

**SEARCH CRITERIA**

<b>Model</b>	Model B: Programmed learning Model
<b>Industry</b>	Farm Forestry, Agroforestry
<b>Focus/Level</b>	Industry
<b>Delivery Mode of Learning</b>	Action Learning
<b>Outcomes</b>	Technical training, Business development, Personal capacity building training
<b>Special Interest Groups</b>	Other

**1. PROJECT TITLE:**

Master TreeGrower Programme

Reviewer Dr Fionnuala Frost

**2. FUNDERS:**

The Master TreeGrower Programme is an initiative of the Joint Venture Agroforestry Programme. The Corporations involved in the Joint Venture include Rural Industries RDC; Land and Water Australia; and the Forest and Wood Products RDC. Funds have been provided through the Natural Heritage Trust, and the National Farm Forestry Programme. The programme is substantial

**3. PROVIDERS:**

The Master TreeGrower Programme was developed and is managed by forestry staff at the School of Natural Resource Management out of the University of Melbourne.

**4. KEY CONTACTS:**

Mr Rowan Reid. Programme Manager

University of Melbourne 03 8344 5011

[rfr@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:rfr@unimelb.edu.au)

**5. INDUSTRY/ISSUE/GEOGRAPHY**

The MTG is designed to adapt to meet the needs of people, climate and geography across Australia. The programme has been run in every state and territory. The programme is based on the undeveloped nature of the farm forestry industry. It acknowledges that while the biophysical features of Australia have the capacity to support a farm forestry industry, the capacity of people and possibly the market to meet the biophysical potential is limited. The programme has been designed to improve the capacity of people who wish to become involved in farm forestry and need to improve their skills, knowledge and confidence to do so.

**6. PROJECT CONTEXT**

Farm forestry is regarded as having significant potential as a new component of the farm system bringing new dollars and new industries as well as environmental benefits into the agricultural industry. However, while there has been a dramatic rise in interest, the actual commitment and area established to farm forestry does not match this potential. Some reports have estimated that if ten per cent of broad acre farm land, five per cent of dairy land and once per cent of the remainder of agricultural land was established to farm forestry the return to Australia would be in the order of \$3.1 billion and employment would increase by 40,000. Value adding and processing would bring a further \$20 billion dollars to the economy.

The biophysical environment is clearly suited to farm forestry however, it is the capacity of people and the markets that must improve if the industry is to become part of the farming system. The MTG has been designed to not only improve the knowledge and skills of the people, but aims to establish new networks of 'likeminded' people and provide valuable hands on training as opposed to lecture style teaching with the view that this approach will lead to improved farm forestry design and development of the industry.

In summary, the MTG is an extension and education programme that aims to support farmers who are keen to become involved in farm forestry and the development of the farm forestry industry within their region.

## **7. PROJECT NICHE**

The MTG has seven objectives. These are:

1. Facilitate farmer involvement in the development of agroforestry and farm forestry within their regions by providing education, experience and support to selected tree growers and their advisers;
2. Help farmers recognise the interests of government, industry and community groups in their revegetation and forest management activities and encourage mutually beneficial partnerships and marketing arrangements.
3. Provide farmers with simple and practical approaches for the preparation of farm forestry plans, measurement of forest product and service and project evaluation.
4. Encourage farmers to play a more active role in the management and support of regional grower groups and programmes.
5. Establish a regional and national peer group of Master TreeGrowers that provides support for farmers involved in farm forestry and contributes to regional extension and development programmes.
6. Support regional, state and national farm forestry, agroforestry and Landcare programmes by providing an education programme that can be tailored to their requirements.
7. Encourage open, strong and sympathetic communication about farm forestry between farmers, advisors, regulators, researchers and industry.

The aims of the approach are to

- Instill confidence in individuals;
- Provide growers with an effective support network ; and
- Encourage people to aspire to become a Master TreeGrower.

Courses are held in regions across Australia and the content is adapted according to where it is being delivered. Regional coordinators appointed across Australia work to promote and run the course also have a substantial responsibility in running the course within their respective region.

In its simplest sense the outcome of the programme is that participants become qualified Master Tree Growers. At a more substantive level, lasting networks are developed and skills in industry developed are fostered alongside the practicalities of establishing farm forestry on-farm.

## **8. PHILOSOPHY/APPROACH:**

*Learning, participatory and action research principles.*

The MTG programme is very designed and delivered according to learning and action research principles. There are a number of features of the programme that demonstrate this.

1. Courses are held within regions where people live and work. Content is adapted according to where it is being delivered. Local soil types, land condition, market access are discussed and communication networks are developed within the local contexts.
2. Most of the course is held out doors and involves participatory process and hands-on training as opposed to lecture style delivery.
3. There is acknowledgement of completing the course, with participants graduating as Master TreeGrowers.
4. Regional coordinators ensure the design and delivery is relevant.

Ultimately, the focus of the programme is on farmer decision-making and is delivered in a way that it is responsive to their aspirations, intentions and access to resources. The delivery is responsive to the needs of people and encourages confidence and self support.

## **9. RESOURCES, MANAGEMENT AND STAFFING STRUCTURES**

The MTG delivers short regional educational courses across Australia (about 42 hours of course work). The course is nationally coordinated by two people (Rowan Reid and Peter Stephens) out of the School of Resource Management at the University of Melbourne. Not only are the national coordinators responsible for course delivery and overall management, their role is to provide tools for ongoing learning and communication. Publications, websites, newsletters and manuals are examples of the type of material designed to meet this need.

