

## **CARBONCARE™ VOICES**

### **Carbon Project Owner Insights: Hall - Brookton, WA**

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## **THE HALL FAMILY – IAN AND MARGARET HALL**

Ian Hall is a third-generation farmer from East Brookton, on Ballardong – Noongar country, where he farmed with his wife Margaret in an extensive family partnership for more than 30 years. The family ceased grain farming in 2010 and leased their arable land for cropping.

Ian and Margaret were inspired in the late 1990's by Professor Syd Shea, after hearing him extoll the benefits of tree cropping, particularly *Pinus pinaster*. Subsequently, the Hall Bros family partnership entered into a share farming agreement with the Forest Products Commission to plant 167ha of *Pinus pinaster*. This original planting was the beginning of a concerted effort to integrate tree crops into the farm landscape.

During the next two decades, Ian became further involved in forestry and carbon farming through his membership and Chairmanship of Avongro Wheatbelt Tree Cropping, and as Vice Chair of the Australian Forest Growers national board.

These days, the Halls are working with Carbon Positive Australia to restore land affected by salt and erosion, the result of native vegetation clearing and stock grazing across generations.

## **THE NUTS & BOLTS**

- Ian and Margaret Hall have been involved in forestry and carbon farming for over 20 years, implementing several projects.
- The Halls believe that planning and innovation is important in incorporating tree cropping and carbon plantings into the farming landscape, with the real opportunity being the landscapes that are not suitable for broadacre farming.
- Ian feels that the agricultural industry needs to come together to ensure the full benefits of forestry and carbon farming are realised and that this consensus and collaboration relies on evidence and data.

## CARBON FARMING BY ANY OTHER NAME

In addition to the initial pine tree project, the Hall family have made further plantings of native sandalwood, *Pinus brutia* and Oil Mallee, and have trialled *Acacia saligna* and a variety of *Melaleuca* species.

A more recent project sees the Halls partnering with Carbon Positive Australia to restore 53ha of degraded agricultural land on their property. With the support of the State Natural Resource Management Program, they are planting biodiverse sandalwood, which benefits the landscape, attracts pollinators and native species – and can be sold for profit down the track. On top of that, saltland carbon plantings test the ability of native trees and shrubs to grow in different levels of salinity, sequestering carbon and increasing the usefulness of land for water use, stock shelter and mixed grazing. In 2019 and 2020, the family hand-planted 81,000 seedlings as part of the project.

As far as Ian is concerned, tree cropping is good Landcare, but not necessarily carbon farming. He feels that tree cropping is a smart way to make use of land that is not suitable for broadacre

farming, and brings a raft of benefits, including preventing erosion and lowering the groundwater table, “the sequestration of carbon is a co-benefit to the projects undertaken, which have also benefited the family’s financial and farming goals” says Ian.



Ian recognises that carbon farming is a great way to incentivise reforestation of country that should never have been cleared in the first place. Ian recalls that he must have developed a sense of “something not being right with the land being so bare”, though he can clearly remember being in his late teens and thinking “great, no trees in the way!” Now, as an experienced land and business owner, he recognises all the ways trees can help – both tangibly on the land, as well as by storing carbon to reduce the effects of climate change.

## PLANNING, INNOVATION AND REWARD

“These days it is essential that every farmer has goals and plans” says Ian. The Halls feel that while traditionally farmers have been very conservative, today’s farmers seem to be more prepared to try new projects and innovations. Ian in particular feels that farm advisors and consultants are vital in getting farmers on board with carbon farming – or tree cropping, “they’re the linchpin”.

Ian feels that practices such as no-till, minimal burning and general Landcare are generally part of normal farming operations these days, primarily driven by productivity and profitability goals. While these practices are returning carbon to the soil, Ian feels that there is currently no commercially viable reward for carbon farming, which ultimately benefits broader society, “if society desires action on carbon, farmers should be financially encouraged like broader society

has been through initiatives like the solar rebate programs” says Ian. After all, Ian knows that “you can’t be green if you’re not in the black”.

## INDUSTRY SUPPORT IS ESSENTIAL

Without a carbon price that rewards farmers, consensus in the agricultural industry on the benefits and co-benefits of carbon farming, and a reliable carbon calculator, Ian believes that carbon farming is too nebulous.

With the nature of funding for carbon farming projects being grant-based and short-term, Ian believes it is hard to get the momentum needed to create lasting change in the agricultural industry. Ian says “growers, natural resource management groups, government and the agriculture industry all need to be singing from the same songbook”.

While with Avongro, Ian was part of the development of a carbon calculator, which was exciting at the time. It’s not being used to the extent that the group hoped it would, but Ian understands why; it’s out of date. The diversity of farming means that developing a carbon calculator that works for everyone is enormously difficult.

## THE POWER OF EVIDENCE

Ian feels that monitoring and evaluation of on-going carbon farming projects – keeping clear, qualitative and quantitative data on the cost, the process, the benefits and co-benefits of carbon farming – are the way forward. “When it comes to consensus and collaboration in the industry, evidence and data is essential” says Ian. Ian feels this evidence, useful in both over-the-fence chats with neighbours, as well as lobbying government and the industry, is powerful. Not only that, but it’s also positively necessary to continue the advancement of agriculture in Western Australia.

For more information please visit: [www.carbonpositiveaustralia.org.au/carboncare](http://www.carbonpositiveaustralia.org.au/carboncare)  
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