

Frank Egan's Farm Visit – 18/05/2023

Frank focuses on sustainable sheep meat production, woodland regeneration and restoring land and waterways. Frank started farming 50 years ago on a 5-acre plot. He now raises sheep on his 300 acres property in Durran Durra. Over that period, they have bred goats (milk, meat and fibre), cattle, poultry and waterfowl, and sheep (wool and meat). Currently, Frank is grazing 150 sheep on 160 acres due to flooding on half his property.



Walking around the farm

We hired a bus for 12 of us to travel from Goulburn to Frank's property in Durran Durra. As we drove through the property, we noticed sandy soils in the water catchment, healthy dams, swales on the hillside and Frank's mixed variety of sheep. After morning tea, we walked to a steeper part of the property near the house. When Frank arrived at the property in 1998, it was continuously grazed by cattle, leaving it degraded with little ground cover. In one paddock with casuarinas, it used to be bare ground. Frank locked it up to rest for some time to allow the plants to recover. As a result, it has high ground cover and is part of his strategic grazing rotation. We walked past one of the dams noticing the grass growing up to the water's edge. Frank showed us stands of young eucalypt trees, which grow densely and eventually thin themselves out into a grassy woodland as we saw further on.



Mineral mix

Frank's sheep are Middle Eastern breeds, with nine different breeds. The ram is left with the breeders as the breeds have different reproductive cycles. He said it takes five years for the sheep to adapt to the environment naturally, after which he will select for traits. Frank does not drench or vaccinate his sheep. He builds a strong herd by allowing natural selection to take place. The Middle Eastern breeds have strong maternal instincts, and he leaves them to lamb in the bush by themselves. Frank provides a mineral mix with a set ratio of dolomite, salt, seaweed, sulphur, and copper to cater for any deficiencies. The pastures have not had any superphosphate in 25-30 years. His grazing regime and practices have encouraged diversity and native species. When they found native sorghum, Frank allowed it to recover and reproduce, increasing its growing area. We saw large areas with tall kangaroo grass.



Kangaroo grass



Walking across latest weir

Following lunch, we walked down to the waterway, where Frank had done amazing work slowing the flow and rehydrating the catchment. He built a rock weir on the surface; however, once the water rose above it, it no longer slowed down. Using a hand auger, he found the water was flowing under the surface. He dug a trench and placed a metal sheet across to slow this flow and create a pool. At a pinch point, he used old fence posts dug one foot into the ground. They are now almost covered by vegetation. We crossed his latest weir made from an old trampoline, rocks, and wool. See the slides for the before and after photos. The vegetation

slows and filters the water, resulting in a clear surface flow. Soil Conservation built the swales above the waterway before Frank purchased the property. They have assisted in capturing and slowing the flow before it reaches the waterway. Frank's regenerative practices have increased ground cover, improved soil structure and water holding capacity, increased organic matter breakdown and nutrient cycling, and encouraged biodiversity above and below ground.

