

May 19, 2010

NOMINATION FOR A K HILL AGRICULTURAL AWARD (WINNERS)

Dave and Marg Daniels and family (Central Queensland)

Dave and Marg Daniels and family practice dryland broadacre cropping on 2,600 hectares. Dave calls his methods 'Soft Farming'. Through intelligent use of liquid compost, minerals and trace elements and a very small amount of chemical fertiliser and herbicide, Dave monitors his crops and soil for nutritional balance and microbial activity.

The Daniels family have doubled the productive potential of their soils, cut farm costs and more than doubled soil carbon down to 1 metre, across the farm. The Daniels family are leading the way in the northern broadacre cropping zone of Queensland's tropical agriculture. Crops grown include sorghum, wheat, chickpea and mung bean in rotation.

Cam and Roxanne McKellar and family (Liverpool Plains NSW)

The McKellar family operate an intensive, irrigated cropping and dryland cropping enterprise where judicious use of livestock as stubble-digesters enhance cropping potential on 1350 hectares. Humidified compost made on the farm (5,000 tons) supports irrigated corn, soya bean, chickpeas and mung beans, and dryland wheat, sorghum, chickpeas and mung beans.

Intelligent use of biofoods (kelp, fish and molasses) to cycle nutrients and carbon drive productive, high quality crops. The success of this farm is based on building and cycling carbon in the soil, crop rotation, animal nutrient cycling and use of inputs that don't harm the natural systems in the soil.

The McKellar family's holistic philosophy of integrated livestock and biological farming is producing high-yielding, nutrient dense crops and balanced, resilient soils. Water use efficiency with the irrigated crops is considerably increased and the carbon in the soil has tripled.

Ian and Dianne Haggerty and family (Wheat Belt, Western Australia)

This family farms mixed livestock and wheat, barley and oats on 17,000 acres. They use clovers in 1-year ley-pastures and 1 year crop rotations. Crops are integrated with sheep which are fed minerals as they graze the stubbles and ley-pasture. The sheep spread the minerals and biology across the farm, addressing deficiencies in the soil and recycling nutrients.

The Haggerty family practice an holistic program of biological farming using worm juice, liquid compost and compost teas integrated with livestock. They aim to achieve an optimum balance of nutrition and biology in the farming system while building soil carbon. Plant and animal health and disease resistance has increased as they have built the health of the soil, and they have been able to grow crops without herbicides.

All three farms nominated are managed to create the conditions in the soil for optimum biological and nutritional balance, the results of which are cut costs and improved yield and quality. They have all markedly increased the structure, water-holding capacity, nutrient balance and capacity, nutrient recycling and resilience of their soils.

A visit to any one of these properties is an inspiring experience. These families are happy, positive, innovative and have a vision for the future. Doing their own research, they also have a sense of being in control of their own destiny, and are not reliant on high inputs of chemicals and fertilisers. They are off the treadmill created by chemical companies, governments, research organisations and education entities.

They are aware that their productivity is based on their ability to increase, cycle and maintain high levels of carbon in the soil. To these farmers carbon in the soil is money in the bank.