

## *Executive Summary*

The Rural Enterprise Program (REP) set about to understand and address the knowledge gaps, challenges and opportunities of landowners and community members in the Noosa Shire Hinterland with the overarching aim of enhancing sustainable progress and rural enterprises in the area. This project was run by collaborative partners Country Noosa, University of Sunshine Coast (USC) and Noosa and District Landcare.

Over a twelve month period a series of community workshops were held along with surveys on land use activity and food purchase behaviours. The workshops provided a platform for the community to discuss opportunities and needs that would help improve rural enterprises in the area. Workshop discussions were corroborated with survey results and together, formed ideas for the development of concept papers that would assist greater Rural Enterprise activity and increase knowledge sharing, and in part function as 'how-to' guides for future enterprise. Concept papers were developed for the following; Carbon Farming, Eco-tourism, recreation and farm-based tourism, Mixed Farming and Holistic Management, Small Scale Agriculture and Niche Produce, Sustainable Grazing, Permaculture, Pest and Weed Control, Marketing, Distribution, Collaboration and Networks and History of Agriculture.

Of the 154 respondents to the land use survey, approximately one third had lived on their properties for five years or less. The predominant land use was cattle grazing (25%), with horses, horticulture and chickens also being frequent land uses. Survey responses were also successfully geocoded allowing land use mapping from 2015 to be updated with an addition of 84 new land parcels, an increase of 22%. The updated mapping confirmed existing land clusters and new instances of land use activities and related land owner characteristics. Maps of land use activities around the rural centres of Cooroy, Kin Kin and Pomona have been developed.

Respondents to the food purchase survey were all aged 25 years and over. The majority (26 out of 29) of the respondents indicated that they intended to shop locally. Of the factors that most influenced them purchasing local were, in order: supporting local community, healthiness of food, familiarity, and environmental sustainability. Even though the majority of shopping was carried out at major supermarket chains, a high proportion sourced fruit and vegetables from local markets. Respondents were aware that fruit and vegetables are produced locally but were unable to specify which and identified local produce with markets and certain local stores, however local store owners indicated that their stock is not necessarily locally sourced. Most respondents travelled less than 3km to purchase food. To help improve the purchase of local produce, Country Noosa can help in the development of Noosa hinterland food labelling including a form of eco-labelling. Country Noosa can also facilitate in the development of distribution networks between local producers and local stores.

All nine concept papers have been developed as stand-alone documents available as information guides for the community. With cattle grazing as the predominant land use in the area, the sustainable grazing paper offers valuable information, from a highly knowledgeable local cattle grazer, on what works best for raising beef in the Noosa hinterland. All the basic choices for beef



production are considered including rotational grazing, breed choice, pasture grasses, legumes and weeds and product. A detailed financial model is also provided as a guideline for beef farmers. Opportunities for value-adding are presented including a local yearling beef feasibility study and opportunities for group farming to improve on economies of scale, including a local group farming example across a large area with six farmers using a variety of co-operation techniques. This paper is a must for those considering beef production or already involved in this enterprise.

Land use practices for managing soil, water, vegetation and animals to increase carbon sequestration (carbon storage and capture) and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions are discussed in the carbon farming concept paper. This paper provides an overview of the Australian Government's Emissions Reduction Fund, a scheme offering financial incentives to organisations and individuals to adopt new practices and methods to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Information on local programs that can assist landowners with environmental management, creating wildlife corridors, protecting habitat are also provided. There are opportunities to carry out research on carbon farming in the Noosa hinterland specifically with the aim of establishing a possible carbon credit revenue stream. For example, the recycling of green waste as a possible carbon sequestration method could be trialled on land that is not currently being used.

For residents of rural Noosa considering an eco-tourism or farm-based tourism business venture, the Eco-tourism concept paper outlines ideas and opportunities. As tourism statistics demonstrate a steady increase in visitor numbers and spending habits, this improves the potential for more eco-and farm-based tourism in the Noosa region, especially combined with existing tourism assets, such as the Noosa Trail Network and Noosa Country Drive. Eco-tourism is generally characterised as low-impact, small scale and ecologically sustainable, with a focus on high-quality experiences that build awareness and appreciation of natural, environmental and cultural assets, and provide socio-economic benefits to local people. With the upgrade of the Noosa Trail Network and the promotion of Noosa Country Drive, visitors that want to experience Noosa away from the typical coastal experience will look for businesses and services that cater for their specific tastes and interests. This may include niche accommodation, food, beverage and cooking, environmental, educational, farm experiences, as well as services catering for the trail network experience, such as bike rental, baggage transport and horse agistment. Complementary businesses include art studios, workshop spaces, day spa and wellness centres. The revitalisation of the Noosa Trail Network also provides specific opportunities to the residents of properties located along the trail networks to cater to the needs of horse riders, mountain bikers and hikers. Many of the trails are long enough to warrant overnight stays, therefore accommodation for hikers and riders, as well as their horses or bikes adjacent to the trail, may increase use of the trails and attract even more 'adventure tourists'. There are currently very few hosts offering short-term horse agistment and farm stays targeted at multi-day walkers, bike or horse riders, therefore there may be an opportunity to diversify into this market. Considerations for short term horse agistment may also include sufficiently large fenced properties with secure shelter; adequate water and feed; and pest-free pasture. Other opportunities for those considering eco-tourism are farm-gate businesses, bike rental and baggage transportation. Success of local farm-gate and trail-based businesses is demonstrated in case studies provided for Cooloola Berries and the Cooloola Farm Trail and Otago Central Rail Trail in New Zealand.

