



Farmers give compost the thumbs up

“Compost has revolutionised my farm, farming practices and exponentially lifted my carrying capacity.”

Breadalbane
workshop
participant

It is estimated that 90% of Central West of New South Wales soils contain less than 2.5% organic matter. Using compost on farms improves the soil by adding organic matter and nutrients.

Project objectives and approach

The Organics on Farm project aimed to increase awareness, knowledge and experience among farmers about the use of compost in broadacre agriculture.

Delivered by MRA Consulting in partnership with Australian Native Landscapes and supported with \$347,303 from the EPA's Waste Less Recycle More Organics Market Development grants, the project involved farmer to farmer communication to demonstrate compost benefits on farm.

Eight workshops were held at host farms where significant improvements had previously been achieved through using compost. After the workshops farmers were encouraged to learn more about compost through;

- ongoing support from Australian Native Landscape advisory staff,
- continuing interaction with host farmers, and
- ongoing access to Landcare and other advisory services.

Additional project incentives included;

- a five-tonne trial for free, or
- a 25% discount on compost purchase.

“We don’t know it all but what we do know makes it worth a try.”

Jane, sheep farmer, Molong



Farmers discuss the merits of composting at Molong.

Incorporated into farming systems

The selected demonstration farms had previously applied compost tailor-made to their needs to boost production. The workshops included a walking tour of the property and covered topics such as;

- independent scientific advice
- details on the nutrient and other compost characteristics
- information about previous trial results
- a cost benefit analysis of the different types of compost available, including modification and amendments to suit soil needs and enterprises.

Site hosts shared their farming compost experience, practical advice and perceptions. Participants also discussed economic benefits and long-term impacts on farm sustainability.



Rob Niccol from Australian Native Landscapes (ANL) discusses compost differences at Reids Flat.

“99% for seed germination on a field where compost was used at a rate of six tonnes per hectare.”

Cliff, host farmer, Milthorpe workshop

Compost as a farm input

The project leveraged independent scientific advice that had shown compost:

- increases soil organic matter
- improves water-holding capacity of soils
- can increase yield
- increases or changes microbial activity, which can improve productivity
- has impacts beyond what can be explained by nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium nutrient inputs.

Results

More than 190 farmers attended the workshops on existing demonstration sites and farms. After the workshops most farmers said they intended to buy compost.

Additional events were held at Blayney with 141 farmers attending.

“There is sufficient knowledge and evidence that compost benefits production; farmers are increasingly realising this, especially when they are thinking about productivity in the long-term.”

Virginia Brunton,
principal
consultant
organics



MRA Consulting Group principal consultant organics Virginia Brunton at the Reids Flat workshop.

MRA Consulting Group (MRA) received a \$279,000 grant and worked in partnership with compost manufacture Australian Native Landscapes (ANL).

MRA has expertise in compost and its agriculture applications.

ANL specialise in producing a range of quality composts and special blends for agricultural systems.

Approximately 250 farmers engaged in the incentive program incorporating compost into their farming systems. They received further support from Landcare and advisory services as well as ANL advisory staff.

More than 80% of participants intend to use compost on their properties in the next year and 97% are confident that high quality compost is available to suit their enterprise.

In total 344 farmers increased their awareness, experience and confidence in compost as a regular farming input.

More than 24,000 tonnes of compost improved about 3,900 hectares of farming soil.

Photos

Central West demonstration property workshops. Photographer: MRA.

NSW Environment Protection Authority

Email: info@epa.nsw.gov.au

Website: www.epa.nsw.gov.au

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