

HEALTHY SOILS



The right stocking rate starts with a soil test

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Sam and Kirsty White operate Bald Blair Pastoral Co, an Angus cattle seedstock herd backed by their own commercial Angus cattle herd. Consisting of four properties in the Northern Tablelands of NSW, Sam is a seasoned soil tester and has been soil testing every year for almost 30 years on his Bald Blair and more recently purchased Kolora property.



"I started soil testing primarily to find out what nutrient deficiencies existed in our soils so I could manage them accordingly with fertiliser," Sam said.

Soil testing has allowed Sam to boost his carrying capacity by approximately 25% because he has managed to avoid any level of degradation of pastures caused by overstocking.

Soil testing strategy

Sam started working with agronomist, Milton Curkpatrick from Precision Pastures in 2016, making the most of his specialist skillset.

"We conduct grid sampling every 200m² across the property, usually in spring, to devise management plans (fertiliser, gypsum and lime) for the coming 1-3 years. We then use variable rate technology to apply exactly what we need in different areas.

"Precision Pastures have helped me interpret our soil test results and I can say to them - these are my production goals, they interpret those needs and identify what nutrients and soil amendments we need address to achieve them.

"We test every three years to see how things have changed in relation to our strategy. For example, during the drought, we didn't use as many nutrients as we thought (due to low livestock numbers), so we didn't need to apply as much fertiliser.

"Soil testing allows you to get the best bang for your buck, so you're not wasting money and only spending money on fertiliser, lime or gypsum where the nutrients are needed."

Surprising results

What Sam found most surprising from conducting soil tests is the variation of soil nutrients across the whole property.

"I was surprised at the level of variation in soil nutrients across paddocks, what one paddock required in fertiliser was completely different to the paddock right beside it," Sam said.

"Visually you might see subtle differences in your pastures but the data from the soil tests gives you solid evidence to base your soil management strategy on."