

Healthy soil the basis for healthy production.

Karen Jarling and Warren McEwan, Glastonbury



Having a healthy soil with a diverse range of micro-organisms is really important to Karen Jarling and husband Warren McEwan. Karen and Warren use a range of approaches as they improve their property's soil health which in turn will support a healthier more resilient pasture and increased production.

In late 2017 Karen and Warren sold their place at Widgee and purchased a small property at Glastonbury, west of Gympie, where they now have cattle, horses which support their contract mustering business and meat chickens. They also rent land to support their cattle herd. Meat from the cattle and chickens are sold by Karen direct to the public under the name of CGL Beef with the name representing Clean, Green and Local which describes their philosophy towards farming.

Soil provides the basis for their pasture and subsequent farm production and as a result is one of the reasons they are keen on improving soil health. "We are building resilience of the soil life, so it will cope with a range of conditions," Karen said. For example, in dry times pasture will hold up longer in a healthy soil whereas in other situations it has been exhausted and hence the feed for animals is gone or of a poorer quality. A healthy soil will support an extended range of beneficial micro-organisms which in turn support plants longer and with improved animal production.



Having a soil sample taken for laboratory testing; to know what the nutrient status of the soil is.



When possible Karen makes her own compost using materials like woodchip mixed with animal manure.

Karen uses her grazing animals as a tool to improve the soil health. In addition to eating grass she likes to see that the cattle and horses have “trampled some of the grass with their feet so they are actually bruising and breaking the grass which will help its breakdown in the soil”. This needs to be achieved with the correct density of animals as well as carefully managing where they graze and for how long. “Managing your animals and you being the boss of where they graze is how it should be,” she says. Otherwise animals will very easily “flog country”. Karen uses a “very sparky fence” (i.e. an electric fence) to control her animals and where possible successfully runs both the cattle and horses together so she has less paddocks being grazed at a time.

Karen says, “Spending lots of time in the paddock and with the animals can really help to get to know the system”. It also has the added benefit of being on the lookout for unwanted weeds.

Karen says she likes to try things. “We are still experimenting but also use past experience”. By trying you “can’t do worse than what you started with”. In some areas they use multi-species cover cropping planted with a minimum tillage planter with oats, brassicas, radish and vetch in winter, biodynamic preparations, worm juice and compost to help speed up the improvement process. Although Karen would rather avoid it she also concedes that there may be a role in using some fertiliser to supply needed nutrients.

By improving the soil health Karen aims to double their cattle numbers in the next 4 years whilst also having a more reliable and productive system across a range of conditions.

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