

# Next Generation Forest Plantations: Integrating trees in rural landscapes

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Adding timber trees to multi-use farmland has both environmental and economic benefits, and University of Melbourne researchers are working with landholders and investors to develop new business models for what could be the future of forest plantations in Australia.

The global demand for wood is increasing. On current trends, the area of tree plantations globally will need to double by 2050 to meet future demand.

In Australia, an expanding population and increasing use of wood in construction for design as well as tree planting for environmental benefits is driving the increased demand for wood products. To address how new plantations might be supported, researchers at the University of Melbourne are exploring new approaches for integrating tree plantations in rural landscape.

“There is a large area of farmland in Australia where different types of planted forest could be integrated with existing agricultural land uses,” says Project Leader Professor Rod Keenan, from the School of Ecosystem and Forest Sciences at the University of Melbourne.

“Adding trees to rural landscape can benefit agricultural production, help to mitigate climate change and support the restoration of forest landscapes, while also providing a future supply of timber and additional income for farmers,” Professor Keenan says.

The study will focus in two key forestry regions in Victoria: Colac-Otway and Gippsland. The researchers will assess the attitudes and experience of industry, investors and land owners and analyse past approaches to plantation investment partnerships in Australia and around the world.

This knowledge will be used to build new business investment models that can meet the needs of different investment partners.

“In the first instance, the project team would like to speak with landholders in the two target regions about their views on integrating tree plantations within rural landscapes” says Professor Keenan.

Hancock Victoria Plantations is a project partner and Chief Operating Officer Cameron MacDonald explains that the lack of new plantation timber will limit expansion in forest processing, leading to an increasing reliance on imported timber products.

“More investment in plantations can drive innovation in timber processing and increased economic value to regional communities,” Mr McDonald says.

Midway Limited Chief Executive Officer Tony Price echoes these sentiments.

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“We are keen to work with a range of landowners to identify new and innovative opportunities that lead to more trees in the landscape and deliver win-win outcomes for both the forest and agricultural sectors while also providing environmental benefits such as carbon sequestration, biodiversity protection and improved water quality,” Mr Price says.

Professor Keenan says that while farm forestry has been promoted for some time, the missing element has been financial capital.

“The aim of this study is to come up with models that can link rural landowners with the finance sector and with industry. That’s why we are working with business researchers from Swinburne University who will assess timber industry, financial sector and landowner requirements for investment partnerships.”

“We’re also collaborating with other research institutes, including CSIRO, who are conducting similar research that promotes the integration of trees in rural landscapes and welcome input from anyone with experience in this area”.

If you would like to share your experience of farm forestry or plantations please contact Professor Rod Keenan at [rkeenan@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:rkeenan@unimelb.edu.au) or on (03) 9035 8227.

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