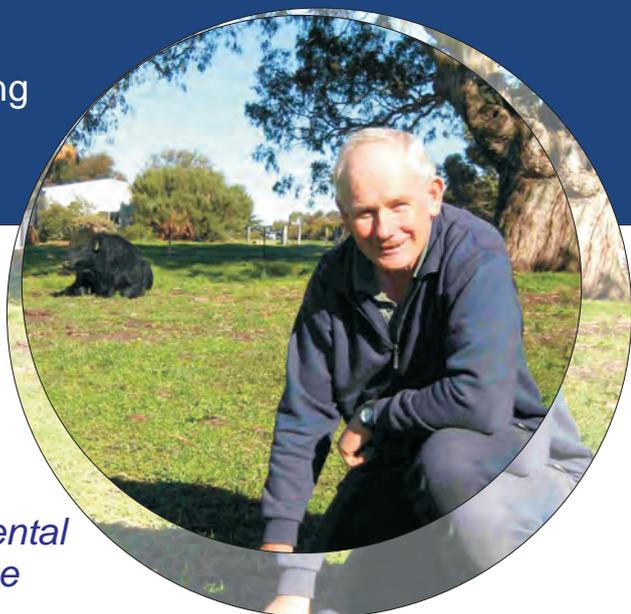


# Soil health is the key



*John Kane says soil health is the cornerstone to successful farming. He claims the EBMP (Environmental Best Management Practice) program has provided the discipline to what he wants to do on his farm.*

John and Jenny Kane farm 200 Angus beef cattle on their 240ha property near Coleraine.

On most days you will find John out on the farm. The picturesque fertile undulating hills provide a scenic backdrop to the work at hand.

John was first introduced to the EBMP (Environmental Best Management Practice) program when he was invited to participate in the pilot study in 2002.

He recently completed the latest version and claims the books are fantastic.

John enthused, "I am really impressed with the quality of the workbook."

He claims it puts discipline into what you want to do on the farm.

"Most farmers know in their heads what they want to do," he said, "but going through the book confirms where you are going and what you are doing."

John explained that for him the book was encouraging in confirming how well he was doing in certain areas.

"It is pleasing to see that a lot of stuff we have been doing is a priority in the book," he said.

The only criticism John had of the workbook is that the 'A' rating appears to be too ambitious.

"I don't think many farmers would achieve many 'A's," he commented. "The 'A' standard is generally too high to achieve. Farmers need to be re-assured that this is the ideal scenario and consistent 'A's would be difficult to obtain," he added.

John is supportive of the EBMP program and encourages all farmers to 'have a go' and adds, "It is certainly worth while undertaking the program."

Jenny is passionate about people growing their own food in their own environment and John is passionate about soils, especially how the soils, plants, animals and humans all interact together.

"Soil health is the cornerstone to successful farming," John declared.





John would like to see more farmers take the responsibility to access the latest knowledge and information on soils and weigh up for themselves the different options and alternatives.

John undertakes regular soil tests and has developed a fertiliser regime particular to his farm.

He has a five year program and uses alternative fertilisers and soil conditioners such as fish, kelp, lime, reactive rock phosphate, soft rock phosphate, trace elements, fulvic acid and phosphoric acid to improve the biology, soil structure and soil health.

“With the increasing costs of commercial fertilisers, it may be timely for farmers to consider these other alternatives,” he said.

John’s fertiliser regime has resulted in increased pasture growth and an improved pH of his soil from 4.5 to 6.3.

John uses his own pH meter to measure the acidity of the soil.

He also uses a refractometer which shows the amount of sugar in the plant. The higher the sugar reading, the greater the amount of uptake of phosphates by the plant. This increase demonstrates a greater nutritional value of the pasture.

He also aerates his pasture with a mechanical aerator in Spring, which cracks the hard pan 4-6 inches from the top.

John said this allows air to penetrate the lower reaches of the soil, which gets the good aerobic bugs activated in this area.

“The result is a greater depth of top soil and better conditions for pasture growth,” he claimed.

John is justifiably proud in what they have achieved over the last thirteen years.

They have set about repairing soil erosion scars by fencing off these areas and planting them with trees and vegetation.

They are also pulling down the old pines and replanting. Jenny has been responsible for selecting the species that are indigenous to the area.

John and Jenny are serious about land stewardship and have planted 6000 trees in three years. Their long term goal for the farm is to plant trees on every internal and external fence line.

John concluded, “We all have an incredible responsibility to pass on our land in a significantly better condition than when we received it.”

For further information, contact Department of Primary Industries - Whole Farm Planning Coordinator on 55 730 900

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