

ASSOCIATION FARMING ewslet EQUENC

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NATURAL

APR 2010 Issue 2

Weereewaa

"Mother of all Ponds"

By Peter Hazell

Recently I was invited to speak at the Weereewa Festival Science and Arts Forum on the subject of soil carbon. I was lucky enough to share the stage with some inspiring and visionary people from many walks of life.

The speaker who commanded the most attention, with his scathing analysis of environmental management in Australia since European settlement, was Upper Shoalhaven resident, wildlife carer and Federal Treasury Secretary, Dr Ken Henry, also the Patron to the Weereewa Festival. If you want to find out more about Dr Henry's presentation, you'll find plenty of references through Google.

My talk was entitled -'Weereewaa – Mother of all Ponds – Teach us about soil carbon.' Using highresolution imagery, thanks to Google Earth, I took the audience on an eagles eye journey around Weereewaa's watershed.

We flew up each tributary looking for the ubiquitous chains of ponds and swampy meadows that once stretched from Weereewaa herself to the tops of the surrounding hills.

But none could we find. Each tributary was a continuous channel cutting through the landscape on its journey back to Weereewaa.

Continued Page 2



Turallo Creek cutting through its floodplain adjacent to Bungendore.

Letter from the Secretary

Hi Everyone,

Hope all is going well for you during this latest dry stretch—just as well we are implementing Natural Sequence Farming strategies and techniques in our landscapes to mitigate the impact!

There is some good stuff in the Newsletter this month and we hope you enjoy it. We will be holding a NSFA US Chapter Field Day on June 20th—more info on the last page of this newsletter.

But, before that, try very hard to get along to the Carbon Farming course in Braidwood over 12 & 13 May. Michael & Louisa from the Carbon Coalition do a great job and this will be your chance to link in with the opportunities provided by the Carbon Coalition, CMA and Landcare.

Also a reminder to please send through your suggestions and recommendations for Field Days, workshops or any other activities you are aware of or would like to initiate yourself to share knowledge, enjoyment and benefits of improving the soil, the land and your community.

Cheers, Colin

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Need to renew your NSA US membership or know someone who would like to become a NSA US member?

Contact Lea on lea.barrett@bigpond.com or 0411892957 for a membership form...or you can print our form from the NSA website—see Upper Shoalhaven Chapter.

Weereewaa

Teach us about soil carbon

From Page 1

The high-resolution imagery available on Google Earth has laid the landscape bare for us all to see its degraded state. But it also shows us, if we know what to look for, clear signs of the landscape that once was. This was a landscape that once thrived despite the longest drought and the largest flood.

It contained the richest grasslands our colonial forebears had ever seen. If ever there was a demonstration of the principles of sustainable watershed and therefore soil carbon management, Weereewaa was it.

In my presentation I argued that, in the patterns and processes still evident today, Weereewaa teaches us everything we need to know about soil carbon management, water management, biodiversity conservation, and landscape fertility (obviously important in agriculture).

The floodplain pockets, once natures soil carbon warehouse, are now incised and dry, while a deluge creates a high-energy surge of water which erodes the soil and washes sediments straight into Weereewaa (good perhaps for whoever owns the land where the sediments are deposited).

My presentation drew inspiration from Peter Andrews, Soil Scientist Dr Christine Jones, and Professors Wily Ripl, from Germany and Jan Pokorny, from the Czech Republic, as well as several other planetary scale thinkers.

To me it comes down to how effectively nature manages the flow of energy through the biosphere. Obviously energy comes from the sun, in huge amounts. Without the buffering effect that the coupling of biodiversity and water brings, the Earth would fry during the day and freeze at night.

Add water only and it creates the most erosive force on the planet. Water is the conveyor belt of the sun's energy as it cycles through the biosphere. It is only when water is coupled with biodiversity, in particular plants, that the sun's energy is dissipated enough to allow life to thrive. This coupling works in many ways to dissipate the sun's energy. I've run out of room to argue the case here, but check out a transcript of my presentation on the association's website.



Turallo Creek adjacent to Kings Hwy near Bungendore – before & after a deluge.



Member's Corner



Natural Sequence Farming in the Suburbs: Every Downpipe is a Dream Come True

By Avinashananda Saraswati (Canberra)

The delight of our downpipes, for those of us in suburbia, is that when the house and land is equal in area, they double the rainfall on the land.

