

# SOIL HEALTH FOR PROFIT

Report on

***Cropping & Mixed Farming Forum with Dr Maarten Stapper***

**Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> September 2014**

**Soil Health for Profit** came about due to demand from Western Australian farmers that there needed to be more education opportunities particularly on biological farming. The keynote speaker was Dr Maarten Stapper, Farming Systems Agronomist and expert on dryland wheat systems and the management of high-yielding irrigated wheat. Maarten is passionate about helping farmers improve the profitability of their operations by harnessing the power of natural soil processes, improving their use of inputs and understanding those practices that negatively impact on soil health.

The report enclosed outlines the response from 22% of the attendees that took the time to fill and return their feedback forms, however there was also a lot of “talk” indicating the success of the event at reaching the needs of producers. Clearly there is a desire to continue this type of education.

The day was hosted by NutriSoil in partnership with Ucarty Catchment Group and local growers that worked tirelessly to cater for the attendees and ensured a great turnout. Thanks also to the Wheatbelt NRM who generously sponsored the event.



***By Rachele Armstrong, NutriSoil Pty Ltd***

***Brought to you by:***



**& Ucarty Catchment Group**

# UCARTY CATCHMENT GROUP NEWS

## Soil Health Forum Success: Agroecology

Agroecology is a low-risk, long-term focussed way of farming that can be financially stable into the future; providing healthy food and fibre whilst helping keep farming families healthy. On 9 Sep 2014 Ucarty Catchment Group hosted a soil health forum in Dowerin with Dr Maarten Stapper (brought over from Canberra by Nutrisoil) who spoke about agroecology to a group of about 70 attendees from Beverley, Bunbury, Cadoux , Corrigin, Cuballing, Dalwallinu, Dandaragan, Dowerin, Gingin, Goomalling, Kalannie, Koorda, Merredin, Morawa, Mt Helena, Newdegate, Northam, Ongerup, Perth, Pingelly, Poppanyinning, Quairading, Tambellup , Tammin, Wannamal, Wongan Hills, Wyalkatchem and York.

If you are curious why so many farmers would travel so far to hear Dr Stapper, read his paper [From Green Revolution to Agroecology](#).

Five WA farmers told stories of their (sometimes bumpy) transitions towards improving soil biology on their farms. These five also appeared with Dr Maarten Stapper on the Q&A panel at the end of the day – Ian Clarke, Goomalling; Andrew Tunstall, Kalannie; Di Haggerty, Wyalkatchem; Gary Page, Pingelly; and Gavin Hagboom, Dowerin.

Thanks to Di Haggerty and Amanda Hagboom for organising the day with Rachelle from [Nutrisoil](#); [Wheatbelt NRM](#) for promoting the event and sponsoring 20 attendees to attend; Di, Amanda and Shirley Hagboom for the venue set-up and clean up and the amazing catering; and Ros the Dowerin Community Club Manager for her help.



*By Christie Kingston, UCG*

## Who Attended?

**Soil Health For Profit WA 2014**

**68 people attended.**

**Feedback forms**

**12 returned representing 15 people attending.**

**Therefore 22% return rate.**

<b>Farm description</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>%</b>
Income Producing and/or >100a	<b>9</b>	<b>60%</b>
Hobby Farmers <100a	<b>0</b>	<b>0%</b>
Stock / Pasture	<b>8</b>	<b>53%</b>
Cropping	<b>9</b>	<b>60%</b>
Orchards / Horticulture / Viticulture	<b>1</b>	<b>7%</b>
Organic	<b>0</b>	<b>0%</b>
Home Garden	<b>0</b>	<b>0%</b>

**NB: Attendees could & usually did fall into more than one category.**

### **Other Reasons for Attending:**

- Paddock to plate meat at Farmers Market etc.
- Have been biologically farming for 10 years. Slowly converting to all aspects of it.
- Wheatbelt NRM support landholders and assists them to understand soil health.
- More profit through less costs.
- Looking to develop a corporate farming model greater than 100k ha. Agroecology and permaculture methods. Can see a place for your products. 2000 new people farming.

<b>How did you find out about the event?</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>%</b>
Invite in Mail/Email from NutriHealth	1	7%
NutriSoil Website/Facebook	0	0%
Farming Secrets	0	0%
Ucarty Catchment Group	6	40%
HiTech	1	7%
Poster on Display	0	0%
Farm Weekly	1	7%
Natural Farming News (A.Pauley)	2	13%
Wheatbelt NRM	3	20%
Other eg.Friend / Neighbour	3	20%

## **GAME-CHANGERS: EVENT IMPACT**

***The respondents were asked what information changed/added to the way they farm.***

- ✓ For next year I am looking at using biology in 25% of our total cropping program. At the moment using Carbon Exhaust, which I believe can only get better results.
- ✓ Seed dressings with NutriSoil will be done next year.
- ✓ Interesting to get more out of 'natural' (sheep and cow poo) fertilisers. Also better pastures = better livestock.
- ✓ The "Farmer Presentations" reinforced the commitment needed to continue the journey once started.
- ✓ Information changed/added - too many ideas to list here.
- ✓ Added to my knowledge base.
- ✓ I'm a Biological Farmer with more than 68,000 hrs of experience. I'm using the Albreicht and Reams system, combined with technology.
- ✓ Will look at now introducing vermicast / compost extracts to my program.
- ✓ We will try some NutriSoil.
- ✓ The information added to and confirmed what I'm trying to achieve on my property. I hadn't considered worm juice but would like to know how I could use it.
- ✓ Improved knowledge on products.

