

10. Milford: Bringing back biodiversity with native shelterbelt plantings



AT A GLANCE

Owner	Jan and Geoff Hamilton
Property name	Milford
Location	Northern Midlands
Property size	1,875 hectares
Enterprise	Prime lamb, fine wool, cropping, steer fattening

KEY POINTS

- Creating shelterbelts has been a key activity at Milford.
- Productivity and natural amenity benefits have been drivers for planting projects.
- Gaining the support and advice of local experts has been an important learning approach.

Background

Milford is a mixed farming enterprise farm owned by Jan and Geoff Hamilton and operated by the Hamilton's daughter and son in law. Jan and Geoff bought the property in 2014 and moved to the Northern Midlands in 2016 and have been planting native vegetation ever since.

They previously owned a farm in Wagga Wagga, New South Wales, for 25 years where they enjoyed planting and managing trees.



The right tree in the right place

After arriving at Milford, the Hamiltons immediately recognised opportunities for tree planting and set about identifying areas to plant shelterbelts.

"When we first came here, the place was very bare,' says Jan, 'the country once sustained significant trees but sadly all that remained of many of the big old trees were stumps or felled trunks left lying in paddocks.

"But knowing the land had grown big trees in the past, we started a planting program to establish some shelterbelts and bring trees and shrubs back into the landscape.

"We had a plant grower come to look at the conditions and recommend what we should plant where. Based on his recommendations, we planted a selection of endemic species depending on the site conditions," says Jan, "some areas are dry and rocky, some are wet, some have lovely loamy soil.

"We always plant a combination of tall trees, medium trees, shrubs and a selection of grasses within a shelterbelt.'

Planting these different layers of vegetation is not only good for biodiversity through the structural diversity of the habitat created; it also maximises the effectiveness of shelterbelts by providing shelter from wind at different heights once the plants mature.

Combined benefits of shelterbelts

Having planted trees on their previous property, Jan and Geoff understood the multiple benefits of shelterbelt plantations for productivity, biodiversity and the environment.

Shelterbelts are proven to boost pasture production, reduce lamb mortality, increase wool production and support weight gain in livestock. They also enhance soil fertility, mitigate erosion and increase water infiltration, while providing food and habitat for native wildlife.

"It's a combination of benefits that motivate us," says Jan, "there's a lot of research that shows the stock, crop and pasture benefits of shelterbelts.

"Then if you plant a diverse selection of native species within those shelterbelts, you get the added benefit of bringing back native wildlife including birds and bugs, which can reduce the amount of spraying required to manage pests.

"It's so much nicer to wake up in the morning and head out on the farm to see birds flying in and out of trees, and insects hard at work and vegetation flowering. It's just a real joy. Knowing behind that, the stock is benefitting, the crops are benefitting, the pasture is benefitting, and ecology is benefitting. It's a no-brainer."

Enjoying the learning curve

Adapting from the climate of inland New South Wales to Tasmania, Jan and Geoff have embarked on a process of learning with the support of their local community.

"There's a lot of support and enthusiasm for native vegetation here in Tassie," says Jan, "there's a lot of ecologists and they're all keen to see native animals and birds and insects come back. We took some advice from our local NRM North about timing and prep, and followed their recommendations.

"We've come into contact with lots of different people. There's a lot of knowledge out there, so we try to tap into it.

"If you look hard, you can also find funding to assist you. Start searching for financial assistance because there is funding out there. Also, look around your local area and see where farmers are doing it well, knock on their door and most will be really happy to talk to you."

Spreading the word

Jan is passionate about seeing more revegetation programs on farms, and encourages any landholder considering native plantings to explore how it could work for them.

'Obviously you've got to make your farm pay,' says Jan, 'so you've got to have areas that are under pasture, under crop or being grazed. But it just adds to the joy of farming to do it when you're surrounded by native birds, animals, bugs and bees.

'I encourage other farmers to get out there and manage their weeds and increase the level of native vegetation.

'Get out there and get going. That's my biggest message. As soon as you start planting trees, it will be hard to stop.'

For resources and advice about establishing and managing trees on your property, contact Pierre Defourny at pdefourny@tasland.org.au.

For resources and advice about establishing and managing trees on your property, visit treealliance.com.au or contact Private Forest Tasmania's free hotline 1300 661 009