

Cross boundary Tagasaste plantings provide a win-win solution to wind erosion



Project Snapshot

Neighbouring farmers:	Karen and Tom Williamson and father and son team, Ron and Jamie Miller
Location:	The farms are located between Wickepin and Kulin, in the Kulin Shire
Property Size:	The Millers are farming 5,500 acres, while the neighbouring Williamson block is 842 acres. The Williamsons also have another property at Cullalling
Enterprise mix:	Both families are engaged in a mix of sheep and cropping 20% sand over clay.
Soil types:	5,500 hectares



Ron Miller, Jamie Miller, Tom and Karen Williamson.



Sheep sheltering amongst the Tagasaste

Local Community Group:

Both families are members of the Facey Group, which is the regional farmer run group working on research, information sharing, trials and experimentation aimed at improving farm practices to keep farms healthy and profitable and the region sustainable into the future.

The Facey Group was instrumental in coordinating this cross boundary project. The Millers and the Williamsons had each approached the Facey Group separately about getting funding for planting Tagasaste trees on their sand plains, as these were no longer viable paddocks for cropping.

Recognising that they would be more successful if they joined forces, the Facey Group helped the neighbours in putting together their successful cross-boundary grant application to Wheatbelt NRM. You had more chance of getting the funding if you were working across the boundary fence with neighbours, so the Facey Group took our applications and presented them together as a whole. The Facey Group has helped immensely in town, providing back up support and guiding people through those initial stages of funding applications and then the follow up and so on. The Facey Group has been enormously beneficial for this region” says Karen.

“A lot of people have too many other things on their plate and don’t get around to taking advantage of the opportunities that come up; this is where the Facey Group is valuable” says Ron.

What benefit do the trees bring to the farms?

Obtaining this funding has allowed both families to plant significant blocks of Tagasaste on sandplain that was going to continue to be degraded by wind erosion. Having the trees on both sides of the boundary provides further protection for the land, and is a win win for the neighbours.

The Millers planted 17,000 tagasaste on their property in June 2011, while the Williamsons planted 15,000. Both families are planning to put in more this year – the Millers will put in another 13,000 and the Williamsons will put in 5,000 mixed native trees.

While the grants are handy, both families would have done the plantings anyway, as they know very well the benefits the trees bring to their farms. The grant has meant that more farmers in the region have had the opportunity to see what has been done on this site and will encourage them to take action in managing sandy soil prone to wind erosion.

“We had planned to plant these trees ourselves, a little bit each year, but then this opportunity came up and this was a great help” say the Williamsons.

“In the past, we have just got in there and done it ourselves – we saw the paddock blowing away and decided to just do something about it” say the Millers

The tagasaste provides excellent fodder for the sheep and can be grazed very early, less than a year after planting. The hardy young trees can be munched right down to the stalk, left for 2-3 months and then grazed again, which is excellent supplementary feed in the season break. The high protein in the tagasaste makes for better quality wool and happier sheep all round.

Once grown, the trees also provide great shade for the sheep and a place to comfortably lamb.

Both the Millers and the Williamsons have noticed a great improvement to their paddocks due to the buffer provided by the trees. Land that would previously have been basically beach sand if left unattended has returned to health and is now providing an economic benefit to the farm, as well as providing an aesthetic improvement too.

The Williamsons also feel that the trees allow the land to return to simple nature and return the natural life to the soil. “When I look at the patches of trees, to me it looks like it has gone back to nature, it’s flourished” says Karen.

“It comes back to the dynamic of the individual farmers that are out there, and how you view running your business but from my point of view, the trees do add value to the farm” says Karen.

How was the planting carried out?

The Millers hired a Chatfields tree planter from the Corrigin Farm Improvement Group, which has a ripper attached to it. They came across a number of patches of gravel and ironstone and some large

rocks, but just had to get around these as best they could. The Williamsons decided to hire a grader and pre-rip their lines to deal with the ironstone problem.

What was normal practice prior to this project?

The Millers

Ron Miller’s father bought their property after the Second World War, securing it for a low price. Ron returned from boarding school at age 15 and helped his father and brother clear the land for grazing and cropping, an arduous task. Ron and his brother went on to split the farm and Ron acquired more land over the years, bringing the property size up to 5,500 acres.

Small belts of trees were left on the property and around 25 years ago, Ron decided to do something about his sand plain and planted a dense thicket of tagasaste. These trees have brought enormous benefit over the years, and also gave Ron the advantage of experimentation and learning. For this recent SCIP project, the Millers ensured there was more space between the trees, so the sheep can more easily move around and graze. Otherwise, the dense thickets cause the sheep to have to get a whole lot of unnecessary extra exercise, as they need to go to the very end of a row to get to the next grazing patch!

12 years ago the Millers also planted trees along their creek lines and, when they bought a neighbouring salt affected farm, set about planting saltbush, which has proven to be another excellent fodder shrub option. Additionally, the creekline plantings provide more shelter for the sheep and stop the creek from washing away. “There is quite a bit of planting of creek lines happening around the area” say the Millers.

The Williamsons

The Williamsons have another property at Cuballing and here they have planted a range of trees including saltbush and sheoaks. The “Kulin block” bordering the Millers’, has pine tree belts from the previous owner planted on it, however these existing trees were not enough to prevent the blowing.

Karen and Tom Williamson recently made an interesting discovery when they used blue metal dust on a wind blown paddock that was previously unable to produce a crop. The rock dust was obtained cheaply from a local quarry and enabled the paddock to retain moisture and hold the sand in place. This previously unproductive paddock was able to produce a crop, much to their enjoyment. They went on to use the dust when planting their trees as well, which they have found to be extremely beneficial.

The beauty of cross boundary projects

This kind of cross boundary project provides a real win win and could easily be replicated in other regions. Both families credit the Facey Group with being an excellent resource and link for farmers in the region. The two families are also able to share ideas about what they are doing on their farms, and benefit from the enhanced wind protection right across the boundary lines.

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