

CASE STUDY

PRIMLEY

PARK

Owned and operated by Tony and Dominie Menkens since 2013, Primley Park is an 800-hectare grazing property supporting a 500-head beef cattle operation with a diversity of improved pastures in the New England region of New South Wales. Improving soil fertility and structure is imperative to the success of the business which produces high-value marbling Wagyu beef for export under the Saltwater Grazing brand.

With a background in sugarcane and beef cattle production in Queensland, fifth-generation farmer Tony Menkens saw a move to the Armidale district as an opportunity to embrace fertiliser alternatives and move away from the cane industry's heavy reliance on chemicals. Elevated at 1100 metres above sea level, Primley Park can grow winter-active pastures such as fescue, cocksfoot, ryegrass and clovers which contribute to cattle weight gain throughout the characteristically dry, cold winters of Armidale's temperate-alpine zone.

The soil health 'lightbulb moment'

The son of a sugarcane farmer from Queensland's Burdekin, Tony Menkens took over a family cattle property in Central Queensland in 1997 where he applied his knowledge from the cane industry to pasture management.

"I was basically using a sugarcane program on a pasture program to fatten steers. The soil test was off the Richter – it was really good and everything was going great. Then, within four years, I had a bloat problem, and the cattle were in all sorts of strife with nitrogen poisoning. I knew then, there had to be a better way," he says.

"When we moved to New England – a high-altitude, high-rainfall area, it was a chance to try an alternative."

Although Primley Park was in good shape generally, Tony sought a more sustainable program to increase soil health and boost the health of his cattle and profitability.

"I started with Metagen straight away after being convinced by a mutual acquaintance who knew founder Shane Fitzgerald to give the process a go. I wanted healthier pastures and more rounded soils with increased fertility. For the first few years, I put Metagen down on about half of the property and the other part was superphosphate," Tony says.



“It took the first two or three years of testing to work out what was lacking before incorporating Metagen’s Evergrow and soluble boron which are applied alone or supplemented with chicken and cow manures. A few years in, Shane came to visit, and we went to look at the clovers. They were well nodulated, deeply rooted and fixing nitrogen into the soil. Everything under the traditional fertiliser program was doing nothing. That was another lightbulb moment.

“The pastures are now more resilient with a greater root depth and there is a greater diversity of pasture types. There are also less cattle issues such as bloat (which can be a challenge with some clovers).

“If you look after your soil, it will look after your crop. It’s what’s under your soil that influences everything and organic matter is a big part of it.”

“I’m also impressed with the longevity of pastures which can last up to 15 or 20 years. If one gets overgrazed or weeds set in, that’s probably 10-15 per cent every year that needs treatment with organic matter to prompt regrowth of desirable forage plants,”

Tony Menkens
Primley Park





The Menkens Family of Primley Park, Armidale.

Sustainability drives soil management change

“The big attraction with buying this property was its soil – predominantly heavy red-black basalt. However, the soil was crying out for a change and I wasn’t convinced the program in place was sustainable,” Tony says.

“Although the soil type is similar throughout the property, all paddocks are unique. Unlike conventional fertilisers where you might see a result fairly quickly, it took a year or two to gradually improve the pastures with the Metagen system.”

For the first eight or nine years, Tony applied Metagen’s product via irrigation.

“The last treatment was in 2023 when I applied it by aeroplane in one fell swoop.”

In 2024, Dominie attended a carbon emissions meeting organised by their bank, alongside similar producers in the area, and discovered that Primley Park was the closest, by a long shot, to making a difference in environmental sustainability.

“In my area, I get asked a lot about the Metagen program. I keep saying I don’t do anything to the grass, I’m working on the soil,” Tony says.

“The Metagen method is a holistic process to soil health, it’s not just a crop fertiliser replacement where you can swap out a superphosphate with a Metagen product. It’s far more involved than that – it’s about understanding the whole soil health process. Once you do that, you’ll end up with a better crop or pasture and better business outcomes.”

Tony Menkens
Primley Park

