

Cattle and the Environment

To produce the best beef in the world, Australia's cattle producers use the latest technology along with over 200 years of experience as caretakers of the land.



For anyone who lives off the land, taking care of the environment is the most important part of their day's work – without a healthy environment their livelihood is at risk. Our cattle producers have been finding new and better ways to live in harmony with their environment. They have bred more efficient herds and now they produce more meat from fewer animals.

Here are just some of the ways our cattle producers make sure the land is preserved for generations to come.

Soils and vegetation

Although in the past some agricultural land was cleared, these days farmers understand the importance of balancing plant, animal, insect and bird life with agriculture.

A healthy ecosystem helps keep soils, grass and trees healthy and keeps weeds away.

Trees and plants not only provide a home, shade and food for animals, birds and insects, they also help to stop soil erosion. Without trees and plants, the soil has nothing to hold it together and is in danger of washing away when rain falls.

Many of our cattle feed on pastures that are of little value for alternative food production, like the sort of grazing land found in northern Australia. In the south where crops are grown, farmers can use cattle grazing to rest paddocks from crops, helping to keep the soil healthy.



Water

The amount of water consumed by an animal to produce 1kg of beef is between 100–400 litres depending on environmental conditions and the productivity of the farm.

If you calculate all the rain that falls in an area where cattle are raised then the figure rises to around 50,000 litres. But that rain will still fall whether there are cattle there or not, so to say it takes that much to produce a kg of beef is not really correct.

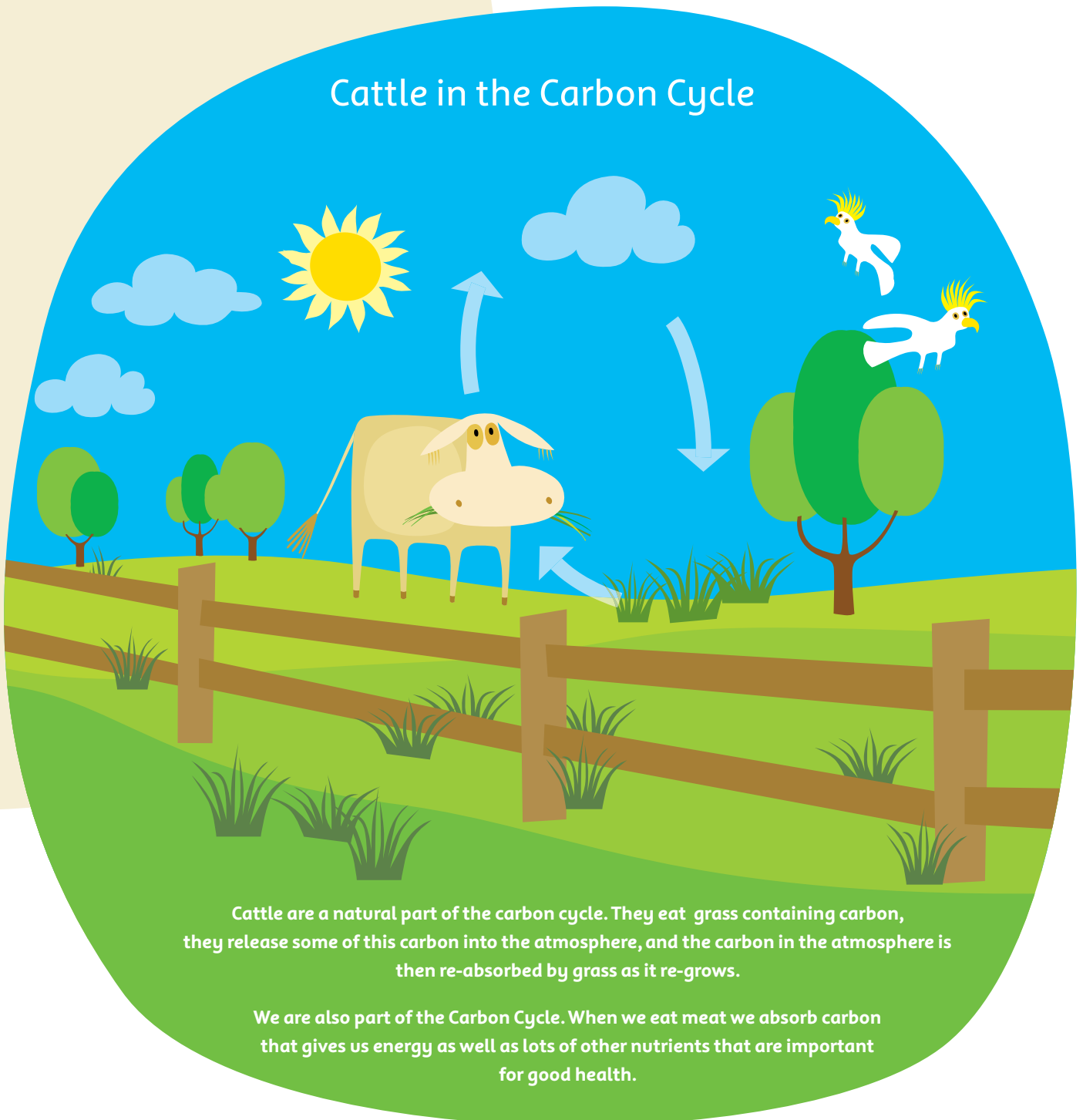
Greenhouse gas

Cattle have four stomachs to help them digest the grasses they eat. The first stomach, called the rumen, holds grass that is only partly chewed – this is called the 'cud'. They keep the cud in the rumen, then burp it up and chew it again before digesting it – and that's known as 'chewing the cud'.

When they bring the cud up they emit methane, a greenhouse gas, from their rumen.

Unlike many other countries, in Australia our cattle generally graze on extensive, natural pastures which help to capture carbon dioxide, another greenhouse gas. The capture of carbon by plants and storing in the soil is known as 'sequestration'.

Cattle in the Carbon Cycle



There are many animals that are ruminants, they include: cattle, camels, giraffes, bison, deer, sheep, alpacas, yaks, wilderbeests, goats, llamas, buffalo, water buffalo, antelope.

What are we doing to be even better?

Although carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere are rising, methane concentrations are stable. However, cattle producers will still look for ways to reduce methane emissions.

Using genetics and science, farmers are breeding cattle that process their food more efficiently and so produce less gas, and scientists have developed special food rations that can help too.

Our scientists are working to find new ways to further reduce methane emissions, and our cattle producers will continue to improve their breeding programs and will keep planting trees and pastures that help look after the soil, the air and their cattle.

Quick facts

Although carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere are rising, methane concentrations are stable.

Agriculture is the only sector to have reduced its greenhouse gas emissions.

By 2001, Australian farmers had planted around 20.6 million trees. With each farmer planting around 150 each year, that number keeps growing.

The amount of water consumed by an animal to produce 1kg of beef is between 100-400 litres.

Agriculture's emissions are down by 6% compared with Stationary Energy – up 36%, Transport – up 30% and Industrial – up 16%.

The trees and plants that grow where cattle graze provide a home, shade and food for other animals, birds and insects, and they help keep the soil healthy.

