





# PRODUCER SPOTLIGHT

with your NSW North West RALFCs



John and Sam Stokes  
'Alveston' and  
Dirty Crazy  
Duri

## Quick Facts

-  Interview with John and Sam Stokes, owners of 'Alveston' and Dirt Crazy at Duri (near Tamworth)
-  Lamb and bees wax enterprises with 350 ewes and 6 beehives!
-  Paddock to plate produce and cosmetics part of diverse farming business
-  Philosophy - soil is the foundation of farming



**Tell me a bit about yourselves and your farming enterprises.**

We have a passion for restoring life to the landscape and after searching for two years, we finally found the property 'Alveston' on 197ha at Duri, near Tamworth in North West NSW. We have been here 11 years and are excited about nurturing natural processes using holistic management to assist the farm in recovering from more traditional methods. With profit as a key driver, we have established a fat lamb enterprise with 350 ewes – we bunch animals and give paddocks up to six months recovery time. We have the aim of running 500 – 600 ewes in the future, once our pastures and soils have been regenerated sufficiently.

Wanting to reduce food miles, supply a product with a story, whilst restoring health and life back into soils, we have established our paddock to plate grass fed lamb business where customers can buy directly from the farm.

As a way of diversifying our farming business, we also established a natural cosmetics enterprise born from nurturing bee hives. Wax from the hives is used to make lip balm and aluminium free deodorant, along with other ingredients that support other farmers, ease poverty and empower women.

**How did you set up your paddock to plate and cosmetics business?  
What was the trigger?**

Our enterprises have evolved over time with the aim of a profitable business whilst restoring the landscape. We had a strong desire to nurture local communities and wanted to give the community the opportunity to buy our produce rather than supplying it to a commodity market. This way we can receive direct feedback about our lamb.

Long term we would like to set up a butchering facility on farm in line with our vision to reduce food miles. We are also in conversation with butchers in Tamworth with a view to co-brand our product (cont. over page)



**Restoring Life to Landscapes**

We have a keen interest and passion in helping others – get in touch to learn more or purchase a lamb pack and cosmetics!

Website: [www.alvestonpastoral.com.au](http://www.alvestonpastoral.com.au)  
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Facebook and Instagram

Starting out with a few bee hives during the drought and after supplying cosmetics to family and friends, we then launched this arm of the farming business after researching the best way to keep the hives. The warre method is a beehive set-up that mimics nature using static hives in a biodiverse environment and negates the use of chemical to manage pests and diseases.

We are also exploring the use of by-products from the butchering of lamb with a view to incorporating lamb tallow into our cosmetics. Lamb tallow is less irritating for those with skin conditions and using by products from the butchering process minimises waste.

### Did you have any challenges in setting up these enterprises?

The biggest challenge is mindset. We keep asking ourselves why we do things a certain way. We were challenged by traditional thinking – for example the docking of lambs tails. We started leaving ewe lambs undocked for productivity gains and improved animal welfare. Improved muscle strength has reduced prolapse and better sun protection has led to less cancers. It is a piece of mind knowing that we can tell customers that animal welfare is a big part of the product story.

Maintaining an open mindset is key – we have successfully broken the worm cycle and haven't drenched for about 4 years (apart from the drenching of quarantined new stock). It doesn't mean we won't use drench at all, it just means we use it with caution.

### What support did you need in making the change? Did you do training/use consultants/review research etc?

There is more to farming than production and one of the biggest drivers to ensuring a successful business is continual learning. We have undertaken a Diploma of Holistic Management and are currently involved in the Farm Owners Academy which focuses heavily on personal development, goals, business coaching and planning. The key has been doing everything together – by going through this learning as a team, we are much better placed to make the best decisions for our farming business. Continual learning, leads to continual improvement. Benchmarking is critical, particularly when looking at your time and inputs. We are continually learning and applying our new knowledge – it's important to not rest on our laurels and be content with old methods used. We are also connected to fantastic like-minded people through various networks including the Bubbogullion 100 Landcare group and the Regen Ag Mentor Program. Other farmers have also been great mentors along the way.

### Why is it important to focus on soils as a key driver in your farming business?

Soil is the foundation of any farming enterprise and the foundation of our society. It is so important to change our dirt to soil – it is a complex system which supports life. Soil biology is crucial to our farming business – we will be using compost tea and johnson-su compost to improve soil biology along with current managed grazing to ensure groundcover is maintained and there are living plants in the soil. Healthy soil really is a key component of keeping our business profitable and able to withstand external fluctuations such as seasons and commodities.

### What is the best piece of advice you have been given? And what advice would you give to others starting out?

- 🐝 Have a go, keep records and monitor (if it's not measured you can't change)
- 🐝 If you are committed, you will succeed
- 🐝 Be involved with a group of likeminded individuals to maintain enthusiasm when things get tough
- 🐝 Tell people what you are doing – accountability keeps enthusiasm, focus and drive



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