

sustainable  
agriculture



# Introducing native perennial grasses into a farming system



## Project Snapshot

<b>Land Manager Name:</b>	<b>Scott McLean</b>
<b>Property Name:</b>	<b>County Peak</b>
<b>Property Size:</b>	<b>2500 acres</b>
<b>Location:</b>	<b>Beverley</b>
<b>Annual Rainfall (mm):</b>	<b>400 - 450 mm</b>
<b>Enterprise Mix:</b>	<b>50% Crop, 50% Stock</b>
<b>Soil Types/Vegetation Types:</b>	<b>Heavy red and grey clays to loam over clay</b>
<b>Local Community Group:</b>	<b>Morbinning Catchment</b>
<b>Catchment/Local Catchment:</b>	<b>Avon / Yilgarn / Lockhart</b>

## Getting involved

Scott became involved in this project after he had attended a community forum in Trayning, that was organised by Dianne Haggerty as part of funding provided through Wheatbelt Natural Resource Management (WNRM). After listening to Dr Christine Jones speak on the value of C4's (summer active plants) and speaking with WNRM staff members Scott decided to become involved and put an application together.

## What has happened

Scott mentioned that he "now knows a lot more people because of being involved in the project", which he said has been good, as everyone has different areas of expertise that he has been able to learn from.

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Due to a lot of research that Scott conducted at the beginning and through the duration of the project, particularly in deciding what pasture species he wanted to grow, Scott says that “I have learnt a lot about perennial pastures and their place in successional soil fertility”. Once the on ground works of the project were done Scott continued to learn a lot about what native perennial pastures needed to establish.

The most important change for Scott is what he has learnt about native perennial pastures especially that it is a long term project. “A lot of the native perennial pasture seed that I have sown didn’t germinate this year. However, I have faith that they will germinate when the conditions in the soil are right for them to do so”, Scott stated, “it won’t happen in 1 year, it is going to take time and the correct type of management to produce the right conditions for the seed to establish and the plants to continue growing”.

## In the Beginning

When first deciding what species of native perennial pastures to plant, Scott decided that it was best to know what was already growing naturally on and near his farm. To do this Scott picked green plants in summer from the roadside. “I collected half a dozen different types of summer active plants and took them in to Una Bell at the WA Herbarium to get them identified. From there I chose to sow *Chloris Truncata* “windmill grass”, recounted Scott.

The windmill grass seed was sown “in the middle of harvest” early November of 2011 during a summer storm into a paddock that was cut for hay that year. “As the seed is so light I mixed it with liquid compost extract and rainwater and sprayed it out over the site. I then used finger tine harrows to ensure that I got good seed to soil contact”.

## What was learnt

Scott will be making some changes on farm since his involvement in the project. “I am determined to see as many of these native perennial pasture species re-establish across my farm as is possible. So to achieve this outcome I intend to change my management strategies to manage for the return of these plants. I have also learnt the value that native fodder shrubs can play when incorporated into this strategy. The 7 species of fodder shrub I planted with this project, have, in a similar way to the perennial pasture, provided green feed and ground cover through the hottest and driest months of the year. Converting sunlight into feed.

“I am happy with what happened in the project. Hindsight is a great thing but I wouldn’t change anything, as I have learnt so much”. Especially about, successional soil fertility, successional plant species and soil biology and their relationship with livestock.

## Looking forward

In the future Scott is going to plant some other species of native perennial grasses over the same area he planted the windmill grass “I believe it is very important to have bio-diversity, not a monoculture.” I also intend using holistic, time controlled livestock grazing to increase the successional fertility of the soil to better produce the right conditions for perennials to establish and grow. I also plan to plant more native fodder shrubs to the area where the perennials are, as they too will benefit this farm as a whole.



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