Queensland Communities in transition

Hill Top Farm, Cooktown – Ecofriendly Farm Stay

Hill Top Farm is an award-winning ecofriendly cabin, camping and organic farm stay situated 15 minutes from Cooktown. It is a quiet and relaxing getaway which offers a self-contained, twin share cabin; a twin share safari tent; and a single powered camp site all surrounded by an orchard and farm.

Hill Top Farm owner, Wendy Seabrook, has a life philosophy to 'tread softly' and has implemented a range of ecoefficient initiatives which minimise the environmental footprint of the farm stay and demonstrate the value of ecological approaches to regenerative agriculture. From the use of both solar PV and solar thermal energy, various energy efficiency measures, minimal water use and waste generation, Wendy has created an eco-friendly oasis in the tropical Cook Shire region.

"Developing closed-loop systems for our homes and enterprises helps protect our environment and makes good business sense" – Wendy Seabrook

HIGHLIGHTS

- 4 kW solar system provides excess energy to farm requirements
- Solar hot water system
- Regenerative agricultural practises lead to minimal water and zero chemical use
- Organic waste composted via waterless compost toilets
- CCIQ ecoBiz Energy & Waste Star Partner[1]

Renewable energy supply

- A 4 kW solar PV system produces sufficient energy for the farm which uses less energy than a 2 person household.
- In 2018, the farm exported 3100 kWh of solar power back to the grid. This was almost as much energy as was used internally by the farm, residents and tourists.
- Hot water is supplied by a split closed thermosyphon solar hot water system.

Air Conditioning and Lighting

- Ceiling fans are used throughout the year along with a single split system air conditioner in the main residence that is used sparingly during the warmer months.
- A minimal amount of fluorescent lighting is used. These will be upgraded to more efficient LED lights as they fail.

Water

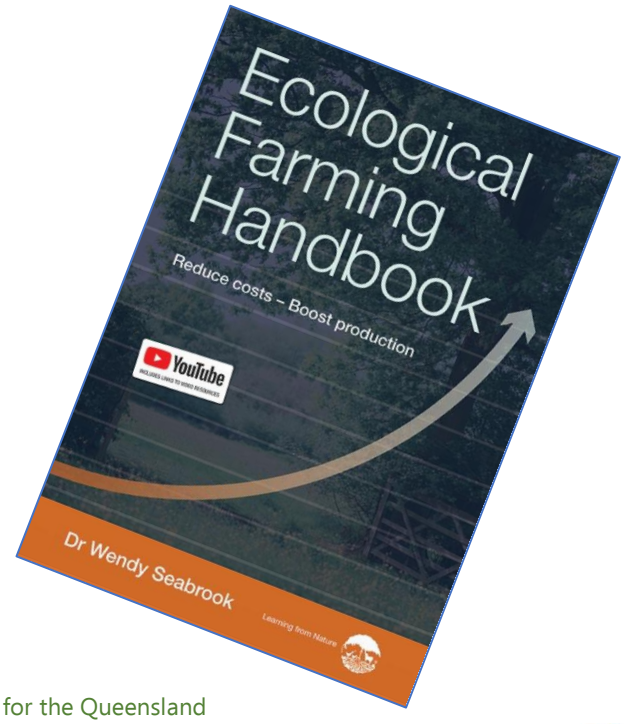
- The farm is situated on 10 hectares of land of which around 20% is used for intensive agriculture and about 5% is irrigated. Regenerative agricultural practises minimise water requirements as per details below.
- Bore water is used for drinking, washing and irrigating. There is no water treatment prior to use.
- A 20 kL rainwater tank provides an additional source of water, however, this is generally not used as there is sufficient good quality bore water.

Waste

- It is estimated that Hill Top Farm produces around 1,920 litres of waste per year. Of this, 50% is sent to landfill (<1 m3), 38% is composted and 13% is recycled. Waste to landfill includes farm waste such as fencing wire and weed mat.
- Three compost toilets cater for residents and tourists. The toilets produce about 10 wheelbarrows per year of good quality compost which is used on the farm
- Organic waste is composted in the waterless compost toilet and/or fed to chooks.
- A grey-water system from the showers and washing machine is designed to directly feed the banana orchard so that nothing is wasted.
- All recyclables (plastic bottles, cans, paper, cardboard etc) are stockpiled and then taken to the Cooktown Waste Transfer station for recycling.
- Food is bought in bulk which minimises packaging e.g. muesli, rice, flour (calico bags), dog food.
- Roughly one wheelie bin of general waste is generated every 3 months.

Regenerative Agriculture

Hilltop Farm is an organic farm and Education Centre which demonstrates how to grow food more easily by bringing back Nature's free ecological services. By looking closely at the science behind the practices advocated by leading organisations and farmers around the world, the message for growers is actually quite simple – repair the ecological functions in our production systems (nutrient and water cycles), use solar energy capture and functional biodiversity to use these free resources more efficiently. For more information on this ecological approach to regenerative farm, visit - learningfromnature.com.au



This case study is part of a series of case studies that have been developed for the Queensland Communities in Transition Program. It has been prepared by The Ecoefficiency Group as part of Clean Growth Choices Consortium with funding from Queensland Department of Environment and Science, 2019. For further information, visit www.cleangrowthchoices.org

1. ecobiz.ccig.com.au/