



# FARMING FOR THE FUTURE

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*Derek and Kirrily Blomfield see the good in things. They live their lives consciously and they love what they do. After a long road and some hard knocks, they established The Conscious Farmer and, with it, their farming path and way of life. Their good life.*





Derek and Kirrily Blomfield with their two sons, Patrick and Reilly.



I spoke with Derek Blomfield a week before the Easter rain this year. A couple of millimetres had fallen the night before, nothing to get excited about, in fact, the small shower was actually something a farmer might be disappointed in. Not Derek.

"We just haven't had that good soak here at all this summer but you know, it's fine, I've woken up alive and the sky is blue, the sun came up, the world is spinning and it's all great. A bit of rain here or there, or not, well what's that in the scheme of things? I'm not gonna let that beat me up. I decided these days to just see the good in things." And there you had it; Derek showed me who he is, what he stands for; a good man and a good farmer.

Last year's NSW Farmer of the Year Award recipients, Derek and Kirrily Blomfield, with their sons Patrick (12) and Reilly (10), and Derek's father Sandy, run their 980-hectare grass-fed-beef producing property, Colorado, situated on the Liverpool Plains, 40 kilometres west of Quirindi. The property has been in the family for 69 years, starting with Derek's grandparents in 1946. Derek grew up on the farm, learning conventional farming ways, before moving away to Orange for Ag College and then working for a short time in the States, farming. He returned to Australia and embarked on a working trip around Australia for a year with a friend from Ag College, enjoying a more care-free life as a 24-year-old.

"It was great. We went in an old 1984 Land cruiser. We did a little bit of anything – we went for an experience. We worked for a builder and a bricklayer in Perth, we worked on a cattle station in the Kimberly - and did a fair bit of fishing."

Derek moved into the family farm business not long after college and, in 2013, he and wife Kirrily, started The Conscious Farmer, a blog through which the pair share their learnings, and a way of life. Derek and Kirrily believe in maximising farm productivity in a sustainable manner, in holistic and preventative health, in consuming mineral rich healthy foods and being happy in life, ensuring longevity and fulfilment. They believe that to produce healthy food in healthy landscapes we need to embrace what nature intended and we need to be conscious; conscious of the soil and its microbiology, the landscape and its ground cover, the water and its movements, soil carbon and organic matter. The Blomfields sell their grass fed beef, packaged, labelled, boxed and delivered direct to Australian families who are conscious about their health and about how their food is produced.

"We have both undergone training in holistic management and what we really took out of that was focussing on what our life goals were, what makes us happy, to get to a place doing what we do that then allows us to sleep at night, and we have embarked on a self-awareness and personal development journey," Derek explains.

"With the birth of the Conscious Farmer we decided to grow and become more vulnerable and uncomfortable and have our opinions and beliefs out there for discussion."

The Conscious Farmer blog brings sustainable farming ideas and practices to a central point from where other farmers can draw new ideas and gain a confidence in new farming systems.

"We have some really serious challenges coming our way, and some that are already here, in agriculture around the globe with climate change, management of diseases in both crops and animals, herbicide resistance and parasite resistance to chemicals and even the process of farming production – how viable, how safe, how long term is that?"

"Instead of being scared of those challenges, instead of seeing them as threats, we've got to turn around and see that every challenge is an opportunity, because it allows us to do something different about it, and achieve a greater result. It requires great bravery. We are trying to build a community, a movement, so that people can realise it is okay to feel vulnerable, it might not be comfortable, but that is just a part of growing. We'll achieve great results if we do that."

In 1991, Derek's first year out of school, he and his family were farming, using industry best practice, full of pride on his property. "I felt proud as punch. If I was told then that in 25 years these are the practises you will be doing, the extra costs that would be involved and that the average income would be the same, I would've been horrified. Now let's project forward another 25 years, where does it end? Now that we are out of that system, I am perplexed by the way it was and still is done."

Derek believes, despite more media space and more awareness of regenerative farming, the industry is still very much driven and dominated by the massive companies making big dollars out of that technology.

