

JUDGING SUCCESS IN FARM FORESTRY

What is farm forestry?

Definitions of farm forestry usually emphasise the production of commercial products, evoking images of blocks or strips of pine or eucalypts. Although some landholders place a strong commercial focus on their tree plantings, in reality farm forestry in Australia aims for a diverse range of benefits.

The 18 examples presented in the next section illustrate some of the many arrangements of farm forestry that landholders have developed across Australia in order to achieve a wide range of environmental, economic and social objectives. In recognition of this diversity, we use a broad definition of farm forestry in this publication: the management of trees and shrubs integrated with agricultural systems for multiple products and benefits. This definition incorporates what some view as agroforestry, making the terms interchangeable.

For most landholders, farm forestry holds the promise of making their properties more productive and sustainable. This publication focuses on how many of the potential benefits of farm forestry have been realised. It aims to answer the following questions:

- Who wants to develop farm forestry?
- What are the benefits and costs of farm forestry for each of these interested groups?
- How can farm forestry be designed to meet the needs of the different groups involved?
- What are the essential ingredients for a successful farm forestry enterprise?

Who's interested?

Three broad groups of people are interested in farm forestry: landholders, industry~ and government. To judge the extent to which their efforts are successful requires an understanding of their broad objectives. What is it that motivates each of these groups?

- Landholders generally aim for more profitable and sustainable properties that will also contribute positively to wider community goals and catchment health;
- Industry generally aims to secure a high quality, economic and reliable supply of forest products;
- Government generally aims to balance private and public interests for regional development, reduce environmental degradation, and reduce the national trade deficit in forest products.

What are the benefits?

After listening to landholders and reading previous publications, it is clear that farm forestry offers many benefits, including:

For landholders

- Increased farm productivity - by providing more shade and shelter from harsh weather for livestock, pastures and crops;
- Improved natural resource management - by controlling rising groundwater, wind- and water induced soil erosion, and spread of weeds;
- Increased sources of income - to increase household income;
- Improved use of existing farm labour and financial resources - by integrating with other farm activities;
- Reduced farm expenditure - by using tree products on farm, such as timber for fencing, firewood and buildings;

- increased conservation values - by contributing to wildlife corridors and ecological buffer zones;
- Enhanced degraded landscapes - often leading to higher property values;
- improved regional environmental and economic values - especially with off-site benefits (e.g. increased local employment,
- Improved water quality in region); and improved lifestyle appeal of farm life.

For industry

- increased supply of an economic and reliable source of raw material;
- Improved access to future supplies;
- improved quality of forest products suited to processing; and
- Improved cost- efficiencies for processing (e.g. no need to purchase land).

For governments

- increased opportunities for regional development - with improved farm profitability and increased employment with forest management and processing industries; Reduced costs in long-term financial support to the agricultural sector (e.g. Rural Adjustment Scheme);
- improved environmental management at a farm, regional, national and international scales - with direct and indirect benefits (e.g. assisting control of 'greenhouse' gases and improved water quality); and
- Reduced contention between industry, environmental groups, and landholders - by providing benefits to all groups.

What constitutes 'success' in farm forestry?

Monitoring farm forestry is essential to enable it to become a viable enterprise. Yet this is no simple task. Given the wide range of potential benefits described above and its diverse designs, assessing farm forestry will have equally varied

outcomes. Successful farm forestry occurs when it has achieved its expectations or the objectives of the people involved. Defining the objectives against which to measure success may vary between farm forestry enterprises.

Furthermore, there is a great diversity of expectations of farm forestry within the landholder, industry and government groups. Landholders can operate as individuals and collectively (e.g. grower cooperatives); industry can include small-scale local processors and international processors; and governments can operate at the local, state and national levels. Also, when attempting to judge whether farm forestry is successful, it is important to remember that the people involved may change their objectives over the years. For example, markets may alter and force changes to the products required. As the farm business changes, so economic calculations of the farm forestry enterprise will need to be adjusted.

Success may be assessed in terms of better use of farm labour, positive environmental changes, increased financial returns, or maintaining the family farm. And it can be assessed over the short-term or long-term. For example, what might seem like a business failure if judged after three years might well become a business success after 15 years. In general, however, 'successful' farm forestry is perhaps best seen as incremental improvement and the likelihood of long-term profitability and sustainability -be it from the perspective of landholders, industry, or governments.

This introduction is from the booklet “Growing Successfully: Australian experiences with farm forestry” by Irene Guijt and Digby Race Department of Forestry, The Australia National University.

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