Mixed farming and holistic farm management, small crop farming and the production of niche goods are all an integral part of the region. At Bunya Grove Produce just 57km north of Noosa, mixed farming and holistic farm management practices go hand in hand. A wide variety of products are sold by Bunya Grove Produce at Noosa Farmer markets, Cooroy butchers, Amamoor and Kin Kin



local general stores. The small land size of properties in the region can be seen as a constraint for growing crops. Both Banyan View Farm and Noosa Black are excellent examples of successful cultivation from small areas of land in the Noosa hinterland. The Banyan View Farm case study demonstrates productivity in market garden crops from small land size. Noosa Black produces a niche product of coffee on just under three hectares at Kin Kin. The concept papers also outline emerging opportunities, existing constraints along with useful information links.

The pest and weed control concept paper provides a guide on how to identify, treat, and manage the impact of the primary plant and animal pests in the Noosa region in the short and long term. Resource links are provided from Noosa and District Landcare and Noosa Council on how to manage waste, and case studies detailing examples of common pests and treatment programs in place to manage them are also provided. Noosa Landcare offer land management programs which include education and training on identifying weeds, and other related land maintenance. With a three-year gold membership, Landcare also offers property inspection and pest management plans, and can provide factsheets and information on weeds and how they can be managed on properties. Their services can also be procured to treat and help manage weeds.

Permaculture is also recognized as an important enabler for rural enterprises in region. Local Permaculture case studies are documented the concept paper along with an overview of permaculture definition, concepts and design parameters. For everything on Permaculture, Permaculture Noosa has been formed to encourage and promote permaculture within the Noosa area of the Sunshine Coast of Australia. At monthly meetings, members have stalls of produce and plants for sale. A seed saving bank is available to donate to and to access. There is a library for members to borrow books that relate to permaculture. Every month there is a guest speaker sharing knowledge with the community.

One of the key challenges highlighted by the community was the need to improve marketing and distribution of produce in the region. This specific concept paper provides a number of opportunities and avenues to connect land owners, growers, customers and distributors in the region. Mary Valley Country Harvest is a case study of a local growers cooperative. The cooperative supports a network of small growers, allowing profitability by finding markets for niche products, collaborating to meet production needs, providing training, support and mentoring, coordinating bulk purchase of farming material such as mulch, and facilitating the sharing of processing and storing facilities. Growers share information and work together practically, organising joint educational activities to share new ideas and innovation, administering shared accreditation and organising bulk purchase and sharing materials and services. In this way, small-scale producers can alleviate some of the difficulties that come with their deficit in the economies of scale.

Another case study is The Food and Agribusiness Network (FAN) a member-based not-for-profit that exists to help the industry connect, collaborate, and grow and spans from Moreton Bay, up the Sunshine Coast to Noosa and out to Gympie. It was recently awarded the best small business social enterprise at the Sunshine Coast Small Business Awards. FAN has a vision to double the region's food and agriculture industry by 2030. They aim to do this by actively facilitating collaboration, promoting innovation, and promoting trade in South East Queensland and across the globe. FAN develops strategic partnerships to further the growth and success of their network, and hosts events that connect businesses, distributors, exporters, and consumers across the entire food chain. FAN also offers business development workshops and a six month mentoring program which links FAN

members at different stages of business development. It also features an intensive three month food start up accelerator for high-potential businesses, funded by Advance Queensland. FAN is a powerful advocate for the development of food and agriculture in the region, hoping to raise the profile of the Sunshine Coast to the highest reputation of quality, innovation, and sustainability.

## Summary of Recommendations

Going forward it is recommended that Country Noosa continue to strengthen community collaboration. Community workshop discussions identified that alliances are particularly sought after in the areas of group farming, land sharing, sustainable grazing, equipment sharing, labour sharing, land regeneration, distribution and marketing and carbon farming research. Collaboration in the form of networks of local businesses in the region was also suggested, in an attempt to leverage strength in numbers, to provide both quality tourism experiences year-round, across seasonal changes. Similarly, opportunities for collaboration between farms and hospitality businesses combining paddock to plate ventures were recognised. Country Noosa can build on the existing Cooloola Farm Trail which already attracts approximately 1,200 visitors per year.

For community collaboration, the development of a register of landowners who are interested in resource sharing is recommended. The register would be used as a starting point to determine what type of collaboration might be feasible. Further steps would be the formation of focus groups where landowners volunteer to drive initiatives. An online centralised information hub would be useful for Country Noosa members. The centralised information hub would provide links to the register, focus groups, updates on collaboration initiatives and relevant project funding opportunities. For example

Another key outcome of the REP was the request for further learning to ensure the sustainable progress of rural enterprises in the region. Further education is needed for small crop farming and horticulture, permaculture, pest and weed control, marketing and distribution and business planning (including financial planning). For further learning, knowledge sharing workshops could be held where experienced landowners speaking with newcomers. Country Noosa should continue to organise site visits and farm tours demonstrating successful small scale agriculture, sustainable grazing, mixed farming and niche produce in the region.

To improve Marketing and Distribution challenges, keynote speaker sessions can include members of Food Agribusiness Network, Mary Valley Country Harvest and Food Connect. The Country Noosa website can host an e-learning hub. Along with the concept papers, resource links to local industry groups, training courses, Country Noosa keynote speaker presentations and include ways for newcomers to connect with existing landowners that have volunteered for one on one mentoring in specific areas.

The REP was successful in demonstrating that landowners are well-positioned to build on the Noosa Biosphere Reserve values of conservation, sustainable development and learning.