



Project Snapshot

Land Manager's Name/s:	Chris Butler
Property Size:	2,100 ha owned, 500 ha leased
Location:	Shackleton
Annual rainfall (mm):	275mm
Enterprise mix:	70% cropping. 30% pasture
Soil types/vegetation types:	Mixed from heavy valley floor to yellow sandplain



Above: Callan Butler

Key Messages

- Consider soil type when selecting fodder options.
- Fodder trees can increase stock feed options, particularly over the autumn feed gap.
- Planting in tree belts can create corridors for local fauna.
- Once established, trees cause minimal impact on the farming operation.

The Story so far

The Butler family have always placed a high value on trees and try to plant a few trees every year as part of the farm's strategic plan. However, it was not until the Wheatbelt NRM Soil Conservation Incentives Program came along that the family was able to plant trees at a greater scale. Chris stated the importance of the grant saying, "The grant has given us the ability to plant alleys of trees at a number of sites, at a scale we would otherwise have found difficult". To provide both windbreaks and sustainable fodder across valley floor paddocks 18,000 saltbush were planted in 5 row belts and 4,500 oil mallee seedlings were established in the middle of the rows. "Our motivation for planting trees is to increase profits, by running more sheep on improved paddocks", Chris explained.

The oil mallees grew well in most parts, though died in areas of more (saline) country across the flat landscape. In comparison, the saltbush proved to be much more tolerant to the adverse conditions that 2012 presented. "If it had been a wet year I think the oil mallees would have survived". Rather than plant this area to the intended mix, Chris will be infilling with just saltbush. "Don't let a dry year deter you. Make sure you re-plant any failed sections". Chris went on to say, "There is nothing worse than a half done tree planting job".

Managing trees in a mixed farming enterprise

To eliminate the extra need for spraying a site before planting the Butler's use a wide Chatfield one-pass tree planter with a scalper and moulder. "We found we don't need to spray because the scalper gives us a weed free area for the trees to grow in the first year," Chris explained. As the Butler's are equipped with GPS guidance at seeding time they can use a skip row for the tree plantings come winter. One tree belt to six widths of the seeder bar is a row spacing the Butler's find works well.

An unforeseen outcome of the tree lines has been a change in kangaroo movement across the property. Rather than coming through the crop they seem to be sticking to the tree lines and kangaroo populations have seemed to increase.

The main difficulty with bulk tree plantings when running a broad acre farming operation is that stock management can be tricky. Paddocks sown with young trees can't be stocked so arrangements are made to the cropping program so the trees are given enough time to establish (typically 12 to 18 months). This juggling period pays off though as Chris mentioned, "It's certainly worthwhile because next year after harvest we should have a readily available feed source in the paddocks, particularly from the saltbush".

Apart from these considerations around establishment, the tree plantings are not a hindrance to the farming operation. Rather the opposite. Since the onset of the project many benefits have been observed, such as reduced wind erosion across paddocks, reduce evaporation by retaining ground cover, plus increased shade and extra fodder for the sheep. Overall Chris sees projects like this driving up both the sustainability and profitability of his farm.

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