

Solum Farm



Champions:

Cheryl and Mike Smith

Age of collaboration:

Two and a half years

Industry:

Certified organic limes, medicinal herbs, vegetables and hemp

Location:

Mororo, NSW

Region:

The Clarence Valley is a prominent agricultural region that has a large proportion of sugar cane farms. With a population of approximately 40 people, it is a small but active farming community enjoying rich and fertile soils.



Mike and Cheryl Smith are the founders of Solum Farm. With over 25 years in farming, they currently live and work on their farm on Yaegl Country in the Clarence Valley. Of their 25-acre property, they have dedicated 15 acres to forest regeneration with the remaining 10 acres farming land for medicinal herbs, hemp and organic limes. They have been involved in share farming for over 2 years and currently share their land with emerging farmers, Hannah Navara and Leon Hoffmann-Detenhoff.

Success Story

- Regional NSW land prices are steadily increasing, especially those in coastal regions which were once dominated by farming lands and which is leaving little opportunity for young and emerging farmers to enter the market.
- Share farming offers a viable and attractive opportunity for landholders to increase the productivity and profitability of their land, to support young and emerging farmers to share farming operations leaving more down time for everyone.
- Provides an authentic opportunity for mentoring to build capacity for young and emerging farmers while enabling a two-way knowledge and skill sharing.



The Catalyst for Change

We knew there were great opportunities to diversify on our small abundant acreage, yet there is only so much two people can do! We had accommodation available and knew it was only time until the right fit came along for us. We wanted farmers passionate about soil, health and growing a farming enterprise. We've always had WOOFERS or travelling backpackers with us to support us. Taking the step into share farming seemed a natural progression to expand the capacity of not only ourselves personally, but also Solum Farm.

The Opportunity

We met Hannah online via the Young Farmers Facebook page where she had posted she was looking for a farm to expand the Hemp Threads production. I responded and we organised to meet.

Solum Farm offered Hannah and Leon a great opportunity insofar as accommodation, land and an opportunity to hang out with two experienced farmers who have been around a while!

We negotiated an exchange for rent which really sees us being able to expand our wildest dreams in terms of medicinal herb production. We have amazing young farmers who are enthusiastic, hard workers and keen as to take on any task we come up with.

"It was the slowness of the arrangement that is what made the magic happen. We met, sat down in the paddock and talked for 3 hours so we really got to know each other."

Cheryl Smith on the secret to successful collaboration

The Challenge/s

As we see it, the greatest challenge with our share farming experience has been the weather patterns resulting from climate change experienced in the Valley over the last two years. Since Hannah and Leon arrived on Solum we have experienced severe drought, devastating fires, and floods. It's been tough and they have stood beside us, put out fires, carted water in and are now supporting Solum to regenerate.



Future Looking

- **Communication:** Before getting to the legal arrangements and documentation, get to know each other. Find out about each other's goals, interests, beliefs and values. Understand each other's positions and aims as a priority. For these two couples, it was the slowness of the arrangement that made the magic happen.
- **Common ideologies:** Through their discussions, the two couples realised how much they had in common through their love and dedication to regenerative farming, soil and herbal medicine. This passion is what enabled them to establish their framework for collaboration around this set of common beliefs. As shared by Cheryl, "in the end, that's what it comes down to".
- **Sharing is mentoring:** Cheryl shared that the biggest measure of success would be to see Hannah and Leon be able to secure their own parcel of land. To provide these amazing young farmers with the opportunity to get on their feet and fly on their own is our ultimate goal in mentoring. It should be said they mentor us too. We have learnt so much from both Hannah and Leon and value their capacity to speak from the heart and lead.