Australia: Regenerative Agriculture on Echo Hills

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Australia: Regenerative agriculture on Echo Hills

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Dr Amber Marshall is Lecturer in Management at Griffith University (Australia) whose research focuses on digital inclusion and rural development. Her work explores how individuals, organisations, and communities in regional, rural, and remote Australia become digitally connected and adopt digital technologies, and how this intersects with social and economic well-being. Dr Marshall's work draws on interdisciplinary perspectives from management and communication sciences and employs qualitative and ethnographic methods to co-design solutions with local stakeholders. Her research interests include digital AgTech and data, digital inclusion ecosystems, remote telecommunications infrastructure, and digital skills and capability development. She has published in top-tiered journals, presented at national and international conferences, produced industry and policy reports, and attracted substantial research funding from government and commercial partners.

Mrs Nikki Thompson has always been a generalist and a visionary who has always followed her heart. She met and fell in love with Peter as a young physiotherapy student and brought those skills with her when she moved to Echo Hills 43 years ago. She has always loved to mix evidence-based practice with more ancient wisdom during her career as a health professional, her coaching career and in her connection with the life on the land at Echo Hills. Her journey with the land has been a gift and whilst not 'working in the paddock' much, her passion for what comes when we all work on 'the inner paddock between our ears' has added different dimension to the emergence of their family and life at Echo Hills.

Mr Peter Thompson was born and raised at Echo Hills walking its land his whole life. He is a farmer who is passionate about agriculture with an emphasis on regenerative practices and its valuable contribution to modern society. He believes in operating as a team in conjunction with his urban counterparts for the long term financial and environmental sustainability of Australia. He has a lifelong love of machinery and technology especially where it can enhance the human experience. He is a curious innovator who reads and travels widely. He likes to find the techniques that can be trialed and tested in local context rather than devoutly following a particular practice. Peter is totally committed to seeing a fair and equitable integration of energy and agricultural production that first and foremost protects the land, water, agricultural practices and human liveability for future generations.

Acknowledgements:

We acknowledge the traditional owners of the land where Echo Hills Farm is situated, on Yiman country in Queensland. We give gratitude to all those who have walked, lived, and cared for this land since humans evolved in this place. We have been and always will be owned and grown by this land. May we all remember that as we journey forward together collaboratively as true custodians.

Introduction

Echo Hills is a family owned and operated business situated in the Maranoa region in South Western Queensland, Australia. Echo Hills has been in the Thompson family for 75 years as a cropping and cattle operation. Having acquired neighbouring Nugget Hills in 2013, the entire property now spans 80 square kilometres. The landscape is characterised by a combination of original forest, substantial creeks, shrubby regrowth, and rocky outcrops. The country ranges from rolling open paddocks of Buffel Grass to wild rocky gorges with permanent spring-fed waterholes (see Figure 1).

Summers are generally hot, starting in late October and going through until early March with bursts of 45-degree maximums in January. Most of the annual 650 mm rainfall occurs in this period. The land responds quickly to rain and can be as rich green as Ireland. However, when the dry season comes, colours of straw-yellow and stark grey are interspersed with grey-green hues of the native timbers. Winter days are generally clear and dry, while nights are cold often getting down below zero degrees Celsius overnight in the June to August period. Spring and Autumn are generally quite short and somewhat indistinct.

Figure 1: The view over Echo Hills from the main farm house.

Peter and Nikki Thompson are the custodians of Echo Hills. Peter Thompson grew up on the farm with his two brothers, taking over operation from his parents, John and Nan Thompson, between 1984 and 1990. Peter and Nikki raised their family of three children Jamie, Ingrid and Andrew at Echo Hills and love to welcome them home with their own children. Emma and Angus King joined the team in 2021

to help manage and steward the cattle and land; they too are raising their three primary-school aged children at Echo Hills.

The Echo Hills team consider themselves an extended family of like-minded and dedicated people seeking new and innovative ways of living in connection with the land and Country. The team is passionate about agriculture and its valuable contribution to modern society. The team's diverse expertise covers animals, soil, ecosystems, and technology, with a focus on well-being and sustainability of all living things, from humans to microbes!

This chapter tells a story of Life on Land at Echo Hills, with a focus on regenerative agriculture. We describe the bold philosophy, innovative approaches, and thoughtful practices of the Echo Hills family farm, which contribute to creating a life on the land that is sustainable, ethical, and helps ensure the future of the property beyond the life of its current owners.

