

A tool for greener pastures

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WHEN he started farming in the 1950s, Bob Davie was advised by the Department of Agriculture to clear trees on his farm, which as a teenager starting out on the land he did. These days, his approach to farming couldn't be more different.

The 73-year-old beef producer tests the amount of carbon underneath his pastures by taking soil samples, DNA tests his bulls to maximise feed efficiency and tenderness of the meat, and measures the electro-conductivity of the soil to predict the risk of salinity in his paddocks.

He and his wife Anne have planted about 40,000 trees on their 144-hectare farm over the past two decades. They have also started measuring the carbon emissions of their farm at Ventnor on Phillip Island. The farm measured 109 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions in 2008-09, half the 2006-07 figure.

It's a sophisticated approach

to farming to make their property both more efficient and environmentally friendly.

"Undoubtedly, the future of the meat industry in Australia is about recognising the amount of carbon emissions, the amount of methane," Mrs Davie said. "We have to address all of these things to be responsible farmers."

Mr Davie added: "You can't try to hide it or push it under the carpet . . . We want to confront it and we are. It's not going to go away."

"And we want to do everything possible to reduce our greenhouse emissions . . . from light bulbs to diesel use and everything we do on the farm."

Soon, the Davies and other farmers will have a chance to assess their farm emissions, with the launch today of a new computer tool.

Known as the FarmGAS calculator, the tool was developed by the Australian Farm Institute and the NSW Government, with funds from the federal Department of Climate Change.

The executive director of the Australian Farm Institute, Mick Keogh, said farmers would be able to know their farms' yearly emissions after only about half an hour's work. He said farmers who were not computer experts need not fear the new calculator, because it asked for similar information to farm budgeting tools.

The calculator can compute the emissions of a range of farm types including horticulture operations, beef farms, piggeries, sheep farms, feedlots, and crop and mixed farms. The calculator also accounts for "environmental" tree plantings.

Mr Keogh said the calculator would help farmers understand the quantity of emissions generated by different agricultural activities, and how to cut their emissions with changes in how they managed their farms.

The emissions calculator will be available free on the Australian Farm Institute website.

LINK
▶ farminstitute.org.au



Environmentally aware farmers Bob and Anne Davie are embracing technology to cut emissions on their Phillip Island farm.

PICTURE: JOHN WOULDSTRA