

Ken Woods and Annabel Walsh

Woodside

"It all begins with the soil. It's out of sight, but it's very much in mind."



Enterprise: Grazing sheep and cattle



Property size: 28ha



Annual rainfall: 700mm



Why regenerative agriculture?

Annabel started doing things differently on her station out of Wentworth NSW 30 years ago. She noticed things weren't going so well. So she studied various learned people around the world, including holistic grazer Allan Savory in Africa, and various people in the United States, and came back and started doing things different.

She divided the 65,000 acre station into smaller paddocks, put in watering points and started rotational grazing.

Life changed five years ago when Annabel had a health issue and we moved from regenerative agriculture on her 65,000 acres to my 65 acres here in the Adelaide Hills.



What practices and principles have you introduced to make your farm more regenerative?

We've implemented rotational grazing, planted multi-species pasture and reduced chemical inputs.

We divided the place into roughly ten equal paddocks and put in a central laneway, so that it's now really easy to move stock. We also installed piping for water, with multiple take-off points for each paddock, making it easy to plug water in with mobile troughs. So whichever paddock that the stock are in, they've got fresh water.

We've been using the Soilkee Renovator developed in Victoria by Neils Olson. I think it is a brilliant product. I would imagine we've put in about 40 different varieties of pasture seeds to date, in order to increase species diversity in the paddocks and build soil health.



What have been your greatest challenges?

A couple of times when we have used the Soilkee Renovator, we used it arguably at the wrong time of the year, too cold and wet. Other times we have put some seed in and nothing grew, then we had a bushfire.

After the bushfires, everything was destroyed. So we literally got out a blank sheet of paper and worked out where we should put the water and laneways, and what we should do with the paddocks.

By avoiding broad-acre herbicide applications we are trying to protect the biology of the soil as much as possible, so it takes us a bit longer to establish our multi-species successfully.



What have been your biggest successes?

We are seeing positive changes, but this is very much a work in progress to renovate this block, particularly after the fire. It isn't going to be done in my lifetime, but we hope that we start the process and it is continued.

No doubt our farming has been made easier, by dividing the paddocks so that it's really easy to move stock. Essentially, you can open a gate and stock will drift from one paddock to the next.

We have personally observed soil improvement, less compaction in particular, which is clearly visible with regular use of our penetrometer, as well as just having a dig with a spade. We have also noted a big increase in dung beetle activity, which is terrific.



Where to from here?

What we're trying to do is really extend the growing season with the variability of climate at the moment.

We would like the growing season to start a bit earlier and end a bit later. So coupled with rotational grazing principals, we aim to do this by encouraging more perennials, and a greater diversity of species in the pasture. This will be achieved by continuing to plant multi-species to get the right mix for extended seasons and stock palatability.

We will also investigate the use of microbial additives for soil health and improved biological function.

Both Annabel and I are keen to share our successes and failures, helping other local farmers transitioning to regenerative agriculture.



Australian Government
Department of Agriculture,
Water and the Environment



Future
Drought
Fund

*This program received funding from the Australian Government's
Future Drought Fund.*

LANDSCAPE
SOUTH AUSTRALIA
HILLS AND FLEURIEU