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SUSTAINABLE FARMING

Sustainable Farming is the production of food and fibre to meet society’s needs in the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

The concept of sustainability integrates those of environmental protection, financial viability and human well-being, both in the present and the future. This involves a systems approach to assessing stewardship of natural capital and human capital, and the interconnections between farming and the broader environment, economy and society with a long-term perspective.

The term natural capital refers to assets provided by ecosystems and the flow of goods and services generated. For the purposes of Sustainable Farms, there are four core natural assets: land, water, carbon and biodiversity.

Human capital refers to the social responsibilities for health and safety of farmers, workers, rural communities and consumers. Farming practices need to satisfy environmental, economic and social criteria in the present and the future.

Sustainable Farming practices include:

> Enhancing the extent and condition of ecosystem assets and services, determined from trends over time assessed against baselines.

> Improving efficiency in using non-renewable resources.

> Enhancing financial viability of farm operations.

> Enhancing the quality of life of those on the farm and more broadly rural communities.

Learn more about sustainable farming at: sustainablefarms.org.au
PURPOSE

The purpose of this plan is to communicate the strategic intent of Sustainable Farms. This document sets out our Vision, Mission and Strategic Goals for the next three years.

To deliver on this three-year plan, Sustainable Farms is seeking to raise a further $5m in funding. This equates to an approximate doubling of income within three years. This additional funding will enable our foundational team to be strengthened so that we can achieve the skills depth and breadth needed to deliver on our Vision. To that end, where expertise are envisioned rather than a reality, we have *italicised* the text.
OVERVIEW

Sustainable Farms is an ANU initiative founded on 20 years of ecological research undertaken on farms throughout the south-eastern wheat-sheep belt of Australia.

Sustainable Farms will translate this research into knowledge and tools that: (1) farmers can use to more sustainably manage their farms and natural capital, and (2) policy makers, educators and industry can use to better enable sustainable agriculture in Australia.

The 20 years of ecological research will also underpin a new multidisciplinary research program, which seeks to demonstrate that a farm that is better managed environmentally is better off financially, and substantially improves a farmer’s mental health and well-being. We believe this to be the case - based on narratives from farmers who ANU ecologists have worked with over many years - but new and further research is needed to quantify, demonstrate, and understand these relationships.

**Sustainable Farms has four core business drivers. These are:**

A Farmer Network, which is delivered by field-ecologists and *agronomists* located in regional Australia who have long-standing relationships with farmers, and expertise in farmer engagement, *agricultural science*, biodiversity and restoration ecology. The Farmer Network undertakes on-farm field surveys, and delivers a demonstration farm program.

A cross-disciplinary Research program, which is delivered by world-leading academics in ecological science, economics and finance, and mental health.

A Communications and Strategic Engagement program, which is delivered by experts in science communication, and industry and government agricultural and environmental policy.

A Project Management and Evaluation program, which is delivered by experts in Australian agri-environmental policy, and natural resource management program delivery and evaluation.
Healthy Farmers  
Healthy Farms  
Healthy Profits  

VISION  

MISSION  

To create a sustainable future for Australian farmers by building on 20 years of ecological research in agricultural landscapes to better understand relationships between environmental management, mental health and financial success.
Figure 1: The project region on which Sustainable Farms is founded
GOALS

GOAL ONE
FARMER NETWORK SURVEYS AND OUTREACH
Sustainable Farms, through our Farmer Network, will create an influential and engaging farms-based outreach and extension program to increase the engagement, awareness and/or adoption of sustainable farming practices. This will be achieved primarily through ongoing ecological surveys on farms within the network, as well as a demonstration farms program, which will show farmers how other farms have benefited from improving natural assets on their farms.

GOAL TWO
FARMER NETWORK PARTNERSHIPS
To facilitate growth of our Farmer Network, and to directly address natural asset degradation on farms, Sustainable Farms will expand our existing formal partnerships with Local Land Services in NSW and CMAs in Victoria as well as other natural resource management (NRM) organisations to assist farmers in the project region to enhance their natural assets.

GOAL THREE
RESEARCH
Sustainable Farms will enable research innovation and delivery through data sharing and co-design of ecological, financial and mental health research, followed by new sustainability research designed in partnership with industry, philanthropy and government.

