

Moore Catchment Council

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Spaded perennials turn bare sand into lush paddock

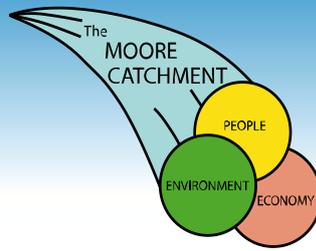
John Isbister is a very happy farmer. His newest perennial grass plantings at Ranfurly Park south of Moora, have turned two gutless white sand paddocks (over 100ha) into green lush pasture for his sheep. The key to success has been the careful planning and rigorous site preparation using spading to improve the non-wetting sands for good pasture establishment. The farm qualified for subsidies through the Northern Agricultural Catchments Council's (NACC) CFOC wind erosion program for perennial pasture establishment and fencing. Rachel Walmsley, Moore Catchment Council's (MCC) Natural Resource Management Officer negotiated the incentives with John and his dad Stuart.

Rachel says "John's planning for his 2012 pasture establishment started in autumn 2011 when the paddocks were grazed and then spaded. He had been watching others using the spading technique for a few years and felt it would be beneficial for his land and improve productivity." John used a Farmax spader which mixes soil to a depth of 300-400mm thus burying the non-wetting sands and bringing less water repellent sand to the surface. Rachel said "John remarked that it was pretty laborious and slow going as he could only do 1.8ha/hr but obviously looking back was well worth the slog."



Spaded vs unspaded – a couple of places in the paddock where it's clearly obviously why spading works

John then sprayed a knockdown herbicide in June 2011, and then planted a fodder crop of barley, sub-clover and yellow serradella to encourage a seed set of legumes (something John thinks in hindsight was risky in an exposed paddock). The result turned out to be valuable feed source. After grazing again in winter 2012, another knockdown was added in August before seeding of the perennial began on 3rd September 2012 using the Heritage Seeds Northern Mix (Gatton Panic and Rhodes Grass) with added Lucerne. Rachel added "John said he was rushing to get the seed in before the forecast rains. He used an Ausplow DBS seeder (with special small seed boot usually used for canola) and seeded at a rate of 4-5kg/ha with



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500mm spacings.” Fertiliser included Super potash 3:1 @ 80kg/ha and Macro Pro extra @ 60kg/ha. John estimates approximate costings at \$120/ha for the spading and \$200/ha for establishment (seed, labour, machinery, chemicals).

The forecast rains and cold temperatures didn’t cause as much germination as expected but over the coming weeks the warmer soil and rain events that did occur encouraged good germination and growth. Rachel said “I visited John early January 2013 to assess the perennials for payment and was astounded at what I saw. In what was tipped to be a pretty rubbish year for perennial pasture establishment, John has managed to establish the best paddocks I’ve ever seen.” Rachel continued “In addition, the spading has actively demonstrated its worth and is visually apparent in a number of places within the paddocks where John lifted the spader a couple of times – only a few plants have survived.” A small issue happened in the second paddock mid harvest time when a number of sheep decided the grass was greener on the other side of the fence and mowed it down to near nothing. Recovery has been astounding. Rachel concluded “John is certainly happy with the result and is looking forward to utilising his pastures soon.”



John Isbister with his fabulous perennials

For more information, please contact Rachel at MCC on 9653 1355