## **What would you like to learn more about?**

- ✓ How to use less toxic chems and become greener as a farmer.
- ✓ Farmers experience over a period of time and what changed their attitude. Best value for your dollar.
- ✓ Everything. We will never stop learning. Green manuring and with how much can I cut back on next year fertiliser and seed applications.
- ✓ Need to know more about what I can do to encourage soil biology. I'm green manuring and mulching and I want to get the timing right. What can I do better to maximise the organic matter I'm growing? A better understanding of the processes going on in the soil. Am I doing things that are negatively impacting on soil biology?
- ✓ More on Microbes. How you can change the soil biology and make it less accessible for weeds. Here in the Northern Wheatbelt, radish is getting worse, followed by rye-grass.
- ✓ Biological recipes for foliar and liquid inject – IDEAS!!! So much conflicting information out there. Thank you guys for the day.
- ✓ More effective using of NutriSoil.
- ✓ Making minerals/nutrients more available in most practical way for our enterprise.
- ✓ The whole lot. Who are NutriSoil's agents in WA?

## **Individual Sessions Comments**

### **8.50 Registration**

Good and easy; Well organised; Easy – first there!; Seemed to run smoothly; NA; Pain-free.

### **9.20 Welcome – Amanda Hagboom, Ucarty Catchment Group**

Can't fault it; Hard worker behind this event, to get that day success; 2 x Good.

### **9.20 Introduction to Day – Intro to Vermiculture & NutriSoil – Rachelle Armstrong, NS**

Tick; Excellent introduction by Rachelle on the day. NutriHealth ag products I believe was received well on the day; Interesting; Set the day up well; Contexted the day well. I knew what was ahead for the day.

### **9.30 Soil Biology: What's it all about? – Dr Maarten Stapper**

Tick; The speaker of the day Dr Maarten Stapper was very informative on Soil Biology. Hopefully in the future he will return to WA for more such events; Good refresher; Good; Great; Brilliant; Excellent speaker – Well structured; Good information that needs to be promoted better in mainstream media.

### **10.30 Morning Tea**

Tick; Huge variety. Well done; Could be a little earlier – breakfast was a long time ago...YUM!!!; Excellent – nice to have gluten free option; Great food & lots of it; Yum; Missed out – too busy talking and ran out of time to eat.

### **10.45 Soil Regeneration: Finding Balance with Agroecological Farming – Dr Stapper**

Tick; Excellent; Great information; Good; Great; Brilliant; Would have liked more examples of what people do to encourage soil biology - maybe some examples of typical inputs for a season of cropping or pasture; Good information that needs to be promoted better in mainstream media.

### **12.00 LUNCH – Roast meat rolls, Salad & Soup**

Tick; Very nice. Well organised; Yum; Excellent – good options and quality; Yum; No complaints about quantity or quality; Nice lunch – needed butter on rolls though.

### **12.30 Making of NutriSoil DVD (during lunch break)**

Very interesting; Missed due to talking – may need to incorporate into schedule for all to watch; Enjoyed it. I want one of those feed mixers.

### **12.45 Farmer Presenters: Ian Clarke, Goomalling; Andrew Tunstall, Kalannie; Di Haggerty, Wyalkatchem; Gary Page, Pingelly; and Gavin Hagboom, Dowerin**

If farmers can share their cost difference from what was in the conventional system to what it is now with the biological or organic approach. What is the quality difference and do they yield more or less?; Very informative on how each farmer gave their presentation and talked about their particular operation/programs on their farms. To me this is really important as it shows farmers using biology and getting the results; I thought this was the most valuable part of the day; Excellent - good to have people with on the ground practical experience; Brilliant. Best part of the day; Interesting. Heartening. Inspiring; Would have liked small group sessions with these people to ask questions and get advice. This was an important session and a good move to have several farmers; This was good and possibly needed more time/variety / difficulty hearing Gary Page / IT photos.

## 2.45 Afternoon Tea

Tick; Excellent; So yummy – disappointed I missed out on my doggy bag; Excellent – good to have gluten free option; Yum.

## 3.00 Panel – Q&A – All speakers

Tick; Well managed; Valuable; Good; Brilliant. Best part of the day; An important part of the day; Not a great fan of panels. Would prefer small facilitated groups / or chat groups; Good.

### Event Logistics / Planning

#### How did you find the Venue & Equipment for Learning?

Great wouldn't change a thing  
If I was running the day I would have... **TOTAL 12 or 80%**

- Adjust AV screen so all people could see the lower 1/3 without having to look around others heads.

#### Was the day well facilitated/organised?

Great, everything ran smoothly...  
If I was running the day I would have.... **TOTAL 12 or 80%**

- Thrown out the Lipton tea-bags and replaced with better quality...:)
- Know your AV & IT.

## List of Resources from the Event

1. Soil Fertility Management – Towards Sustainable Farming Systems and Landscapes
  - Dr Maarten Stapper
2. From Green Revolution to Agroecology – Dr Maarten Stapper
3. Greater Production by Building Soil Biology – NutriSoil Results Brochure
4. Case Study: “NutriSoil Helps the Haggertys Improve Productivity with Reduced Inputs”
5. Time to Take that Step to Reduce Fertiliser Use – Joel Williams

Contact NutriSoil (details over page) for copies of these resources to be sent to you.



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