

***Australian Forest Growers
2008 Queensland
'Tree Farmers of the Year'***



John and Jane McLaughlin

'Mounefontein'
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Summary

John and Jane McLaughlin, 2008 Australian Forest Growers – Queensland Tree Farmers of the Year, have turned their 5156 hectare ‘grazing’ property into a sustainable and profitable ‘tree farming and grazing enterprise’. This has happened over time by John and Jane observing and learning about their property then researching, putting in place a plan and carrying out significant onground works to make it happen.

Their property ‘Mounefontein’ is now one of the best examples of a truly integrated native forestry and grazing enterprise in Northern Australia. John and Jane consistently provide industry leadership to other producers via hosting and participating in many field days and workshops, and will soon be further promoted via an AgForests Queensland ‘web video case study’.

In 2006 John and Jane decided to become serious about the timber part of their enterprise by conducting an standing volume and products inventory across the whole property (5156 ha). At this time they also commissioned a major silvicultural thinning/treatment works project across the property which has taken two (2) years to complete. This included one of their industries’ first large scale ‘forest practice thinning’ in their ‘remnant’ mapped areas under Queensland Vegetation Management Act 1999, using the new ‘Native forest practice code for freehold land’. Information gained from this significant onground works project has been very valuable for the industry to help determine the real cost of silvicultural treatment over a large area. Plus, this work has provided important native forest productivity data for State government researchers of which is surprisingly relatively unknown for Queensland.

John and Jane inherited the property with some areas of timber remaining but historically trees were seen as the enemy to grazing productivity. Generally the property’s timber resource was regarded as a reserve for periods of financial stress such as a fall in cattle prices, with little concern about managing it for timber productivity. They came to a realisation that even fencing timbers would be in short supply if some effort was not made to conserve the better regrowth. As time went on more and more effort has been made to manage the timber resource as of equal importance to grazing as part of the property’s enterprise, which fitted in with the McLaughlin’s sustainable production ideals for the property.

So over time John and Jane have become ‘tree farmers’ as well as graziers, with the property having substantial natural stands of productive Spotted gum, Ironbarks, Queensland blue gum/ Forest red gum, some of the best hardwood timber species in Australia. The property has a history of producing various grades of sawlogs, poles, girders, fencing timbers, with harvest in the 1940-50s, early 60s, 1967, 1991, 1997, 2005, with the most recent sale (2006) producing approximately 700 m³ of products. Current harvest philosophy is that areas to be harvested are given priority depending on the age and size of the stems, plus the need of the forest to have some timber removed to encourage future growth (silviculture).

John and Jane’s interest in the potential of their native forest resource increased over the last 20 years in conjunction with their keen participation at various workshops and field days including Property Management Planning, AgForests Queensland field days and a five-day native forestry workshop series, sponsored by AgForests Queensland.

They have had a Forest Management Plan in place since the 1990’s, a component of their Property management plan, which was recently revised (2006) and splits their property up into four (4) different types of country with appropriate management regimes. Their Plan’s vision is: *‘Management of the property encompasses sustainable timber production as a high priority together with beef production at a level that recognises and promotes minimum grazing pressure through cell grazing management’.*