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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 that the program will work towards until 2022.
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.

Figure 1: The project region on which Sustainable Farms is founded
VISION

Healthy Farmers
Healthy Farms
Healthy Profits

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.
MAP OF PROJECT AREA

A simplified map of the Sustainable Farms project area

- Location of Sustainable Farms Team
- Farmer Partners
- Project Boundary
- LLS and CMA Borders
- State Border
GOALS

GOAL ONE
FARMER NETWORK SURVEYS AND OUTREACH
Create an influential and engaging farms-based outreach and extension program to increase the engagement, awareness and adoption of enhanced natural asset management based on long-term ecological monitoring.

GOAL TWO
FARMER NETWORK PARTNERSHIPS
Build the capacity of the NRM sector to support farmers to better manage their natural assets through formalised partnerships and informed by the latest research.

GOAL THREE
RESEARCH
In partnership with industry and government develop a multidisciplinary research program to understand relationships within and between landscape function, mental health and wellbeing and financial success.

GOAL FOUR
COMMUNICATIONS AND STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENT
Lead a program of research translation and communication to build support for sustainable farming practices among key government institutions, industry groups and philanthropic foundations.

GOAL FIVE
PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND EVALUATION
Make informed management decisions by monitoring and evaluating the project and adjusting resource allocation to progress and evolve the project.
GOAL ONE
FARMER NETWORK SURVEYS AND OUTREACH

Create an influential and engaging farms-based outreach and extension program to increase the engagement, awareness and adoption of enhanced natural asset management based on long-term ecological monitoring.

Our Outcomes

We know this goal has been achieved when:

➢ Farmers have increased their awareness and knowledge of natural asset values and management.
➢ Farmers share their knowledge and increase their understanding of the relationships between ecological values, financial resilience and mental health.
➢ Farmers actively enhance natural asset management.

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

➢ Producing reliable, credible and relevant ecological research from our on-ground, local and long-term studies to inform how we enhance natural asset management.
➢ We have developed and are implementing regional stakeholder engagement plans.
➢ We have developed tools and resources to support farmers to enhance their natural asset management.
➢ Our outreach and extension programs are well attended and valued and showcase farmer best-practice.
➢ We have engaged more than 30% of farmers in the project region through our extension and outreach activities.
➢ We continue to implement Long Term Monitoring of biodiversity on farms in the project area, and initiate new studies to understand the relationships between landscape function and biodiversity.
GOAL TWO
FARMER NETWORK PARTNERSHIPS

Build the capacity of the NRM sector to support farmers to better manage their natural assets through formalised partnerships and informed by the latest research.

Our Outcomes

We know this goal has been achieved when:

- With the support of our partners, farmers in our Farmer Network have secured resources to improve natural assets on their farms.
- NRM agencies are attracting funding that they can direct on to farms.

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

- We increase our number of formalized partnerships
- We are planning and reviewing our research outputs with the NRM sector
- We collaborate with our partners on:
  - Joint funding or acquiring funding
  - Community engagements
  - Capacity building
  - Incentive programs
- We have collected data to demonstrate improvement of biodiversity because of these new works
- We are informing our partners projects with contemporary and long-term research
- We have built on existing agreements with NRM agencies and organisations to provide advice and/or share capacity.
GOAL THREE
RESEARCH

In partnership with industry and government develop a multidisciplinary research program to understand relationships within and between landscape function, mental health and wellbeing and financial success.

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 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 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.

> We have co-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.
GOAL FOUR
STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS

Lead a program of research translation and communication to build support for sustainable farming practices among key government institutions, industry groups and philanthropic foundations.

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 landholders to manage natural assets on farms from the finance industry, regulators and through government policy.

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

➢ We are viewed as a trusted source of information and advice by farmers and NRM organisations.

➢ Leaders in government, industry and finance seek expert advice from Sustainable Farms.

➢ Learnings from Sustainable Farms are embedded in ANU courses.

➢ We have amplified the voices of farmers who are engaged in managing their natural assets to improve landscape function.

➢ 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.
GOAL FIVE
PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND EVALUATION

Make informed management decisions by monitoring and evaluating the project and adjusting resource allocation to progress and evolve the project.

Our Outcomes

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

- Multiple linkages across different areas of work are evident
- Our team is connected and involved in shared projects
- The project is evolving in response to evidence of performance and evaluation of needs and opportunities
- External review indicates effective implementation.

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

- Collaboration between different project areas is being supported by management decisions
- Monitoring and evaluation practices are embedded in the project and support adaptive management
- We continue to attract funding to deliver the program
- We have an engaged team with the skills breadth and depth needed to deliver on our vision.
“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
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