

CARBONCARE™ VOICES

Farming Insights: Adams - Woogenellup, WA

By: Johanna Tomlinson

Edited By: Martha Barnard-Rae

CARBON FARMING RISK MANAGEMENT; A PRIORITY AT YALLARA PASTORAL

Mark and Heather Adams farm 6,910ha on Minang Country at Woogenellup, Western Australia. Theirs is a mixed farming enterprise, but they focus on crop – generally barley, wheat and canola.

The whole Adams family lives and breathes agriculture. Heather and Mark have always been involved in WA Farmers (including at the state level), as well as local and regional landcare projects. They were instrumental in developing Stirlings to Coast Farmers, which supports members with agricultural research-based outcomes that are relevant to the local area.

Not only that, their daughter, Kimberley was awarded top honour at the Young Professionals in Agriculture Forum in 2014. She undertook her research on the family farm. Her Dad was very supportive – as far as he's concerned, "change, innovation and young people are so important for the future of agriculture". In short, they're innovative, progressive farmers.



Another thing about the Adamses is that past experiences have made them wary of the zero-carbon movement and what it means for farmers on the ground.

THE NUTS & BOLTS

- Previous experiences with agroforestry projects have left Heather and Mark feeling battered and a bit cautious when it comes to large-scale planting projects for carbon farming.
- The Adamses do see there may be opportunity for carbon farming in the future, however, carbon calculation and a return on investment and effort is required.

THE OPTIMISM OF YOUTH

Yallara Pastoral Company has been a no-till operation since the mid-1980s. Heather and Mark have several other 'Green' feathers in their cap as well. They manage their cropping to minimise

stubble burning, they use a strip and disc system to reduce fuel use, they undertake soil testing to keep a lid on fertilisation and herbicide costs and use a seed destructor to help fight herbicide resistance. But the fact is, while they see benefits of biodiverse plantings on degraded or unused parts of their farm, they are not planning to get on board with carbon farming at the moment.

The current reluctance to get onboard with carbon farming stems from their own previous experiences. Heather and Mark have literally planted tens of thousands of trees on their property over the years for different reasons. Agroforestry projects where they have planted trees for alternative revenue sources include:

- Pines: Over 130 Ha's of pines in partnership with the Forest Products Commission, but the project was mismanaged and left them with a caveat on their land, and
- Saw logs: They started a 40-year project in saw log plantations, but Federal Government support for the project was withdrawn, leaving the family to manage the project themselves.



CLIMATE CHANGE CHALLENGE

Heather and Mark agree that the climate is changing. In fact, their son-law, Nathan, has recently entered and analysed the past 50 years of rainfall data. The evidence showed a declining trend – and Heather agrees that this is a challenge for farmers.

Heather is keen to do what they can on the farm to mitigate the effects and impacts of climate change, but she just wants support, from the Government and the agriculture industry, to ensure that carbon planting projects have the greatest possible chances of success. And for Heather, that means deep research into which native species, on which types of land, and with what kinds of maintenance, will result in a favourable result for everyone – including the grower's bank balance. For her, carbon planting isn't something you do to feel good. A solid return on investment and assurance that it will be effective is what the Adamses are looking for. After two challenging planting projects where involvement with third parties has been troublesome and the success of the plantings have been compromised (through no fault of their own), Heather subscribes to the old adage: Do it once, do it right.

MOVING FORWARD WITH CARBON FARMING



Currently, Mark and Heather can't see the benefits of carbon farming, but they both agree that they will become clearer in the future. Their plan is to hold off on carbon farming until an appropriate opportunity crops up. Having said that, Heather's already got her eye on a few key parts of the farm that could be used for future planting projects. They're hoping to incorporate future planting into areas of the farm which currently represent challenges and are not performing from a cropping point of view, including landscapes impacted by shallow water tables. Given their past investments and involvements in Landcare and natural resource management projects, the Adamses are very familiar with the co-benefits of permanent plantings.

Their children, Heather says “might jump onto it with great enthusiasm (as we would’ve when we were younger) and make it work,” but Heather and Mark say there are four things that they’ll need to see before they add carbon farming to the farm plan.

- **Carbon market:** A carbon price and a carbon credits scheme that is equitable to all parties would go a long way to convincing Heather and Mark to do carbon farming.
- **Tried and true methodology:** The Adamses need research-supported data about the types of endemic species that can be most effectively used in carbon farming in Western Australia, and the best way to get it done in each region for carbon and co-benefits.
- **Clear, measurable benefits:** A way of calculating carbon is required and any measurement tool needs to be tested, proven and affordable. This way, farmers will have a clear idea of the costs and benefits of being involved ahead of time.
- **A return on investment:** When it comes to big decisions on their farm, Heather and Mark are not interested in taking risks without knowing that there be a return on their investment, and their effort.

For Heather and Mark, the bottom line is the risk; “It’s all about managing risk,” Heather says. “That’s what farming is. There’s always a challenge and we just keep going”. The family has spent years working to support agriculture. Their wisdom, experience and open-minded approach makes them an important voice in the on-going discussion around carbon farming in Western Australia.

For more information please visit: www.carbonpositiveaustralia.org.au/carboncare
For inquiries: community@carbonpositiveaustralia.org.au