



2018 NATIONAL LANDCARE AWARDS

11 October

Brisbane Convention & Exhibition Centre

Nominee: Ashley Volz, QLD

Category: Austcover Young Landcare Leader Award

Ashley is always thinking outside the square and looking to improve profitability, while retaining sustainable farm practices. Ten years ago, at just 24 years old, Ashley Volz took up the position as chair of South Myall Catchment Landcare Group. During this time he has played a major role in the planning and implementation of new and improved sustainable farming practices for the catchment. In addition to being chair, he has held many additional roles including; vice chair of North East Downs Landcare, management committee member of North East Downs – where he served temporarily as chair – and Landcare director on the regional body for the Condamine Catchment (Condamine Alliance).

On his own property, Ashley has developed an action plan that implements low soil disturbance and low-cost methods to utilise stubble from crops with high-density grazing. This enables the stock to plant the next crop and includes managing strip-feeding with a solar-panelled electric fence, pre-set to automatically release cattle to shift onto the next strip of stubble. This methodology has resulted in friable soil that reduces the loss of good agricultural soil and drought-proofed his property.

It is not always easy to sell your beliefs and methods to people who have farmed at least twice as long as you, and are rather set in their ways. However, Ashley has managed to use his own property as a demonstration plot to show his fellow landholders the positive results that can be achieved with a little creativity and clever thinking. A field day was held at Ashley's property demonstrating these methods to forty landholders, enabling them to take-up this method of sustainable farming. Other projects Ashley has implemented and demonstrated are; rotational grazing fencing with watering points to increase soil organic matter and improve management practices; fencing of remnant vegetation to restrict cattle and improve biodiversity and; controlling weeds of national significance in remnants to improve biodiversity and increase native vegetation and grasses.

Ashley has also managed to help landholders in the South Myall Catchment improve their Landcare practices and skills. Attending field days and holding demonstrations on his and other landholders' properties, he has had the opportunity to explain in great detail the many advantages of implementing sustainable farm practices. Topics he has spoken on include; improved profitability, less labour, improved ground cover, improved water retention, more soil carbon, and improved drought resilience.

Ashley has also been at the forefront of encouraging the management committee of South Myall Landcare (SML) to plan for the future, to be drought ready, plant pasture with legumes and herbs on run-down cropping country, and be more alert for new and emerging weeds. Currently SML is promoting the use of modified machinery to remove African boxthorn and lantana camara in order to reduce the amount of chemicals sprayed into the atmosphere. In addition, SML is now offering small incentives to landholders to help them control environmental weeds on their properties – the result of Ashley's constant forward thinking.

This program is supported by Landcare Australia and the National Landcare Network, through funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Program.





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The innovative, sustainable practices Ashley has implemented on his property has enabled him to be a role model for other landholders; encouraging and enabling them to have a go themselves. Ashley has been very proactive in promoting the retention of remnant vegetation and has fenced several areas on his property to restrict stock and improve habitat and biodiversity.

Changing his farming systems in 2012 from dairying to beef cattle production and cropping, brought a lot of infrastructure and income changes for Ashley. Instead of seeing this as an insurmountable challenge, it was the instigator behind Ashley's initiative to implement a methodology that promotes sustainable change in the farming industry at minimal cost and labour.

Landcare is a grassroots movement that harnesses individuals and groups to protect, restore and sustainably manage Australia's natural environment and its productivity. Groups that fall under the Landcare umbrella work on a diverse range of environmental projects and include farmers embracing sustainable farm management and any community group that partakes in volunteer environmental activities. To find out how you can become a Landcare volunteer and for full details on all 2018 National Landcare finalists, visit www.landcareaustralia.org.au

Ends

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Web Summary

Ashley is always thinking outside the square and looking to improve profitability, while retaining sustainable farm practices. Ten years ago, at just 24 years old, Ashley Volz took up the position as chair of South Myall Catchment Landcare Group. During this time he has played a major role in the planning and implementation of new and improved sustainable farming practices for the catchment. Using his own property as a demonstration plot, Ashley has encouraged other local landholders to adopt his methodology that implements low soil disturbance and low-cost methods to utilise stubble from crops with high-density grazing.

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