

Lachlan Hughes scholars past and present speak at foundation info day

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Kat Fausett and Beau North accepting their Lachlan Hughes Foundation scholarship memento from Charlie Massy and Philip Hughes, with Hamish Hughes joining in. Picture: Sally Gall

Support has been a cornerstone of the Lachlan Hughes Foundation, which all listening to past and current scholarship winners at the information day at Dulacca last week would say is paying great dividends.

Both the 2021 scholar, Sarina's Beau North and incoming recipients Joel and Emma Muirhead from Eidsvold and Mundubbera, told attendees they knew they needed more knowledge and exposure to new concepts to advance their plans.

Mr North described the scholarship as life-changing for he and fiancé Kat Fausett's dream of transitioning from cane to permanent pasture, because it provided him with access to industry experts, consultants and the opportunity to attend training courses and programs.

"Natural sequence farming has really been a standout course for me as our farm is in an extremely high rainfall area, prone to erosion and with multiple gullies running through," he said.

"I learnt so much about how to slow the flow of water and retain it in our soils, as well as rethinking my relationship with weeds and appreciating them as pioneer species and indicators of soil conditions."

Thanks to a visit from Stuart Andrews, son of natural sequence farming founder Peter Andrews, they were able to prioritise pasture and plant establishment over contour building.

"We have learnt so much throughout this project so far, with the main thing being patience," Mr North said.

"The farm is now in varying states of transition - some areas are cover crop, some permanent pastures, some a mixture of both, and a few patches of cane that were too wet to harvest.

"Sometimes it just feels like a huge mess, but then I look carefully and see that our paddocks are actually bursting full of life.

"It is still hard when I see the undesirable species popping up, and summer certainly presents many of those, but I now see it's all part of the process of the soil healing itself.

"I know that with time, dedication with good management and focusing on soil health, we will achieve our goal of vibrant diverse pastures across the entire property."

Mr North said they planned to continue educating and investing in themselves, and with the support of the Lachlan Hughes Foundation, grow to a bigger scale, armed with more knowledge and experience.



Philip Hughes introduces the Lachlan Hughes Foundation scholars - Jack Groat 2020, Beau North and Kat Fausett 2021, and Emma and Joel Muirhead 2022. Picture: Megan McNicholl.

Joel and Emma Muirhead, 2022's joint recipients, said they'd decided to apply for the scholarship for a number of reasons, including being a step they needed to take to continue to learn about their personal and business vision.

That is one that "connects families and community around the dinner table enjoying good open communication and learning while they eat nutrient dense, grass-fed proteins that helped the land grow and be alive both above and below the grass line".

In addition, they wanted to keep sharing what they were learning and seeing, and felt the foundation had likeminded goals.

"We, like the foundation, feel sharing this journey is incredibly important, pivotal in fact," Mr Muirhead said, "as new journeys often seem frightening due to the unknown and can come with judgement, crippling enough to crush dreams and innovation.

"We personally see this happen far too often in our industry and take this part of our scholarship very seriously, as judgement is destructive, and can be a key player in a person's emotional stress, a space I know personally and unfortunately we are reminded of it far too often."

They were already on the regeneration journey prior to receiving the scholarship and will put their scholarship towards reinvigorating the catchment around a wetland that requires reinstating at Twin Rivers.

"This area directly affects the banks of the Burnett River and currently large erosion can be seen, a sight very common on this river," Ms Muirhead said.

"We are excited to learn through action how to read our landscape, to retain water and spread fertility under the guidance of landscape pros."

Other expectations are to capture and record data as evidence and show that hoof and tooth are key in the regenerative process and increase their knowledge base in areas of livestock mindset, human mindset, soils and positive succession of flora and fauna.

They also plan to hold 'catch ups' on their properties "where innovation is encouraged, openness is embraced, uplifting conversation is held, and freedom of thinking is welcomed".

"We have seen first-hand increases in sustainability on our properties and know that as we share and grow, thanks to foundations that honour such champions like the Hughes family, we can not only revitalise communities and increase economic sustainability, but we can also open minds and hearts and be a regenerated industry," Ms Muirhead said.



by **Sally Gall**, Senior journalist - Queensland Country Life/North Queensland Register.