and waters, but right now we’re looking at how we plan them out to best utilise our different land types so that particular areas in a paddock don’t get flogged and we’ll be able to move back into our rotational grazing systems, which we were doing.”

Overcoming challenges

In tackling the often daunting prospect of implementing change, Richard and Adele said Project Pioneer had provided them with the tools, confidence and ongoing support to make big decisions.

After completing the RCS Grazing for Profit School, they moved on to RCS Next Steps and then onto ExecutiveLink™ program.

“The Next Steps process was important because it gave us a mentor who encouraged us to make sure we were moving along. It’s a coaching/mentor type program which contained modules of grazing management and business management,” Adele said.

“It was challenging to get over our own fear and thoughts which restricted us in terms of what we thought we could or couldn’t do. It was challenging to sell off a place we and our family were comfortable living on and try to take the next step. We were trying to get our head around it for 12



The property has a number of volcanic rock areas with waterfalls.

months before we made that step.”

The Actons said while they’re now seeing the positive impacts of Project Pioneer, they were initially reluctant to become involved.

“We were nervous that we couldn’t take the time out from our lives and we had too much else to do, but it probably is one of the most positive things we’ve been involved in for our business,” Adele said.

“Rather than dancing around and being stressed all the time, it’s helped us sort out our goals and start in that direction.

“We certainly feel like we’ve come a long way through it and we’re very excited about the future.”

Solid support network

When part of the RCS ExecutiveLink program, the Actons were in regular contact with other beef producers who were also involved in the Project.

“We met with them every four months and regularly phoned and emailed each other,” Richard said.

“Confidentiality is very high – everyone is trusting, and open and nothing is off the table. Everyone is supportive of each other and their goals.

“Being in contact with other businesses like ours enables us to nut out things and come up with hopefully innovative ideas about how we deal with some of the really challenging problems that producers are faced with.

“It’s invigorating. When it’s dry or there’s drought, it can get you down, but talking to some of the people involved in Project Pioneer, they’re very energetic and it keeps you going. It acts as a bit of peer pressure as well. When the going gets tough, you have a yarn and away you go again.”

Adele said they had learned so much by taking this different approach. “You can take little bits from here and there, rather than trying to work through it all yourself,” Adele said.

“For example, if our costs for supplements are getting a bit high, we can compare what other business are doing and have that inform our decisions.



“It’s a unique environment that was challenging to enter into at the start but it certainly has opened a lot of doors for us and given us access to information that generally would not be available to us.”

Give it a go

For other producers contemplating working with RCS, Richard and Adele’s advice is simple – give it a go.

“Don’t be close-minded. Be willing to listen, try new things, make changes and diversify,” Richard said.

“If you don’t like it, you can go back to what you were doing.

“We were implementing a lot of the changes at our previous properties and we have a plan for our new place. What we would like to do will happen – Rome wasn’t built in a day.”

Adele believes the benefits extend throughout the whole industry.

“I think it’s very important as beef producers that we start putting a more positive message across as a group to society because I think what society wants is how we need to manage our country and that is changing incredibly,” she said.

“There are so many other public outcomes that we are required to manage for. I honestly am a true believer that we can balance agriculture with our ecological needs, but I think it’s a matter of challenging how we’ve done things a little bit in the past and that’s what we’re doing.”

Russell & Catriona Murdoch

Holroyd, Boobyjan

Gayndah

QLD



Russell & Catriona Murdoch at Holroyd.

Russell and Catriona Murdoch changed their business, their lifestyle and their priorities through regenerative agriculture.

Where are you from?

We're originally from southern New South Wales and wanted to expand our cattle enterprise there but were landlocked within very expensive country. We travelled from NSW to Gladstone in Central Queensland, looking at 11 properties in 14 days, and ended up here at 'Holroyd' in 2016 as it ticked off most of what we were looking for. The property has a really good balance of country including creek flats, softwood scrub, brigalow and open forest areas. There are a lot of different soil types, so we thought it would meet the requirements we had for our business.

Why did you decide to implement regenerative agriculture practices?

When we arrived at Holroyd it was very rundown with severely scorched large areas of land due to over-grazing and limited watering points. We saw a lot of potential to create a sustainable and profitable grazing operation that also prioritised biodiversity, soil and ecological health. At that point, we became part of Project Pioneer and started to change the way we do things.

What changes did you make?

We have subdivided paddocks into 10-20ha lots and strategically placed more troughs and water infrastructure. This has allowed us to implement an effective rotational grazing system that better utilises pasture, while also decreasing the distances cattle have to walk to water and protecting riparian zones.

How has production improved as a result of those strategies?

By creating those smaller paddock areas and implementing significant rest periods for each paddock with rotational grazing, we've been able to greatly improve our utilisation of pasture and increase our pasture yields four-fold. At the same time, we've protected the soil and ecological health, by maintaining continuous groundcover, retaining soil moisture and protecting riparian zones.

What have been the ecological results?

Since implementing regenerative practices there has been an increase in groundcover from 50-80% across the property. Biodiversity has also spiked, and we've seen the return of a number of native legumes and blue grass, among other species.

Like much of Australia, you've experienced extreme drought on Holroyd. How has regenerative agriculture helped you to better handle tough conditions?

By using data from grazing charts and feed budgeting, we made the decision to reduce cattle numbers early, when they were still in good condition, and have been able to keep a good body of grass. When it does rain, the country will come away so much more quickly and we'll be ready to buy stock – ideally before the price increase.

And how has the transition benefited you personally?

Russell: I worked off-farm for 30 years and was very keen to be in the cattle operation with Catriona full-time – and this has allowed us to make that happen. We previously had some ineffective communication strategies, but we've identified each of our roles and responsibilities based on what we are good at. Now, when I'm given direction, I can take a couple of breaths, think and not snap.

Catriona: Project Pioneer has given us more tools than just managing grass and cattle, it has given us tools to manage communication – which has been a huge advance in a husband and wife situation, and one of the key things that has helped us develop and move ahead with our business. I've always been like a bull at a gate, but now understand not everyone has to operate like that.

Increases in ground cover and biodiversity are evident on Holroyd where growth has defied climatic conditions through regenerative management.

Top right: taken September 2017, with 309mm rain for the year.

Bottom right: taken September 2019, with 250mm rainfall.

What are the other, consumer-focused benefits of farming in this way?

The regenerative management we've adopted is not only good for the country, but because it is so good for the soil and the environment it comes through in the goodness of the product we produce. That then has a flow on effect for people, health and chronic disease.

Why would you recommend this approach to other producers?

We've been able to manage our environment effectively and efficiently both for better environmental outcomes and profitability. You really can't go wrong. It's now so inherently obvious to us that everyone should be doing it. We're also supported by a network of like-minded people – we can pick up the phone and ask them any question, no matter what time it is. We're just so grateful to have them.

How does your enterprise demonstrate to consumers that producers take their responsibility to look after the ecosystem very seriously?

Like most family-operated farming businesses, as stewards of the land we are providing management not just for the sustainability of our business but for the long-term sustainability of the environment. In doing this, we also provide environmental services to the wider community, people, plants, animals and the entire ecosystem. This is demonstrated by our management style of maintaining 80% or greater ground cover, limiting stock access to riparian zones at critical times, and controlling of pests – all of which comes at a cost and also benefit to the business. We would love and encourage some method of on-farm consumer visits as it could only bring positive outcomes.



Business

Through Project Pioneer, producers learnt about key business indicators and processes, such as cashflow planning and budgeting skills to improve financial literacy and increase profitability.

Profitability and good business management was taught as an essential aspect of any business needed to achieve strong ecological outcomes.

Project Pioneer participants had access to business tool, ProfitProbe™, which provided them with an accounting breakdown of their business, and benchmarking of productivity, profitability and efficiency in comparison to previous years and similar agricultural operations. The platform compared any enterprise, drilling right down to analysis of the performance of properties with similar land types.

Providing producers with access to meaningful data enabled improved decision making and the ability to measure the business' vision and goals. This also equipped producers with the information they needed to achieve economic, ecological and social improvement.

 **100%**
of participants increased their financial management systems (eg. budgets)

 **10%**
reduction in overhead ratio (initial Project Pioneer participants)*

 **10%**
improvement in gross margin ratio over the life of Project*

 **\$1 billion+**
of assets under management of Project Pioneer participants

 **100%**
of producers improved their business management processes (eg. decision making)

Key indicator	Second year participants	Fifth year participants	Desired outcome
Average of Enterprise COP / Meat Produced Cattle	\$ 3.33	\$ 2.75	Lower
Average of ROA	1.80%	3.50%	Higher
Average of Asset Turnover Ratio	6.90%	8.80%	Higher
Average of Gross Margin Ratio	58.40%	60.50%	Higher
Average of Overhead Ratio	63.60%	44.30%	Lower
Average of Finance Ratio	7.90%	8.80%	Lower
Average of Expense Ratio	94.70%	74.70%	Lower
Average of Gross Product / Full Time Employee	\$434,974.97	\$449,838.67	Higher
Average AU Managed	2,477	2,386	Higher
Average of Plant Income Ratio	82%	43%	Lower
Average of Economic Gross Margin / AU Cattle	\$290.88	\$342.30	Higher

A cohort comparison of average key business indicators for Project Pioneer businesses who completed ProfitProbe™ in FY1920. The pattern of key indicators becoming stronger as length of time since first receiving support through the project increases was echoed across the board.

*Statistics reflect participants that completed ProfitProbe, not reflective of all Project participants.

Pat & Prue Lonergan

Property names: Rolfe Creek and Parnu

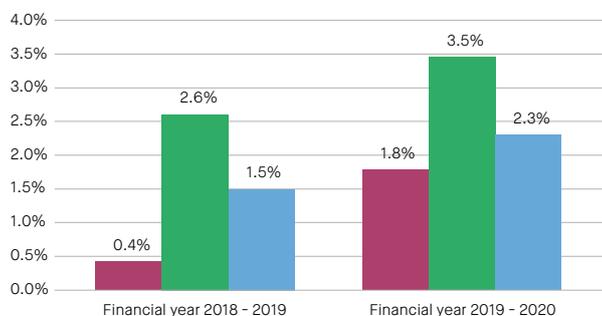
Location: Clermont, Central Queensland

Size: Rolfe Creek - 4,600ha, Parnu - 2,250ha

Operation: Beef breeding and trading



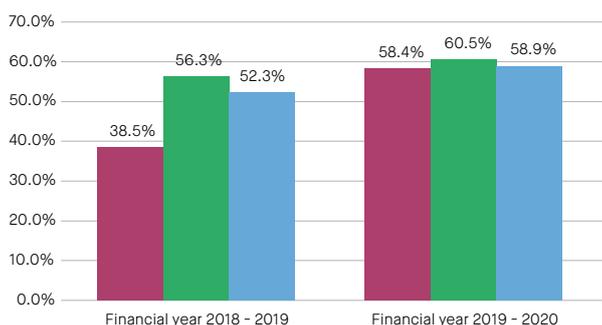
Return on Assets*



- Second year Project Pioneer participants
- Fifth year Project Pioneer participants
- ProfitProbe average

Benchmarked second and fifth year Project Pioneer participants Return on Assets (ROA) compared with the average for all businesses benchmarked via ProfitProbe™. The data demonstrates that fifth year participants, with at least four years of education and support, performed better than the average, who had not necessarily had that education and support. Second year participants improved their ROA to be closer to the average after being involved in the project for just 12 months.

