

On Farm

Tree's company at Gloucester dairy

LANDHOLDERS need to better recognise the value of trees to their farm's profitability and value, and invest more in the success of their plantings, according to revegetation expert, Matt Kilby.

"People should understand that a stand of trees is a long-term economic asset," Mr Kilby said.

"Then they become more open to making an up-front investment to ensure that every tree they put in the ground is going to survive and produce a return for them."

The founder of Trees for Earth, a company dedicated to high-quality, productive revegetation, Mr Kilby has devised a suite of planting methods, from ground preparation to maintenance, that can mean planting a single tree may cost as much as \$15.

While that's well beyond the expectations of many landholders, so are Mr Kilby's results.

At Basil Schneider's Gloucester dairy farm, "Apple Glen", Mr Kilby last October planted about 350 mixed tree species, including lace bark, silky oak, hoop and bunya pines and flame trees.

"That was exactly a year ago, and they're now as big or bigger than trees I put in five years ago using Landcare methods," said Mr Schneider.

By MATTHEW
CAWOOD

In addition, only four trees have been lost from the "Apple Glen" planting.

Mr Kilby's planting program is exhaustive, starting with a deep ripping 12 months out from planting, soil nutrient and microbial additives, special tree mats and pink tree guards that maximise the plant's use of the light spectrum, and two or three years of intermittent follow-up work to keep grass and other competition away from the tree bases.

"If you plan to grow a good crop of wheat, you do soil tests, and keep the weeds and pests out," Mr Kilby said.

"If you want to grow a good crop of trees, they deserve the same treatment."

And he argues that the value of trees to the farm is ultimately greater than any annual crop.

As well as providing the usual benefits of shade and shelter, and to serve as wildlife corridors, Mr Kilby believes trees should be chosen and planted in ways that modify a farm's micro-climate to boost productivity, and ultimately contribute to a farm's bottom line.

For that reason, he's in favour of a mixed selection of native and exotic species, including deciduous trees that annually fertilise the land with their leaves, and cabinet timber varieties that may deliver much-needed funds to a future generation.

"A thriving, biodiverse planting may cost \$5000 to put in, but within a year it may have added \$10,000 to the value of the land," he said.

"It's all about properly integrating trees into the landscape and the farming system. Get that right, and people start to take a different view about the real cost of planting trees."

Mr Kilby will be one of four speakers at the Malloon Creek Natural Farm field day at Bungendore this Saturday, November 3, and will be conducting a second planting at "Apple Glen", Gloucester, on November 17.

■ Visit www.treesforearth.com.au or contact (0418) 654 231.

RIGHT: Matt Kilby of Trees for Earth and Gloucester dairy farmer, Basil Schneider, "Apple Glen", discuss the phenomenal growth rate of seven-month-old trees planted by Mr Kilby on "Apple Glen".