When I first started to use my downpipe supply, I kept the water separate from the land. I kept it in water tanks and let the over flow go down the stormwater drain into the nearby lake. I had a dry garden though often I had water in my tanks. Downhill from the tanks had a better time as gravity helped disperse the water, but uphill only got water when I carried buckets there. I dripped the water through 20L buckets with taps at the bottom. I considered pumping the water through drip irrigation, both ways of using water on one plant and not in the garden bed. I had a pond with permanent water in the middle of desertified garden beds.

But then I met the magnificent ideas of Peter Andrews and experienced the farms of the NSF people in the Upper Shoalhaven chapter. A revolution began. Peter uses the land as a huge water tank! I realised that all the water presently going down the drain, or held isolated in my water tank, was potentially able to be held in the biggest tank available – all my soil and plants. I could slow the water and use all that came, not let it flow fast down the drain.

I lay awake at night scheming of how to divert water into contours that go around my block. Of how to have a chain of ponds that are garden beds. I have started by re-organising my rain tank over-flows uphill as much as possible, a spaghetti tangle mostly hidden behind abundant greenery.



Jon-George and I testing our contour channel to keep the water on the high land

I leave my stormwater connections unglued so I can change my mind again about how it works best. I walk around in the rain, at night with a torch, and revel in the flowing of water. I indulge my interest with buying a laser level, moving on from the spirit level balanced on a tomato stake or a bucket of water thrown on the land in question. Where once I had a sloping garden path, I plan to have stepping stones, which are weirs as I take the water across contour to my fruit trees.

I am taking the big step of letting the water loose on the land.

Now the water for my frog pond goes over the soil, via a weir that takes it as broad as possible staying below the foundations of the house.

The fear of scarcity....will the water ever reach the pond? I have an emotional fear of letting go, not holding every drop in plastic. This feels primal as survival. Peter suggests the same amount of water will flow, but over a longer time. I know that the whole area is wetter, that grass is growing where it never has before.

I start to look at the garden as a whole, not at individual beds.

I have chains of ponds all over the place, one outflow leading to the next.

Maybe this will moisten my mind and my fear of letting go as well.

Avinashi is a NSFA US Chapter member and Swami of Saraswati Yoga. In addition to applying NSF principles in her backyard, Avinashi draws on extensive knowledge of anatomy and physiology as a registered nurse and remedial massage therapist, in gestalt therapy, rebirthing, process work. She has experience in the movement and body therapies of Rosen, Hakomi, Pilates and Continuum. More info: www.saraswatiyoga.com

-Editor

Let us hear from you! "Member's Corner" is your space to submit comments or articles for sharing amongst our community. Submissions to the Editor via email or post: lea.barrett@bigpond.com or P O Box 369, Braidwood, NSW 2622

Member's Corner



Unnatural Resource Management: Some Reflections on the Reality of Weeds and Resources

By Ben Gleeson (Braidwood)

What is the nature of a 'resource'? What is the nature of a 'weed'?

Consideration of both of these terms reveals that things considered 'resources' and things considered 'weeds' are determined solely by the hominid species, *Homo sapiens*. There is no specific quality possessed by all weeds or by all resources that could be used to objectively assign either status to any particular animal, vegetable or mineral. Your own use of these two terms is a function of many factors relating to your cultural, technological and environmental background and perspectives.

It seems reasonable then to wonder, 'is there anything particularly 'natural' about the categories of weeds and resources that we commonly use?' Given that 'resource' status depends entirely upon the shifting perspectives of humankind, what exactly do we think is 'natural' about natural resources? Further, does it make any sense to speak of a natural, or an unnatural, weed?

The term 'natural resources' is often equated with healthy soils, clean water and -specifically in relation to environmental management- native ecological communities; especially their commonly associated dominant native vegetation types and species. Whilst standing native vegetation was previously considered a resource only for its potential to provide harvestable timber, since relatively recently we

have come to consider the value of this vegetation in relation to some of its other perceived benefits.

These benefits include: protection of soils from erosion, increases in soil fertility, retention of soil moisture, reduction in soil temperatures, decreases in soil compaction, improved surface water quality, improvements in local rainfall patterns, interception of mists and increases in the occurrence of dew from raised local humidity. Such natural resources provide potential habitat for other plants and animals which leads to increased diversity and stability and the continuing resilience of the overall 'resource'.