Gross margin ratio*



- 2nd year Project Pioneer participants
- 5th year Project Pioneer participants
- ProfitProbe average

Gross margin ratio indicates how much gross product (cash and non-cash income) remains after paying direct costs. The comparison between groups reflects the trend for ROA, where those businesses involved in the project for longer performed better than those businesses new to the project. The gross margin ratio for the most recent cohort of project participants was considerably better in their second year, indicating a better knowledge and management of their relationship between productivity and direct costs.

Pat and Prue Lonergan own and manage two cattle properties, 'Rolfe Creek' and 'Parnu', near Clermont in Central Queensland.

For years, the couple injected funds from their off-farm businesses into the development of their properties. They believe Project Pioneer helped spearhead their growing business, by helping them to identify their priorities and utilise their existing skills to capitalise on opportunities.

"We needed a better understanding of how we could make our cattle business more profitable," Prue said.

"There was a lot to do and it was hard to know where to begin. For us, it really started to streamline things in terms of what our priorities were because you can't do it all at once - physically or financially.

The Lonergan applied the grazing principles outlined by Project Pioneer to create an infrastructure plan and develop grazing plans to suit their management style. Pat said the tools gathered throughout the Project had streamlined all aspects of the business together.

"It's knowing where we sit at the end of the growing season and having a plan, and knowing in advance that we're going to run out of grass at a certain point in time so we can manage this with stocking rates," Pat said.

"It's empowering to have so many decision-making tools at your disposal for all aspects of the business."

Meet the
pioneers

Kale & Karin Robinson

Hillsborough Station, Ravenswood



Ravenswood

QLD

Property name: Hillsborough Station

Location: Ravenswood,
Burdekin region

Size: 43,000ha

Operation: Beef cattle

Kale and Karin Robinson with their four sons.

Producers know climate, interest rates and cattle prices cannot be changed, but the response to these forces can drive long-lasting and balanced practices to benefit both beef production and sustainability.

That's the sentiment which has propelled North Queensland beef producers Karin and Kale Robinson to undertake significant changes to their land and livestock management at 'Hillsborough Station'.

Located in the Burdekin region, approximately 70km from the coast at Ayr in the Great Barrier Reef catchment, the 43,000 ha property runs close to 6,000 head of Brahman and Droughtmaster-cross cattle.

Kale and Karin's new approach to managing the property and its natural resources has been inspired and supported by their involvement with Project Pioneer and their work with RCS.

The Robinsons purchased Hillsborough Station three years ago in partnership with Karin's parents, Pat and Jenny Williams, who are based in nearby Charters Towers. In just two years of participating in Project Pioneer, the Robinsons have already increased their carrying capacity through improved pasture management.

But at the crux of this improvement is not just a change in on-farm practices, but in the mindset which underlies their management decisions.

"When we first moved here, we came into what was classed as drought in this area. Since we've had the information and knowledge provided by Project Pioneer, we approach the land with different eyes," Karin said.

Kale said accessing tools and support through the Project proved invaluable in producing a range of data to help inform management decisions and give them confidence.

"The data is useful because we can now see what is really happening rather than just blaming things on drought, which is what we would have done two years ago before starting Project Pioneer," Kale said.

"By collecting data and analysing it, we know our benchmark carrying capacity is 8.5 stock days per hectare per 100mm of rain. We've been able to develop a management plan to match the stocking rate to Hillsborough's carrying capacity."

Karin said Project Pioneer also provided the couple with a positive outlook.

"In agriculture, you can't change a lot of things, but there are things you can have some control over. That's the frame of mind the project puts you in, so you're not just living on hope that tomorrow it might rain," she said.

"You start to understand what the land is doing and how it responds to change, and it's exciting.

"Since being involved in Project Pioneer we've had a paradigm shift – we see ourselves now as being grass producers, because if we can nail that, then the beef is going to be a by-product and it's going to be better for our business.

"Obviously there is big component of understanding the cattle side of production as well, but I think if you go back to basics, and understand that it's also about what's happening in the soil it gives you new tools. The information is there, so use it."

Positive change

With sugarcane fields close to one side of the property and the Leichhardt Range running along another boundary, Hillsborough Station comprises a diverse range of soils and land types. It's also home to a number of waterways, including Eight Mile Creek and Banana Creek and part of Barratta Creek, which all flow into the Reef catchment.

One of the biggest changes the Robinsons have implemented through Project Pioneer to manage this biodiversity was introducing a rotational grazing system and adopting new on-farm technology.

The combination of the new initiatives will help maintain and increase pastures, and prevent sediment run-off and soil loss, ultimately boosting productivity and profitability.

"We're about to start a cell rotational grazing system that incorporates a walk-over-weighing system," Kale said.

The couple installed new cattle yards with a low-stress focus.



“When the cattle walk through to get to water, it will record their weight and instead of us having to muster a whole paddock, if we want to sell a certain amount of cattle, we can just draft them off in paddocks and pick them up. It will also help us identify any non-performers or sickness.

“We’ve also just built new cattle yards with a low-stress focus. The design takes into consideration the behavior of the cattle and how they run, and it decreases the labour needed in the yards, while increasing safety.

“We also have a crush-side system that enables more data to be stored. It records weight and reads the NLIS for each animal. If a female is in-calf, it can also record three different types of data for that beast – for example if it is 1-3 months pregnant, 3-6 months pregnant or more than 6 months pregnant.



“We have already noticed that just by changing little practices and increasing our body of pasture, there has been positive effects. It’s also profitable to our business as well – it’s a win-win.

“By understanding the grazing circles of the cattle and managing pastures, we’ve been able to increase our carrying capacity.”

Karin said Project Pioneer provided the ongoing support and guidance needed as they implement change.

“The great thing about Project Pioneer is you don’t just go to little things every now and then. You have support all the time, including on-property visits from people who are just so knowledgeable,” Karin said.

“We have a grazing chart and on-farm monitoring sites throughout the property that help us really

look at the biodiversity, estimate the number of stock days per hectare that might be there, and basically help us evaluate for the whole paddock.

“Being able to read the country and see how many stock days you’ve taken out and thinking ‘maybe we could have put a bit more in there’, it’s a continual process. When you’re new at it, you have that support from Project Pioneer and RCS.

“The on-farm monitoring sites are a good record of our management. It’s a chance to see the impact of management changes that we’re making such as more biodiversity in the different grass species coming through.

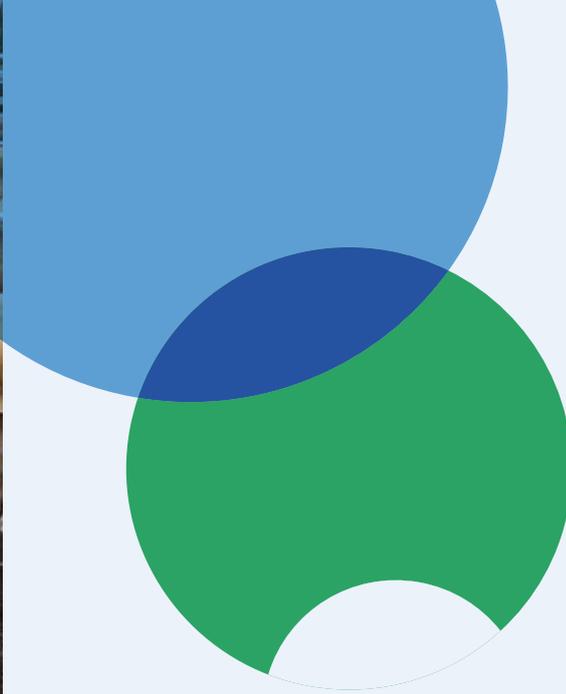
“As well as drought, we’ve had to manage abnormal seasons, such as winter rain last year. It has allowed us to have maneuverability in our business and allows you to make real-time decisions.”

More tools for the business kit

Taking a more analytical approach to decision making in the environment of a family business has been another benefit of Project Pioneer for the Robinsons.

“We found it has given us more confidence in trying to make some hard decisions or communicate what might need to be done, and removes the emotion. It gives us more facts and data to do that, especially when you’re communicating within a family business,” Karin said.

“You’re not just saying ‘I think we should do this’.



“It takes the emotion out of decision-making, and I think that’s one of the biggest impacts it’s had on our business.

Karin said while changing their management practices sounds like an overwhelming task, RCS had made the process accessible to the average producer.



“Project Pioneer is not just about business. It touches on succession and communication and setting yourself up for the future. It touches on everything.”

“We’re lucky in the sense that we have good communication with my parents. We have regular business meetings just touching base, to make sure we’re all on the same page,” she said.

Empowered with knowledge

The Robinsons said investing the time and energy into learning more about pasture management through Project Pioneer was empowering.

“Investing in education is an investment in yourself, because it opens up your mind to new ways of doing things and understanding how the land works,” Kale said.

“I know the challenges, the stigma it has. We’re the first to put our hands up and say we questioned why we should get involved, before we made the decision.

“But the reality is we’re seeing positive changes happening, and it’s benefiting our business.

“Project Pioneer put us in contact with like-minded people and people looking for ways to keep moving forward and not just surviving. That’s refreshing, because we all know the obstacles that living on the land comes with.

“You can’t change the weather, interest rates or cattle prices, so what can you change? Project Pioneer helped us answer that.”



Kale with the crush-side system that enables critical weight data to be collected.

Production

Through Project Pioneer, producers learnt to implement regenerative management practices and grazing principles, including grass budgeting and resting country, to gain a better understanding of the relationship between economics and animals to increase on-farm efficiency.

Producers with mixed enterprises also explored different cropping systems and how they may contribute to a more productive business.

Rotational grazing is a key production strategy of regenerative management, and many Project Pioneer participants who had been in the program for a number of years wholeheartedly adopted this valuable grazing technique so that they now move cattle more frequently.

Setting up for this level of intensification often requires investment in fencing and the addition of watering points for cattle. Producers made these changes throughout Project Pioneer, demonstrating their commitment to a more sustainable operating model.



Neighbouring properties: Project Pioneer participant's property on left side of fence, September 2019

Dan Carney

Property name: Wongella

Location: Kilkivan, South Burnett

Size: 4,047 ha

Operation: Beef cattle



Dan Carney drew on Project Pioneer to transform the former tree plantation he manages into a high-performing grazing system.

When Dan's employers purchased 'Wongella' in 2017, the property didn't have water infrastructure or internal fences, and the pasture was low quality - presenting a blank slate for development.

Over the past three years, Dan has constructed 150 paddocks on the property, and is on track to reach his target of 200 by the end of 2021. Traditionally, this type of country supports one beast to four hectares, but Dan said by improving the water infrastructure carrying capacity had doubled.

"The previous owners relied a lot on dams, so with a reticulated (trough) system, we were able to utilise country that would have been too far from water and not grazed efficiently. It also allowed us to spell the better country," Dan said.

"We're now running double what the property would normally run without stressing soil or pastures, and we'll pay all that infrastructure off in a three to five-year window with the increased carrying capacity.

"Project Pioneer really helped in the dry years with the one-on-one consultations. I had my finger on the pulse with our feed budgets, and coupled with some really good trading opportunities, we made some terrific margins.

"Typically in the drought, I would have been too bogged down doing operational stuff because it was dry and we're trying to do fencing.

"But Project Pioneer just really kept me thinking about the bigger picture, and that's when we really crunched the numbers on some trading opportunities and took advantage of that."



