



Hi Fert Sustainable Farming Award - West Gippsland

Joint winners: Wendy and Ross Horner
Daryl and Fay Sinclair

Ross and Wendy Horner are commercial Angus breeders at Inverloch. They became involved in the family farm in the early 1990s and have faced up to many long-term challenges such as pest plants and animals, salinity, soil acidification and vegetation decline.

The property was suffering from a lack of shelter with stock being blasted by severe coastal winds. One of their first tasks was to subdivide the seven existing paddocks into a total of 24. A massive revegetation program came next with around 15% of the property now covered by indigenous native vegetation.

The farm is a flat clay pan with overlaying sandy rises which causes problems with drainage and waterlogging of paddocks over winter. In 1999 they laser graded the main drain that weaves through the property. The drain was then fenced off and revegetated to improve water quality and prevent erosion. This process has now been repeated on all of the secondary drains on the property.

An annual weed control program has been developed which involves broad leaf pasture weeds, noxious and environmental weeds. Vermin control is also a big issue. Ross and Wendy have successfully reduced rabbit populations by 70% across the farm by an integrated program of fumigating, baiting, ripping and shooting.

Ross and Wendy are innovators in their industry. They have recently built new 'bugle' type stockyards designed by the Rutherglen Research Institute to enable them to manage their stock in a more natural way and reduce stress levels. The Horner's hard work and effective planning means they are now able to manage their farm in a more productive and sustainable manner.

Daryl and Fay Sinclair purchased their Stony Creek dairy farm in 1986. Sustainable land management was on their mind and they set themselves some long-term goals for creating their ideal landscape vision. Ten years later they are reaping the rewards of their efforts and enjoying vastly improved productivity.

The Sinclair's strategy has been to use proven techniques and a pragmatic approach. They have maintained natural resources by fencing off remnant vegetation, created wildlife corridors that provide shade and shelter for stock, managed fodder conservation and a cropping program, focused on better farm management practices and kept a close eye on costs.

The farm was a local 'focus farm' for three years and the Sinclair's have also been involved in a number of Target 10 programs such as pasture management, fertiliser application and feed nutrition. The family has been actively involved in the Stony Creek Landcare Group for many years and have inspired others to attempt best land management practices.

In 1995 the dairy was milking 180 cows, they are now happy to be milking 240 cows and hope to maintain this level as it provides a sustainable business and enjoyable lifestyle.

Daryl's main plan for the future is to continue with his revegetation work. With four boys in the family there have many hands to help with planting which is a major feature of the family's work each autumn and spring.



Pictured L-R: Andrew Jenkin, Plant Manager Hi Fert, Fay and Daryl Sinclair, Wendy and Ross Horner, joint winners of the Hi Fert Sustainable Farming Award – West Gippsland, John Thwaites, Minister for Environment and John Landy, Governor of Victoria.