

LANDSCAN Farm Plan™ - a new workshop to assist graziers

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Abstract

NSW DPI is developing a practical, one-day workshop for graziers who have completed LANDSCAN™. The workshop focuses on the development of detailed management strategies for selected paddocks as an introduction to farm planning and record keeping. Several pilot courses have been run to date.

Key words

Paddock management, farm development, farm planning, decision-making, land capability.

Introduction

LANDSCAN™ (Clements *et al.* 2005) is an on-farm, landscape management workshop series for graziers, dealing with sustainable land-use practices. It is designed to help landholders assess land capability and potential productivity on a paddock basis using landscape indicators and soil tests. Degradation issues such as acidification, salinity and erosion are considered on a whole-farm basis, rather than in isolation. The essential balance between sustainable, profitable production and conservation is achieved by better matching enterprises and pasture types to different land classes and landscapes.

A New Workshop

The final session in the original LANDSCAN™ includes practical assessment of several paddocks to determine management options and priorities, and to allocate scarce resources to optimise natural resource management (NRM) and economic outcomes. To put these skills and knowledge into action, NSW DPI has developed a practical one-day course, LANDSCAN Farm Plan™.

LANDSCAN Farm Plan™ focuses on the development of farm mapping skills and detailed management strategies for selected paddocks after completing LANDSCAN™. Participants consider and tabulate the NRM and production issues for the chosen paddocks and develop specific management strategies to address them. In all instances this involves identifying key trigger points for environmental or production outcomes, and may include triggers and strategies for drought plans. This contrasts with previous farm plans with a more general whole farm

focus, that identify issues on a physical map of the property. Landholders consistently state that aerial photos and acetate overlays, while valuable initially, are of limited use in on-going property planning and active property management.

LANDSCAN Farm Plan™ costs \$130 GST free (after NSW Government subsidy). Sustainable natural resource management principles are applied to key paddocks requiring a plan, where production outcomes (e.g. finishing, lambing or calving paddocks), degradation issues or conservation/biodiversity have been identified as important. Landholders receive one A3 laminated and several full colour copies of the Spot 5 images of their property with the boundary outlined. They draw in paddock boundaries, and learn to use the image to determine length and area and to keep useful production records to assist decision making and resource allocation. This training course results in a basic plan which could well provide CMAs with a pre-requisite for incentive funding. Details of both courses can be found on the website www.profarm.com.au.

Results so far

Only pilot LANDSCAN Farm Plan™ courses have been run to date, and modifications based on informal feedback, have been used to improve the content and presentation of succeeding courses. Responses have generally been positive. However, because LANDSCAN Farm Plan™ is an extension of LANDSCAN™, it is pertinent to examine the feedback from that workshop series. Evaluation of participants' subject knowledge is taken at the commencement and conclusion of LANDSCAN™,

covering the main learning outcomes of each session. The results show an average knowledge increase of 66% with many groups achieving a score of 75% correct answers following the course.

Practice change is, however, more difficult to assess. Mail surveys have been sent out 6-12 months later to obtain data on course content, delivery style and to try to determine practice change. Responses have been extremely positive in regard to content, length and delivery style. A core outcome is the increased knowledge about and adoption of tools such as soil testing. When asked specifically if, as a result of participating in LANDSCAN™, they are better able to take and interpret soil tests, 85% of participants said, "Yes". In addition, 97% said that they would recommend the workshop to others.

General comments gathered from these mail surveys included the following:-

- "If only we had done this course before we prepared our farm plan"
- "Property development made easy....."
- "As new landholders, this course was absolutely invaluable for us,"
- "I used to try to improve the poorest parts of the property – now I understand why it is better to spend money on the better parts."

Conclusion

The use of adult learning principles, presentation by experienced staff and delivery on-farm through a mix of practical and theoretical activities, appear to be features that landholders appreciate. Thus, LANDSCAN™ has been enthusiastically supported by graziers and landholders on the tablelands, slopes and coastal environments, with over 500 completing the course to date. This suggests considerable potential for LANDSCAN Farm Plan™ to assist graziers to prioritise inputs and develop paddock management strategies that make best use of scarce time, labour and financial resources for optimal outcomes.

Acknowledgments

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References

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