

New carbon plantings fit neatly in the farm jigsaw

BY GRAEME ANDERSON

Landcare is entering an exciting new era at Jigsaw Farms' eleven properties, two of which were former Potter farms just north of Hamilton. Jigsaw Farms is applying landcare at the landscape scale and is well on the way to planting almost one million new trees – or an incredible 30% of the property revegetated with landcare and farm forestry plantings.

Jigsaw Farms owner/manager Mark Wootton says "We will probably end up with around 1000ha of land revegetated throughout our properties". About 600-700ha will consist of longer-term farm forestry plantations with Spotted Gum grown for high quality timber being the focal species.

"While we may be pushing the limits from a landcare perspective, this goes hand in hand with boosting the agricultural production from the 70% of the property that we have selected for improvement. We are doing as much as we can to improve our production from the better soils. Areas we believe are limited for agriculture are targeted for forestry and trees. We do not own a single creek that is not fenced off! We do this not just for water quality, but believe that this can also help with our disease free status, as waterways travelling throughout farming landscapes are possible sources of infection.

The farm planning maps for Jigsaw Farms provide an impressive overview, with the large tracts of connected revegetation and farm forestry areas – all designed to fit neatly into the farm unit. "Siting our tree planting areas relies on an overall gut feeling for the landscape. We design our revegetation around saltpur scalded areas and remnant trees, and we also like to follow the Birds of Australia guidelines by having belts of vegetation at least 50 metres wide wherever we can and to connect all new and remnant vegetation."

The end result looks fantastic as well as providing great shelter throughout the farm. "The benefits of good shelter were observed a little while back where we had a lambing percentage of around 100% in an agroforestry paddock and much lower lambing survival in exposed paddocks" said Mark.



Farm plantations invaluable for stock during "the big chill"!

The record February 2005 "Big Chill" was devastating for many livestock farmers across Victoria. Rather than waiting for their final harvest to prove their worth, Jigsaw Farm's extensive woodlots proved themselves of immediate economic value by offering priceless shelter for their freshly shorn sheep. Mark says "At Melville Forest our most precious young sheep (one year old ewes) were shorn on the day before the cold snap, and were very vulnerable. We put them in the big broad forestry plantations (60 metres width) and zero losses resulted: a good story indeed. The larger and wider shelterbelts appeared to offer more protection"

While the majority of revegetation is farm forestry, Jigsaw Farms include buffers of indigenous revegetation in all of their plantings.

With earlier plantings now clearly visible from a distance, the Jigsaw Farms stated vision of "putting together the pieces of the sustainable farming puzzle" is leaving a huge and inspiring mark on the local landscape. The properties provides a powerful insight into the future – where large-scale plantings grow happily amongst high value agriculture – striking a social, economic and environmental balance many have long wished for.

Graeme Anderson, DPI, Victoria
graeme.anderson@dpi.vic.gov.au

