

4 SUSTAINABLE FARMING PRACTICES ON THE RISE



The Aussie farming industry is on the move into a more ecological future. Whether it's new energy sources, new tech, or new property upgrades it's hard to ignore the push towards sustainability. If you're thinking of joining a circular economy that's good for the environment and your bottom line, here are four sustainable farming practices worth considering.

1. Adopting precision agriculture

Precision agriculture is the future of farming. It integrates technology and data to make farming crops and raising livestock more accurate. This means there's less wastage of resources, such as fertiliser and fuel, so farmers can make the most of what they have. This sustainable farming practice sees traditional practices brought into the present with the help of software, sensors, satellite imaging, drones, GPS capabilities and more – it's cutting-edge stuff.

Using these tools, farmers gain extra control over their processes which, in turn, helps them become more sustainable, **boost ROI** by increasing the quality and volume of yield and **reduce the reliance on water** and other resources. For example, by adding GPS capabilities to a tractor, crop harvests become much more efficient as no areas are skipped or overlapped, saving fuel and energy. Similarly, collecting data on soil quality offers farmers insights into fertility levels and lets them optimise fertiliser use, benefiting the environment and reducing waste. A number of **apps**, services and **resources** are available online to help you get started, including **PCT Agcloud**, a software solutions business and **i4M**, a company offering tools to begin the precision agriculture integration process.

2. Considering organic fertiliser

Transitioning to organic fertiliser is part of the rapidly growing move to organic farming across Australia, with revenue in the sector expected to grow by nearly **7.9% in 2021**. **Biochar** is

one such soil additive, made from heating organic matter like manure, crop waste and woodchips, that can increase fertility and crop productivity. As this product is used by more and **more farmers**, it's showing potential in increasing soil carbon content, which can help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It's part of the larger conversation around **carbon sequestration** and greenhouse gas reduction – one of the hot topics at **Beef Australia 2021**.

Making the shift to organic, with the fertiliser you use being a huge piece of this puzzle, can not only help the environment, but your bottom line, too. Research shows that going organic can earn **three to six times greater profit for farmers** and also offer **better yields during drought**. Further research has shown that switching to organic fertiliser has the potential to offer crops **greater nutritional properties**, making this sustainable farming practice a great option.

Though, like most things in agriculture and nature, good things take time. This means your land may need time to adjust when switching to more organic materials. In some instances, depending on what you grow, it may take years to be fully visible. That's why it's important to conduct ongoing testing to ensure your soil is receiving the nutrients it needs. To get started, you could engage a third party that offers soil sampling and testing to work out next steps, such as **Soil Land Food**.

3. Introducing renewable energy

Energy, in general, is a big topic in farming – agriculture is estimated to make up **13% of Australia's greenhouse gas emissions**. Soaring electricity prices are motivation enough for farmers





Did you know? Recycled farm waste can also be used to generate energy. In 2020, Melbourne-based company **AgBioEn** kickstarted a **\$2 billion project** to turn agricultural waste into energy for food production.

to switch to more affordable options but investing in renewable energy can help you reduce your energy costs and the planet, which is why the government is **supporting businesses** to make the move.

The benefits are threefold:

- ✓ It reduces your power bills in the long run
- ✓ It helps improve productivity
- ✓ It reduces your emissions and therefore your carbon footprint.

But becoming more energy efficient doesn't just mean switching your energy provider, it can also mean optimising your operations by:

- ✓ Adding renewable energy sources, such as **solar panels**, to your property that you can draw from may also entitle you to **rebates** when you send surplus energy back to the grid, generating a long-term source of income
- ✓ Upgrading your equipment, such as irrigation systems, to become more energy efficient, e.g. by introducing **hybrid energy sources**
- ✓ Updating insulation and access to storage rooms, for example, through **automated cool room doors** to reduce energy wastage.

If you want further advice on how you could reduce your energy consumption, visit **Business Energy Advice** for a free one-on-one consultation.

Tip: The government regularly releases new grants for businesses which wish to become more energy-efficient, so it's worth **keeping an eye out**.

4. Adopting integrated pest management (IPM)

In Australia, the use of chemicals for pest and disease control purposes in crops and animals at various stages of farming has doubled **to over 50,000 tonnes** each year since 1992. And, of course, it's also costing the environment, with

negative impacts on soil and water quality as well as on biospheres and natural ecosystems.

IPM is a sustainable farming practice looking to address this issue by promoting pest management initiatives that are safer for all – animals, people and the environment. The idea at the core of IPM is to look at the environmental factors surrounding the problem and create unfavourable conditions to prevent it from thriving. Depending on the issue, IPM suggests one or a **combination of different strategies**, such as:

- ✓ Building up plant resistance, or setting up barriers and traps to create less favourable conditions for the pest
- ✓ Strategically embedding pest-resistant varieties of crops – these could be naturally resistant or developed through breeding or genetic engineering
- ✓ Strategically introducing the pest's natural enemies, such as predators, parasites or microbial pathogens
- ✓ Introducing quarantine regulations or restricting the introduction of crops and movement livestock to limit the entry of and exposure to the pest.

IPM is a long-term sustainable practice which should be introduced slowly – as forward planning and close monitoring is essential. There are numerous **resources and case studies** available online, especially on the topic of IPM for **broadacre crops** to help you get started.

Sustainability in farming has never been more relevant, both in business and for the environment. The case for integrating more sustainable farming practices and making considered choices can not only help boost your bottom line, but benefit the long-term health of your property and, in turn, the planet.

Find out how a Westpac agribusiness specialist banker could help your financing to step into the future of farming.