Products and/or Services offered by the family business

Echo Hills is a commercial family-run farm whose owners and workers deeply value the pillars of connection, collaboration, and community in their daily interactions. Their regenerative approach to agriculture is based on the natural intelligence which permeates living relationships. The key commercial activities, explored below, sit under the umbrella entity *Soil2Soul* (Soil2Soul, 2024)

- ***Grazing***. The grazing businesses includes raising Ultrablack cattle breeders, finished grass-fed beef, and agistment of other cattle on their property. This is complemented by farming of donkeys and sheep (for meat) as part of on-farm self-sufficiency.
- ***Technology testing and commercialisation*.** Peter Thompson regularly tests emerging digital technologies in partnership with AgTech providers. These include *AgriWebb* farm data collation, *Optiweigh* livestock monitoring, *Farmbot* remote water monitoring, and *Cibo Labs* and *DataFarming* satellite imaging technologies to name a few. Peter also invents, develops, and builds farming machines. In 2002, Peter patented a planting point technology (PeterpoinT), with the patent expiring in 2023. This technology is sold nationally through AgPoint on a royalty basis.
- ***Consulting***. Nikki Thompson works more in the human ecosystem as a coach and facilitator, working with individuals and small businesses. She has a passion for helping unlock the full and emerging potential that arises when people can bring their full selves into personal and professional relationships. The Thompsons have plans to expand into regenerative agriculture consulting in the future (which they currently do informally).

The Thompsons also participate in coal seam gas (CSG) projects by way of 40 CSG wells and the associated infrastructure of flowlines, pipelines, and water transfer stations on their two properties: Echo Hills and Nugget Hills. The Thompsons were one of the first non-gas company owned properties to host operational CSG developments. Peter and Nikki took the view that they were best suited to guide the interface of this new industry with agriculture, with their long history of stewarding the land. Given this, they worked long and hard with Origin Energy to create a transparent, viable, and workable agreement that has become the foundation model for CSG industry agreements. Their key criteria were that the land came first, followed closely by agriculture, and their personal liveability having critical importance. They view the money coming from CSG as compensation, not income, for their role in protecting the land.

Vision and Mission

The Echo Hills vision is: *Healthy food, healthy soil, and a healthy place to live*. This vision is underpinned by the notion that soil, plants, and animals work in collaboration to produce nutritious food and regenerate the land and life. Nature has billions of years of experience in the symbiotic creation of life and the Thompsons, as stewards, are here to listen, learn and respond.

To achieve this vision, the Echo Hills team aspires to be leaders in regenerative agriculture. While there is no accepted definition of regenerative agriculture, one that resonates with the Thompsons is as follows.

> *As a philosophy and approach to land management, regenerative agriculture asks us to think about how all aspects of agriculture are connected through a web—a network of entities who grow, enhance, exchange, distribute, and consume goods and services—instead of a linear supply chain.*
>
> Natural Resources Defence Council (NRDC) (2021)

A crucial association between the Echo Hills vision and this conception of regenerative agriculture is that all things that live on land—plants, animals, and people—are connected by the soil. This is reflected in the *Soil2Soul* name given to the parent entity of the Echo Hills family business. This approach also resonates with the following more scientific definition of regenerative farming.

> *An approach to farming that uses soil conservation as the entry point to regenerate and contribute to multiple provisioning, regulating and supporting ecosystem services, with the objective that this will enhance not only the environmental, but also the social and economic dimensions of sustainable food production.*
>
> Schreefel et al., (2020, p. 5)

The Echo Hills team's approach to realising their vision through regenerative farming is underpinned by guiding values and principles that inform everything they do. The following summaries the principles and values for regenerative agriculture at Echo Hills Farm.

Principles that guide what they do
Experiential practical knowledge, invention, and innovation
Acknowledging and working with natural intelligence
Embracing technology and emerging innovation as part of how we function
Looking at new ways of living in connection with country/land

Values that guide how they work
Relationship-based business – local, national, and global
Non-hierarchical relationship with the land, sharing resources and knowledge
Syntropic practices - handing things back in better condition than they were found
(Bio)diversity of land and people

Background to the family and the business

John Thompson's legacy

While the Thompson family have been custodians of the land at Echo Hills for 75 years, they acknowledge that the land was stewarded by the Yiman people for thousands of years prior to that. As Indigenous stories acknowledge, humans have evolved from the Earth, as have the Thompson family living and working on the land over the decades.

