

# [***Carbon sequestration boosts soil health at Dederang***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BP8-VVB1-F0J6-J0SX-00000-00&context=1516831)

The Land

April 2, 2024 Tuesday

Internet Edition

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**Length:** 812 words

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**Body**

"Without the necessary microbes, plants require synthetic fertilizers to reach full productivity," John McEvoy said when describing the regenerative approach to ***soil health*** he and his wife Sharon are taking on the family farm near Dederang in northeast Victoria.

To counter that apparent lack of natural ***soil*** life, they have taken a new direction inspired by the writing of respected Australian ***soil*** biologist, Dr Christine Jones and other landholders who have successfully restored the landscape functions.

"Nature has given us the answer for thousands of years and Dr Jones wrote - 'if we put enough carbon in the ground, we would have fewer emissions to deal with'," Mr McEvoy said.

The McEvoy's began their ***soil*** restorative journey two and half years ago, with the intention to maximise the amount of carbon stored in their ***soils***, but also to reduce their reliance on and longterm risk of using synthetic fertilzers.

"For us it is about regenerating ***soil***, growing healthy plants and producing healthy food," Mr McEvoy said.

"We sow multi-species cover crops into existing pasture swards and they form symbiotic relationships.

"And by inoculating the seed with beneficial microbiology, we can grow amazingly healthy crops nearly all year round."

They have a summer mix and a spring mix of plants, which they allow to seed if it works with their stock movement program, where the cattle and sheep are moved according to the amount of ground cover left in the paddock.

"We've always enjoyed sowing and growing things so we might sow even up to three times a year now with up to 15 different species and we inoculate the seed with biological products for improving the ***soil*** structure, improving the water infiltration and putting liquid carbon into the ***soil***," Mr McEvoy said.

"We are doing this because we have learnt its going to be better for our ***soil***, our animals and our ***health*** because we are not using any chemicals or chemical fertilizers.

"And also because this is a crucial alternative to all of the renewable energy structures that we think are a short term fix when we could be putting carbon in the ground.

"People like Dr Christine Jones say if we can get enough people doing this kind of farming then we wouldn't need to worry about our emissions to anywhere near the same extent, because it is not the carbon in the air that's the problem but its the lack of carbon in the ***soil***."

Although they are only two and half years into a lifelong project, the McEvoy's can see immediate benefits in the paddocks they have thus far treated.

"We are growing crops to sequester the carbon and in the process our stock are very healthy, but we also noting less run-off from those paddocks because the ***soil*** is able to soak up the rain more effectively," Mr McEvoy said.

"We are getting close to growing green crops all year round and absolutely enjoying the excitement of it.

"We have also found that building ***soil*** carbon improves ***soil*** structure, which allows better water infiltration and encouraging plants to cycle nutrients,"

In further supporting their commitment to the regenerative journey, Mrs McEvoy said she had felt for many years that they were trapped by the 'industrial' farming methods.

'We would spray, we would sow a mono-culture crop, and then we would get some kind of insect infestation and we would spray with another chemical," she said.

"And because they were annual crops then we would have to do it again next year - we were in a cycle and couldn't get out, so it was about breaking out of the chemical trap."

Mr McEvoy said the trap was started in the 1940s by Louis van Lyberg, a German agricultural scientist with the idea that agriculture should be formed on growing mono-culture crops that needed NPK inputs to reach productivity and thus attract rising and distant consumer demand.

"It wasn't until he was on his deathbed in the sixties when he said he was sorry that he had led farmers down the wrong path," Mr McEvoy said.

"But by that stage the chemical companies had all the fertilizer companies were on a roll and they've kept us on that roll for the last fifty years and a lot of people find it very hard to break out.

"It's scary and they don't want to do it but we have found that it's exciting to break out of it and see what you can grow without all those things, and it's so much more interesting.

"We are trying to get back to growing good healthy food which many people don't have the chance to eat now, it looks good but its not nutritionally dense.

"And the healthier ***soil*** beats the weeds and bugs."

Along their journey, the McEvoy's point to other mentors, beside Dr Jones and including Gabe Brown, Nicole Masters and Grant Simms.

"Our basic principles are - no till, maintenance of thick ground cover, diversity of plants, living roots as long as possible and high stocking density while rotating our stock around the small paddocks," Mr McEvoy said.

**Load-Date:** April 1, 2024

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