

## Diversity the key on Summerfield Farm

ALEX MILNER-SMYTH

Cover cropping and multiple enterprises have helped turn Summerfield Farm, an 80 ha property on the outskirts of Summerfield, North Carolina, into a profitable and sustainable business.

Originally a tobacco farm, the property belongs to David Couch, who owns a successful local construction company.

**Scott sees the poultry, which eat parasites and fly larvae left behind by the cows, as an integrated pest management strategy.**

Realising the need to diversify revenue streams during the global financial crisis, David decided to re-commercialise Summerfield farm, which until then had been used to grow hay for horses.

In 2012 he appointed one of his construction managers, Scott Phillips, to run the new enterprise. Scott grew up on a ranch in Mexico and had significant experience managing rural properties across America. He had also worked



SCOTT PHILLIPS BESIDE A REFRIGERATED STORAGE UNIT IN SUMMERFIELD FARM'S PURPOSE-BUILT ON-FARM MARKET.



SUMMERFIELD FARM'S INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT STRATEGY INCLUDES THE USE LAYING HENS, WHICH ARE MOVED INTO PASTURES AFTER THE CATTLE TO EAT PARASITES AND FLY LARVAE. MOBILE SHEDS LIKE THIS ONE ARE MOVED INTO THE POULTRY PADDOCKS TO PROVIDE THE HENS WITH SHELTER AND NESTS FOR LAYING.

alongside Allan Savory, originator of the concept of holistic farming, and as a result had developed an understanding of holistic land management and rotational grazing principles.

Inheriting a farm with soil erosion, low organic matter and low fertility, Scott realised he needed a plan to address soil health concerns while generating a financial profit.

Working with local USDA District Conservationists he implemented a high diversity pasture program to produce maximum biomass of high-quality pasture. The program included planting highly diverse summer and winter crops and using cattle to facilitate the addition of organic matter to the soil through grazing.

Scott views cattle as an additional species and an integral part of the regeneration process. "Cattle are a tool we use to rebuild soil health. The by-product of that is grass-fed beef."

Planted in July, mid-summer in US, his 2013 summer mix included sorghum, millet, grazing corn, soy beans, sunflowers and hemp.

Like Gabe Brown, Scott works uses high-intensity rotational grazing, using high stock numbers for short periods of time and leaving two thirds of the biomass produced for the soil. Not only do the cattle add fertiliser through manure, but chewing and saliva help speed the breakdown of dense cover on the soil surface.

Groups of laying hens, housed in mobile enclosures, are moved into pastures after the cattle. Scott sees the poultry, which eat parasites and fly larvae left behind by the cows, as an integrated pest management strategy. His flock of 100 hens produces an average of 100 eggs a day. The eggs are sold direct to consumers for \$ US6 a dozen, with consumer demand outweighing production.

Crops can grow to more than three metres tall before they are grazed; not surprising for an area that can receive more than 1,000 mm annual rainfall.

As well as diverse pastures the cattle have

access to minerals in powder form. These are dispensed individually, rather than in a mixture, allowing the stock to self medicate as required. Sulphur, potassium, salt, iodine, magnesium and calcium are

available and Scott has noticed a big demand for iodine correspond with a significant reduction in pink eye infections.

Now in his second year of operation, Scott runs more 175 head of cattle at a

## MULTIPLE ENTERPRISES CAPITALISE ON SUMMERFIELD'S LOCATION

The Summerfield Farm enterprise, which includes a purpose built on-farm market, is well suited to the local demographic of families with high disposable incomes.

The farm is located on the outskirts of Summerfield, a well-to-do semi-rural suburb of Greensborough, North Carolina and the market offers fresh fruit, vegetables and seafood in addition to the farm's eggs and grass-fed beef.

Cattle from the property are slaughtered and butchered at a local abattoir, usually three or four head at a time, depending on consumer demand. The meat is then brought back to the farm, where it is sold direct to consumers.

Summerfield Farm produce is receiving rave reviews for quality and taste from consumers and restaurateurs, generating local media interest. The story works particularly well because of the farm's anti GMO and anti synthetic inputs policies, the focus on meat quality and David Couch and Scott Phillips' commitment to environmental restoration, which aligns strongly with consumers' increasing concerns about how their food is produced.

David has further diversified revenue streams, and improved his risk management, with a newly built on-site wedding and event centre that takes advantage of the property's rich history and picturesque setting.

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A POST-GRAZING SUMMER COVER CROP ON SUMMERFIELD FARM.

VARIETY	KG/HA
Austrian winter pea	10
Cow pea	5
Crimson clover	5
Hairy vetch	5
Pearl millet	8
Cereal rye	8
Winter barley	8
DE rape	.33
Ethiopian cabbage	.33
Winfred hybrid brassica	.16
PT turnip	.16
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>

THE WINTER COVER CROP MIX, GENERALLY SOWN IN LATE AUGUST, IS FORMULATED TO PROVIDE 40 PLANTS/M<sup>2</sup> AT A TOTAL COST OF \$A191.77. ALTHOUGH IT DOESN'T GROW AS TALL AS THE SUMMER MIX, IT PROVIDES EXCELLENT INITIAL FORAGE AND REGROWTH IN THE SPRING.



SCOTT PHILLIPS WITH A TROUGH CONTAINING MINERAL SUPPLEMENTS FOR THE CATTLE. EACH SUB-SECTION OF THE TROUGH CONTAINS A DIFFERENT MATERIAL, ALLOWING THE STOCK TO 'SELF-MEDICATE' BY TAKING ONLY WHAT THEIR BODY NEEDS.

stocking rate of 2.25 head/ha; considerably more than the locally accepted stocking rate. He calculates his cost at \$ US528/ha including seed for cool and warm season pastures, plant, manpower and fuel. At \$ US2.20/kg of beef produced, this is less than the national average cost to grow beef in America.

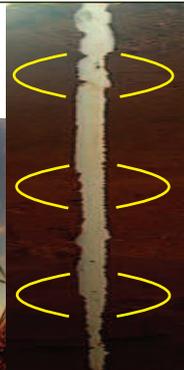
The production figures are supported by field observations that suggest cover cropping has increased soil health, with summer and winter cocktails now sown without fertilisers.

Summerfield Farm has been turned into a highly productive and profitable business in a surprising short period of time, but Scott is not ready to rest on his laurels and has his eye firmly on the future. "We will continue progressing and eventually get to perennials and push the boundaries on livestock management."

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