Arriving in a Willy's Jeep meandering through dense scrub in 1949, Peter's father came to Echo Hills believing this country to be 'good sheep country'. It was back-breaking work in the early days with minimal mechanical assistance and little infrastructure. Land was cleared to allow the running of livestock with cattle soon taking over from sheep. Farming cereal crops was introduced to help manage the brigalow regrowth. It is essential to understand the ethos of the times, as this story is told. In those early years, there was governmental pressure to develop the country to feed the nation and grow the economy. The passions of the individual custodians intermingled with the possibilities that the environmental and political context allowed.

Being raised with the instructions from John Thompson to always "keep your eyes open", great observational skills were honed in the family. Peter, as middle of three sons, always had an innate love of the land. As a young adult working with his father, at times they 'butted horns' around whether grain or cattle should have 'right of way', each having their justification.

Peter also inherited a keen interest in technology from his father, who was a champion of invention and innovation. In the 1960's and '70's, John Thompson spearheaded the local progress association, and was at the forefront of developing better ways to do things, on farm and in the community. Like his father, Peter is concerned with finding simple solutions to actual problems.

Changing with the times

At Echo Hills, technological changes have walked hand-in-hand with a growing commitment to regenerative agriculture over the decades. Starting from a 1923 Fordson tractor, mechanical support for farm work has increased in size, complexity, and efficiency. And, like all technologies, this has come with pros and cons. A deep philosophical premise held by the Echo Hills team is that technology is a tool that needs to be utilised in service of the vision the team upholds.

Profitability must be taken into account to be responsible land stewards, but the Thompsons see profit as a precessional outcome, i.e., a natural consequence of being good land stewards. Profitability also does not mean that every single aspect of the business will make money; some aspects of the business fund others for overall benefit to land and life. This process is iterative, creating the conditions for growth in all domains, rather than being super-focused on one service or product. Over the years farming practice have involved: shifting cattle from cropping country to ensure compaction is minimised; rotating crops; naturally maintaining soil fertility; and redesigning paddock lay out to minimise water runoff and erosion.

As knowledge about sustainable agriculture and technology evolved, changes occurred at Echo Hills. The family has always been curious and motivated to change as new evidence comes to light. However, the Thompsons don't invest in new things just because they are new or to 'keep up with the Joneses'. With his fascination with technology, Peter is an excellent mechanic and handyman. Living on the land and isolated from many services, making do is often a necessity, so there is a strong ethos

of reduce, reuse, recycle. How this philosophy and associated practices align with SGD#15 is explored below.

SDG#15: Life on Land and Echo Hills Farm

The Thompsons' commitment to sustainable life on the land began well before establishment of the UN Sustainability Development Goals. The seeds for innovative approaches to farming, which prioritised the long-term sustainability of the land over maximising short-term productivity and profits, were planted 75 years ago. Informed by John Thompson's belief one should always hand things back in better condition than when they found them, Peter and Nikki have strived to improve the condition of their land over time while maintaining a commercially viable business. While it has not been their explicit intention to be guided by SDGs, the Echo Hills team contribute to several of SDG#15's targets. While these practices are inter-twined, they are explored below in relation to each target.

Target 15.1: Conserve and restore terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems

Echo Hills is in a region within Queensland which has a 'reliably unreliable rainfall'. Since the Thompson family arrived, they have lived and worked within those parameters. Always having been dry land graziers and farmers, they have spent decades working to conserve precious water. Living on the eastern fall of the Great Dividing Range, their water run-off is subject to responsibility and regulation related to protecting the Great Barrier Reef. The freshwater courses, namely Slate Hill and Eurombah creeks, running through the property flow into the Dawson River, Fitzroy River and eventually run into the Reef at Rockhampton some 400 kilometres away. The Echo Hills team protects both Slate Hill and Eurombah Creeks from runoff through fencing, ensuring waterways are grassed, and undertaking structured management of livestock in those areas. The goal is to ensure, as much as possible, that clear water is entering the off stream.

Water supply to the property is sourced from one deep-flowing Artesian bore and four sub-Artesian bores. All the water used on the property is for domestic and stock use, with free-to-air water supplies limited to closed poly tanks, which minimises water loss through evaporation. These bores are interlinked which provides redundancy and flexibility of supply. The Thompsons also follow water management principles established by Peter's great grandfather; that is, to manage the land to ensure effective management of overground water to supplement the bore water. Tank water is also used for the houses on the property.