"I think you would have to be really naïve or blinkered to think that the problems we are facing in industrial farming now aren't caused by industrial farming. We are all aware of chemical resistance, yet our technology is about putting a bigger band aid on. When is the research going to concentrate on different farming systems that aren't focussed on rescue and recovery? We need an exit strategy from that system."

Agriculture has also always been a part of Kirrily's life, from her childhood years on her family's fine wool sheep grazing property at Yass, to studying a Rural Science degree, to her years as an agronomist, and now, facilitating information sharing amongst farmers as The Conscious Farmer.



## “THE CONSCIOUS FARMER ALLOWS US TO SHARE WHAT WE ARE LEARNING TO PEOPLE WHO WANT TO HEAR IT.”

“I don't profess to be an expert of all things regenerative in agriculture, but I do know how to effectively share from those who do!” Kirrily states on their website.

A positive outlook on life has seen both Derek and Kirrily through some difficult times, both on the farm and in their personal life, with the premature births of both their sons.

“Our first born was born at 27 weeks and that just wasn't right,” Derek tells. A couple of years later, their second son was also born prematurely. After a tough introduction to the early years of parenthood Derek and Kirrily, attended a sustainable agriculture seminar on the Sunshine Coast in 2006 and learnt about the quality of food and its relation to human health.

“We embarked on a personal development journey from there and started taking our health into our own hands,” Derek explains of the early days.

“We firmly believed that both of our sons’ premature births were emotionally and nutritionally related and so, from that point on, we really started making change. The Conscious Farmer allows us to share what we are learning to people who want to hear it.”

The Blomfield boys are now strong and healthy children and Derek and Kirrily have also seen improvements in their own land through the implementation of new practices and a focus on grazing management, including; increased grass density and diversity, more soil coverage, an increase in young tree growth, both planted and self-regenerated, better rain infiltration and a better host environment for microbiology. Challenges still remain, but their vision for agriculture, not only on their own farm, but around the world, puts them in good stead to achieve great things.

“We are very focussed on being profitable ourselves. If we are to be sustainable, we have to be profitable. If you are not regenerating your land, then you can't truly be profitable. The two have to go together. What we are doing is not about my children, or their children, it's about everyone in the future. If we can't be profitable and sustainable then there is something in the equation that we haven't got right yet,” Derek says.

In a world where the juggle between work, family life and other commitments seems increasingly demanding to balance, how

does a person find the will and the drive to promote a healthy life for the good of the future generations the world over?

“At some point we have to become accountable – while we own this land and we are entitled to take the profits from it (or service the debts from it), but we are purely custodians of that land. We have the financial rights to the land, but true land ownership, what is that? I can't truly say I own this land because I'm borrowing it from the future generations. They're the ones that own it and, when you look at it that way, no one can ever say they own it,” Derek's viewpoint, as well as his passion, is inspiring.

“I don't mind whether my opinions are respected by others, but I wouldn't be respecting myself if I didn't share it.”

In their work towards shifting the focus in agriculture and research, Derek and Kirrily are helping people to discover the importance of this planet, of this population and of this life. Such gifts are to be both acknowledged and respected.

“I want people to look forward 500 years. This is the future we are talking about. If we don't all look at things as a whole, rather than the individual, we are disconnected, where is the trust and the faith? It is about us all being connected and about making this amazing planet we live on work. This place is so repairable. Let's use what we have and do a good job of it. Be thankful for it and love it.”

What does the conscious farmer want his boys to grow up believing - in farming and in life?

“I don't mind if they do or don't want to be on this farm or any other farm. I don't mind what it is they do but I always want them to be conscious people.”

Derek tells of a special moment given to him by his youngest son, Reilly, after a long discussion in the paddock about the cows having transported clover seeds between paddocks for regeneration: “So Dad, the cows are our food, the cows are our business and the cows are a tool.”

“I still get goose bumps and emotional thinking about that now. He summed it up in three lines. And I thought, ‘The future's in good hands.’”

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