

CASE STUDY: NRIP WQ Grazing 2020-2021

QUICK FACTS:

Landholders: Rhiney and Amy Vella

Project: Queensland Government's Natural Resource Investment Program 2020-2021

Location: Yalboroo, 80 km north of Mackay

Area: 76 hectares

Rainfall: 1400-1500 mm

Business: steers for feedlot finishing or meatworks

No. of head: 25

BACKGROUND:

Rhiney and Amy purchased their property at Yalboroo in December 2019. Historically the farm had been producing sugar cane for generations, but they set about converting paddocks over to improved pasture. With Rhiney's time limited by shift work and his family background in the grazing industry the move was an obvious one.

With quality, high yielding pasture in the paddock and no stock to graze it, Rhiney and Amy decided to utilise what they had for hay production until cattle could be purchased. Initially hoping to fatten steers for the finishing and local abattoir markets, the high price of cattle made this an uneconomical option. Instead, Rhiney is planning to purchase a bull to breed with the cows he already has until prices reduce.

Rhiney and Amy decided to apply for funding through the Natural Resource Improvement Program Water Quality Grazing project being delivered by Reef Catchments to help them undertake their proposed developments. The funding has subsidised the installation of land type fencing and pasture improvement.

WHAT'S HAPPENING:

In the last 12 months, 16 hectares of cane land has been converted to improved pasture, mainly mixed species including fine cut Rhodes grass, V8 stylo, signal grass, Tully humidicola and Reclaimer Rhodes grass. Redlands Leucaena has been planted in sprayed-out rows on raised beds. Management of the Leucaena has been a steep learning curve, as raised beds allow for improved drainage but also mean the soil around the developing roots of the young plants dries out quickly.

With the completion of the land type fencing, cattle were purchased and have grazed the area over the wet period. Electric fencing has been installed on neighbouring pastured paddocks to allow movement of the cattle onto fresh feed and to ensure sufficient groundcover is maintained.

The remaining paddocks, except for two, will be ploughed out and seeding to improved pastures in the coming year. Installation of further fencing and watering points is planned to establish a cell grazing program. Yard facilities will also be installed.

ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE:

- Conversion of 16 hectares of cane land to improved pastures
- Implementing mixed species planting of both grass and legumes.
- Installation of 1.95 kilometres of land type fencing to improve feed utilisation on hilly country.
- Opportunistic production of hay as an income stream until grazing operation has been established

FUTURE GOALS:

- Trial Redlands Leucaena on raised beds to improve feed quality.
- Move the business from breeding stock to finishing of steers for the meatworks and feedlot markets.
- Remove remaining cane paddocks and re-pasture to mixed species.
- Install the necessary fencing and yard facilities to undertake a cell grazing operation.

QUOTES:

“We’re planning on being here for a long time so we want to do things right”. Rhiney

“The project funding helped us bring forward the installation of the land type fencing of the hill”.
Rhiney

PHOTOGRAPHS:

Vella family photo.jpg: Rhiney and Amy with their children Cohen, Hayley and Brody

Vella land type fencing.jpg: Fencing of the hills has allowed for increased control over grazing pressure

Vella pasture improvement.jpg: Paddocks have been sown to a mixture of tropical grasses and legumes.