Target 15.3: *End desertification and restore degraded land*

In 2020, the Thompsons made a bold decision to cease continual cropping, which previously included wheat, oats, barley, chickpeas, sorghum, and mung beans. Cropping had been the farm's primary income stream for over 40 years, in line with many others in the region. The decision was prompted by a more ambitious focus on regenerative farming. Specifically, they replaced continual cropping with managed grazing.

Managed grazing involves fluctuating the cattle stock in paddocks depending on land conditions. This allows the Echo Hills team to balance original and transitional biodiversity; that is, encourage regrowth of traditional trees and shrubs while maintaining enough non-native Buffel grass and other introduced species such as Chicory and Desmanthus to feed cattle. The Thompsons achieve variable stock rates by charging other people to agist their animals. When land condition is good, more animals are brought in; when land condition is poor, stocks are lowered to allow the land to recover.

The Thompsons' approach to managed grazing is driven by their commitment to soil health as the foundation of regenerative agriculture, which is further aligned with Target 15.3. As Peter says, "It's not the cow, it's the how"; this means that looking after the land means the cow will also be looked after in the process.

In contrast to the accepted norm of blade ploughing or treating with granular herbicide to eradicate regrowth, the Thompsons aim to keep a healthy balance of trees shrubs and grass. Their method is to run a light pulling chain over the regrowth every 5-7 years seasons, depending on conditions. This breaks off the shrubbery and low trees to form a rich mulch on the ground. The plants aren't killed in this process; rather they are activated to grow. It is like a largescale pruning or "chop and drop" technique, a syntropic farming principle.

Significant strips and clumps of mature trees are left or added over the years, resulting in a landscape that has a wide diversity of plants and growth stages, all the while providing essential ground cover. Independent soil testing by the state government Department of Primary Industries, as well as farm records, show this style of management has increased soil carbon levels up to 25% higher than virgin scrub. The Thompsons have numerous photos showing severely degraded and eroding areas completely rehabilitated within 3-5 years.

At the same time, careful management of livestock and judicious culling of excess macropods returns the land to a healthy balance. The Thompsons note that achieving land restoration is complex and can impact other SDGs; and there is a need to balance traditional and transitional biodiversity. Peter says, "To most people, according to the criteria, two Caterpillar tractors with a scrub pulling chain between them, is deforesting. And yet we're increasing the soil carbon and keeping the water cleaner".

Target 15.5: Protect biodiversity and natural habitats

While the focus for the original Echo Hills cropping paddocks is restoration, the Nugget Hills part of the property offers opportunities for maintenance of 6000 acres of native bushland. This area is managed through controlled burning. Cool and hot burning techniques help manage and keep understory fuel levels under control, and fire breaks and access tracks help manage seasonal fire outbreaks. At times, light grazing is used in these 'native' areas to keep grass down and prevent catastrophic fire. Mechanical interventions are also used from time to time, such as 'ripping' using a chisel plough to aerate hard pans created by humans or livestock.

By keeping the water and land as healthy as possible, parts of Echo Hills and Nugget Hills are excellent habitat for native animals, birds, fish, and other animals, which contributes directly to Target 15.5. Several species that are found on the property including: birds (e.g. Jabiru, wedgetail eagles, sea eagles, pelicans, wrens, wood ducks); water animals (e.g., freshwater fish, platypus, mussels, turtles); mammals/marsupials (e.g. dingo, koala, echidna, wallaroo, gliders, wallabies; and reptiles (e.g., green frogs, goannas, pythons, other snakes). The Thompsons also collaborate with other organisations to conduct research into the animal life on their properties. For example, they have worked with Boobook Explore, an ecological tour company based in Roma, to investigate the white throated turtle that inhabits Eurombah Creek.

It is important to note that some native animals in remote Australia have become so populous that they have become a pest due to overgrazing and land degradation. When the Thompsons first took over Nugget Hills, they needed to significantly cull wallabies and kangaroos as they were decimating the land – especially in cropping paddocks which they had turned into dust bowls.