2,052km
of fencing installed
throughout the Project



939
livestock watering points
installed



81%
of producers maintained or
increased their stocking rate



55%
of participants maintained or
decreased the number of times
cattle were handled each year



89%
of producers increased number
of times stock were adjusted to
match feed available

Those producers who subdivided paddocks and recorded grazing data in MaiaGrazing online grazing management software showed an improvement in metrics known to be strongly linked to increased ground cover and reduced run-off, including shorter graze periods and longer recovery periods. On average, those producers also realised higher yields over the period data was collected.

	Before project	After project	Change
Avg. no. paddocks	66	145	120%
Avg. graze period (days)	14	7	-50%
Avg. recovery period (days)	30	43	43%
Avg. days not grazed (% of total)	68%	86%	26%
Avg. density (hd/ha)	1.1	6.5	491%
Avg. graze yield (SDH/100mm)	27.9	33.5	20%

(Source: MaiaGrazing)

Brett & Pip Krafft

Rainbow Hill, Thangool

Brett and Pip Krafft with their children.



Property name: Rainbow Hill

Location: Thangool,
Central Queensland

Size: 810ha

Operation: 500 head of
breeding and trade cattle

Striking the fine balance of matching stocking rates to carrying capacity while building groundcover is no easy feat, but this Central Queensland family is achieving their goal.



Brett and Pip Krafft, 'Rainbow Hill', Thangool, and their young daughters run 500 head of breeding and trade cattle, targeting a turn-off weight of 400kg to supply predominantly to the feedlot sector.

In 2016, they signed on to participate in the ground-breaking Project Pioneer. It's a decision Brett and Pip say has helped them to not only identify targets and a clear direction for their business but also to access support to help them implement plans to achieve those goals.

Good grazing management and optimising pasture use has been a focus for the Kraffts, as they have set about making on-farm changes at Rainbow Hill and another nearby property they run as one aggregation, totalling 810ha.

For the Kraffts, the impacts of those changes have been significant in their business and landscape.

"We saw Project Pioneer as a great opportunity to create a viable, profitable business that would give us what we needed as a family," Pip said.

"Grazing management and improving soil and water health was always high on our list of priorities, and being part of this program has meant we really have been able to identify milestone targets and access a lot of resources to create possibilities.



"We were already aware of, and admired, RCS' principles, motivations and programs so to have an opportunity to do the ExecutiveLink program through Project Pioneer was fantastic.

"We're not inheriting an established family business and we're not part of a larger family business, we're basically starting from scratch. With debt and financing it's not easy, so being able to access resources and knowledge is very important for us. To be able to increase scale, we needed the support that RCS and Project Pioneer have provided."

Path to change

Brett said a key to achieving their on-farm goals has been to undertake major water infrastructure and fencing programs.



"We really ramped up splitting up our country, resting our country and trying to build a better soil profile, which leads to better ground cover," Brett said.

"Before we commenced the project, we were grazing half and resting half of our paddocks, and had five troughs. We mostly relied on dams and springs in the creek for stock water. We now have 90% of our paddocks resting at any time, and have installed an extra 18 troughs, which means our stock no longer use surface water.

"We've split up all our major paddocks and spread watering points out, enabling us to rest paddocks as we rotate our cattle.

"We've always rotated our cattle but not to the degree that we are now. We're aiming for 100% groundcover at all times and to improve grass quantity and quality – the only way to do that is by resting paddocks and then adding livestock for short grazing periods.

"The landscape here is undulating with improved scrub soils and forest soils, and a mix of native grasses. When we first started Project Pioneer, we might have had 60% to 70% ground cover. We have improved that and maintained it through the dry period that we've experienced this year.

"We also have major creek systems running through the properties – some have permanent water holes and a few springs, but all of them feed into the Kariboe and Kroombit Creeks which then flow into the Dawson River and eventually into the Fitzroy River, and then out into the Great Barrier Reef.

"One of the biggest impacts of the Project for



me is that it changed the way you look at things, especially water. I think we both comment, when we see water running, what colour is it? How much soil is in it?

"We noticed our dam starting to dry up - I initially put it down to a series of dry years, when in fact we have improved our water penetration. Water is staying on our land and that water retention is resulting in less run-off."

Pip said their on-farm changes had also facilitated one of their biggest achievements – matching stocking rates to carrying capacity.

"It always seems like an obvious, foregone conclusion that beef producers are doing that, but I think it's very hard to achieve," Pip said.

"Although you have a long-term benchmark, the carrying capacity of your property changes constantly with seasonal conditions. If cattle numbers are static year after year, regardless of season, the land system will end up degraded through overstocking. The time it takes for that land system to recover from overstocking is usually at least two to three good seasons, if at all, which equals lost productivity to the business.



Brett with one of the Kraffts' 23 watering troughs.

"Our goal is to match stocking rates to carrying capacity and we feel we're doing that very well.

"Resting paddocks is a big innovation – allowing the grass to recuperate, grow and respond. As a result, we've increased our long-term benchmark carrying capacity and we're able to run more stock numbers than we did five years ago.

"As part of Project Pioneer, we have a subscription to the online grazing management tool MaiaGrazing, which we use to record what we're doing and plan for what's ahead, to forecast, and then make decisions."

Having the tools to plan ahead has also empowered the Kraffts with a greater feeling of control in an industry so reliant on the vagaries of weather and market prices.

"We're constantly aware of where we are in terms of grass availability, and seasonal conditions. We're very on top of what's happening and we forecast what's going to happen, according to different rainfall scenarios," Pip said.

"We're very aware of where we are at any point in time and we always have a couple of options up our sleeve as to which way we'll go, depending on what plays out with seasonal conditions and markets.



"We feel we're much more proactive than reactive now."

Overcoming obstacles

The path to change is rarely completely smooth, so the ongoing support from RCS through Project Pioneer has been crucial for Brett and Pip.

"A big challenge or obstacle for us is debt and financing. We haven't yet overcome that but we have the resources to create a plan," Pip said.

"We've been able to think outside the box and had opportunities through the Project and externally that have enabled us both to access off-farm income.

"That has enabled us to maintain the business through change. Often there will be a period where cash flow is low, but I feel that we've overcome that through off-farm income very successfully."

Brett said thinking about succession has also been a key consideration for the family.

"Project Pioneer has helped us navigate the opportunity to access more land to expand our business, and to help family members through change," he said.

"Through Project Pioneer, we've come up with different scenarios and different ideas to enable all parties to come to an agreement.

"We're in the final implementation stages now and it looks like a win-win for everyone.

"We overcame that through the resources of the ExecutiveLink board and RCS staff, tossing ideas around the table and hearing about and learning from other people's experiences."

The bigger picture

Like many primary producers, the Kraffts are acutely aware that what they do on-farm has a ripple effect well beyond their boundary fence.



The Kraffts run 500 head of breeding and trade cattle.

Having achieved significant changes in their business, they're keen to show other producers the impact of the improvements they have made.

"We'd like to help spread knowledge of good land management practices throughout the catchment," Pip said.

"It's incredibly important to create and maintain prosperous, productive communities. Good land management is a cornerstone of flourishing communities; poverty and hardship are extremely detrimental to the environment and, equally, depleted land cannot sustain successful communities. If you have prosperous, successful people, the environment is also going to prosper.

"For me the Great Barrier Reef has always been really important. My family has been involved in catchment management in various places in eastern Australia, and we're all passionate about waterways and water quality.

"Not long after we found out we were successful with our application for Project Pioneer, we went on a holiday to Pumpkin Island on the southern Great Barrier Reef, and it was great to be able to tell our daughters what we were doing.

"We explained that it would take time and effort, but what they could see around them when we went snorkelling would benefit from it."

Brett stressed the importance of the Project.

"The widespread drought across NSW has really brought it home for me that more initiatives like Project Pioneer need to happen," he said.

"The way the land has suffered from over-stocking in the drought, to the huge mental strain that these people have gone through and are still going

through. Projects like this can help everyone to make the right decision at the right time and be proactive.



"The message needs to be, have a look at what you're doing now and I guarantee you'll be harming something, whether it's the environment or your business.

"Have an open mind, seek education, but most importantly, act on it."



People

Project Pioneer producers learnt the importance of building strong communication, goal setting and time management skills, and to think critically and strategically about the people in their business.

The lines between family and business are often blurred within farming enterprises. For some, the knowledge gained about how to manage people within their business delivered the most powerful results due to stronger human relationships, and defined roles and responsibilities creating clearer lines of communication.



85%

of participants said they increased their people management and forward planning



Robert & Stacey Clapperton

Property name: Wheelbarrow Creek

Location: Nanango, South Burnett

Size: 335ha

Operation: Beef cattle



Robert and Stacey Clapperton are a young couple with a growing family near Nanango in Queensland's South Burnett region.

They purchased their 335ha property in 2017, and while they knew they had the skills to run a conventional beef cattle operation, they also knew there had to be a better way.

Stacey said they were determined to increase their profit margin but also wanted to look after the land simultaneously, so the opportunity to join Project Pioneer came at the perfect time.

"The agricultural industry is a tough one and in doing the Project we were giving ourselves the best chance to succeed against some of the common struggles faced by graziers," she said.

"Being involved in Project Pioneer has completely changed our mindset and we're aiming for a healthier, simpler and more profitable grazing enterprise. We are so much more confident in our decision making and ready to face any challenges with an excited outlook.

"The possibilities are endless. Together, we've had the opportunity to learn new skills and concepts which has opened up a deeper level of conversation.

"Our communication is more meaningful so our goals are feeling a lot closer to reality and have become more ambitious.

"When we're talking about ecosystems and grazing management, we're on the same page, and it's such a good feeling. All in all, we've a healthier, simpler business."

Regenerative agriculture pioneers



The Gibsons: Kristy, Cameron, Murray and Wendy.

Property name: Coonabar

Location: North of Rolleston, Central Queensland

Size: 6,781ha

Operation: Trading beef cattle

The Coonabar story

Regenerative management practices has driven profit for this Central Queensland beef business.

When the Gibson family first purchased their 6,781ha Central Queensland beef holding, 'Coonabar', near Rolleston, at the height of the 1980s interest rate surge, it could support only 600 breeders in a good year. But they saw potential and took residence in Coonabar's shed for the first nine years while they embarked on developing the block.

It was originally their intention to operate under traditional set-stocking practices, running a breeding herd and growing out bullocks. Then, in 1992 the Gibsons attended their first RCS Grazing for Profit School™. Here, they developed a clear understanding of the intrinsic link between soil, animal, human and financial health – and this set in place a transformation to a business which can now carry up to 3,500 head.

Today Coonabar is a nimble and profitable beef enterprise underpinned by thriving ecological health run by Murray and Wendy, along with their son Cameron and wife Kristy.



Ariel shots of Coonabar comparing 1980s to 2021.

Production

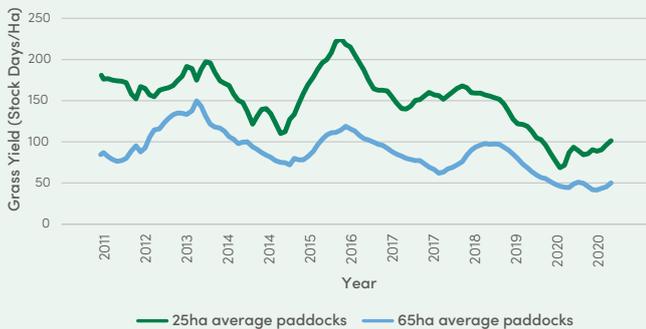
The property, which is predominantly Brigalow country, has been carved into about 150 paddocks, using cost-effective electric fencing, to provide the infrastructure needed to support a time-controlled rotational grazing system.

