



Tree-grower David Jenkins discussing his agroforest with field day participants and (right) attendees measuring a Sydney blue gum for carbon.

Catching carbon at a tree filled field day

A group of 16 landowners recently participated in the South West Catchment Council's Catching Carbon with Trees field day.

The day was hosted by David Jenkins who shared his 38 years of tree growing experience at his 230 ha property near Bridgetown.

Attendees heard the latest information on tree growing activities eligible for carbon credit payments and estimated the amount of carbon stored in David's agroforest by undertaking a practical tree measuring exercise.

The agroforest, established in 1987, provided good grazing in its early years and has produced several timber harvests yielding 3,741 tonnes worth around \$110,000.

Over the past decade David has diversified his timber business by milling mature eucalypt logs for flooring and other products as well as using it for various farm projects, including building a magnificent barn for his son's wedding. But for David it's more than just income, aesthetics and lifestyle, it's also about attachment to the land, a sense of place and purpose that growing trees has provided.

Current opportunities for carbon farming

Forest scientist, private consultant and presenter on the day Peter Ritson, reminded participants that carbon dioxide (Co₂) is removed from the atmosphere by trees. Through photosynthesis carbon is stored in new growth and oxygen released. Removing Co₂ from the atmosphere is an important means of slowing climate change.

Carbon credits may be eligible for tree growing activities, the main ones being permanent plantings (no commercial harvest) and farm forestry plantings (with commercial harvest).

Permanent plantings must have been established on cleared land after July 1, 2007, while farm forestry plantings must be part of a working farm and established after July 1, 2010. This type of planting also has area limitations depending on rainfall.

Eligible tree growing activities also need an approved method for carbon accounting, including standards for assessment, reporting and auditing. This accounting work can be onerous, especially for smaller growers.

Under the Australian Government's Emission Reduction Fund (ERF) tree growing projects can be paid for by carbon credits if all requirements are met. The deadline for registering existing tree growing projects with the ERF is June 30, 2015.

For information go to: <http://www.cleanenergyregulator.gov.au>.

Calculating the amount of carbon stored in trees

The day's third presenter, Richard Moore, led a hands-on tree exercise which required participants to measure the amount of wood in an agroforest tree's stem per ha.

Once everyone had conducted their estimates, they calculated the amount of Co₂ equivalent (Co₂-e) by allowing for the quantities of wood in roots, branches, bark and leaves, its density and proportion of carbon, before finally converting to weight of CO₂-e.

The amount of Co₂-e currently stored in 1 ha of the agroforest was calculated at 363 tonnes. Averaged over 28 years of growth, this equates to 13 tonnes of Co₂-e per ha per year. This figure ignored the Co₂-e stored by trees already harvested.

To put a yard-stick against this sequestration figure, the average car emits approximately five tonnes of Co₂-e every year.

The field day enabled participants to gain a better understanding of what trees can do for landowners, of the carbon market and what's involved in estimating the amount of Co₂-e stored in forests.

If the level of discussion and number of questions are anything to go by there was lot of learning going on.

- Wendy Wilkins, SWCC sustainable agriculture project manager