Accordingly, the Thompsons take a balanced approach to biodiversity. Recognising that their property is both a place for restoration and commercial operation, they strive to create biodiversity that is fit-for-purpose, rather than attempt to restore the land to its absolute original condition. Peter said, "Echo Hills is known to have significant biodiversity, but not all necessarily original – this is a good thing as it means overall greater diversity. "

Beyond the business: Connection, Collaboration, Community

The team at Echo Hills aims to extend their impact into the broader community through various advocacy and volunteer activities that augment the overall vision and mission. These activities fall into the broad categories of connection, collaboration, and community. Though they overlap in various ways, we provide some distinct examples below and link them with SDG#15, specifically *Target 15.9: Integrate ecosystems and biodiversity values into national and local planning*.

Connection

The Thompsons work hard to remain connected to their staff internally and to other stakeholders externally, which is achieved through their organisational structure. Hierarchy does play a role in the structure at Echo Hills, but it is a natural hierarchy rather than one built on job titles. Each member of the team has a unique and emergent skillset and passions and that is respected as decision making opportunities arise. While planning is a vital part of this, intuition is also highly valued as part of the process. The arrival of Angus, Emma, and their family to Echo Hills in 2021 is an example of that. A short job description sent to several people who 'felt right', followed up by personal communication and honest conversations, saw Nikki and Peter attract and retain the 'right' people for the job. Unknown connections and synchronicities emerge from this type of embodied, values-driven growth.

These connections, informed by frequent, open, and clean communication, extends beyond the farm to the community, local and further afield. While the Echo Hills team is aiming to create a microcosm that is generative, knowing the ripple effect that will have, they also work strategically to create connections that are based on trust and mutual respect in the wider community. From involvements on national committees to having a broad network of colleagues globally (including some from working at Echo Hills as backpackers). In support of Target 15.9 and its focus on influencing governance systems external to the farm, the Echo Hills' web of connectivity is vital for creating a field of trust, so that stories can be shared to create a greater awareness and understanding of the role of primary producers and land custodians in our modern and increasingly urbanised world.

Collaboration

The Thompsons have always been involved in community organisations and advocacy. Nikki's passions have been more in the arena of education and health whilst Peter's have had an agricultural focus. Peter is currently Chair of the National Farmers' Federation (NFF) sub-committee on Telecommunications and Social Policy. He is also on the NFF working group for the Farm Data Code, the CSG taskforce, and previously the NFF Workplace Relations committee. Nikki is on an advisory committee for Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM). Both Peter and Nikki are members of the Macintyre Alliance, not-for-profit organisation that brings together like-minded farmers in western Queensland with an interest in how to improve the way they manage our farms and natural assets. They are also involved in organisations looking at regenerative ways of doing business including Syntropic World (Syntropic World, 2024), New Economy Network Australia (NENA, 2024), Australian Earth Laws Alliance (AELA, 2024) and the global Warm Data Lab (warm Data Lab, 2024) community.

In their work to promote healthy rural communities, the Thompsons are active members of Remote Australians Matter, a local organisation seeking to advance a new community-driven, place-based models of primary health care that are innovative, equitable, appropriate, well-funded and sustainable for remote Australia. Nikki Thompson also writes a weekly column for their local paper Maranoa Today. These are inspiring stories of local residents who all play a part in creating vibrant and healthy communities.

The Thompsons' thought leadership and consistent engagement with diverse audiences directly and indirectly contributes to Target 15.9 in helping to integrate ecosystems and biodiversity values into national and local planning.

Community

As noted above, the impact of Echo Hills Farm's SDG-aligned vision, mission, and values are felt at the local, national, and even international levels. The Thompsons are known for doing things a little bit differently. Other farmers who have 'looked over the fence' at Echo Hills have begun to question how they do business. Peter and Nikki are always open to answering questions but are mindful of not trying to 'convert' others to their way of thinking. Nikki says that leading by example in regenerative farming "slowly gives people permission to look more deeply at what may be possible and feel comfortable to have a go and see for themselves."

Echo Hills has attracted both praise and criticism from industry and the media. The Thompsons have been widely praised for spearheading regenerative agriculture in the cropping sector. For example, in 1998, Peter and Nikki won National Grain Growers of the Year Award for their prime hard wheat. The award was not simply based on yield, but criteria included land health, grain quality, record keeping showing data-supported decision making and local business and community support.

Finally, both Peter and Nikki are regularly called upon experts to make comments in the media about agriculture, sustainability, rural development, and technology. For example, in 2023, alongside other national experts, they were guests on a three-part series on digital regenerative agriculture on the Digital Village (Digital Village podcast.(Digital Village, 2023) The Thompsons have also shared their wisdom at national and international conferences, further contributing to Target 15.9.