On the western side of the property, 90 smaller (25ha) paddocks run around 1,000 cattle which are only grazed for around four to five days per year and rested for the remainder to replenish the root and leaf reserves of grasses – this means the cattle are moved to a fresh paddock almost every day.

The eastern section of the property is still being developed and is currently made up of 60 paddocks averaging 65ha, where cattle are moved about once a week.

This rotational grazing regime has been fundamental to increasing the land's productivity and carrying capacity.

Grass yield per hectare paddock comparison



PRODUCTION DRIVER: *The smaller paddock size on Coonabar's western side allows for higher stock density and longer rest periods, resulting in a greater yield per hectare when compared to the less developed eastern side of the property.*

"When our rotational grazing system is absolutely pumping, I know the 1,000 head of cattle in front of me are putting on more than a kg a day – for me there is nothing like that, it's a sight to behold," Cameron said.

Animal welfare is prioritised through the implementation of Low Stress Stock Handling (LSS), with skills Cameron has gleaned from spending time with LSS leader, Jim Lindsay, and iconic horsemanship expert, Monty Roberts.

"We have the cattle in a good frame of mind when we move them into the next paddock for grazing," Cameron said.

"Having the mob psychology right means there's no rushing and they won't crash into waters or break fence tapes."

Detailed grazing charts are used to ensure Coonabar is operating at a sustainable stocking rate, a concept introduced to Murray and Wendy at their first GFP school. Almost 30 years on, it remains one of the most fundamental management tools used within their business.

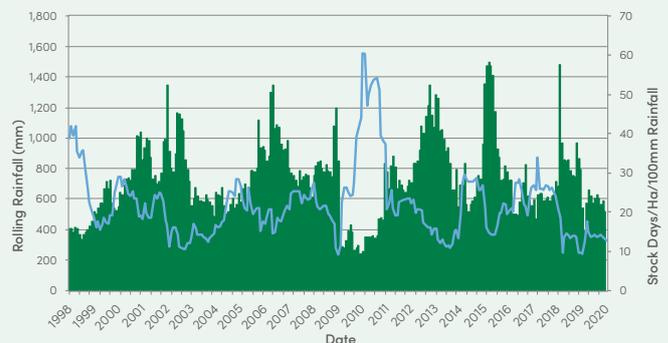
"The grazing charts keep us well informed on each paddock's productivity, and ensures we are never overstocking the land relative to the rainfall we have received," Cameron said.

Digging through the Coonabar records, production during the last three decades has almost tripled as a combined result of using grazing charts to budget feed and other regenerative practices.

Stock days per hectare per 100mm of rainfall received (SDH/100mm) is used as a unit of measurement to determine how effective a landscape is at converting rainfall into productive pasture for stock. When compared against a benchmark, it can also be used to determine if the appropriate number of cattle are being grazed for the available grass and rainfall received.

In 1999, Coonabar's stocking rate averaged 10.3 SDH/100mm, but by 2020 this figure had risen to 28.3 SDH/100mm, marking a transformational improvement despite some of the driest periods on record.

Stocking rate vs rainfall at Coonabar



CONSTANT IMPROVEMENT: *This graph highlights actual stocking rate over time, measured in Stock days per hectare per 100mm Rainfall (SDH/100mm). This unit of measurement enables graziers to determine if they are running appropriate cattle numbers (matching stocking rate to carrying capacity) based on the actual quantity of rainfall received. This methodology expects variable rainfall to occur and provides a way to manage diverse seasonal conditions.*

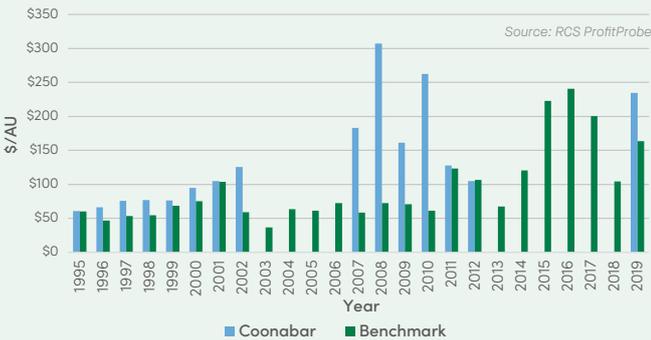
The family’s focus on the ecological health of their paddocks has propelled them to continually improve Coonabar, despite drought and dry periods.

Throughout these harsh dry spells, the Gibsons remained resolute they would not purchase feed, but rather adjust stocking rate to be in-line with the property’s carrying capacity at that point in time. In doing so, they could maintain the integrity of the soil and best position grass to bounce back when the rain did come.

“We maintained our mindset and trusted the system,” Cameron said.

“As the feed depleted, our numbers depleted, but by adhering to RCS grazing and KLR Marketing principles we still traded cattle and made a good profit.”

Gross margin per animal unit (AU) in years ProfitProbe was completed on Coonabar



CONTINUED FAITH: *The Gibson family have used ProfitProbe and on average, they have out performed other grazing businesses in the ProfitProbe benchmarking group in terms of gross margin per animal unit.*

The Gibsons held fast to the principles in 2019, when they reduced the overall stock numbers to just 129 after Coonabar received only 235mm of its 650mm average rainfall. When a decent drenching of 37mm finally arrived, it took only two weeks for paddocks to be blanketed in feed.

Murray said application of RCS’ regenerative grazing principles ingrained a level of resilience and stability into their cattle business and helped shield them from the perils of market trends and seasonal conditions.

“We’re insulated from fluctuations to a large degree,” Murray said.

“We haven’t had an unprofitable year since we started and we know we can get through anything, be that a dry period or downturn in the industry.”



Business

Coonabar's management toolkit is further strengthened by the KLR Marketing system which offers strategies to minimise overall risk and increase cash flow when trading livestock.

The system has underwritten their trading business since June 2007, when the family started culling stock based on weight, as opposed to fertility.

Cameron said KLR was a 'no-nonsense' approach to trading.

"It's as straightforward as a spreadsheet where we enter our input costs, cattle weights and the purchase details of the sale before we decide to take action. From that, an answer is generated indicating if that trade is worthwhile or not," he said.

"There's absolutely no emotion associated with this process, we enter honest figures and receive an honest answer."

This means the Gibsons buy and sell a wide variety of stock, from cows and calves to bulls and steers, which are sold into the most profitable market, be that a feedlot, processor to another producer.

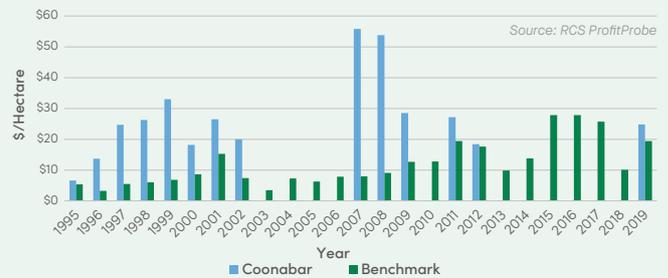
To ensure the accuracy of figures, the family weigh cattle every six to eight weeks using a digital system which tracks weight gains through the animal's electronic ear tag. On average 25,000 head walk across the scales each year.

To track the economic performance of the business, the Gibsons have periodically undertaken financial analysis using the RCS benchmarking tool ProfitProbe™ which has given them important oversight into the key drivers of profitability.

The Gibsons' operation model is based on trading cattle.



Earnings before interest and tax per hectare in years ProfitProbe was completed on Coonabar



STRONG PERFORMER: RCS's ProfitProbe™ benchmarking system examines the Earnings Before Interest and Tax (EBIT), which is a thorough measurement of a business's profitability. The graph demonstrates Coonabar has consistently outperformed comparable operations.

ProfitProbe is a suite of analytic tools that thoroughly examines every facet of a business and uses industry data to benchmark an enterprise's earnings against comparable operations.

Within ProfitProbe, Earnings Before Interest and Tax (EBIT) is used as a key indicator of performance and has allowed the Gibson's to break down their economic productivity on a per hectare basis.

According to Coonabar's EBIT figures, the business has continually outperformed the benchmarking average.

Cameron said it was heartening to know Coonabar was ahead of the industry curve, however the main driver in his use of ProfitProbe was its ability to provide a robust and thorough snapshot of the enterprise for strategic planning.

"There's always room to improve, and ProfitProbe gives the clear insight into any areas needing that betterment and has indicated where there are opportunities for further expansion," he said.

"Again, this comes down to honesty and being honest with yourself on where the business is heading."

In 2006, findings from ProfitProbe spearheaded the business's transition away from breeding and backgrounding.

"You can clearly see the change in the business during 2007, this is when we stopped breeding and fattening and became traders. The figures are chalk and cheese."



Land

When they reflect on their time at Coonabar, the transformation of the landscape is not lost on the Gibson family. Cameron said it's not just production, but the entire ecosystem, that has benefited from regenerative grazing.

"The birds we have around here are just incredible. If you stop your motorbike or turn the vehicle off anywhere on the property all you can hear is birds chirping," he said.

In fact, the thriving wildlife habitat at Coonabar has piqued the interest of the Capricornia branch of BirdLife Australia. The group conducted a two-day study of the property and have since verified there are 110 species of birds.

This healthy landscape is synonymous with a productive landscape and the Gibsons have also increased ground cover and grass varieties right across the property.

Data from the Queensland Government's Department of Environment and Science (DES) *The Long Paddock* report for July 2020, shows Coonabar has never been in better shape, with 97.4% of the property recording ground coverage of 70% or higher.

This is a significant increase over time given between 1990 and 2016 more than 73% of the property had ground coverage of between 50-70%.

However, regenerative agriculture offers more opportunities than just greater production and a healthier ecosystem.

The increased carbon sequestration potential presented by greater groundcover, and reduced run off and erosion, means the Gibsons are now approached about carbon farming.

While there is no doubt regenerative practices have made Coonabar carbon-rich, the storage of this carbon predates the emergence of the current schemes available for landholders to participate in, thus making it ineligible to be sold as carbon credits.

"If we had bought Coonabar today, carbon farming could have been a part of this business. Carbon farming works hand-in-hand with regenerative farming, and it means you can create an additional income stream from implementing practices which are already good for the land and profitability," Cameron said.

Coonabar does, however, have 40-50m wide strips of regrowth from the initial clearing in the 1990s. These are spread across the property, nestled between native species of Brigalow, Box and Eucalypt trees which not only hold great ecological value to the grazing business, but also have the potential to be monetised through biodiversity offset programs.

"People have heard about our carbon success here at Coonabar and I have received phone calls from businesses wanting to explore if there are different methods in capturing what we have, be that the vintage carbon we store, or for myself to share our methods so others can implement them on their own properties," Cameron said.

People

Perhaps one of the most powerful results delivered by working with RCS and regenerative grazing is stronger human relationships, with clearer roles and responsibilities creating stronger lines of communication.

"Our daughter-in-law says we work quietly, efficiently and independently," Wendy said.

"When we get to the yards, there's no need for giving orders to each other, we all go our own directions because each of us know exactly what the other is doing.

"It's rewarding to know how well we work together. There is certainly no yelling or shouting."

