

Western Australian Alpaca farm shows benefits from EMS

The Blackwood Basin Group's BestFarms Environmental Management System (EMS) program is helping one Alpaca farm in Western Australia to develop practical solutions to on farm environmental issues.

Anne Smith started Hobson's Choice Alpacas farming business 15 years ago and is now on a 15-acre property, just 8km south of Busselton in WA. Hobson's Choice specialises in breeding Black Huacaya and Coloured Suri alpacas, and producing alpaca wool and knitted garments.



Photo right: Anne Smith with one of her Black Huacaya Alpacas

As a member of Biological Farmers of Australia, Anne has always tried to manage her property with environmentally friendly practices and minimal use of chemicals whenever possible. Her gentle approach to farming has already shown benefits, demonstrated through her growing reputation for producing very healthy animals due to her holistic and mostly organic farming methods.

Also a very active member of the Australian Alpaca Association, Anne has led a project to develop a nationally accredited course for alpaca farmers. The course material is expected to be available across Australia through any Registered Training Organisation by 2006.

Anne attended BestFarms training workshops in 2004 to learn how to best tackle some of the environmental challenges on her property. Some of those challenges include waterlogging, soil acidity, soil fertility and biodiversity decline, weeds and feral animals.

Very pleased with her decision to commit to the EMS program, Anne explains that she first became involved with BestFarms because, 'I didn't have a lot of knowledge about how to best manage environmental impacts on my property and I saw the workshops as an opportunity to see what other farmers were doing and to get some professional advice.'

Anne noted that "The workshops helped me to bring everything that needed to be done together and gave me access to resources that I didn't know existed, such as my local catchment group, Land for Wildlife and

locally grown indigenous plants for my property. I have also been able to save water, address fire safety and generally increase my awareness of issues such as soil nutrition".

"The BestFarms program has also helped me to feel less alone in this process. I now have a support group and a facilitator that will help me when help is needed".

In the last 12 months Anne has tested soil samples, installed a new watering system and pump, limed the roadway to improve access and reduce sedimentation and planted several varieties of fodder and rehabilitation trees. As a result of these activities and completion of their Farm Action Plan, Hobson's Choice is now ready for BestFarms certification.

'The workshops helped me to bring everything that needed to be done together and gave me access to resources that I didn't know existed'

Meanwhile Anne plans to keep working on improving her property by planting more trees to reduce waterlogging, removing weeds and implementing water management strategies in wet areas on her property. This will keep her busy, but not overwhelmed, as these activities have been planned over time according to Anne's time availability and as resources become available.

"Environmental Management Systems are here to stay and although there is not yet an obvious demand for proof of environmental responsibility, I believe there will be in the near future, due to pressure from Government regulators and the community," said Anne.

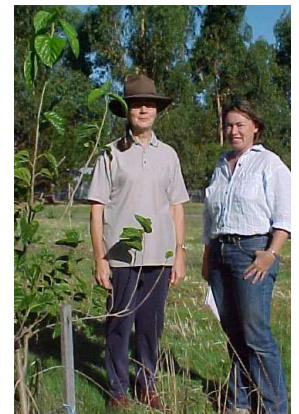


Photo right: Anne Smith and BestFarms Regional Coordinator Christine Kershaw with one of Anne's fodder trees.

When asked what message she would give to other farmers, Anne said, "Get into it now, whilst this opportunity exists and increase your knowledge. Anyone who wants to have a look at my system is welcome to visit my property to see how it works. We won't have an option with EMS in the future and so you should start to prepare now. "

Congratulations Anne, on your achievements so far!

Contact Anne Smith on (08) 9753 1079
 or Christine Kershaw on (08) 9765 1555