In Australia today, images associated with these new 'natural resources' do not often include vegetation communities which contain prominent and thriving non-native plants. Why is this? In many situations, non-native plant species are capable -to a lesser or, indeed, greater extent- of providing the same wider benefits (listed above) as our native plants. Given that the criteria we use to define our resources are entirely unnatural human constructs anyway, why is it that we choose to exclude certain species from the category of 'natural resource'?

Considering the benefits they may provide, is it possible that the species we exclude from being 'natural' resources (native and non-native 'weed' species) could form a new category of resource? If we must, perhaps it may make sense to consider these potentially beneficial organisms as 'unnatural resources'.

Will we need a new government department or authority responsible for the promotion and protection of our unnatural resources? Hopefully not! As the pendulum pauses and begins to move in the opposite direction, our current NRM bureaucracy will come to appreciate the many natural benefits of our 'unnatural' resources. The kind of 'unnatural resource management' associated with Natural Sequence Farming will probably require less herbicide, less chainsaws and fewer bulldozers than are currently employed -somewhat paradoxicallyby the defenders of Australia's present-day 'natural' resources.

Ben is a NSFA US Chapter member, and current secretary of the Braidwood Urban Landcare Group. He is presently studying for the Bachelor of Ecological Agricultural Systems at Charles Sturt University. Ben and his partner Annie live in Braidwood with their two young children.

-Editor

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Are you a Carbon Farmer?

By Lea Barrett

There's a lot of talk these days about Soil Carbon, and "Carbon Farmers". Being very new to the land, my husband and I have embraced Natural Sequence Farming principles and Permaculture principles simply because they *made sense* to us—but I hadn't really grasped the importance of Soil Carbon or Carbon Farming until I took the time recently to read up on the subject.

I knew that Soil Carbon was obviously the carbon stored within soil and is the part of the soil that has been alive including important elements such as calcium, hydrogen, oxygen, and nitrogen.

I knew that soil organic matter is made up of plant and animal materials in various stages of decay but didn't realise that Soil Carbon is also present in leaf litter, roots, insect life, humus and fungi

Nor did I realise until reading more on the Carbon Farmers™ website, that the biological activity of microbes and fungi, stimulated by the action of the roots of plants as they push down through the soil as foliage grows and regrows (after harvesting or grazing) is what produces soil carbon.¹

From the soil tests we had taken on our little patch of (degraded) land, I knew that soil organic matter is often reported in soil tests as the percentage of soil organic carbon (SOC) present in the soil sample.

In the CSIRO paper "Soil Carbon: the basics", Dr Jeff Baldock of CSIRO Land & Water, tells us that although determining the amount of soil organic carbon in soil is important for understanding soil health, knowing the type of organic carbon present is also important as this can greatly impact soil productivity.

More importantly, he writes "We have established that the amount of each organic carbon fraction varies significantly across soil types and some fractions can be altered by management practices."

Furthermore, in good soils organic carbon can be >10 per cent, while in many poorer soils or soils which are heavily exploited, levels are typically <1 per cent.

Dr Baldock concludes that the amount of organic carbon in soil is a balance between the build-up which comes from inputs of new plant and animal material and the constant losses where the carbon is decomposed and the constituents separate to mineral nutrients and gases, or are washed or leached away.²

Peter Andrews addresses the issue of Soil Carbon in "Beyond the Brink" in which he writes that the level of Carbons in the soil in Australia "is only a tiny fraction of the level of 220 years ago" and believes that the current level of soil carbons could be as low as 6 or 7 percent of what it used to be. He also tells us that in ancient Australia, the carbons in the soil were thousands of years old. Today our soil carbons are generally only two or three years old. Why? Because carbons oxidise when they dry out-and one of the reasons that they dry out is because most farmers still plough their soil as well as applying huge quantities of fertiliser and what Peter calls "weedicide".

As a result, fertility has been and continues to leach from the soil at an alarming rate in large areas of Australia. This is because whenever rain falls on the soil it will start to move and transport soluble nutrients in the soil unless there are plants there to control it.³

Those of us that understand Natural Sequence Farming principles, know that plants—and more specifically weeds—are the key to a landscape's fertility. Peter reminds us that because weeds accumulate fertility (as opposed to grass that consumes fertility), weeds are the great Carbon manufacturers of the landscape. Weeds grow rapidly and produce a large bulk of organic matter—both above and below the surface.