Their solid family relationships are built on working towards a common goal and being on the same page with cattle and property management, which has given Cameron and Kristy peace of mind that when the family does embark on succession planning it will be a smooth transition.

Creating a profitable enterprise has also supported the lifestyle of both generations, including allowing for off-farm investments to give Murray and Wendy security for their future retirement.

"When Murray and Wendy want to leave Coonabar, they can, but they are content being here, just as we are to have them here," Kristy said.

"Collectively, we have been running the business to make a good profit, but also to ensure there is a good lifestyle for all of us. When succession planning occurs, our next focus will be on further developing our back country, as we believe there is more potential, and more productivity, to be gained."

Reflecting back on the RCS journey, Wendy said she was so grateful she listened to the advice of a friend who encouraged her and Murray to attend their first RCS workshop back in the early 1990s.

"We said we couldn't afford to do it, but they said we couldn't afford not to do it, and they were completely right," she said.



Soil

Prioritising soil and vegetative health helps to ensure reduced runoff and that an operation’s most basic, yet vital asset – its soil - is not washed away. This is critical to improving the quality of the water that flows into the surrounding waterways.

Project Pioneer participants were taught to monitor soil health to gain a line of sight over what lies beneath the ground’s surface by paying close attention to the behaviour of vegetation and measuring water quality.

Important factors in improving soil health include providing sufficient rest from grazing and developing robust root systems. These factors are at the heart of regenerative agriculture management.

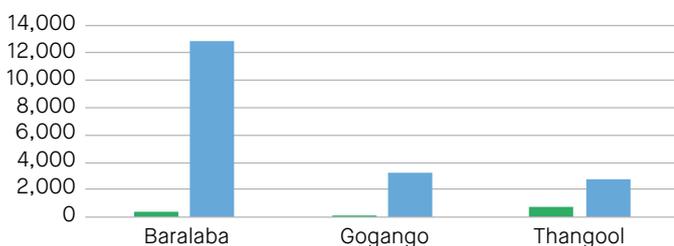
A key measurement of soil health is water quality. This graph demonstrates the water quality in waterways on Project Pioneer participants’ properties compared to those who are not practicing regenerative management.



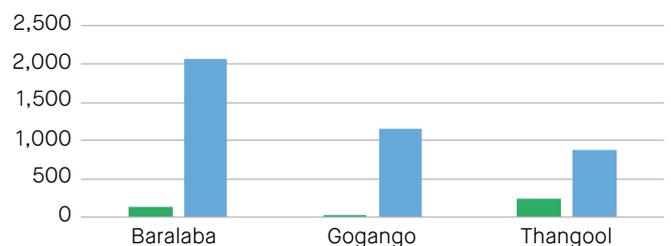
Rainfall run-off from a property managed under regenerative grazing principles (left) compared that from a neighbouring property that is not managed using regenerative principles.

Water quality graph from the 2019-2020 Project Pioneer water quality surveys

Total suspended solids (mg/L)



Turbidity (NTU)



● Regenerative ● Other

Initial overland flow results for the 2019-2020 water quality surveys. These measurements were taken on three Project Pioneer properties in the Fitzroy catchment. The regeneratively managed properties have implemented RCS principles such as those adopted through Project Pioneer, while the other properties have not.



Andrew & Tali Brownlie

Lochmead, Emerald



Property name: Lochmead

Location: Emerald,
Central Queensland

Size: 1,300ha

Operation: Trade beef cattle

Image courtesy of Fitzroy Basin Association.

Skills honed through Project Pioneer have helped the Brownlie family reinvent their Central Queensland grazing operation into a thriving branded-beef venture.

An ambitious goal set during Project Pioneer has seen the Brownlies take Andalia Pastoral from a simple breeding operation to a diversified and innovative business backgrounding cattle and selling grassfed beef direct to customers in Central Queensland.

To capture the burgeoning demand for local beef, Andrew and Tali Brownlie grow out premium mixed breed heifers to 450kg across their agisted 1,300ha portion of 'Lochmead', on the outskirts of Emerald. These cattle are processed at a local abattoir and packed into convenient 28kg and 56kg boxes.

"We started the beef business mainly because we wanted to eat grassfed beef ourselves and couldn't find it locally, so we knew there would be demand," Tali said.

"Our customers are people who mostly live in towns, and they are drawn to our beef not just because it's grassfed, but also because they know we're local graziers producing beef under regenerative and sustainable practices."

The current customer base for Andalia Pastoral's branded range can be found in Emerald, Springsure, Blackwater, Clermont, Rockhampton and Yeppoon.

To spearhead this new venture, the family made the bold choice for Andrew to leave his off-farm job working in the mining-support industry. The couple said this was a step inspired by Project Pioneer and their subsequent involvement with RCS' ExecutiveLink™ program, including creation of a peer-led board to provide producers with robust and objective strategic advice.

Image courtesy
of Fitzroy Basin
Association.



“It was during ExecutiveLink the board said I needed to set a date for when I was going to leave my off-farm job,” Andrew said.

“This was a huge goal we had been working towards for some time, so without knowing the future we set the date for 30 June 2021.

“The accountability put on us by the board was pivotal in how this next phase came about, and we took the leap of faith to start our beef business in May 2021 – so we beat the date we set during ExecutiveLink by two months.”

However, the bedrock of their beef business is, and will always be, their land. Despite enduring prolonged periods of drought their country has undergone immense environmental and pasture improvements through the regenerative grazing practices learnt and adopted through Project Pioneer.

Regenerative foundation

Andrew and Tali, alongside their children Ella, Nixon Maclay and Sierra, run Andalia Pastoral across their portion of Lochmead, while the remaining 900 ha is farmed by Tali’s parents in a separate business.

Before starting Project Pioneer in 2017, the Brownlie’s operation consisted of 220 Droughtmaster-cross breeders, plus progeny, run across 16 paddocks and turned off as feeder steers and heifers.

Today there is a striking difference, with all cattle grazed in a rotational system across 58 paddocks which are connected by a strategic watering network.

Rotations are carefully monitored through the MaiaGrazing app, which Andrew said was vital in ensuring their paddocks are grazed at an appropriate level – ensuring maximum productivity while simultaneously protecting their pastures from overgrazing.

“The app helps us know how many stock days per hectare of feed is available in each paddock, and provides a snapshot of the whole operation,” Andrew said.

“It allows us to monitor grasses, know what the cattle have taken out of the paddock and forecast how many more stock days we’ve got left before we should start selling down to protect the land.

The graphs and planning tools on MaiaGrazing are great at forecasting what the season ahead will look like with the ability to look at as many scenarios as you wish.”

Andrew said the rotational system has allowed the Brownlies to build resilience into their land and business.



“What we have learnt is we can work with nature, or we can work against it,” Andrew said.

“It will always be more profitable, and create more resilience in the environment, if we work with this awesome ecosystem around us.”

Pasture quantity and quality

Ensuring the land has adequate rest combined with creating more paddocks to encourage cattle to make full use of the property, has paved the way for vast environmental improvements.

The property is made up of black soil, with some red sandy ridges, and has seen an increase in the pasture quantity and quality.

“We’ve got a mix of native and introduced species – there is some pretty heavy buffel country, right through to speargrass, Mitchell and blue grasses.

“During Project Pioneer, the more desirable grasses have increased and the undesirables have decreased, which in turn will improve the quality of the pasture and also the ground cover.”

Tali noted the increasing ground cover, which is vital to creating a healthy soil base and reducing sediment run-off to the Reef, had occurred despite the ongoing drought which started in 2018.

“We’ve been through the driest period my family has ever seen in the 70 years we’ve been here,” she said.



Image courtesy of Fitzroy Basin Association.

“My dad came out to have a look at the place during that time, and he commented there was more ground cover on our place than he had ever seen. So, we knew we were still positively influencing our country even though it was the driest season we have had.”

“That was truly amazing. It’s incredible to think we have seen positive trends since starting Project Pioneer.”

Renewed focus

A core focus of RCS training is human relationships within grazing businesses, and Andrew and Tali look back on Project Pioneer as having a positive impact on their family dynamics.

“Before Andrew left his off-farm job, our 11-year-old son said he thought we were burning the candle at three ends,” Tali said.

“Being able to focus purely on our cattle business has changed everything for us.”

Andrew agreed, and said he’s enjoying spending more time with his children and driving the new beef venture.

“It feels like a huge relief, I’m still floating on cloud nine,” he said.

“We knew we couldn’t do our meat business while I still had my fulltime job. Given the dry, we don’t yet have the backgrounding business humming along to a certain level where we fully replaced my wage, but we have complete faith in our decision.”

On a personal level, the couple also credit their training to empowering them to pursue their

passions, which for Andrew also includes a venture in the bee industry.

Alongside cattle, Andalia Pastoral is now selling going hives and honey, which aligns with their overarching goals of improving the natural ecosystem.

“There’s strong demand for going hives, and we know this is a step which is working to create more pollinators in our region,” he said.

“Bees are an incredible little critter and play a huge role in creating a healthy ecosystem.”

The bigger picture

While Lochmead is more than 300km from the coast, Andrew and Tali are ever-mindful their on-farm management has an impact on downstream ecology given the creek network across Lochmead runs into the Fitzroy River and, ultimately, the Great Barrier Reef.

“If you’re improving the ecology locally, it’s going to have an impact on surrounding areas,” Andrew said.

“By increasing ground cover and species of desirable grasses, there is less erosion meaning there is also less impact downstream.”



“Our environment is so amazingly complex, but through this process I’ve been able to begin to see what impact we do have. I think that’s a good thing for other producers to look at and consider as well.”

Trish & Barry Christie

Meet the
pioneers

Property names: Wavily and Woodlea

Location: Burrandowan and Cooranga North, South Burnett

Size: 2,500ha

Operation: Beef breeding and backgrounding

Trish and Barry Christie manage two properties in the Burrandowan and Cooranga North districts in the South Burnett. As a multi-generational business, they run a commercial beef breeding and backgrounding operation over almost 2,500ha across their properties "Wavily" and "Woodlea".

Through Project Pioneer, Trish and Barry identified the areas of their business which were in need of improvement and proactively addressed their land management problems.

"We weren't concentrating on land condition or soil health," Trish said.

"We had a profitable business with healthy cattle, but Project Pioneer turned around the entire focus of our business. We now have a clearer focus on land and soil condition, as well as the other elements of our operation."

Barry said while it would take years to reap the full benefits of the regenerative practices implemented through the Project, they know already there had been positive change.

"Land condition and pasture quality and diversity are a big part of every decision we make. We're constantly monitoring the progress in the paddock and now always have a shovel with us to take a better look at what's happening in our soils. We never would have done that before," he said.

"Previously we grew single species pastures, but moving forward we will plant a multi species pasture under irrigation over rested country to improve soil health."

Digging deep to work with nature

Kerrie Sagnol, RCS Soil Health and Carbon Advisor, was inspired to transform grazing businesses and safeguard the Great Barrier Reef through soil health.

Kerrie Sagnol grew up in a small farming community in south-west Victoria, but it wasn't until she began working for RCS that she discovered her life passion, soil biology.

"I was out on a two-week road trip visiting some client properties with RCS' Terry McCosker and Dr David Johnson, a molecular biologist from the US, who was well known for his research in soil biology and production systems," Kerrie said.

"It just made so much sense. Putting soil biology into the picture with how it helps production and health of the system was the missing piece for me. I thought, 'this is how we start working with nature instead of battling against her and manhandling her'. We can end up with better profitability and environmental results this way."