GOAL FOUR
COMMUNICATIONS AND STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENT
Sustainable Farms will lead a program of research translation activities to influence programs and policies of key institutions and industry groups to support sustainable farming practices. Our communications activities will raise public awareness and build trust in the initiative, and influence attitudes to better enable support for sustainable farming in Australia. We will increase our impact by incorporating research and engagement learnings into ANU teaching activities.

GOAL FIVE
PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND EVALUATION
Sustainable Farms will undertake strategic planning and develop sound policies and procedures to ensure effective governance and successful implementation. We will expand Sustainable Farms and achieve a funding model which allows long-term implementation. We will create a culture where staff are committed to evaluating our work so we can learn and improve our performance, and effectively report on how Sustainable Farms has impacted agri-environmental policy and industry, agricultural landscapes, and farmer’s lives.
GOAL ONE
FARMER NETWORK SURVEYS AND OUTREACH

Sustainable Farms, through our Farmer Network, will create an influential and engaging farms-based outreach and extension program to increase the engagement, awareness and/or adoption of sustainable farming practices. This will be achieved primarily through ongoing ecological surveys on farms within the network, as well as a demonstration farms program which will show farmers how other farms have benefited from improving natural assets on their farms.

Our Outcomes

We know this goal has been achieved when:

> Farmers in the project region have increased their awareness and knowledge of the natural asset management concepts promoted through our Farmer Network.

> Farmers participating in the Farmer Network share their knowledge and increase their understanding of the relationships between ecological values, financial resilience and mental health.

> Farmers participating in our Farmer Network actively invest in natural asset management.

We know we are on the path to achieving this goal when:

> We have developed a Farmer Network Plan that maps to stakeholder needs.

> We have an increasingly long time-series of ecological data from our Farmer Network.

> Our Demonstration Farmers are active advocates and well-known champions for Sustainable Farms.

> Our Demonstration Farm events are well attended.

> Farmers in our Farmer Network have the tools, knowledge and capacity to improve natural asset management on their farms.
> We have a cost-effective means to measure our impact and shifts in attitudes towards, and uptake of, sustainable farming practices.

**Our Priorities**

**The strengths we will leverage to achieve this goal include:**

> Long-standing relationships with farmers
> Expertise in field ecology and natural resource management
> *Expertise in field agronomy*
> Expertise in farmer engagement and *agri-extension*
> *Expertise in sustainable farm planning*

**What we will invest in to achieve this goal:**

> Developing and implementing a **Farmer Network Plan** that is regarded by our Advisory Committee as highly likely to succeed.
> The continuation of biodiversity surveys on a selection of farms to monitor ecological condition.
> The robust selection of a network of demonstration farms that meet documented social, geographical and ecological criteria. These farms will provide influential examples and narratives of the benefits of restoring natural assets on farms.

> Design and delivery of a demonstration farm program model that delivers outputs that lead to the adoption of farming practices which improve natural assets.
> The development of tools, educational resources, and farm planning workshops to support farmers and others to restore natural assets in agricultural landscapes.
GOAL TWO
FARMER NETWORK PARTNERSHIPS

To enable growth of our Farmer Network, and to directly address nature capital degradation on farms, Sustainable Farms will build on existing partnerships with Local Land Services in NSW and other NRM agencies to assist farmers in the project area to enhance their farm’s natural assets.

Our Outcomes

**We know this goal has been achieved when:**

- There are a significant number of works completed to improve natural asset management on farms in our Farmer Network.
- We have collected data to demonstrate improvement of biodiversity within the Farmer Network because of these new works.

**We know we are on the path to achieving this goal when:**

- We have developed a Farmer Network Plan that maps to stakeholder needs.
- We have built on existing agreements with Local Land Services in the project region to provide advice and/or share capacity to achieve our vision.
- With the support of our partners, farmers in our Farmer Network have secured resources to improve natural assets on their farms.
- We have significantly expanded the Farmer Network.
Our Priorities

The strengths we will leverage to achieve this goal include:

> Existing long-term farmer-researcher relationships
> Expertise in field ecology
> Expertise in *field agronomy*
> *Expertise in agri-industry*
> Experience and expertise in *agri-environmental policy and program design*

What we will invest in to achieve this goal:

> Providing a service to connect farmers within our Farmer Network with funders to improve the condition and/or extent of natural assets on their farms.
> Assisting government agencies and non-government organisations to demonstrate natural asset management concepts through our Farmer Network.
> Further build on existing agreements with government agencies and non-government organisations to improve current practices and discover new practices for improving biodiversity and other natural assets on farms, and to monitor the response of biodiversity to such investments.
Sustainable Farms will enable research innovation and delivery through data sharing and co-design of ecological, financial and mental health research, followed by new sustainability research designed in partnership with industry, philanthropy and governments.