So...that little bit of research answered my questions on Soil Carbon (and confirmed that my husband and I are on the right track to build carbon in the soil on our property.) But...What's a Carbon Farmer?

Michael & Louisa Kiely of Carbon Farmers TM tell us that depending on what is grown in the soil and how the soil is managed, it can store large amounts of Carbon or it can release large amounts of Greenhouse gases.

The Kiely's believe that as landholders, we can therefore decide what the soils contribute to Climate Change—simply by what we grow and how we manage our soils.

My conclusion is that by following the farming principles that *simply made sense to us*, my husband and I are inadvertently "Carbon Farmers".

I feel good about this since most of the time I have a feeling of helplessness at being able to affect Climate Change.

Sure, we've got a long way to go to build a significant level of Carbon in our soil, but we've made a start.

We've been able to rest our paddocks for a few years now.

We've gently ripped our highly compacted soil with a Yeoman's plough to allow water, nutrients and organic matter to penetrate.

We've planted nitrogen fixing trees and we've planted them on swales designed to slow down the flow of water across our landscape.

And...we're allowing the plants and weeds to do their job in building carbon in the soil.

All in all—it feels good to be a "Carbon Farmer" and to know we are doing our bit to restore the landscape and affect Climate Change.

Are you a Carbon Farmer?

¹Carbon Farmers TM

² "Soil Carbon: the basics", Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, © Copyright CSIRO 2008

³"Beyond the Brink", Peter Andrews

Successful Forest Farming: Nutrition is the Key

By Matt Kilby and Graeme Salt

The financial appeal of growing hard-woods in a 'fast-food' world where cash-flow is king has been limited, to say the least.

Pine and paulownias have dominated the timber growing arena, as softwood profits can be enjoyed by the current generation rather than the next. However, recent research suggests that the half-century crop cycle often associated with cabinet hardwoods can be dramatically reduced. Hardwoods can be harvested within twelve to fifteen years if provided with the right conditions. These 'conditions' include a synergy of: species mix, planting density, soil structure, seedling preparation, grass and weed control, pruning techniques and pest and disease management.

The first two years governs the length of the crop cycle. A poor start ensures at least forty years until maturity, but a kick-start in the first 24 months has reduced maturity time by up to 60%! In this context, farming cabinet timber becomes a highly attractive financial proposition.

Research has highlighted the importance of the above criteria for rapid maturity, but there is one critical link that has been largely ignored; new plantings usually involve ex-pasture country and cattle growers are notorious for their soil-nutrition neglect. Usually they choose to supplement nutrition in the animal rather than correcting problems in the soil. These soils should always be tested and nutritionally corrected before planting to ensure that growth during the critical two-year foundation period is maximised. There are four corecomponents in this maximising process:

- 1. mineral balance
- 2. microbial balance
- 3. sustainable herbiciding
- 4. natural hormonal stimulation

MINERAL BALANCE

Correction of all mineral deficiencies is essential but the first priority is al-

ways calcium. Calcium is the king of nutrients. There is no point applying any other nutrients until calcium levels have been optimised for that particular soil type. Calcium is the trucker of all minerals. Mineral uptake and associated growth and timber quality will always be limited in the absence of sufficient calcium. The right amount of calcium to apply in any given soil type is best determined by a good consultant who understands basic soil-balancing principles. Nutri-Tech Soil Therapy™ is a free analysis service that can also help growers understand soil nutrition, nutrient requirements and the ratios involved in achieving soil balance. There are some important ratios involved in building a productive soil. The calcium/magnesium ratio, for example, is the single most important ratio in this soil-balancing process. When this ratio is correct, there will be a breathing, open, well-drained soil, nutrient uptake will be optimised and beneficial soil-life will enjoy ideal living conditions.

Phosphate is the second most important consideration when seeking mineral balance. This element is critical for photosynthesis. Photosynthesis produces the carbohydrate energy for plant growth and associated root development. Phosphate is also critical for the micro-organisms, which are the prime-movers in successful timber farming. Free-living, nitrogen-fixing bacteria like Azotobacter, for example cannot operate efficiently without adequate phosphate. Timber plantations need to have this natural nitrogen system performing efficiently, as the application of excessive synthetic nitrogen has proven detrimental for timber quality.

All of the trace elements should be boosted to minimum acceptable levels. Zinc and boron are particularly important. Zinc is needed to produce the growth hormone auxin, which determines leaf size. A small leaf produces stunted growth, as the smaller the leaf, the lower the available 'solar

panel' area available for converting the sun's energy to plant growth energy.