Since starting with RCS in 2017, Kerrie has concentrated on north-east Australia, where she has witnessed many producers experience the rollercoaster of ongoing drought conditions, floods and bushfires.

"One of the positives I've seen come out of the drought is how producers have implemented the principles that we teach through the RCS schools and training, and as a result their businesses have been much more resilient. They're focusing on what they can manage and less on what they can't," she said.

"These landholders understand the tools they have at their disposal, which help them make decisions based on when they should be offloading cattle and getting a jump on the market. We're also very aware of how drought is impacting their landscapes and helping them manage it to become 'rain ready'."

One of the key focuses of Project Pioneer is giving producers in the Great Barrier Reef catchments the skills to understand the impact they have on their soils and outlying environments, and how to improve it in a profitable way for their businesses.



"As the saying goes, there's no point being green if you're in the red," Kerrie said.

"If we can show people ways of being profitably regenerative and the neighbours can look over the fence and see that happening, it's a snowball effect. It's about giving them the tools to be able to go and do it themselves."

Kerrie is committed to helping producers regenerate their environment, and is determined to be the role model for female agriculturalists that she never had.

"Growing up, I never considered agriculture as a serious career path for girls, and I guess that's because the examples were few and far between," she said.

"Now I really want to demonstrate to women that careers in agriculture are as smart as they are diverse."

Regenerative agriculture pioneers



Garlone Moulin and Jamie Gordon at Mt Pleasant.

Property name: Mt Pleasant
Location: Collinsville, Queensland
Size: 13,800ha
Operation: Breeding and trading beef cattle

The Mt Pleasant story

The regenerative journey

Seeing their pastures slowly deplete and recognising the need to reposition their business as a more profitable entity drove a deep-seeded shift of mindset for the Gordon family and how they managed their 13,800ha property 'Mt Pleasant', about 35km north-east of Collinsville.

Since 1917, the Gordon family has called the red goldfields country of Mt Pleasant, which is made up of a mix of low to moderate fertility soils, home.

When third-generation producer, Jamie Gordon, along with his wife Garlone Moulin, his sister Joan and her partner Bill Jardine, bought the property from their parents in 1995 the land was looking far from abundant.

"We'd just been through a very dry period, in fact the cumulative rainfall total from March 1991 to December 1996 was in the lowest 20% for any similar period on record," Jamie said.

"We realised the strategies we had used to get through a dry period before weren't working for us anymore. The landscape was very beat up, and by the time we eventually received rain, we noticed the response wasn't as good as it should have been."

Jamie could vividly remember the property having a thick, heavy and luxuriant pasture base when he was a child, and even though numbers across the property's 12 paddocks had been slashed and rain had fallen, he couldn't replicate the results needed.

"All that came back was a monoculture of Indian couch," he said.

Matching this frustration was the financial burden that came with buying Mt Pleasant, which eventually drove the family to a significant crossroad.

"At this time, we recognised that in order to continue, we needed to change," he said.

The change came in 2000 when Jamie and Garlone attended RCS launch-pad regenerative farming course, Grazing for Profit™ (GFP), which armed them with new tools to restore their landscape.

"We realised during the course that our missing piece was rest and that we needed to get more of it into our country," Jamie said.

"Nowadays, the word used more often for this type of grazing is 'regenerative' — and that's just it. Plants need to 'regenerate' and you simply cannot graze them continuously."

Changing paradigms

The GFP course spearheaded the Gordons into a regenerative grazing journey over the next 20 years, where they worked closely alongside RCS. This included repeating the GFP course and graduating from Next Steps and ExecutiveLink™, to more sharply focus both their business and grazing management.

The culmination of this training, and Jamie and Garlone's dedication, has positioned Mt Pleasant as a productive regenerative exemplar, which sets the foundation for a profitable breeding and trading operation.

Today, the property is carved into 90 paddocks using a mix of three-barbed and mostly single-wire electric fencing, with plans underway to establish more paddocks.

A 6,500ha portion of the block is cut into 64 paddocks and is home to Mt Pleasant's weaner and trading herd which, depending on the season, can comprise up to 1,800 head. Stock in this mob are shifted between every one and three days, depending on the season and are backgrounded or finished to meet the most profitable market, be that a feedlot, live-export or processor.

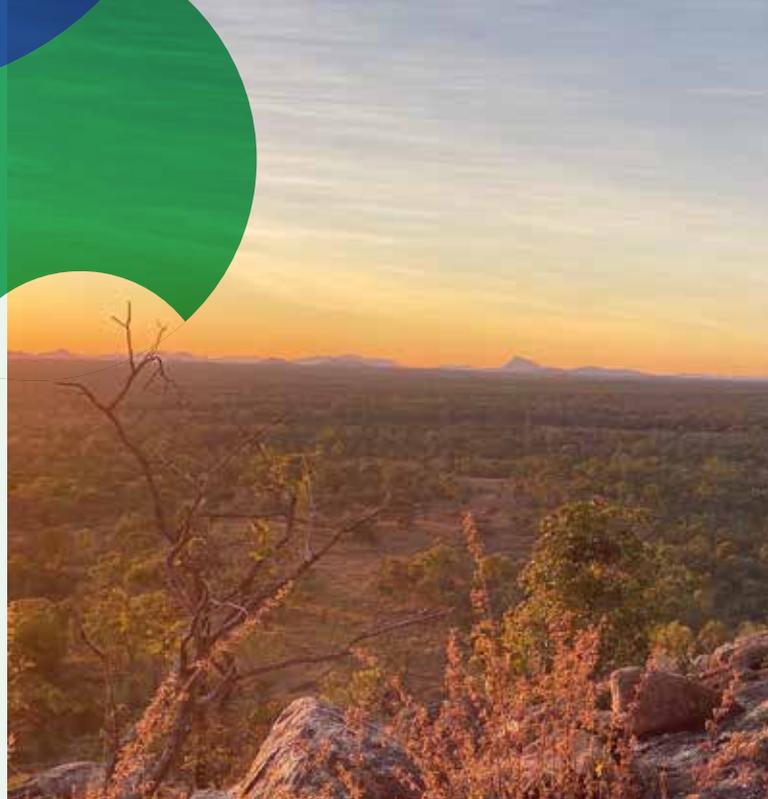
The remaining land, which has 26 paddocks, runs the family's breeding herd. This fluctuates between 800 and 1,000 head and is run on a separate grazing program. The size of the paddocks on this side of the property varies so cattle can be shifted every three days and up to every few weeks.

The bulk of the now thriving system's infrastructure was established not long after the family attended the first GFP course, which prompted them to think outside the box and agist some of their land to a client, creating an additional revenue stream and freeing up their time.

They worked with a hydrologist to design a comprehensive watering network which connects 150,000 litre storage tanks that gravity feed through a network of 63mm and 90mm pipes to a series of troughs, ensuring cattle can graze across the full area of their usable land.



"Shifting our cattle really made the difference, and by the end of the 2000s we had reached a tipping point, and a range of new grass species just took off," Jamie said.



Quality in the pasture quantity

The increased biodiversity began with native black spear grass, forest bluegrass and golden beard, creeping into areas which used to be blanketed by Indian couch. From there, a range of productive stylos began to emerge, which increased the quality of the pasture's feed mix.

"It had been our goal to add volume," Jamie said.

"We wanted quantity and quality and we really started to achieve that through better management of our grazing."

Garlone noted the biodiversity across Mt Pleasant had stretched well past grasses and now extends to palatable trees and shrubs, most noticeably a lot of soft-wood species such as beefwood, bottle tree, corkwood, which have all helped increase overall ground cover. Critically, this allows moisture to soak deeper into the ground and improves the health of their soils.

"We have found the grasses and plants coming through are different every year," she said.

"After every flush of rainfall we are surprised to see what pops up, or comes back stronger. And with this, we have also observed many species of birds, mammals and reptiles return to the landscape, which is a clear sign of improved ecological health."

Jamie said the transformation of their land reached a pivotal milestone in 2015 when the nutrient levels of their pastures had improved so much there was no longer the need to add urea lick to their stock's nutrition.



“That would have been the first time in about 40 years we hadn’t supplement fed urea,” Jamie said.

“We realised we were getting enough protein from the stylos, which was enough to carry us through the full year.”

However, Jamie noted their productivity achievement of not having to feed out urea, was also influenced by their breed of choice, Nguni cattle.

“The Nguni can recycle the ammonia in their blood system more effectively than normal cattle, this comes from thousands of years of living off straws and sticks, which means they have access to nitrogen other cattle can’t access - so that’s become our urea source,” he said.

The family introduced the highly-fertile African, *Bos Taurus* breed composite, after Jamie witnessed their productivity in action during a trip to South Africa in 2010.

His travels were timed during a period where the family was weighing up if *Bos Indicus* bloodlines, which are prevalent in their grazing district, were best suited to their goals.

“There are a lot of hidden expenses in running a low-performance breeding herd in the North,” Jamie said.

“So I didn’t want to carry on with breeding unless I knew we had a really functional herd. When I saw the Nguni cattle, they were running on tough country in an even tougher climate. Basically, they are a *Bos Taurus* which can survive really harsh conditions.”

Thinking back

Reflecting on their holistic training through RCS and their two decade-long regenerative journey, Garlone said one of their biggest achievements was building resilience and sustainability into their land and business.

“The health of our land has increased our profitability as we have been able to lower our cost of production. With the improvements to the environment, droughts have become much milder,” she said.

“Thinking back, all of this has combined to create a real change in the mental and emotional place we are in. When we first bought the business we were in survival mode, short-term focussed and had very little hope for the future. Today, we are now excited by how far we have come and how much more we can achieve.



“It’s all been a journey of discovery, and looking ahead, I think our goals will keep evolving too. Our main focus hasn’t changed and all we want is to make our land, people and cattle as abundant as they can be.”

Jamie and Garlone run Nguni cattle.



Bristow & Ureisha Hughes

Strathalbyn Station, Bowen



Bristow & Ureisha Hughes with their young children.

Property name: Strathalbyn

Location: near Bowen, Burdekin region

Size: 33,200ha

Operation: Wagyu, Brahman and Red Poll breeders

Production gains and Reef benefits go hand-in-hand for this young North Queensland couple.

Improving the condition of grazing land has been at the heart of an ambitious five-year plan of a young, focused Queensland couple. Along the way, they are transforming the management and culture of a sweeping 33,200ha beef cattle operation.

Bristow and Ureisha Hughes manage 'Strathalbyn Station' near Bowen. They graze around 6,500 head of breeding stock with Wagyu, Brahman and Red Poll genetics. The cattle are a major regenerative tool across a mix of soil types and diversity of grasses and legumes.

Strathalbyn Station acts almost as a reef catchment of its own, with Bonnie Doon and King Creeks running through the property, along with 28km of winding Burdekin River frontage, all bordered by mountain ranges.

The station makes up part of a broader grazing operation 'Wentworth Cattle Co', in conjunction with three other properties across Central Queensland owned by Bristow's parents.

Management reimagined

Bristow and Ureisha, along with their two small children, brought their eagerness to learn and a willingness to question traditional on-farm practices when they started managing Strathalbyn Station. Bristow's parents had successfully worked with RCS for 25 years, and in 2016 Bristow and Ureisha signed on to Project Pioneer to further value add these strong foundations.

The new approach built on strategic watering point placement which had been underway since 2004, while a new fencing regime provided the missing



Improving the condition of the land is at the core of the Hughes' five-year plan.

ingredient needed to transform land utilisation and grazing.

