

Agroforestry as integrated natural resource management

Ian Nuberg, Rowan Reid and Brendan George

Integrated NRM: a time of great change for the better

‘It’s a great time to be involved in the management of agricultural lands and forests in Australia.’ If we wrote that sentence 100 years ago, we would have probably substituted the word ‘management’ with ‘opening up’ and ‘exploitation’. We might have added that this was essential to secure Australia’s place as one of the leading economies and nations of the modern world. While the focus of the task is very different, the scale and urgency of the many issues facing land management in Australia today has not diminished.

As we continue to develop the economic productivity of our land we are confronted with the question of how to sustain this development. Agriculture and forestry both impact, and are impacted upon by, soil and water resources, native and feral plants and animals, and by atmosphere and climate. The people who manage the land are responsive to community perceptions of appropriate land management, either by legislative coercion or by gradual changes in their own environmental awareness. The agriculture and forestry sectors share much in their response to the future, and for those involved there is a great opportunity to contribute to the development of truly sustainable and economically viable rural landscapes that are uniquely Australian.

The challenge of the early 20th century was to remove the forests and woodlands to make room

for agriculture; the challenge for the future is understanding the interactions between forests and farming and designing new agricultural landscapes that integrate them for conservation and profit. Agroforestry, a marriage of forest and agricultural science, is a pivotal discipline in the practical implementation of this change.

This chapter lays the foundation for appreciating the urgency and nature of this change. We begin with a robust and pragmatic definition of agroforestry. Then follows an explanation of how agroforestry emerged in the efforts to secure sustainable agriculture and forestry in Australia. We mount our argument for agroforestry as a key strategy for on-ground action that integrates many natural resource management issues.

Moving from theory to practice, we describe the design and planning processes by which farmers integrate their individual vision and resources with real and meaningful changes on the ground.

We then introduce the rest of this book by summarising and linking each of its chapters.

What is agroforestry?

The terms agroforestry and farm forestry are used interchangeably in Australia with respect to the establishment and/or management of trees on farms for productive purposes. We have chosen the term agroforestry for this book because it reduces the emphasis on timber production, thus acknowledging the equally important role of non-timber