

INSPIRING SMALL FARMS TO GROW BIG IDEAS

THE BEGINNINGS

In the past, Up2Us Landcare Alliance has had engagement of large productive based landowners. They currently engage Landcare in a different way – to assist them help small landholders become aware of their rights and responsibilities and make use of their land.

What started out as a complaint about weeds on 'lifestlye properties' in 2012/13 has developed into our organisation being able to work with a new genera of people who are keen to make their land productive.

In 2014 a few options came together.

Firstly, Up2Us started networking with landholders who were producing on small acreage trying to gain an insight into the steps of production, including what they learnt along the way. All of the producers we consulted said the most important thing was research, research, research and as part of their initial research, many of them undertook a Whole Farm Plan or Farm Plan 21 course. Since that initial contact, Up2Us has been working with small landholders to provide them with the opportunities to expand their working knowledge of their property, the vision that they have for it and sustainable land management tools.



BUS TOUR 2014

Secondly, Up2Us was contacted by the CEO of Foundation of Regional and Rural Renewal (FRRR) in October 2014. Twelve months after the phone call we signed a contract with the William Buckland Foundation Fast Track Ag program to promote and provide farm trials/demonstrations to develop the diversity of small acreage landholders. Capers, Garlic and alternative fertilisers were chosen in response to community interest and success of local enterprises.

This was a steep learning curve for Up2Us as we were committed to ensure that we were able to scientifically reproduce evidence-based demonstrations by setting up and collecting the correct information in terms of ensuring that we had the right scientific methods and processes in place. Our learning took us to another Landcare network who had already set up demonstrations. We visited the Westernport Catchment Landcare Network who had already tackled these issues which assisted us in understanding our obligations and reporting requirements.



FRRR's money was strictly for increasing expansion and production capabilities for farmers. Up2Us had a gap in service provision – in addition to increasing production for small acreage landholders, we needed to provide education. Up2Us along with some of the current small producers approached GBCMA for funding for education over 2 years in order to address this gap. The funding gave us the flexibility to compose and run a complete package which has been extremely valuable.

Up2Us started hosting sustainable land management sessions for landholders specifically on small acreage, recognising that whilst this type of sporadic education gave us connections with people and started people connecting and learning it didn't address the consistency we were after. In June 2015, Up2Us decided that Farm Plan 21 would be the course that could address the gap and therefore started working alongside Agriculture Victoria and 4 Up Skilling in order to create a reality. We started this course on the 15th Feb 2016.



Alongside this program Up2Us has been networking with the Mansfield Shire Council and Mansfield Producers group encouraging them to become involved in the Climate Smart Agriculture program. The Climate Smart Agricultural Program is a research based project within the Goulburn Broken catchment that is now particularly interested in the work we are doing and is intent on following our progress and results.

THINGS THAT WORKED WELL

1. Philanthropic money – Up2Us was participating in something that Landcare in our area hadn't worked in before
2. Setting up of demonstrations – whilst time consuming, the set-up has been executed professionally which is ensuring the growth of crops.
3. Farm Plan 21 course – Up2Us has been working with the landholders for 18-24 months prior to establishing a course here and whilst we thought it would benefit them, we had to market that prospect. We flagged the concept that the course be conducted as two units of a Diploma of Agriculture so that if people wanted to continue their study they were more equipped. I believe this to be an added asset for those participating. Up2Us engaged an education service provider to assist with the student competencies. Farm Plan 21 course enabled us to incorporate all the learnings to date and directly apply them to individual participant's properties. One participant said "We have done heaps of these courses



but this is the first that we can actually apply to our own property so we are really looking forward to what comes out of it". A complete course means that we get a commitment from property owners and we get a consistency of people attending. It becomes a priority for them.

4. Future of small farming – the future of small farming in Mansfield will be directly impacted by the small steps that we are taking. The Mansfield Producers group is a group of people who are working on the marketing and the management of a regional group which directly compliments the next steps for our clientele.



LESSONS LEARNED

1. Busyness – Whilst this may not be the core business of Up2Us it does increase our busyness. Up2Us has seen a gap in service provision and we are working at filling it but it may mean that it will take us longer than usual as we have 7 + hats rather than one.
 - Up2Us works with people on small acreage and they are committed to producing but they often have part-time to full-time work and work on their properties as well so we are dealing with highly busy but motivated people.
2. Non-attendance/rescheduling – In the effort to try and host a series of events which cover off on all the basic information of land management and the busyness of people's much rescheduling has occurred. I reiterate the benefit of working within a course context and the value Farm Plan 21 as it encourages people to focus and commit to something that they may not normally.
3. Mistakes with our philanthropic group –
 - a. Budget management - Up2Us was able to achieve the required outcomes and go in under budget.
 - b. Communication is a huge key – the expectation is that you are to communicate all that is happening and use all media to do this.
 - c. Limited room for non-compliance – one of our core outcomes was difficult to manage and although much effort was put in to complete it, we couldn't seem to make it happen. The expectation is that it would be achieved



SETTING UP THE CAPER DEMONSTRATIONS IN MANSFIELD 2015





GARLIC DEMONSTRATIONS TOLMIE – NEEDS TO COPE WITH ALL WEATHER



CAPER DEMONSTRATIONS TOLMIE – CAPER BUDS ARE ALREADY BEGINNING

