



Your Levy at Work

# Share Farming with Nature

## David and Sue MacAulay Staceys Bridge, near Yarram Gippsland, Victoria

- 1100 acres over two properties
- 400-440 dairy cows
- MacAulay family farm since 1882
- Hills and river flats on the Albert River within the Corner Inlet catchment



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David MacAulay's land is part of his family to be cherished and respected.

Since 1882, the MacAulay's have been farming their river country at Staceys Bridge west of Yarram. David grew up on the land, enjoying the dairy life and relishing the bushland that grew alongside the pasture.

When the property came into his hands, he and wife Sue were determined to keep what remained of remnant native vegetation and start to create new bushland corridors along their Albert River frontage.

“My liking of the bush meant I started thinking that some areas of the farm were better off being fenced off and preserved rather than being cleared for more farm land,” he said. It was a philosophy that flew in the face of accepted wisdom at the time, but David could see the value of land beyond simply how much grass it could grow.

“I suppose there are some who are more interested in the last blade of grass, but I am not so concerned about that. I would rather have the satisfaction of seeing some vegetation,” he said. As he walks around the farm, David's passion for protecting bushland is clear. New growth where a bushfire had recently passed through was a cause of great excitement, and there was pride in his voice when talking about large scale community projects that turned marginal farming land into verdant bush.

Today, the towering eucalyptus and riverside forests look wonderful, but it was not so long ago that the farm - and much of the district - was infested with weeds and vermin. Tackling the noxious plants was the number one priority and the scale of the task led David to realise the power of community action.

“Farming in the hill country here was severely infested with ragwort,” he said. “Then when the hills farms were being sold and turned into plantations, that started the problems of erosion and poor water quality, so I became involved in some local committees to help overcome those problems.”

Other programs like the successful GipRip project, which saw large scale riverside remediation work tackled by farmers with assistance from the dairy industry and conservation groups, saw the rate of fencing and planting increase dramatically on the farm.

With the success of on-farm projects, the enthusiasm of local landholders just kept growing. “Another little project we did with the Landcare group was building a couple of fishing platforms on the Albert River, because the river banks were being damaged by people going up and down to fish,” he said.

When not running the farm or helping with Landcare projects, David always manages to find a few hours for one of a many community organisations that he has been involved with over the years.

In no particular order they include: the Lands Department, Soil Conservation Authority, West Gippsland Catchment & Land Protection (CALP), Corner Inlet Waterway Authority, Corner Inlet Management Group, Nooramunga Corner Inlet Project, South Gippsland Bass Implementation Committee, Land and Protection Portfolio Group, Gippsland Riparian Project and the Yarram Yarram Landcare Network Jack & Albert River Restoration (JARR) Project.

He's not the type to seek accolades, but David was awarded the Yarram Yarram Landcare Group Individual Award in 2011, in recognition of decades of commitment to the wider community. "I was very honoured and humbled, but everything I've been awarded for has been done in association with other groups or people," he said.

Sue MacAulay has seen her husband coming home after dark enough times to know that his passion is built on a belief that he is doing the right thing by both the farm and environment.

"He has always been focused on the farm and his broader community activities were always focused on agriculture and the environment," she said.



David is passionate about protecting vegetation on his dairy farm, finding a balance between areas for productive pasture and protecting remnant bushland and riparian land.

## Land for Wildlife

When Lyrebirds are spotted on a dairy farm, the environmental projects are definitely working.

Three of the beautiful native birds, which are sometimes heard but almost never seen, were spotted recently on David and Sue MacAulay's farm at Staceys Bridge. "It was wonderful, we just stood there and watched for half an hour," Sue said.

Seeing native animals returning to the bushland has clearly been one of the highlights of the long-term remediation work done on the farm, although some creatures are more welcome than others. "The sulphur crested cockatoos and galahs aren't so well received in the orchard," David laughed. "But we have the lyrebirds, massive amounts of wallabies and part of the bigger changes with the dry years was seeing kangaroos here that we never had in my younger times."

While native wildlife is welcomed, the property is still a working dairy farm where milk production is the core business. But David reckons the land he has reclaimed for bush has benefited both the environment and farm management. "We have a lot of river frontage so it has made life a lot more convenient," he said. "We have got rid of all those tangly bits of ground where stock would go, particularly if they were sick, and they would fall into the river. It's made stock management easier and, I believe, it has made water quality better."



Before & After views of the riparian restoration projects that David & Sue MacAulay have achieved on their Albert River property.



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Written by Danny Buttler for GippsDairy 2012.  
With Thanks to David and Sue MacAulay.