“The big turning point for us was putting together a five-year plan allowing us to implement large-scale development strategies that have completely changed the way we graze, the type of animals we graze – it’s a whole new way of looking at things,” Bristow said.

These far-reaching changes included constructing 150km of fencelines, laying 90km of 75mm, 90mm and 110mm pipe, and installing 60 troughs and 25 tanks to create a super-charged network of watering points. The core benefits of this development has been reduced grazing ‘hot spots’ and more even distribution of grazing pressure.

“There was so much under-utilisation of parts of the property before and over-use in other areas, so we’ve basically been able to even out how we use the country, and this has allowed us to better care for the topsoil and the animals,” Bristow said.

Fast-tracking on-farm development has also been propelled by adjusting the breed composition of the herd, high demand for Wagyu beef, good seasonal conditions up until 2017, and a strong cattle market.

“Our progress has also benefited from us using all resources available, including working closely with scientists and accessing external grants to build our knowledge and access benchmarking information. This has helped to facilitate evidence-based decision making,” Bristow said.



“It’s critical that as graziers we work together with all stakeholders, and take a holistic approach to everything we do.

“In doing this, we’ve also been able to protect the Great Barrier Reef. I think in the past, agriculture has been given a bad rap for its impact on the environment, but this shows we are closing the gap on that perception through these results.”

New mindset drives results

The impact of the changes on Strathalbyn has also shown environmental outcomes need not come at the expense of business objectives. Only two years into the five-year implementation plan, production has increased by more than a quarter, with significantly greater gains ahead as the property transformation continues.

"In the past two years we've gone from branding 3,500 calves to branding 4,300 calves and, despite significantly lower rainfall, have increased the carrying capacity of the property by 1,500 head per year," Bristow said.

"At the same time, we're having a positive impact on the Reef by boosting the ground cover of the whole property. This has been achieved by increasing the number of paddocks and water points to allow us to better utilise some areas while resting others.

"Greater ground cover has also allowed us to heal small gullies and reduce run-off dramatically, and we have significantly less sediment leaving the property which is very rewarding."

In only the early stages of the overarching strategy, the Hughes say there is no foreseeable cap on the gains that can be made to both production and environmental outcomes.

"In terms of the long-term benefits, I just don't know where the ceiling is, but I can't see there ever being a point where you stop looking for more ways to improve – it's been a complete change of mindset," Bristow said.

"We're also now more resilient in the dry times and make better use of what we have in the good seasons, so we're able to better look after our land."

This change of mindset is evident across the entire business, and it's reflected in all measures of performance.

"We have better financial literacy, a better understanding of how a business should be operated, better land, grass and animal management, an increase in branding rates and breeder retention through increased conception rates, and better use of nutritional insights," Bristow said.

"We're growing more grass and retaining ground cover, and for us that means making more money.

"The better we can look after our land the better it will look after us."

A human story

One of the surprising off-shoots of Project Pioneer, and working with RCS, has been the growth of staff capacity and their personal connection to the business as progress has unfolded before them. A clear plan has allowed employees and contractors to feel part of the process, and allowed them to celebrate in the positive changes and results.



"Our new management plan has really given people something to look forward to, and everyone feels a sense of accomplishment when we meet an end goal," Bristow said.

"I believe we're definitely achieving more buy-in from employees, they're excited to see how the land and animals have improved through the hard work they have contributed to the infrastructure improvements."

A bright future

As Bristow reflects on the fast-paced changes achieved over the past three years, he can only see further ambitious development targets being hit over the next five, by tapping into the key themes of managing and balancing grazing pressure, and increasing water efficiency.

"Three years ago, we had 14 main paddocks and four holding paddocks – now we have 49," he said.

"Over the next five years I would expect to at least double that and, as a result, increase carrying capacity by 1,500 head through better grazing management and land utilisation.



"Our personal long-term plan is to have 50,000 head by the time I am 50, so that obviously includes expansion beyond Strathalbyn. Our strategy to achieve this is to invest in places that are under-developed and under-utilised, and to implement our learnings and hands-on experience there to help the country realise its full potential."

Proud to play a part

RCS Project Officer George Stacey has had the honor of improving grazing businesses while protecting the Reef.

RCS Project Officer, George Stacey, looks back on Project Pioneer with a sense of great pride.

George hasn't just guided other producers towards regenerative management - he has experienced first-hand the success of RCS practices in action through watching his parents implement holistic management on 'Ranmoor', a 18,210 ha property outside of Richmond in North West Queensland.

He said he is honoured to be helping not only multiple producers, but the cattle industry at large through the Project.

"All the work of RCS, which simultaneously helps farming businesses become more profitable while creating ecological benefits, is worthwhile but there is something remarkable about also supporting The Great Barrier Reef," George said.

"The Reef is an absolute wonder of the world, and I feel it's a part of our Australian identity so we should be doing all we can to protect it."

"For RCS, our primary business is to assist farmers and graziers to run the best business they possibly can, and by doing that, there is always an improved ecological outcome."

George said Project Pioneer also worked on a broader scale by encouraging producers to consider the flow-on impacts farming practices had on the environment.

"There is no silver bullet a producer can apply to ensure they are protecting the Reef - there never are with complex ecosystems like this," George said.

"But, I do think it's important for anyone working in agriculture to think about the impact their farming practices are having on the world around them."



George reflected that, in his experience working with RCS, the most difficult change producers need to make is actually a shift in thinking, not physical changes to their farming practices.



"Before you can make any change in the paddock, you need to change what's happening between your ears. It was extremely rewarding to watch graziers make the paradigm shift over the course of the Project for the benefit of their business and the Great Barrier Reef."

Meet the
pioneers

Adam & Jacynta Coffey

Boreelum Station, Miriam Vale



Miriam Vale

Property name: Boreelum Station

Location: Miriam Vale,
Central Queensland

Size: 2,500ha

Operation: 1,000 head of cattle

QLD

Adam and Jacynta Coffey with their young children.

Seeing the timber for the trees: how Adam and Jacyntha Coffey transformed a failed timber plantation into a future-focused regenerative grazing enterprise.

When Adam and Jacyntha Coffey arrived at 'Boreelum Station' near Miriam Vale in Central Queensland in 2016, there was a feeling of darkness that hovered low over the failed and long-forgotten hardwood timber plantation.

For almost a decade, trees had been left to grow rampant across 400ha of the property's 2,500ha. They built a heavy treetop canopy that had choked out grass but nurtured an assortment of menacing woody weeds. The cool flow of natural springs, once abundant throughout Boreelum's rolling hills, had dried away.

But the Coffey's saw something in it.

Yes, the property was overgrown, lacked fencing and core infrastructure, and came with a dilapidated 'renovator's delight' barely upright on its stumps. But it was good soil, in a high-rainfall area and after a long and, at times, turbulent search for a place to call their own it held the promise of the regenerative beef operation they had long dreamed of. That search had included a deal on a property in Western Queensland that fell through at the eleventh hour.



"So, Adam got in the car and drove 9,000km in six days to find something because this was our dream and this was what we wanted, so it was a matter of now or never," Jacyntha said.

"He looked at a number of properties we thought we could afford, and this one fit the bill – we got there in the end."

An unconventional journey

Like the property itself, the Coffeys' journey to Boreelum was far from conventional. Originally from Tasmania, neither Adam nor Jacyntha came from farming families but had always known agriculture was their future. Jacyntha, who studied commerce, worked as an auditor in Hobart while Adam

completed studies in agriculture at Marcus Oldham College, before they set out on a tour of Australia in search of station management work to gain valuable experience. An expedition which included a number of years in the Kimberley and Northern Territory. During this time, not only did they hone their pastoral skills, but also ran cattle on agistment to build a breeding herd.

When the Coffeys took ownership of Boreelum, the decisions they faced, such as how the property could best be developed, were large and foundational in nature. It was a blank slate and, while a lot of work, a chance for Adam and Jacyntha to put in place practices they felt would not only grow their beef enterprise but also prioritise their natural capital for the long-term health of the ecosystem and their business.

A timely introduction

It was also at this time they became aware of Project Pioneer. Adam and Jacyntha had previously been exposed to the work of RCS, which delivers the program to producers across Queensland, but now was the time for them to integrate regenerative principles into their own agribusiness from the ground up.

"We saw the Project Pioneer opportunity come up and it was at the perfect time as the knowledge we gained really changed the way we approached development of the block and what we've done," Adam said.

"We had used rotational grazing in the Northern Territory before and we knew the value of it, but what has been great is that we've been able to come into our own place to start fresh and hit the ground running by doing it right the first time."



Environment and production hand-in-hand

Whilst still only a little over three years into the Boreelum story, development has been achieved at a much more rapid than anticipated pace. The old timber plantation is now gone, removed with protection of native vegetation and topsoil health front of mind, while strategic fencing and water placement has grown the number of paddocks from eight to 23 to facilitate rotational grazing, and pasture rest. Without the choking effect of heavy, introduced timber the flow of natural springs has also returned.



“Environmental sustainability and profitability, to us, go hand-in-hand, so we don’t really see them as two different things,” Adam said.

“If we’re not doing the right thing we’re not going to be very profitable and not going to be here very long – it’s as simple as that.”

Testament to the strength of the holistic development plans put in place has been that the Coffeys have transformed Boreelum amidst the challenges of seemingly relentless severe climatic conditions. Only 12 months after they arrived came a cyclone, followed by another rain event which dumped 620mm of flooding rains in three days. Shortly after, the weather about-faced to one of the worst droughts in recorded history.

“In terms of season, we’ve had cyclones and extreme floods, we’ve had extreme dry and this has been coupled with the fact we’ve been developing,

so it has been difficult to get a yardstick across everything as we’ve not yet had a normal year,” Adam said.

“But we’ve absolutely seen a lot of gain in terms of the grass we have grown, and that’s been through the regenerative management practices we have put in place.

“Even at this stage, and in one of the toughest seasons on record for this area, we’re okay – we’ve a good body of feed and we’re not just sitting waiting for the rain.”

More than on-farm results

RCS and Project Pioneer have not only provided the Coffeys with on-farm management support, they’ve also contributed significantly to Adam and Jacynta’s personal and professional growth, particularly through the strength of the relationships they’ve fostered with other producers.

“One of the most surprising things to come out of this has been the power of sharing financial information with their businesses, and the financial and personal learnings that have come from that,” Adam said.

“Additionally, the on-farm consulting we’ve received through the Project has included a professional coming onto our place and really having a look at our practices and what we’re doing right and what we’re doing wrong.”

For Jacynta, the network of support she now has access to has been life-changing.



“I think personally, for me, the Project helped me a lot with confidence because I have knowledge to back up what we are doing,” she said.

“I also think it’s forced us to actually write down our goals, reinforce what we want and then make us accountable for what we want to achieve in our growth.

“And in the long-term we want to improve as much land as we can.”





Karen Smoothy

Tipperary, Theodore

A chemical-free solution for tick and weed control set Central Queensland producer Karen Smoothy on her regenerative agriculture path.



Property name: Tipperary

Location: Theodore, Central Queensland

Size: 1,800ha

Operation: Simmental-cross breeders.

Karen Smoothy at Tipperary



When Central Queensland beef producer, Karen Smoothy tragically lost her husband, Wayne, to a toxic overload, it was the catalyst for her to drastically reduce chemical use on-property. She sought out a more sustainable approach to control weeds, significantly reduce ticks and confidently navigate drought.