**Our Outcomes**

**We know this goal has been achieved when:**

- Sustainable Farms has an established reputation as a world leader in the production of research relevant to farmers, natural resource managers, industry and government.

**We know we are on the path to achieving this goal when:**

- We have a Research Plan that maps to stakeholder needs.
- We have produced and disseminated high-impact research that identifies and quantifies any links between sustainable farming initiatives and the financial profitability of farms implementing these practices.
- We have produced and disseminated high-impact research that identifies and quantifies any links between sustainable farming initiatives and the mental health and well-being of farmers implementing these practices.
- We have produced and disseminated high-impact research that identifies and quantifies any links between the profitability of sustainable farms and the mental health of their caretakers.
- We have produced and disseminated high-impact research on environmental accounts in the project area, specifically, the value of natural capital and the trade-offs needed to ensure sustainable agriculture in temperate woodland landscapes.
Our Priorities

The strengths we will leverage to achieve this goal include:

> Expertise and experience in environmental accounting
> Expertise in surrogate ecology and restoration ecology
> Expertise in farmland biodiversity conservation
> Expertise in agricultural productivity
> Expertise in statistics
> Expertise in economics and finance
> Expertise in mental health
> Expertise in decision science
> Expertise in data curation
> Expertise in GIS science

What we will invest in to achieve this goal:

> Developing and implementing a Research Plan that is regarded by our Advisory Committee as highly likely to succeed
> Data curation and data sharing systems to ensure the research team have access to quality assured long-term ecological data and metadata from our Farmer Network.
> Research planning with industry and government to ensure our research agenda addresses identified needs within these sectors.
> Research to quantify and demonstrate the link between improved environmental management and the financial viability of these practices.
> Research to understand the link between finance and mental health in the farm sector.
> Research to quantify and demonstrate links between sustainable farming initiatives and the mental health and well-being of farmers.
> Research to develop a set of environmental accounts for the project region.
> Collaboration with other research partners to ensure we add value through strategic alignment and therefore avoid duplication.
GOAL FOUR
COMMUNICATIONS AND STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENT

Sustainable Farms will lead a program of research translation activities to influence programs and policies of key institutions and industry groups to support sustainable farming practices. Our communications activities will raise public awareness and build trust in the initiative, and influence attitudes to better enable support for sustainable farming in Australia. We will increase our impact by incorporating research and engagement learnings into ANU teaching activities.

Our Outcomes

We know this goal has been achieved when:

> There is increased understanding of the nature, and importance, of sustainable farming methods, both within and outside the farming sector.

> There is better support for the implementation of sustainable farming practices by the finance industry and regulators.

We know we are on the path to achieving this goal when:

> We have a Communications and Strategic Engagement Plan that maps to stakeholder needs.

> We have expanded our existing relationships with farmers and NRM organisations, and are viewed as a trusted source of information and advice.

> Ministers and leaders in government seek our advice.

> Leaders in industry and finance trust Sustainable Farms, and seek expert advice from Sustainable Farms.

> Learnings from Sustainable Farms are embedded in ANU courses.

> We have engaged more than 30% of farmers in the project region through our extension and outreach activities.

> We know the specific decision makers in government, understand their perspectives, and have designed and delivered activities to motivate them to better support sustainable farming practices.
Our Priorities

Our strengths we will leverage to achieve this goal:

> Expertise in communications and marketing
> Expertise in science communication, facilitation and knowledge brokering
> Expertise in social science
> Expertise in agricultural communications
> Experience in, and knowledge of, industry and government

What we will invest in to achieve this goal:

> Policy briefings, meetings and workshops to create dynamic relationships with government and industry to promote awareness of Sustainable Farms, and uptake of our learnings in government and industry policies and programs.
> Partnerships with both industry and the finance sector to promote sustainable farming practices.
> Partnerships with ANU educators to increase our impact through incorporating research and engagement learnings into ANU teaching activities.

> Developing and implementing a Communications and Strategic Engagement Plan that is regarded by our Advisory Committee as best-practice and highly likely to succeed.

