

Regenerative Farmer Profile: Southampton Homestead



JEFF POW & MICHELLE McMANUS own and run Southampton Homestead in Balingup, southwest WA producing pasture-raised chickens and Muscovy ducks.

Having received a number of national awards for innovation in Farming, Southampton HS is nationally and internationally recognised for their work towards “*reclaiming the terms of trade on farm*” by optimum value-adding of their produce.

Their story of recovery from the devastation of the 2013 fires has been an inspiration to many people as it demonstrates the true courage of individuals and community who are determined to achieve their goals.



Practice Changes

The majority of poultry production in Australia is focused on yield and efficiency maximisation with the practices requiring intensive engineered growth inputs, while Jeff and Michelle are pioneering a return to the pasture-based system of raising livestock with holistic grazing where the poultry follow the cattle’s paddock rotations. This allows the birds to express natural social and foraging behaviours, eating a spectrum of whole foods such as a range of plants and insects generated from a healthier soil microbiome.



Why

Their work at Southampton is diverting the perspective of production away from a commodity mindset towards one of providing food to a consumer who demands ethical practice and transparency in the supply chain.

On farm they have a micro-abattoir and butcher room enabling them to harvest and process for efficient delivery to customers that provides financial security over the enterprise by being able to control and manage key aspects of the supply chain.

“Growing farmers is a necessary part of our business”

“The farm has been restored and regenerated twice: once in 2008 from a pine plantation, and in 2013 from a bushfire”



Outcomes

- Production of healthier, happier, low-stress animals by allowing natural behaviours in a balanced biological system, encouraging high immuno-function resilience to pathogens.
- Established direct supply to retailers, restaurants, and consumers, achieving a fairer return of the enterprise earnings.
- Southampton have supported other farmers start up their own pastured poultry enterprises, with several setting up their own on-farm micro-abattoirs



Chicken tractors using holistic grazing methods.

Challenges

- Chick supply is reliant on ‘factory’ chick production with genetics owned and controlled by multinational interest.
- The high cost of energy plus the costs of off-grid supply weigh heavily on gross margins.
- Work on regenerating degraded farmland, sequestering carbon, and retaining water in the landscape is not valued economically. This is the most labour intensive voluntary work on the farm.
- Traditional models of credit assessment make financing expansion of the operation unobtainable.

Future Goals

- The foundations have been laid for future expansion of the enterprise from a production perspective as well as educating and training new entrants to agriculture and those wanting to diversify.
- There is a need to transform the poultry industry in order to provide greater transparency in production and supply, while providing an ethical product that regenerates the health of the landscape, the community and the industry.



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