Keirstone

Central Tablelands, NSW

Belinda Hanks is a fifth-generation owner of Keirstone, a property near Tarana in the Central Tablelands region of New South Wales. She inherited this part of the original property in 2008. Belinda and her husband John run sheep and cattle on the property and have been working on subdividing the larger paddocks to facilitate rotational grazing. They now also have a 40-hectare biodiverse carbon project under the Environmental Planting method.

PROPERTY SIZE:	378 hectares
PLANTING SIZE:	40 hectares
KEY NATURAL ASSETS:	Remnants of critically endangered Box–Gum Grassy Woodland vegetation, large old paddock trees. Creekline passing through southeastern part of the property. Strategic location for habitat connectivity, proximity to nearby Eusdale and Evans Crown Nature Reserves and to tributaries of the Fish River corridor.
PROJECT FEATURES:	• Highly diverse planting using a mix of locally native species from Central Tableland Apple Box Grassy Forest (PCT3366) and Central Tableland Ranges Peppermint-Gum Forest (3369) communities. • Block and linear shelterbelt plantings integrated into active rotational grazing system for sheep and cattle. • Registered carbon project with 25-year permanence, part of Greening Australia and Canopy's 2024 National Reforestation Program (ERF186544). • Delivered in partnership with Nestlé and One Tree Planted as part of the Nestlé Global Reforestation Program. Supported by the NSW Government.

Greening Australia

Belinda has lived in the Tarana area all her life, and inherited this land passed down over five generations. It's a picturesque place and she has always loved the trees and landscape.

The challenges she and her husband John face on the farm would be familiar to producers everywhere: climate change, water insecurity, invasive species and soil degradation. The granite soils are also prone to erosion, which is one of the reasons they are really working on keeping their groundcover.

Belinda and John run sheep and cattle at Keirstone. Photo credit Think Mammoth.

Greening Australia team preparing to plant and guard seedlings at Keirstone. Photo credit Think Mammoth.

Whole-of-farm productivity and habitat

Belinda said: "We've been working on subdividing larger paddocks to move to more rotational grazing. We're trying to improve the soil and encourage more biodiversity and growth of native grasses and trees. Our older native trees are becoming increasingly stressed and showing signs of decline. We need shade, habitat and water for all types of animals, birds and insects."

The couple approached Greening Australia about integrating plantings into their property, and Greening Australia found the project could be eligible for funding as a carbon planting under the Environmental Planting method. When asked about their motivation for going ahead, Belinda said the project ticked boxes for what they wanted to achieve holistically for the farm.

Belinda said: "This project is hopefully going to achieve carbon capture, much greater diversity of plants and animals, and much needed shade and shelter for animals and grazing pasture in the future."

"Without support we could never have achieved the outcomes we wanted on this scale, so for us it has been fantastic, and hopefully very rewarding for all of us in the future."

Nature finance provides important funding to make projects like these possible. In this case, Greening Australia and its environmental markets business Canopy partnered with Nestlé and One Tree Planted to fund and register the project as part of the Nestlé Global Reforestation Program.

This Keirstone project has also been supported by a NSW Government High Impact Partnership grant.

Implementation and biodiversity benefits

With the paperwork in place, in 2024, Greening Australia worked with local partners C&M Rural Consulting to install fencing and Jayfields Nursery to plant a mix of species that would best represent the broader critically endangered Box–Gum Grassy Woodland community, and more specifically, Central Tableland forest communities. About half of the planting area was direct seeded and the rest was hand planted with seedlings treated with Sentree to deter browsing.

The planting design incorporates wide linear shelterbelt plantings along existing fences, tree lines, and the creek, with a few additional block plantings. This works within the existing paddock structure and grazing regime, but also provides biosecurity by buffering boundaries with neighbouring properties. Belinda and John also requested that an electric wire be added to some of the fencing to deal with browsing pressure from kangaroos, pigs and deer, which the project helped fund.

In addition to providing shade and shelter and improving farm biosecurity, the revegetation at Keirstone will create new food resources for birds and insects and add vital 'stepping stones' of vegetation between existing remnant paddock trees to help local wildlife move through the landscape. Threatened woodland birds could especially benefit from this planting, with Diamond Firetails, Hooded Robins and Superb Parrots recorded close by, and historical records of Brown Treecreepers in the district.

Reflections on the project

Two years on, and most of the site is growing well, but extremes of wet and then dry did cause losses, particularly in the direct-seeded areas. Working with nature, such variations are expected and planned for, so there has been some infill planting of seedlings to help recover these areas.

Reflecting on the project so far, Belinda and John are happy with how the project is going overall.

They anticipate the planting being of great benefit in a few more years when the trees grow up, and are pleased with how the project will tie together protection for their stock in terms of shade and shelter, biosecurity control from neighbouring properties, and bringing more diversity in vegetation back into the landscape.

With the benefit of hindsight, Belinda and John reflected that the direct seeding area might have been better with seedlings, though they acknowledged no one could have predicted the weather extremes that caused the losses. They also would have preferred to get the electric fencing planned and installed at the start, rather than adding it later, which took more work. They would recommend other landholders to do similar projects, and advised doing some preparation and hard thinking about what you want to achieve.

From Greening Australia's perspective, the strong integration of the revegetation with the farming system has been the highlight. Belinda and John have been able to keep farming while the native vegetation has been added back in. While some of their land has gone out of production, regular payments from the carbon project should help compensate, and many of the paddocks will have added value in terms of shade and shelter.

The Greening Australia team have also appreciated working with Belinda and John, who clearly understand that adding more diverse vegetation into the landscape means more resilience in the system overall.

Belinda Hanks inspecting part of the planting area with Greening Australia's Ian Rayner. Photo credit Think Mammoth.

"We wanted that diversity of plantings, and more of them on the place…Nature unfortunately doesn't have a commercial value, and that's what the carbon has done. It's complicated and there's good and bad, but it's allowed projects to get going. We certainly couldn't have done what's been done without the funding."

— BELINDA AND JOHN HANKS

The site design incorporates linear and block plantings integrated with the rotational grazing system at Keirstone. Photo credit Think Mammoth.

Scan to watch a video on this project, or visit https://youtu.be/_RautjOcj_M

For more information, contact Greening Australia | 1300 886 589 | greeningaustralia.org.au/contact

For a no-obligation chat about biodiverse carbon plantings on your land, register your interest at: greeningaustralia.org.au/landholders

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