> Effective marketing and communication strategies that promote sustainable farming practices, and recruit participants to Sustainable Farms’ Farmer Network.

> A website and media profile to raise public awareness of Sustainable Farms, to garner trust in the initiative, and to shape audience expectations.

> Publishing books and other products (podcasts, blogs, twitter feeds, brochures, interactive maps and images) that will influence farmers’ attitudes to, and uptake of, sustainable farming practices.
GOAL FIVE
PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND EVALUATION

Sustainable Farms will undertake strategic planning and develop sound policies and procedures to ensure effective governance and successful implementation. We will grow Sustainable Farms and achieve a funding model which allows long-term implementation. We will create a culture where staff are committed to routinely evaluating their work so we can learn from our experiences and improve our performance. And so we can effectively report on how Sustainable Farms has impacted agri-environmental policy and industry, agricultural landscapes, and farmer’s lives.

Our Outcomes

We know this goal has been achieved when:

> We have an established reputation within industry, the farming community, research, and government, as a professional, productive and influential force in agri-environmental policy, practice and research.

> We have raised sufficient cash funding to deliver all elements of Sustainable Farms.

We know we are on the path to achieving this goal when:

> We have a Project Management and Evaluation Plan that maps to stakeholder needs.

> We have a team with the skills breadth and depth needed to deliver on our vision.

> Our people are engaged and motivated.

> Our Advisory Committee commends our strategic hierarchy.

> We attract additional investment (>5m) from industry and philanthropy.

> Our performance monitoring and external review indicates effective implementation.

> Our evaluation provides a robust assessment of the value of our work.
Our Priorities

Our strengths we will leverage to achieve this goal:

> Expertise in governance and project management
> Expertise in research leadership
> Expertise in agri-environmental policy and program design
> Expertise in social science and program evaluation
> Expertise in administration

What we will invest in to achieve this goal:

> External evaluation to scrutinise performance, to garner fresh insights, and to validate our achievements
> Developing and implementing a Project Management and Evaluation Plan that is regarded by our Advisory Committee as best-practice and highly likely to succeed.
> Our people, so we can attract, develop and sustain a high performing work team.
> Information management, administration and internal ANU leverage to efficiently support delivery of Sustainable Farms.
> Targeted fundraising so we can grow Sustainable Farms and achieve a funding model that allows long-term implementation.
> Stakeholder mapping and engagement with both primary and secondary stakeholders to ensure strategic intent aligns with expectations.
> Monitoring and evaluation practices that support adaptive management and reporting on the performance and impact of Sustainable Farms.
ENDORSEMENTS FROM OUR DONORS

“I have always strived to enhance the flora and fauna of the country I have managed. When I acquired a grazing property in the early 80’s it was a great challenge to put my ideas into practice. Yet within a short space of time the flora took on a new look, tree saplings appeared in numbers, the native shrub cassinia appeared en masse and the birds and mammals become more numerous. I am proud to support the establishment of Sustainable Farms. I believe passionately in the value of wildlife ecologists working with graziers, like myself and the benefits their knowledge brings to regional communities.”

Kent Keith, Grazier and ANU Donor

“I have made donations to Sustainable Farms because I believe our agricultural future depends on their vision of Healthy Farmers, Healthy Farms, Healthy Profits. I know how hard it is to farm successfully in Australia, and what value comes if you invest in the natural capital on your farm. I commend them for what they are looking to achieve and am proud to be one of their supporters.”

John Mitchell, BA’82 Economics, Grazier and ANU Donor
“Sustainable Farms seeks to leverage the significant expertise, datasets and human capital of the ANU Fenner School of Environment and Society and translate this into meaningful impact for Australian farmers, Australia’s environmental biodiversity and, ultimately, all Australians.

Sustainable Farms consideration of how this affects farm finances and farmer mental health speaks to the multi-disciplinary expertise at ANU that has the potential to truly change the way Australian policy makers, scientists, educators and communities think about the importance of sustainable farming practices.

This is an ambitious project, and one that The Ian Potter Foundation is proud to support. I would encourage anybody interested in Australia’s future prosperity to consider supporting this exciting initiative which focuses on the dual goals of a prosperous economy that exploits and supports a healthy environment.”

Professor Tom Healy, Governor, The Ian Potter Foundation
CONTACT US

Director of Sustainable Farms
E sustainablefarms@anu.edu.au
W sustainablefarms.org.au
CRICOS Provider #00120C