



# Northern United Forestry Group

## Northern United Forestry Group scoops National Landcare Award

A group of local landholders has won the prestigious 2004 Telstra Country Wide Landcare Research Award.

The Northern United Forestry Group (NUFG) was recognised at an award ceremony held at Parliament House, Canberra, on Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> September.

Miloo farmer and NUGF President, Ian Rankin, who was in Canberra to accept the award, says the group has been recognised for its expertise in low-rainfall farm forestry. In addition, the group is active in promoting that it can be profitable for the farmer, and beneficial for the environment, to have trees and shrubs working for you on the Northern Plains.

The Northern United Forestry Group (NUFG) is an incorporated, community-based collection of 38 farming families who have been working together in northern Victoria since 1998. The Group's extensive research into suitable native trees for farm forestry is being used to establish low-rainfall farm forestry as a commercially viable enterprise providing forest products, environmental services and community benefits.

The NUGF is committed to establishing permanent systems that bring about sustainable land use change. The Group's research involved finding native acacias and eucalypts suited to this part of Victoria that could both revitalise the natural ecosystem and could be used in a sustainable farm forestry industry.

The NUGF worked jointly with the CSIRO, Victoria's Forest Science Centre, Melbourne University, the Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment and the Royal Botanic Gardens. The results of the Group's research was passed on to other interested landcare groups and the public through the media and through hosting the successful "Farm Forestry on the Northern Plains Conference and Expo" in 2003.

One of the key strengths of the NUGF is its strong farmer base. The native plantations are managed as part of a mixed farming enterprise including established local industries such as cropping, fodder production, prime lambs, wool growing, dairy and beef cattle.

The judges were impressed by the Group's latest innovative farming project designed to demonstrate that perennial plantings hold the key to the future viability of salt affected land. The 40-hectare demonstration project is being established on the Hay family property at Kamarooka. Native grasses and saltbush are already growing, a groundwater bore network is in place, and 15,000 trees and shrubs will be planted this spring.

According to Ian the Kamarooka project draws on significant local expertise and demonstrates the strong partnerships that exist in fostering innovative natural resource management in the region.

"The Kamarooka research project will provide important local information on the economics of growing hardwood species on the northern plains, both in terms of returns for wood products and integrating tree growing into an existing cropping and grazing enterprise for environmental rewards," says Ian.

Ian says that NUGF has received strong support from local staff at the Department of Primary Industries and the North Central Catchment Management Authority.

Other partners in the research include the Federal Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, local landcare groups - including Kamarooka Landcare Group and the Bendigo Creek Floodplain Group - as well as the East Loddon P-12 school.

Ian says, "we know there is a strong interest in growing trees for a range of benefits and the Northern United Forestry Group is keen to take a leadership role in providing access to a broad range of information, particularly local research results."

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