Regenerative Ag

A Farmer's Story

North Central CMA

Australian Government | National Landcare Program

Tyler Nelson is a member on the Normanville Regenerative Farming group. The family property is located north of Boort.

Tyler works on the family farm with his grandfather, father, and wife. The multi-generational property is 2,500 hectares, and predominately dryland with a small area of irrigation. The farm is mostly cropping and hay production but over the past four years livestock have been brought back into the farming system after a ten-year break.

"The main crops grown on the farm are wheat, barley canola, and vetch and oats for hay. We also grow lentils, chickpeas, and faba beans when the conditions are suitable," Tyler said.

"The main challenges for me and probably most farmers are the variable climate and market, cost price squeeze with increasing input costs and return on commodities, and weeds, and disease. It is always a balance with maximising production and managing the soil."

Over the past few years regenerative agriculture is a term being used in discussions with farmer groups such as Vic No-Till and the Normanville cropping group.

"I am always thinking about alternative practices for improving the soil and maintaining ground cover, this has led me to sow multi-species crops on small areas of the property. Our cropping is mainly monocultures, even though these are the main practices that support the farming operation, they are usually a high input with chemical and fertiliser applications," Tyler said.

"The trialling of multi-species pastures seems to be working more with nature and the introduction of livestock has created more diversity in the farming system and diversified the farm income. "The multi-species pasture trials have allowed me to put more focus on livestock production, ground cover and soil health with less focus on pest weeds and insects. At this stage it is only small scale, utilising paddocks that were not as productive with cropping, last year the mixed species paddocks provided ample feed for the entire growing season, finishing off our lambs in good time."

Tyler also discussed the benefits of sowing multi-species pastures to provide additional pasture when required.

"They can be sown early, less concern with frosts, and increased biomass. Lucerne flea did target one or two of the pasture species, but there were plenty of other species that weren't affected by insect attack and eventually the pasture outgrew the pest pressure," Tyler said.

Tyler has recently sown some multi-species blends including a mix of summer and winter active mix, hoping to produce quick feed and cover with the winter active species establishing later, to grow through winter and spring.

"I need to look at our current farming system before sowing larger areas of the multi-species pastures, such as livestock numbers, water locations, stock yards and shearing sheds.

"I like going to the multi-species paddocks knowing there is enough good quality feed at the right time of year while maintaining ground cover."

Tyler checking tillage radish growth in his multi-species cover crop.