

# The story of Jogalong Downs: multiple benefits from a long term experience with tree planting.



Thriving tree crops at Jogalong Downs.

## Property details

<b>Family:</b>	Tom and Donna Henning and their daughters, Jodie, Sarah and Kirstie
<b>Property:</b>	Jogalong Downs
<b>Location:</b>	Wongan Hills in the Wongan Ballidu Shire
<b>Size:</b>	Approximately 3,000 ha in total with 2600ha of this arable
<b>Soil types:</b>	There are a range of soil types on the property including red loams, gravel over clay, yellow wodjil sands and grey sands.
<b>Annual rainfall:</b>	325mm
<b>Enterprise mix:</b>	A mixture of wheat and barley crops and sheep. Approx 1820ha of the arable land is cropped with wheat and barley

## Tree planting program

<b>Total trees planted on the property:</b>	150,000
<b>Years:</b>	Between 2012
<b>Species planted:</b>	A mixture of saltbush, Casuarina obesa, brushwood and various types of Eucalypt including oil mallees.
<b>Most recent tree planting project:</b>	In July 2011 the Henning's planted 60,000 trees in mixed species belts to reduce wind erosion with funding provided through the Wheatbelt Natural Resource Management "Soil Conservation and Incentives Program" (SCIP)



Tom and Donna with a mallee.

## What sparked the interest in tree cropping?

For over a decade now, Tom and Donna Henning have had an interest in tree crops – both for the benefits trees bring to the land and for the long term commercial potential.

Ten years ago they were successful in applying for funding through the Saltland Pastures project and their tree planting mission began. Since that time, they have planted a total of 150,000 trees at various sites throughout their property – some with the help of grants and some out of their own pocket.

"The primary reason we started looking at trees was the economic return; as well as doing something that would help us with management of low producing areas, we wanted to find something that would give an economic return, which is why we included the oil mallees and the brushwood in there as a harvestable long term crop. If we had only planted saltbush it wouldn't have been economically beneficial for us, we wouldn't have done it"

## How are the tree planting projects designed and implemented?

Over the years, Tom and Donna have built a great working relationship with Shane Lyons and Deb Impiazzi at the local Kokardine Nursery. Shane and Deb provide advice on species and site selection, site design and tree establishment as well as practical help preparing and planting the sites. Tom and Donna also access the technical advice and help provided through Wheatbelt NRM to ensure the best survival rates for their seedlings. Additionally Tom and Donna can now draw on the knowledge they have gained over 10 years of planting, and all the lessons learnt along the way. This gave them confidence in carrying out their most recent SCIP project - planting a massive 60,000 trees in mixed belts and fencing and managing the site for rotational grazing.

To undertake their SCIP project, the Henning's first sowed the paddock with barley and then established the belts over the barley crop a couple of months later. The land was sprayed and pre-ripped as part of the barely cropping work. "We find we get better weed management and survival rate if we plant the trees in existing crops" This way, the trees get buffered from the winds and are able to get well established, while also receiving the benefit of the fertiliser and weed control that the crops get.

A Chatfield tree planter was hired to plant the seedlings and help was provided by Tom and Donna's 3 girls, Donna's sister Anthea

***"The grazing is deferred and you don't need to excess feed them. This cuts down the amount of time you spend managing and handling the sheep system."***

and Shane and Deb from Kokardine Nursery. Trees were planted in 14 belts, with each belt consisting of 4 rows, with a total belt width of 10 metres. A different combination of species was used within each belt. Tom was able to identify the more saline land to be planted to saltbush, and on the better land the oil mallees and brushwood were planted. Again, Tom and Donna credit Shane and Deb with providing excellent quality seedlings, tall and robust enough to make planting with a Chatfield easy, and delivered right on time. "We always request in our grants that the seedlings come from Kokardine"

## What benefits have the trees brought to Jogalong Downs?

### Transformation to land management

The SCIP project has transformed the way Jogalong Downs is managed, by using fencing to divide the land into different management units. Before, it was just one very big unit that was difficult to manage. The fencing was a job that needed to be done on the farm anyway so by pulling down 6 kilometres of old fencing and putting in 8 kilometres of new fencing, the Hennings have been able to redesign a section of the farm, which separates the land use units into logical sections that are much easier to manage. The higher land is for wheat and barley, the low productive areas

are for grazing and barley and harvestable tree crops.

### Less time and money spent on sheep, more time for other work

The Hennings believe that spending the time and money to fence paddocks according to the productive ability of the land is well worth the effort – it makes managing the farm a lot easier, there is more flow and there is a time saving, a huge factor in the life of busy farmers. Donna is involved in the local community of Wongan Hills, having a part time job at the local school and being involved in various community projects, including a planned community garden. Tom and Donna are also Wheatbelt NRM peer mentors, meaning they are available to provide farmer to farmer help and tips to others considering getting into tree crops. With Tom doing the majority of the practical farm labour, having his time managed as efficiently as possible is crucial, to enable both of them to continue to contribute so much to their local community.

***"If it is grazed regularly, it makes better feed because the sheep prefer the younger, fresher coppice."***

"Its made life a lot easier. The salt has been treed and fenced off. From doing this we'll also benefit from having autumn feed at the break of the season. They'll be locked into saltbush so the pasture can get away. Once it comes time to lamb, they'll have lots of food in the paddocks they're going to. So the grazing is deferred and you don't need to excess feed them. This cuts down the amount of time you spend managing and handling the sheep system, and frees up time to do other farm work" says Tom.

### Natural weed control, less wind erosion and shelter for the sheep

Rotating the sheep in this way means they also help with weed control, reducing the need for chemicals, to which weeds can quickly build resistance. All in all, you're not having to constantly buy in feed or employ someone to feed the sheep and less money is spent on chemicals so "it does work out financially better for us in the short term" say the Hennings. In addition, having the trees there is reducing potential blow-outs in the low productive areas and providing shelter for the sheep.

### Any other tips?

Over the years, the Henning's have learnt the importance of building good relationships, such as the ones with Wheatbelt NRM and Kokardine nursery. Having reliable people available to assist with the site and species selection and design or plantings is crucial to success.

As far as grazing the trees, Tom and Donna have found that the trees need a good 2-3 years to get established before they can handle grazing. With regards to the saltbush, they find that if it is grazed regularly, it makes better feed because the sheep prefer the younger, fresher coppice - it seems to be more palatable to them. They have also found that the sheep prefer the other trees in the winter, as the oil must get diluted, whereas in summer they tend to leave them alone.



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