“When I first found out about Project Pioneer I knew it would be beneficial to my operation, not just to the ecological system and to regenerative grazing, but to help control ticks and weeds with much less reliance on chemicals,” Karen said.

Karen joined Project Pioneer in 2019 - it was her second experience with regenerative management practices, as she attended an RCS Grazing Clinic in 2017. While Project Pioneer has since expanded her regenerative knowledge vastly, the initial insights she gained at the first RCS clinic were enough to help her work through an extremely dry period and to make key production gains across the 1,800ha Brigalow softwood property ‘Tipperary’, 18km from Theodore.

While Karen and son, Billy, started implementing regenerative practices such as rotational grazing immediately following their first experience with RCS, drought was settling in and Tipperary received little rainfall from early 2019 to early 2020, forcing the Smoothys to make some tough decisions within their breeding enterprise.

“By October 2019, we had destocked by 50%, so our herd size was down to around 300,” Karen said.

The Smoothys strategically used the dry period to sell off their late breeders, allowing them to achieve an optimal mating window of three months, and made strides towards tackling a weed problem.

“One of the added benefits of having destocked due to the drought, and resting our paddocks was, when we did get rain, the grass grew quickly. As an added result, our Parthenium problem was minimised.”

The invasive weed, Parthenium had reduced the Smoothys’ carrying capacity on Tipperary. However, since introducing regenerative management and receiving much-needed rain, its hold on the property has been significantly weakened.

“By mid-January 2020, we were rain ready and received around 340 mm over a month, which brought our pasture back to life,” Karen said.

“Normally we would have been worried Parthenium would overpower the grass, but because we hadn’t undermined the grass roots by over-grazing, the weeds weren’t able to take root.”

Now that they have achieved a healthy amount of ground cover, the Smoothys have moved into the process of rebuilding herd numbers and are currently running 430 head, with a goal to build to 800. Karen is also proud knowing the increased ground cover has reduced sediment run-off.

“We are doing our part to protect the Reef,” she said.



“Project Pioneer has given us the opportunity to learn so much. We now know how important it is to understand ecological indicators, such as soil health, biodiversity and water cycles.

“We look forward to the future, as we know we have so much more we can learn to improve Tipperary.”

Working for both sides of the fence

An unassuming star picket boundary fence west of Rockhampton stood out as a pivotal memory in a year of transformative highlights for Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF) Agricultural Extension Work Placement Program graduate, Angus Dunne.

For Angus, the scene brought together everything he had learned throughout the year: the value of data, the cumulative impact of a multitude of decisions, the power of stories. But most of all, it prompted a question Angus was yet to solve: how can we support both sides of the fence to change and benefit from improved ecological function and business profitability?

Traineeship delivering dividends

The QFF program was funded by the partnership between the Australian Government's Reef Trust and the Great Barrier Reef Foundation, and the

Queensland Government Reef Water Quality Program. In 2019, it supported 14 graduates to build their skills in businesses across Queensland that are improving farmer profitability, improving environmental outcomes, and ultimately reducing runoff to the irreplaceable treasure that is the Great Barrier Reef.

After completing a Bachelor of Ecological Agricultural Systems at Charles Sturt University, Angus was employed as a Project Officer with RCS under the QFF traineeship program and went on to stay with the organisation until the completion of Project Pioneer.



This fenceline - the location of an overland flow measurement site - starkly shows the difference in land condition between a regeneratively managed property on the left and a more conventionally managed property on the right.

Angus Dunne, far left, with the 2019 Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF) Agricultural Extension Work Placement cohort.



His selection for the traineeship gave Angus a career path and allowed him to see first-hand how ecological outcomes, financial outcomes and resilient communities are intrinsically linked.

"The program highlighted the role producers have to play in the future of the planet and our industry," Angus said. "It's an amazing program, and I'm humbled to have been a part of it."

In addition to formal training sessions during the year, Angus' main focus was to support the delivery of Project Pioneer. Since 2016, Project Pioneer helped more than 300 family grazing business throughout the Great Barrier Reef catchment increase and maintain ground cover and improve water quality entering the Reef, while fostering profitable and resilient production systems.

Angus was involved in on-ground extension activities, delivering professional guidance, mentoring and facilitation with senior advisors from RCS and partner organisations such as WWF, Central Queensland University and NRM groups.

Project Pioneer's emphasis on the systems based nature of agriculture and how everything is interlinked was a dramatic learning curve for Angus. Farm management software, satellite mapping, profit benchmarking, management accounting, monitoring points, soil tests, and matching stocking rate to carrying were just some of the skills delivered to producers in Project Pioneer.

People are the strongest link

Angus' experience has emphasised that despite producers' affinity for the land, animals or crops, the biggest driver of economically and ecologically successful farms is people.

"Not coming from a farming background, I've was surprised by how passionate and diverse the agriculture and extension industry is. The producers

and professionals I've been lucky enough to work with are grounded, open, and excited to be making a change," Angus said. "It was inspiring to be surrounded by people taking action and sharing their story.

"Working with people was a real highlight of the year. I was able to build valuable skills in communication, organisation and working collaboratively, and none of this would have been possible without the enthusiasm of the professionals I worked with from a diverse range of backgrounds who were so generous in sharing their knowledge."

While Angus was inspired to work with people, he said it's what's under their feet that he was just as excited about.

"I would love to see every Australian dig a hole and get curious about soil," Angus said. "Soil holds the wealth of our nation and is the key to our future. Soil is an area for everyone to get curious about and start discussing and sharing their stories and what they're learning."

Which brings us back to that question: How do we support both sides of the fence?



"What makes us change is a question behind a lot of extension work and was brought to the forefront with Project Pioneer. There's no single answer, but through RCS I found setting visions and goals and putting together a plan is a huge part of it. Project Pioneer did an excellent job to support the skills, confidence and networks to turn that plan into action," Angus said.

"What really drives it home is a picture like that fence line. I think Project Pioneer was a great success and I hope the wider community, funders, and other graziers in the reef catchment can see the impacts."

FUNDING PARTNER



Great Barrier Reef Foundation

Great Barrier Reef Foundation

Coral reefs need clean, clear water if they are to withstand the impacts of climate change, but every year millions of tonnes of sediment runs off land into marine ecosystems.

For the Great Barrier Reef, run-off from adjacent catchments is a major cause of declining water quality. Sediment run-off clouds water and reduces the light available to plants and corals, restricting growth and affecting marine life.

The Reef Trust Partnership between the Great Barrier Reef Foundation and the Australian Government includes \$201 million for projects aimed at improving water quality on the Reef in line with the Reef 2050 Water Quality Improvement Plan.

The Foundation selected Project Pioneer in our first round of water quality grants because of its proven methods of increasing ground cover in grazing lands and reducing fine sediment run-off onto the Reef.

Project Pioneer has successfully reduced fine sediment pollution within very high, high and moderate priority catchments. It has worked with 150 grazing businesses to improve land management practices, covering a total area of more than 1.3 million hectares. This fantastic result exceeds the targets set by the project.

RESEARCH PARTNER



Central Queensland University

Central Queensland University's (CQUni) Coastal Marine Research Ecosystems Centre contributed research in the area of measuring sediment run-off from paired properties, to compare the difference between regenerative grazing and traditional grazing methods on sediment and water quality.

SCIENCE AND PROGRAM PARTNER



WWF

WWF Australia has a strong interest in promoting and supporting sustainable beef production in Australia and has been an active partner throughout the delivery of Project Pioneer.

WWF's support began with assistance with the production of case studies and a video showcasing innovative grazing families participating in the Project.

In later years, WWF Australia and RCS Australia embarked on field surveys to quantify the impact of Project Pioneer on land condition, ground cover and water quality in Great Barrier Reef catchments. The results of our comparative surveys to date have shown how dramatic the impact of good land management can be on land condition, ground cover and the quality of storm water run-off into Great Barrier Reef catchments. The correlation of these factors to productivity and resilience is also evident.

There are many rewarding aspects for WWF as a result of its involvement in Project Pioneer. In addition to the significant contributions beef producers are making to improving the health of the Great Barrier Reef through improved water quality, Project Pioneer has been rewarding for WWF Australia in the depth and strength of relationships that have been forged.

CQUni worked with WWF and RCS in delivering this project. Trial results were provided in a detailed report. The Project aligns with CQUni's ethos of working with community and industry groups to develop practical solutions to real-world problems.

What has been the most rewarding part has been the tangible evidence obtained by the research and its potential to encourage more landholders to adopt regenerative grazing practices.

The Reef and its health is central to the communities which CQUni serves along the Queensland coast. There is clear evidence of the connection between land management and sediment loads reaching the reef catchment. CQUni is committed to working with primary producers to identify innovative solutions to improve land management without impacting productivity.

TECHNOLOGY PARTNER



MaiaGrazing

MaiaGrazing's purpose is to help farmers produce high quality food for a good return, while improving their land, through adoption of improved grazing management across the livestock industry.

We provided access to MaiaGrazing's automated grazing management decision support tool and associated support services, together with product training webinars and engagement workshops. We also undertook extensive data analysis to report on the level of engagement of participants, the degree of adoption of rotational grazing principles, and production outcomes as a result of adoption in terms of gross production and carrying capacity.

We believe that Project Pioneer is an example that leads the way in how to achieve mainstream industry adoption of improved grazing management, and we seek to use it as a template for future initiatives and to assist our customers to get the most out of the MaiaGrazing tool.

The most rewarding part of our involvement was seeing the 'light bulb moments' when participants gain insight into what improved grazing management means for them and how valuable it can be for their business.

There is an enormous shift in capacity to make confident decisions around land management when Project Pioneer participants build a relationship between the physical domain they see and interact with daily, and their grazing data within the MaiaGrazing tool.

TECHNOLOGY PARTNER



FarmMap4D

FarmMap4D partnered with Project Pioneer by offering participants access to its online mapping and property planning tools, and assisting RCS with project and sustainability reporting.

In recognition of the important role producers can play in influencing the health of the Reef, FarmMap4D collaborated with Project Pioneer to assist producers objectively analyse and report groundcover growth and to demonstrate how management decisions can impact the ecological system of their property.

For FarmMap4D, the most rewarding part of the Project has been the opportunity to work as part of an integrated program and partner with producers to achieve better ecological and business outcomes for their grazing operations.

COMMUNICATIONS PARTNER



Blue Hill PR

Blue Hill PR is deeply connected to the communities that Project Pioneer has had such a strong and positive impact on.

Its founder, Stacey Wordsworth, grew up on a cattle property in the Fitzroy Basin of Central Queensland, very similar to many of those which have been transformed through the work of the Project.

As a communication agency, Blue Hill PR combined its farming heritage and deep understanding of agribusiness with extensive experience across public relations, content creation, and strategy to tell the rich and triumphant stories of Project Pioneer participants.

Blue Hill PR's belief that a thriving agricultural industry is good for people, good for business and good for the world, strongly aligned with Project Pioneer's mission to support profitable and ecologically prosperous grazing businesses.



PROJECT Pioneer

There's more to the story. Visit: www.projectpioneer.com.au



Great Barrier
Reef Foundation



Project Pioneer is funded by the partnership between the Australian Government's Reef Trust and the Great Barrier Reef Foundation. The Project is delivered by RCS with support from WWF, MaiaGrazing, FarmMap4D, Central Queensland University and Blue Hill PR.