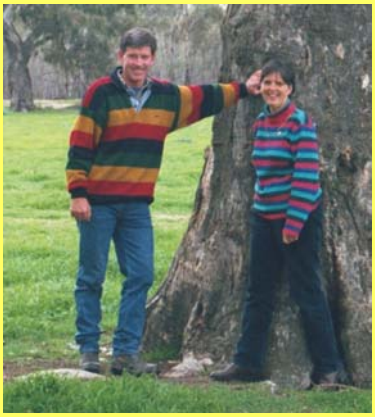
BIODIVERSITY ENHANCEMENT PLANS IN ACTION

Australian tomato LAP develops & implements biodiversity strategy to mitigate rising water tables & to create biodiversity corridors for native fauna & birds.



John & Pat Kennedy, Unilever Australasia Pilot Farmers making an outstanding contribution to biodiversity enhancement on their farm.

Work in partnership with:
Outsourced Environmental, Australia;
www.outsourcedenvironmental.com.au or www.growsustainably.com or email: enquiries@outsourcedenvironmental.com.au

More information:
Sikke Meerman
UBF Vlaardingen
The Netherlands
sikke.meerman@ unilever.com
or
Mario Solomon, Unilever Australasia,
mario.solomon@unilever.com

The issue

Since the onset of European settlement, the development of Australia's agriculture and with the increase in areas established for farming activities, a rapid decline in biodiversity (or net loss) has occurred.
The Unilever Australasia tomato pilot located in Northern Victoria and Southern NSW, occurs in an area where a substantial decline in native vegetation has resulted in a change in surface and ground water balances and is thought to be contributing to a rise in shallow or perched highly saline (EC – 30 dS/m) water tables.
Sustainability of agricultural production in this region is linked to improved water use efficiency and most likely enhanced or replanted areas of native vegetation.

Addressing the issue

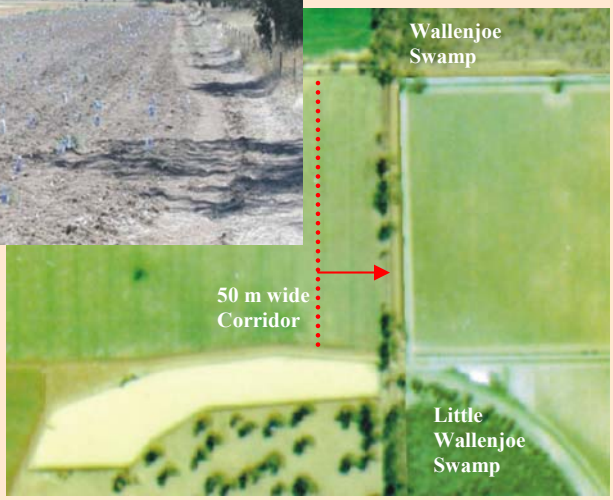
The Australian pilot has;

- Conducted a biodiversity reconnaissance study of each of the 10 tomato farms contributing to the Australian LAP. This study was conducted by biodiversity specialists in conjunction with local government authorities and catchment management NGO's,
- Established a strategy for the assessment of biodiversity on farms, following an extensive review of literature, consultation with experts, government agencies and conservation groups,
- Selected biodiversity indicators, developed indicator field assessment methods, established initial interpretative thresholds based on consultation with experts, and field evaluated these indicators for pilot farms. For more information see: Grow Sustainably Biodiversity Abstract & Paper (Oct 2003) in the Downloads section of www.growsustainably.com.

The assessment and subsequent enhancement strategy aimed at; assessing native flora; improving the health and diversity of vegetation as a basis for providing productivity benefits for farming systems in order to positively impact shallow or rising ground water tables and surface water runoff from farms; improving the habitat value for native fauna and providing shelter for farm livestock. Biodiversity enhancement plans have been established in consultation with pilot farmers and local Catchment Management Authorities.

Progress

The Australian pilot farmers worked with the LAP facilitators to;



- Identify areas on and around their farms for biodiversity enhancement.
- Identify non-productive and some productive areas for the protection of existing native vegetation and/or the reestablishment of new areas of native vegetation.
- Identified areas where biodiversity enhancement could provide ground and surface water mitigation assistance, stock shelter, protect sensitive or endangered species or improve habitat value. These plans linked in with local regional catchment revegetation plans, including the protection of endangered species.
- Initiate works on farm including exclusion of stock to native vegetation (fencing), collection of local vegetation seeds, transplanting seedlings, watering and weed control.

The photographs above demonstrate one of several initiatives undertaken by pilot farms to enhance biodiversity. This example illustrates how one farmer has taken a 50m strip of productive farm land and replanted this area with native trees (seed sourced locally) to provide a corridor for native birds and fauna to move between two swamp systems. This area also provides groundwater mitigation benefits.

Challenges

- Initiating enhancement plans has been slowed in the past 18 months due to severe winter drought conditions (worst in 100 years). Some significant progress achieved on several farms.
- Government funds for fencing, local seed collection and tree planting are available and individual farm applications for funds are required in some areas.