

Major Caring for our Country grant to help drive change in the Avon

AVONGRO Wheatbelt Tree Cropping is one of the few Western Australian groups to be successful in the very competitive new national Caring for our Country Program developed by the federal government. The \$400,000 project 'Developing sustainable production systems, resilient to climate change – Baselineing' will commence as soon as possible and run to the end of 2009.

AVONGRO attributes the success to the submission's strong partnership with CSIRO nationally, with the State Government agencies Department of Agriculture and Food WA and Forest Products Commission and with grower groups such as the Australian Sandalwood Network, Oil Mallee Association and brushwood growers.

Under Caring for our Country's Sustainable Farm Practices Program, the team will work together to the end of 2009 to investigate the total productivity and economic performance of integrated production systems that include traditional agriculture and tree crops. For the tree crops they will create models for growth, carbon sequestration and greenhouse gas flux. They will also model on-farm biophysical impacts of landuse change and identify gaps in research, making recommendations for any necessary future work. Using effective modeling tools developed by CSIRO, a specific set of tools will be developed, calibrated to Avon conditions and the native tree crops which are a focus of the region.

'We are extremely proud to have been successful and are very aware of the increasing need to work collaboratively to avoid duplication and achieve significant results for the Avon' said AVONGRO Chairman, Ian Hall, 'Our aim is to increase the awareness and adoption of integrated tree crops, to show how they interact in the landscape and demonstrate their influence on the overall farm business. CSIRO have developed the science and the tools, we can link them with the practitioners. Together we can help land managers make decisions on developing holistic production systems that will be more resilient to a changing rainfall pattern.'

Land managers in the Avon will be invited to participate in the project and help develop the Avon specific modeling. By the end of the project an interactive program, the 'Sustainable Farming Toolkit' will be made freely available to land managers, Natural Resource Management Officers, agribusiness consultants, financial advisors and anyone with an interest in the Avon. AVONGRO hopes that the outcomes of the project will be useful for other low-rainfall tree growing areas of Australia.

'Users will be able to assess the outcomes of multiple scenarios at hectare scale on their own farm over the web.' Charlie Hawkins of CSIRO said, 'We anticipate that this project will lay the foundation for further work in the near future and assist in creating more productive and sustainable farming systems and landscapes.'

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