



Conservation Farming – Northparkes Land Management

By embracing conservation farming on land forming part of Northparkes Mines, the company has contributed to the advancement of farming techniques and provided direct benefits to the local farming community.

Background

The mining leases which make up Northparkes Mines cover 1,630 hectares. Northparkes also owns a further 4,370 hectares of land surrounding the mine forming a buffer between the mine and neighbouring properties.

Until 1997 Northparkes managed the land by leasing it on a short term basis to farmers. Intensive cropping carried out on short term leases had the potential to create environmental problems including soil damage and erosion.

Sustainable land use

As Northparkes is not in the farming business, it had initially been reluctant to farm the land. However as the commercial needs of short term leases conflicted with the company's desire to protect and maintain the long term value of the land, Northparkes changed its approach to directly manage the land and appointed a farm manager in 1997.

Northparkes devised a farm strategy that involves the use of best practice conservation farming techniques aimed at improving soil quality and productivity, retaining and improving the lands inherent value. Contractors carry out the actual farming under the supervision of the farm manager and in accordance with the strategy.

As Northparkes' primary focus for the land is not a commercial one, it has provided opportunities to trial experimental and innovative techniques. The Department of Industry and Investment NSW (I&I NSW) has become actively involved in establishing large scale agronomy trials across the farm paddocks.

Trials carried out by Northparkes and I&I NSW include demonstrations of large scale cropping of new varieties, a trial in progress to identify optimal fertiliser application rates for fertile soils and an ongoing trial to assess the impact of row spacing and sowing rate on yields.



I&I NSW trials at Northparkes

Sharing knowledge

A significant focus of the Northparkes farm strategy was to impart what was learnt about conservation farming through the sharing of results and demonstrations.

Northparkes has used a number of forums to share what has been learnt including field days onsite in conjunction with the Central West Farming Systems, six monthly meetings onsite with local landholders and direct contact with interested landholders by the farm manager. Results are made available to agronomists.



Central West Farming Systems Field Day at Northparkes

Establishing wildlife corridors

Areas of remnant vegetation are linked across the agricultural land by maintaining wildlife corridors that are established or improved along fence lines, road verges, creeks and drainage lines through an annual revegetation program. 10,000 trees are planted each year, if conditions are suitable. In excess of 150,000 trees have been planted to date within the landholding.



Planted wildlife corridors between agricultural land

Benefits to the community and Northparkes

Whilst the Northparkes farm strategy goes well beyond what is required by the regulators, there are significant benefits to the company.

The use of sustainable conservation farming is part of a strategy of eventual rehabilitation of the mine and surrounding areas.

The process of sharing knowledge with the farming community has allowed Northparkes to demonstrate its genuine commitment to sustainable land management.

The farming strategy has built positive relationships with the local community, neighbouring farmers and regulators. As a result, the community is largely supportive of the mine's exploration and mining activities.

Disclaimer: This case study is intended to provide summary information only. It does not intend to be comprehensive or to provide specific legal advice. Given the changing nature of legislation, regulations, program rules and guidelines, there is a potential for inherent inaccuracies and potential omissions in information contained in this case study. All information in this case study is provided "as is" with no guarantee of completeness or accuracy and without warranty of any kind, express or implied. In no event will New South Wales Minerals Council Limited, any related members, consultants or employees thereof be liable to anyone for any decision made or action taken in reliance on the information in this paper or for any consequential damages.