There are regional partners and coordinators whose role is to facilitate the delivery of the course within local regions. The partners, for example Greening Australia, often provide administrative support and office facilities for the coordinators. Regional coordinators have included government or non-government officers, landowners and employees of regional forestry industry programmes.

The MTG draws from an array of presenters who, in effect, reflect the supply-chain of the industry. Policy, marketing, agronomic and communications skills are drawn from in relation to the course.

## **10. PROCESS/METHODS USED**

Courses are located within regional communities across Australia. Participants are drawn from within these regions. This approach improves the likelihood of relevance of course material as well as enabling the establishing of lasting networks. The course itself runs over a two month period and includes eight sessions and covers the following topics.

1. Introduction to agroforestry and farm forestry design
2. Market opportunities for farm forestry products and services
3. Tree and forest measurement and monitoring
4. Silviculture principles
- 5, 6 and 7 Appropriate farm forestry and farm forestry design.

8. Closing session. Acknowledgement of achievement, firming the network and a review of the programme.

All sessions involve review of previous sessions, practical hands-on activities as well as presentations from highly regarded, (and usually) local experts. Key competencies have been determined for each of the sessions.

In addition to the course delivery participants are required to prepare and present a farm forestry project during the programme. The project is often based on their own farm forestry project. This approach provides confidence and information to participants to enable to apply their learnings during, or soon after completing the course. Participants are asked to present their findings (a very powerful learning tool) and usually within the environment where the project is to be applied. New ideas, confidence and understandings as to how to apply theoretical concepts so they become reality emerge from this approach.

The MTG course is supported by comprehensive, but accessible reading material and an a website.

## **11. IMPACTS TO DATE.**

*Outstanding – Very high.*

Nearly every participant involved in this course find the programme, enjoyable, effective and value for time for money. It would appear that the principle objectives of establishing networks and providing people with confidence to undertake farm forestry projects, works. So far, approximately 800 people have completed one of about 40 programmes held in all states and territories across Australia (South Australia did not participate). Participants are drawn from diverse backgrounds, not necessarily where primary production is the major income. Some were from nurseries, others in contracting or value adding industries and others where new landholders who may work off-farm and who simply wanted to put trees back onto the property but had relatively little agricultural knowledge to do so. This diversity appears to be a strength of the course.

The course has made a valuable contribution in improving the skills and capacity of people who wish to become involved in farm forestry and agroforestry.

## **12. EFFECTIVENESS:**

*Outstanding – very high.*

A range of reviews conducted throughout the programme have highlighted that people have:

1. Greater confidence in their ability to undertake a farm forestry or agroforestry programme;
2. The capacity and enthusiasm to maintain the networks.
3. Most people continue their enthusiasm for the topic long after the course is completed.
4. Improved understanding of the entire wood production process, from establishment, to forest management (particularly pruning) and marketing.

One of the challenges for farm forestry and agroforestry is that the industry becomes viable and returns a profit. Many participants involved in the course found that indeed they did gain some financial return from this industry, or at least anticipated they would in the medium to longer term. Interestingly though was the fact that a proportion people were not seeking financial gain, rather altruistic and environmental reasons were their principal motivators.

Other unexpected outcomes have emerged in the various reviews of the MTG programme. People who came to live in certain locations and who did so because of the attractiveness of the area, very often came with relatively little knowledge of the area. Once they had participated in the course, people tended to have more 'local knowledge' about soil types, weather conditions, and land capability, as well as useful knowledge on farm forestry. This knowledge enabled people to feel far more accepted by the more established residents of their community.

The programme has made a substantial contribution to farm forestry and has been awarded the following prizes.

2000 The Allen Strom Eureka Prize for Environmental Education (\$10,000)

2001 The Institute of Land and Food Resources Award for Excellence in outreach.

### **13. PROJECT DOCUMENTATION AVAILABLE:**

The Australian Master Tree Grower Programme 1996-2001. Development, delivery and impact of a national outreach and education programme. Rowan Reid and Peter Stephen. Unpublished RIRDC publication.

O'Meara, T and Wright, JK. (1999). *Evaluation of the Australian Master TreeGrower Programme*. Report to RIRDC/LWRRDC/FWPRDC Joint Venture Agroforestry Programme. Unpublished.

AgInsight and AgKnowledge (2002) Review of the Australian MasterTree Grower Programme. The social outcomes and impacts. RIRDC.

### **14. ISSUES:**

Clearly, this is a very successful industry and an excellent investment by the Joint Venture. There are challenges emerging though. Apart from the often noted issue of ongoing financial support, there more significant issue will be the pressure on the course to adapt to a changing audience. By and large, course participants to date have been farm forestry, agroforestry enthusiasts, convinced of the importance and need for the industry. However, the nature of the audience is changing where people with less interest and certainty are participating. The course may need to adapt substantially to cater for these new needs.

### **15. COMMENTS/CONCLUSIONS:**

This programme is highly regarded and appreciated by the vast majority of those who have participated. The emphasis on learning and participation has been an important strength to the programme. However, the diligence and commitment to evaluating the impact of the course on stated objectives and regular review of course content and delivery has also been significant in its ongoing improvement.

### **16. REVIEW METHODS:**

Interviews with regional coordinators. Desktop analysis. Fionnuala Frost also managed a review of the programme whereby 40 telephone surveys were conducted and 280 faxback surveys received from course participants.