



2018 NATIONAL LANDCARE AWARDS

11 October
Brisbane Convention & Exhibition Centre

Nominee: John Ive, ACT

Category: Australian Government Innovation in Agriculture Land Management Award

Over the past 37 years Canberra-based farmer John Ive and partner Robyn have transformed their 250 -hectare Yass Valley grazing property “Talaheni” from an eroded, salt-encrusted basket case to a productive sheep, cattle and farm forestry operation.

True to its name, “Talaheni” (Arabic for “wait a while”) wasn’t turned around overnight. In 1980, farm biodiversity was barely acknowledged as an issue as was carbon sequestration and climate change. John was ahead of the curve, developing an integrated farm plan with targeted monitoring to track progress.

He measured groundwater depth and salinity from the property’s piezometer network, as well as dam salinities and sub-surface waterflows. Saline seeps on potentially fertile flats occupied 23 percent of “Talaheni” when John acquired the farm. He increased native vegetation and conservation areas, excluding domestic stock from almost a third of the property while increasing farm productivity on his most fertile reclaimed flats.

John addressed the salinity issue by establishing over 200,000 native trees on rocky recharge ridges. Nurturing native vegetation, he provided the essential ingredients for enriched biodiversity. With salinity reduced, soil carbon increased and tree growth ensured substantial sequestration. Soil carbon increases fostered improved water infiltration and soil moisture. John’s approach recognised the quirks of the climate cycle, giving him the ability to adjust grazing pressure on high recharge ridges at critical times.

John also constructed extensive contour banks to manage water movements. This lowered water tables on saline discharge areas on otherwise fertile flats, allowing him to sow deep-rooting, highly productive perennial pastures on reclaimed saline seeps.

As well as increasing biodiversity and soil carbon levels, John’s monitoring efforts are also helping him prepare for climate change. Using Waterbank, a soil water balance-monitoring tool that mines rainfall and evaporation data from the Bureau of Meteorology, he is able to compare historic soil moisture on “Talaheni” with soil moisture projected to 2100. The data collected shows that soil moisture is declining, while permanent wilting point (the minimal soil moisture required by plants to avoid permanent wilting) increases. John is now considering how to retain soil moisture by reducing runoff and evapotranspiration, increasing infiltration and introducing more water-efficient, deeper-rooting perennial pasture species.

John's carbon audit of “Talaheni” also established that, at worst, the property’s operation was carbon neutral. Subsequently Melbourne University researchers determined that between 1980 and 2012, “Talaheni” sequestered 11 times more carbon than livestock and energy-use emissions. Newly established perennial pastures and trees achieving additional sequestration are now offsetting total emissions.

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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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

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Web Summary

John Ive and partner Robyn have transformed their Yass Valley grazing property from an eroded, salt-encrusted basket case to a productive sheep, cattle and farm forestry operation. Using targeted monitoring, John was able to measure groundwater depth and salinity as well as dam salinities and subsurface water flows. Saline seeps on potentially fertile flats occupied 23 percent of the property when John acquired it. He increased native vegetation and conservation areas, excluding domestic stock from almost a third of the property while increasing farm productivity on his most fertile reclaimed flats. John's monitoring efforts are also helping him prepare for climate change. Using a soil water balance-monitoring tool that mines rainfall and evaporation data from the Bureau of Meteorology, he is able to compare historic soil moisture on the farm with projections to 2100.

Pull-out quote:

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