

Supported Landcare Action Works!

A small investment assisting an innovative farmer develop an idea can have far-reaching benefits. The \$35,394 National Landcare Program funding awarded through South West Catchments Council enabled a multi-year trial that is having a cumulative impact.

Manjimup producer, Doug Pow, in collaboration with Warren Catchments Council, incorporated biochar into the rhizosphere of avocados. Two matched rows of 36 Hass trees – a control row and a treatment row of 5%, 10%, 20%v/v- were planted in November 2014.

Very quickly it was apparent trees in biochar of any application rate were growing faster than their matched controls which were performing to industry expectations. So dramatic was the accelerated growth rate and maturity, producers have adopted this practice in planting tens of thousands of avocado trees. Other tree crops have also incorporated biochar – 36ha of citrus, stonefruit, walnuts, figs, tamarillos, kiwifruit, apples.

The first harvest this summer, at the conclusion of the trial, indicates trees growing in biochar are producing higher than 250% more fruit than the control trees. Doug Pow is continuing to tissue test strategic trees and maintain records should researchers wish to unravel the mysteries of this dramatic difference and to explore other parameters the original budget precluded.



Fruit from the 36 trees in the control row filled a bin – it only took 13 trees growing in biochar to fill the second bin.

The rate of application and increasing diversity of its use is signalling the need to establish a local biochar processing facility.

Doug Pow was recognised as a Soil Health Champion in 2015's International Year of Soil celebration. The small landcare grant enabled a testing programme and the extension support to share his innovation across sectors of the sustainable agriculture industry.



Doug Pow, centre, discusses the trial with farmers, some who travelled many kilometres to attend.

For more information contact Warren Catchments Council's trial project officer, Kathy Dawson kathy.dawson@warrenc.org.au.

Footnote: The biochar 'fines' sourced for this trial were essentially by-products from Simcoa Pty Ltd's high-quality charcoal production, made from *Eucalyptus marginata* (jarrah).