

# Mt Alexander Regenerative Agriculture Group



The Mt Alexander Regenerative Agriculture Group (MARAG,) with the Mt Alexander Sustainability Group, initiated in May 2019 has grown from 20 landholders to over 70, covering over 16,000 hectares. The groups "Community Action Plan" supports testing and trialling a range of targeted regenerative agriculture activities applicable to the local setting to help landholders develop improved capability to change practices contributing to building healthy soils, vegetation and biodiversity whilst reducing the risks from wind and water erosion.

The high level of member participation in on-paddock demonstration initiatives is testament to the level of enthusiasm of the members. Farmers commit to adopting a range of regenerative practices, soil is tested before and after to assess any changes in soil carbon. Multi-species cover crops are now being planted by at least 10 to 15 members. Five dung beetle nurseries have been established by group members to rapidly multiply the number of beetles across the shire.



**Soil sampling for soil carbon monitoring**

## About the Facilitator

Deane Belfield, is the group's facilitator. Deane manages a sustainable business consultancy, as well as a biodynamic beef farm. He is an advocate of including regenerative agriculture as a key strategy for any community seeking to achieve Zero Net Emissions (ZNET) through soil carbon sequestration. At the 2019 National Carbon Farming conference Deane was awarded the Leadership Award. He sees regenerative farming practices as a means of building soil health and soil carbon to help grow healthy locally sourced produce, boosting productivity and climate resilience. Increased soil carbon can help the community achieve its ZNET by 2030 target, a strategy supported by the Mt Alexander Shire Council.

## Group Objectives

- Increase understanding of the implications of climate change on their farming operations to make informed decisions about how they need to adapt their land management practices in the future.
- Increase their understanding of the soil carbon cycle and land management practices to maintain or increase soil carbon.
- Increase their understanding of plant species suitable to their location, planting plans and maintaining revegetated areas.
- Increase their knowledge on pasture establishment and management.
- Develop property plans for landscape works to improve water retention and landscape function in their region.
- Increase skills and knowledge to decrease their carbon footprint.

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## Group Activities:

These activities are conducted in a workshop format or webinar, combined with on-farm field events

- **Recap and Review:** Purpose is to regroup with members, consolidate learnings and feedback from Year 2 and discuss proposed framework for Yr3
- **Understanding Your Soil Test:** interpreting soil tests and using this knowledge as a basis for correcting soil imbalances and enable those conducting field trials/demos to make better decisions leading to improved soil biology and hence yield
- **Multi-species cover crop trials and demonstration:** to improve knowledge and skill about pasture establishment and management and cover crop types (winter, summer) to help improve soil biology (fungi/bacteria, C:N), pasture nutrient density and balance, ensure maximum vegetation cover, retain moisture, smother weeds, provide maximum photosynthetic capacity to build soil carbon and build macro nutrient foundation through plant symbiosis
- **Grass and pasture inventory:** Conduct workshop followed by on farm audits of prevalent grasses, forbs, natives, perennials and annuals and enables landholders to identify speies
- **Managed Grazing:** Principles of holistic or managed grazing will be reviewed, along with case studies and tools, and in field trials and demonstrations, including tissue testing.
- **Dung beetle nurseries:** to build on the field work for holistic grazing and cover-cropping to create capability for farmers to incorporate dung beetles as part of their regen system and enable local breeding of beetles at scale, via on farm nurseries
- **Revegetation, Planting, Shelterbelts, Hydrology:** gain an understanding of plant species that will improve soil condition (where and why) water retention and provide biodiverse habitat
- **Soil Amendments, Compost & Biochar:** understand the potential of integrating various soil amendments including biochar and compost into the soil, and trial non-farm manufacture and application. Farmers to be encouraged to undertake small trials of on-farm manufacture with potential to combine with cover-cropping.

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## For more information

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