



Project Snapshot

Land Manager's Name/s:	Tony Williamson
Property Size:	3,700 ha
Location:	Belka
Annual rainfall (mm):	330mm
Enterprise mix:	85% cropping, 15% pasture
Soil types/vegetation types:	Mixed

Key Messages

- Utilise funding to give something a try, the results may surprise you.
- Think about where you may be wasting inputs on your property and consider other options.
- Planting a mixture of perennial shrubs offers livestock a more-balanced diet.
- Perennial forage shrubs can offer an alternative feed source to livestock during the summer and autumn months.

Unproductive country 'rich' again

Tony Williamson runs Morella Farms, a property between Merredin and Bruce Rock. Growing crops is his 'bread and butter'. Like many farms in the wheatbelt however his soils are extremely variable. This means that some areas of the property are not suitable to cropping. Without help financially many of these areas would be either left unmanaged or cropped for the sake of it.

With the help of the Wheatbelt NRM funding Tony was able to plant an area of very rocky granite and shallow loamy country with the perennial shrub Old Man Saltbush (*Atriplex nummularia*). This country was difficult to seed in the wet as Tony's heavy seeding gear would turn it to slop. Plus due to the shallow soil only poor yields could be achieved. "If it wasn't for the funding on offer we wouldn't have bothered to revegetate the area because of the cost to do so", Tony said. "The timing of the funding was great because the nearby creek was starting to show signs of salinity".

With good preparation the 16ha area established well. The site was initially sprayed with a knockdown, and then a scalper was used during the one-pass planting operation. This meant the Saltbush was planted into fairly clean site. By transforming the area with saltbush (16,000 seedlings) Tony can now devote the fenced off area exclusively to stock, particularly when trying to

establish other pastures early in the year. "Although it's only a small area, it should be very productive saltbush country, because of its high fertility and efficient water holding capacity", Tony believed.

Lessons Learnt

Through this exercise Tony now looks at the landscape on his property in a new light. Tony explained, "Cropping areas which are consistently unproductive, no matter what you do is counter-productive to the bottom line". He added, "We have learnt to identify areas which are not returning a profit through normal farming practices. Once identified, it is then up to us to find an appropriate use for it which is either not losing money or contributing to the profits of a different enterprise". He is very happy that through this project he was able to find a way to buffer the enterprise from the pressures of the autumn feed gap. He would encourage other people to give it a go as the overheads are minimal and inputs are no longer being wasted.

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Below: Brendan Williamson



Published: March 2013



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