Boron is a highly leachable element which is often neglected in long-term crops. It is not unusual to see a mere teaspoon of boron double the yearly growth of a tree that is boron- deficient.

MICROBIAL BALANCE

Leading US microbiologist, Professor Elaine Ingham, has demonstrated that some crops prefer a bacterial dominated soil, while some others will only flourish in a fungal dominated soil. Timber crops need a fungal dominated soil - kick up some leaf litter the next time you visit a rain forest and witness the visible fungal activity. The ex-pasture soils often chosen for timber farming are always bacterial dominated, and this immediately becomes a limiting factoring in the rapid establishment of the tree crop. It has been assumed that the herbiciding of the grass cover reduces competition for moisture and nutrients while also reducing the growth loss associated with the toxic emissions of some grass species in their battle for supremacy. While these assumptions are essentially correct, the major gain from completely removing the grass from the picture actually relates to this fungi/bacteria balance. When the grass is gone, the fungal dominance can develop without hindrance and this offers a huge 'kick-start' potential. This fungal dominance can be further enhanced by the application of fungal dominated compost and/or mulch i.e. add forest litter to traditional compost to ensure the proliferation of fungi. Liquid seaweed is another productive fertiliser that promotes fungal growth. While fish fertilisers promote bacterial growth, liquid kelp is also ideal for this purpose.

SUSTAINABLE HERBICIDING

The use of herbicide to remove pasture competition is a dual-edged sword. While the practice successfully nullifies the competition, it can also

Nutrition is the Key

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seriously disrupt beneficial soil-life. Herbicides kill algae - single-celled plants which are an essential food source for both bacteria and fungi. Algae live near the surface to access sunlight, and like all plants they produce sugar from photosynthesis. These carbohydrates are the energy source for the beneficial microbes. All herbicides destroy algae, as a singlecelled plant has absolutely no resistance to herbicides. When algae are removed from the food chain, there is a corresponding drop in the numbers of fungi and bacteria, which derive part of their energy from this plant. So we have a dilemma - on one hand we have a practice that builds the likelihood of desirable fungal proliferation, but at the same time the herbicide is reducing the overall numbers of fungi in the soil. There is a solution here, and it involves the use of a liquid called fulvic acid in conjunction with every application of herbicide. Fulvic acid is a remarkable material. It has the capacity to increase the uptake of herbicide or any other material with which it is combined. Herbicide can be reduced by 30 to 50 % which more than covers the cost of fulvic acid. However, it is another characteristic of fulvic acid that increases the sustainability of herbicides: Professor Elaine Ingham reports that the herbicide residues can remain in a soil for six to eight months during which time they can continue to compromise soillife. If your child ingests poison and is rushed to Outpatients for treatment, the first step will be the administration of activated charcoal. The charcoal absorbs the toxins to reduce further cellular damage. Similarly, fulvic acid can be used to absorb herbicide residues and remove them from the system. This removal process features a two-way action. Fulvic acid has a Cation Exchange Capacity (CEC) of 1400. Most soils have a CEC ranging from 5 to 25. Fulvic acid, with this phenomenal absorbency, can suck up toxic residues to isolate their damage potential. Fulvic acid is also a powerful microbial stimulant. Microbes are drawn to the fulvic molecules like

bees to a honeypot. Many herbicides are actually biodegradable, and this influx of microbe activity can break down and remove the toxins confined within the fulvic storehouse. The second fulvic feature which facilitates detoxification relates to the size of the fulvic molecule. This molecule is so tiny that it can be easily leached from the soil, often taking undesirable residues along for the ride.

The key to herbicide sustainability is as follows:

Always include equal amounts of fulvic acid with your herbicide If, for example, you normally use 1.5 litres of Glyphosate per hectare, cut the Glyphosate by one third and add an equal amount of fulvic acid, i.e. 1 litre of Glyphosate with 1 litre of fulvic acid per hectare.

HORMONAL STIMULATION

When mineral and microbial balance have been achieved, then there is considerable potential to boost this vigour of young trees, using foliar fertilisers containing natural hormones like cytokinins, gibberellins, auxins and betaines.

Timber-Tech Triple Ten contains seven natural hormones, including a revolutionary new discovery called Triacontanol. This hormone, extracted from bees wax, can make a profound difference in root development and general plant health.

