



Master Tree Growers Course Bellarine Landcare Group 2021

“They say best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago and the second-best time is now, and I think it’s important to actually get people started. If you look at our place we started with six fruit trees, and they survived so we planted another six fruit trees, and now we have over 80 trees. And people ask how you decided to do that? Well, we kind of didn’t, we just got started, we replanted what was successful and chopped what didn’t work. What’s important is getting started - and doing The Master Tree Growers Course is a great way to get started” Kate Lockhart (participant)



Large Farms Project Overview

The Large Farms project, titled Improving On-farm Soil, Vegetation and Biodiversity for Larger agricultural enterprises in the Corangamite Management Unit (Large Farms), has delivered new knowledge and skills to broadacre farmers in the Corangamite Region.

The Large Farms project is split into four sub-projects with three of them being delivered through external project partners –

1. Soil Carbon Program - Southern Farming Systems (SFS),
2. Sustainable Dairies Program - West Vic Dairy (WVD) / Agriculture Victoria (Ag Vic)
3. Master Tree Growers Courses - the Otway Agroforestry Network (OAN)
4. Innovation and exchange program with Landcare

The Large Farms priorities include increasing soil carbon, native vegetation and biodiversity on-farm while improving knowledge and management practices around soil acidification and climate change adaptation.

Sub-project Overview- Master Tree Growers Course

The Master Tree Growers Course is delivered by the Otway Agroforestry Network. The Corangamite Catchment Management Authority (CMA) supports and provides funding for the course to be run in the Corangamite Region. The Corangamite CMA has supported four courses over the last five years, with 99 participants having graduated.

The Otway Agroforestry Network delivered the Australian Master Tree Growers course alongside Bellarine Landcare Network in Autumn 2021. The eight-day course is designed for landholders wishing to integrate trees into farming systems for conservation, agriculture and profit. The course encourages farmers to aspire to be 'master tree growers' and provides participants with the skills and confidence to both act on their property and support others in their community.

Project Timeframe

2018-2023

Outcomes

- 99 Participants have graduated
- 32 events were held throughout the Bellarine, Central Otways, Heytesbury and Surf Coast

Funding

This project is supported by Corangamite CMA, through funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Program.

Activities

Master Tree Growers is an eight-day field-based course for landholders aspiring to learn more about the benefits of vegetation and become tree growers. The course, designed by Rowan Reid in 1996, encourages teaching the correct techniques for growing vegetation for profit or conservation.

The course does not favour any species or products but focuses on growing the right tree, for the right environment that is in the landholder's best interest. The Master Tree Growers Course connects participants with an experienced mentor and a network of other local landholders.

The first introductory session involves the Otway Agroforestry Network Committee members talking to participants about the broad scope of the course.

The following seven sessions focus on topics such as timber production, timber products and markets, trees on farm, benefits to livestock, biodiversity and on farm examples and discussions from previous and current participants.

Partners

Bellarine Landcare Group
Central Otway Landcare Network
Heytesbury Landcare Network
Surf Coast Inland Plains Network

Key drivers for landholders participating

- Wanting to rehabilitate the land for environmental reasons.
- Being able to make a profit from selling wood products.
- Looking for mental health improvement by being outside in nature and caring for trees.
- The chance to leave a legacy for the next generations
- Being a beginner and not having any prior knowledge about growing trees but wanting to be supported to learn more.
- Attracting wildlife to their property.
- Providing shade and shelter to livestock.

Participant testimonial

Kate Lockhart

Having studied under Rowan Reid (the designer of the Master Tree Growers Course) at university, Kate Lockhart was always interested in agriculture and forestry.

When Kate and husband Justin moved into their property in 2006, they found it was scorched and windy, and they focused on trying to break the southwest gust. Kate and Justin planted a single row of trees, analysed the results and discovered the microclimate on the protected side had improved, so they decided to produce more rows or layers. Every row of windbreaker trees kept changing the microclimate and made growing vegetation progressively easier.

Kate said the Master Tree Growers Course was about landholders working together to discuss the issues of the day, whether it be climate change, erosion, shade and shelter; it was about problems solving to get the best outcome for the local landholder.

Kate says the Master Trees Growers program helps you to diversify your income sources, shade and shelter are essential for livestock health, and she doesn't think our traditional agricultural courses teach this.

Garry Spry

Garry Spry is a retiree who turned to tree farming with his family on the Bellarine Peninsula. Garry and his family found a plot of land with lake frontage and modest vegetation in Point Lonsdale, although they didn't realise how difficult it would be to grow trees there. The property had previously been

used as a mine that removed all the topsoil. Weed management was also a significant challenge on the property. The Spry's pulled out over 500 compressed cubic meters of Boxthorn alone.

Revegetation of the property is a project embraced by the entire Spry family, although each member has slightly differing motivations. Garry wishes to reconnect with his farming background and working on the land, while his wife and daughters are more invested in improving the property's biodiversity.

Through Master Tree Growers, Garry was exposed to the fundamentals of tree growing and was matched with a mentor who advised him to choose different species of trees that suited his land and Ecological Vegetation Class. Gary said he would not have known how to approach revegetating his land without the Master Tree Growers program, and that he has received positive feedback from his local community on the great work he is doing on his property.

Next steps

The Master Tree Growers Program has proven successful at a local, national, and international level, with many landholders expressing their appreciation for the broad range of expertise delivered through the course and its presenters. The program continues to create a network of tree growers that act as a valuable source of knowledge within their community.

Whilst the current funding for the program through the National Landcare Program finishes in June 2023, the Otway Agroforestry Network will continue to educate landholders through their newsletter, podcasts and field days.

The Corangamite CMA proudly supports the work of the Network and is hopeful further Australian Government funding will allow the course in the region to continue for years to come.

The Corangamite CMA is proud to assist the Otway Agroforestry Network in showcasing the visible results on farm including increased biodiversity, diversity of agribusiness, and improved property aesthetics as well as increased landholder skills and knowledge.