The role of technology in achieving SDG#15

Collectively the Echo Hills team has moved from generalist to specialist over the decades, and now that pendulum is moving towards an integration of those parts. Technology can play a huge part in that integration process as computing power can assist the human journey. The Thompsons are deeply in favour of hybrid models (digital-human) as they move toward being truly generative. Peter cautions using digital technologies for its own sake, and insists that *"*technology should enhance our people, not replace them*"*.

Peter Thompson is an early adopter and national thought leader in digital technology adoption for regenerative agriculture (see Figure 2). Even before digital technology was commonplace on farms, Peter was using tramline farming in the 1980's to reduce soil compaction and overlap in cropping situations, which reduced inputs such as fuel, seed, fertiliser and herbicide, and helps to achieve Target 15.1 to conserve and restore terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems. Tractors moved to being GPS-guided in the early 90's. With a passion for mapping, Peter integrated high resolution aerial photography with satellite mapping to ensure his "eyeometer" was farming the potentially erodible slopes in a manner that, in his words "would keep the paddock in the paddock".

Not one for convention, Peter developed a farming method that saw him remove costly and highly interventionist contour banks on old cultivations; these banks were also not needed in new developments. He did this by reading the land, then using the longest, straightest planting runs within the natural contour constraints, utilised the natural gullies and watercourses to safely carry excess water ("just as nature had designed them"). This resulted in higher rainfall infiltration leading to higher yields and little-to-no erosion on cropping paddocks. These uses of technology to work with rather than against the land contributes directly to Target 15.3 to end desertification.

Other technologies also enhance the capacity of Echo Hills to contribute to SDG targets by enabling the team to track some of their activities and measure some of the impact they are having on the land through interventions. For example, soil testing, pasture sampling, and dung sampling technologies are used to observe trends (i.e. soil carbon or fertility changes over time) and inform land and animal management practices. Farmbot is used for monitoring of water tanks and water consumption by stock. Combined with "warm data" (e.g. human observation of manure shape, dung beetle activity, insect activity, soil condition, koala scratchings) these datasets help the Thompsons make choices that help conserve and restore water (Target 15.1), land (Target 15.3) and habitat (Target 15.5).

A continuing mantra in Australian agriculture is "you can't manage what you can't measure", as stated in 2023 by Tony Mahar, then CEO of National Farmers Federation (NFF, 2023). However, Peter and Nikki do not subscribe to this instrumentalist view of farming and land management; it is counter-intuitive to their philosophy of working in collaboration with nature, which cannot be controlled absolutely, though some farming systems may attempt this. Instead, the Thompsons view digital technologies as powerful tools to assist in decision-making but not automate it. This broadly aligns SDG#15 in terms of living on land in harmony with it, rather than seeking to dominate it.

Figure 2: Peter Thompson operating GPS and autosteer on the Quadtrac tractor.

What next for Echo Hills Farm and SDG#15?

A major change the Thompsons are working towards is a redefinition of land management from ownership to stewardship. Just as Indigenous cultures saw the land as owning them, rather than the other way around, the Echo Hills team is looking at new models that include self-owning land and the concept of tradeable digital twins. This is very 'outside the box' thinking in the current economic reality, but these concepts are gaining traction. In the current economic system that is market driven and externalises nature in general, those working in agriculture are not only producers of food and energy but are also undervalued custodians of natural resources. Future models need to embrace that diversity and realise that there will never be black and white, one size fits all answers to the deep questions that Nature poses.

Broadening the concept of family is something else the Thompsons see as an important step forward for the family farm. This includes connecting with like-minded and open-hearted others who share a common passion and bring their unique skills to the table. Honest communication and a willingness to be wrong and to continually learn and grow are critical, replacing old ideas of intergenerational succession or selling the farm as the only options. They say, "we see our farm as a place to help grow understanding and practical custodian skills. A place to learn and grow self, others, food and our relationships to Earth. A place where the business-as-usual model can be challenged through the lens of how natural systems work rather than dictated by human constructs that externalise and devalue nature."

They plan to use the Principles of the Earth Charter (Earth Charter, 2024) as guidelines moving forward.

1) Respect the Earth and all its diversity
2) Care for the community of life with understanding, compassion and love
3) Build democratic societies that are just, participatory, sustainable and peaceful
4) Secure Earth's bounty and beauty for present and future generations.

The Thompsons say, "this feels like a life well lived."

Figure 3: Welcome sign made by Peter Thompson. Description needed

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