If the two-year challenge is met successfully, then we should have full canopy cover by 24 months. The trees should be strong and disease resistant, reflecting the benefits of this two-year nurturing period, but most importantly, the groundwork has been done to ensure a dramatic reduction in maturity time.

From "QLD FOREST FARMER'S ASSOCIATION NEWS" Volume 2 Issue 11



Matt Kilby, providing detailed information on using trees for sustainable land management outcomes.

Learn more about successful tree planting techniques from Matt Kilby at the NSFA US Chapter field Day June 20, 2010 in Braidwood. (See last page of this newsletter for details.)

-Editor

Around the Paddock—NSF activities





Providing insight into NSF principles at CMA Riparian Weeds Field Day—Martin Royds, Chair Governing Body, Natural Sequence Farming Association



"hard working sand bag": A couple of sand bags in an eroding road drain—one rain event and it filled to the top with sediment! Submitted by Matthew Hulse, Braidwood

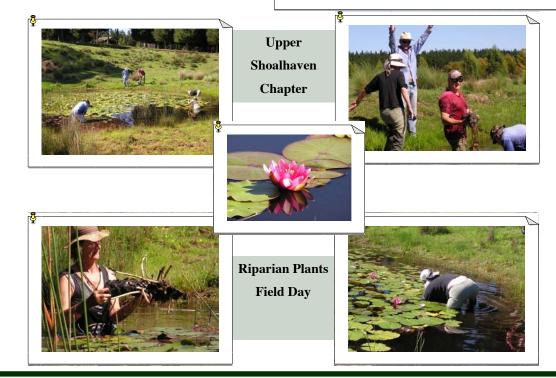
Mini-Water Harvesting Walk'nTalk

On the evening of April 22nd, the NSF Upper Murrim-bidgee Chapter hosted a walk 'n talk at Orana Steiner School, Weston, ACT. On show was the sequestration of downpipe-water into its biodynamic landscape and a similar Permaculturalist approach to soil hydration, - back yard scale.

Both followed and acknowledged Natural Sequence Farming and Keyline principles.

About 15 folks showed up and were suitably impressed! For more info, visit:

www.tinyurl.com/Orana-water



Nunyara & Jembaicumbene Creek Field Day—June 20, 2010

Nunyara is located 10 kms south of Braidwood on Burkes Hills Road, off the Cooma Road. The 100 acre property is a work-in-progress with Colin and Lea in the early stages of improving very poor, over-grazed, compacted soil with the aim to one day support a self sufficient farm. The Field Day at Nunyara will include an explanation of the Permaculture Design being implemented as well as the importance of effective tree planting to address soil nutrient and hydrology issues as well as future wind break and sun trap requirements. Matt Kilby of Global Land Repair will join us for practical talk and demonstration of successful tree planting strategies and techniques demonstrating how important effective and relevant tree planting is to various types of long term land and soil management.

We will also visit Jembaicumbene Creek crossing on Cooma Road (just 1km from Nunyara) for a session with Martin Royds on the better practices to use when attempting to restore health to a creek and creek bed.

The day will start at 9am and finish about 2pm. Morning tea and BBQ lunch provided.

Please bring sturdy footwear, water, hat, warm clothing.

FREE for NSFA members, \$10 per person for non-members.

RSVP: Contact Lea & Colin on 4846-1429 or email Lea on lea.barrett@bigpond.com.

(Colin McLean is Secretary, Upper Shoalhaven Chapter, NSFA and Lea Barrett is Membership Coordinator & Newsletter Editor, Upper Shoalhaven Chapter, NSFA)



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The Natural Sequence Farming Association is a not for profit apolitical organisation supporting Peter Andrews, The Natural Sequence Farmer, and the development of a system of farming to promote sustainable land management based on Peter's unique ability to read the natural land-scape. Through the Association we create partnerships between land management organisations, government, business and the broader community to promote and support Natural Sequence Farming.

For more information, please contact any one of the Executive team listed here or go to our website: www.naturalsequenceassociation.org.au.

Upcoming Events:

NSA US Field Day: June 20, 2010

Practical Carbon Farming: May 12 – 13, 2010, Servicemen's Club, Braidwood. To register, call (02) 6374 0329 or email

Louisa@carboncoalition.com.au

Next Newsletter: June 2010

Sponsor a New Member:

Refer a new Member to NSFA US & get 50% off <u>your</u> next membership fee. Contact Lea Barrett for details.