

## Innovative farming New methods aim to improve yields and cut costs

By: *Briley Curnoe*

FARMERS are being encouraged to adopt innovative farming methods to help the environment on the eve of a climate change debate in Federal Parliament.

Ken Bellamy, a biological innovator and founder of a Townsville-based company, VRM, has been lobbying the Government for legislation to encourage new approaches to farming and clean living.

New farming methods emphasise the need for inoculation, which Mr Bellamy says means putting something into the soil that stays there.

Inoculants help to increase biodiversity, often lost when crops are repeatedly grown in one spot. VRM's inoculants focus on the capture of energy from the sun and using it to process other nutrients, promoting photosynthesis in and on the soil.

Mr Bellamy said: "There's no real loss to the farmers, we aim to reduce 30 per cent of their fertiliser use and replace that cost with inoculants in the ground that makes the rest more efficiently used.

"This also means that there is less fertiliser left on the ground to wash off."

These innovative processes allow farmers to obtain a more sustainable yield from their crops, while reducing the cost of fertilisers and techniques in an effort to produce more net cash for farmers than previously.

"We've worked quite hard in the last few years to develop the premise of using the carbon thing as an incentive for people to switch over to a different type of management of their farm," Mr Bellamy said.

"Not as another income stream, but as a one-off incentive to jump from this way of doing things, to that way over a five-year period."

The implementation stage has already begun with local farming groups such as Combined Rural Traders distributing the concept.

The other side of VRM's business involves carbon offsets and relationships with those involved with the Emissions Trading Scheme.

The public can also offset their carbon emissions.

"People can do this in a number of ways. They can grow permanent pastures, with different grasses growing all the time. The whole process is transferable all the way down to the backyard," Mr Bellamy said.

Townsville City Council has already signed up a number of parks and a few schools are also on board.

Those who fly frequently can also offset their carbon through a new scheme, My Clean Sky,

which purchases offsets from Prime Carbon.

Mr Bellamy said Prime Carbon collects the units, puts them in bundles and sells them at wholesale price.

“If somebody who travels and wants to offset how much gas is used or released in the atmosphere from their travel, it's all calculated down to their particular bit which is bought from a farmer with what carbon that farmer has already captured,” he said.

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