

Despite being a farmer for most of her life and no stranger to its heartbreaks, the most recent drought was the turning point for Sandra Winsor. Operating a livestock and fodder-cropping farm just outside Gulargambone saw Sandra enduring the worst drought NSW has ever seen.

Following years of fodder costs outweighing the value of her cattle, Sandra made the difficult decision to sell half of her breeders, all of which were in calf at the time. After selling her livestock and reassessing the business needs, Sandra determined she would need to build a more sustainable business model and to work *with* the landscape.

Sandra knew that she had to make some more changes for her business to survive another drought. With the support of her partner Roger, tools from Professor Hugh Pringle's Ecosystem Management Understanding, and Charlie Arnott's podcast in her ears, she set to work.

Sandra's initial focus was rehydrating the landscape by slowing and using rain. In order to achieve this new approach, which would drought-proof her property, piping was installed for the collection and storage of water off buildings. Water was then piped to shelter belts and to the top of tributaries, which filled waterholes for livestock drinking water.

Sandra was aware of the Emergency Water Infrastructure Rebate (EWIR) and already a customer of the RAA. After completing her works she applied online, a process she found very straightforward, and was approved for a 25% rebate of costs incurred up to the value of \$25,000.

"The funding allowed water solutions during the drought which knitted with the future plan," Sandra said.



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"The EWIR funding has certainly helped with working toward repairing natural systems, planning and working toward a hydrated landscape, considering and reducing environmental impacts and focusing on long-term, realistic cattle production targets and continued fodder cropping."

Now in full recovery, Sandra has restocked to 70% of her pre-drought cattle numbers, a number she feels is the maximum capacity for her enterprise. This allows for the feed to go to seed, encouraging more growth and more nutritious, enduring feed to support the livestock.

"While there is no guarantee that drought won't have an impact in the future, the funding has been integral in allowing continued livestock and cropping production alongside long-term environmental benefits," Sandra said.

Sandra has made more changes to her farming practices, including cultivating on the contour of the land which allows for water spreading and infiltration; and respecting the natural drainage systems while maintaining good ground cover to minimise erosion. The impact of these changes is significant; Sandra now has knee-high grass growing in areas that were formerly barren.

"By far, the biggest lesson has been to sit back and observe what nature already has in place, then [work on] capitalising and enhancing that," Sandra said.

"We may not all drive big, shiny red or green tractors or trade thousands of head of stock, but I want to thank the RAA for recognising all types of farmers in these programmes. Some plant trees and some push them over, but at the end of the day we all chose to grow food for our nation in one way or another. I just hope in the future there will be a greater emphasis on demonstrating positive environmental and biodiversity outcomes in these funding opportunities," she said.