



Taking garden composting methods and applying them to her cattle property has been a great success for Sally Chappell.

Sally Chappell

SHANNON VALE STATION, GLEN INNES, NSW.

SALLY AND GREG Chappell had only been on their property, Shannon Vale, for six months in 2000 when they had to send cattle off for agistment, where graziers pay to have their stock taken in and fed, because their drought-affected pasture couldn't feed them.

"The neighbours must have been thinking, 'These people have brought the drought demons. We don't need them'," says Sally, 54.

It took them three years and thousands of dollars spent on chemical fertilisers before Greg realised they were at a tipping point. "Greg looked at me and said, 'There has to be a better way. People put mulch on their gardens and the gardens improve. There's got to be something like that we can do,'" says Sally.

A little research told them that if they treated their property more like a suburban garden they might find a solution. They were hesitant - "Mind-locked to the dominant ways of fertilise or else," says Sally - but finally committed themselves to three years of composting and mulching to both revitalise the soil and get rid of a massive weed problem that was threatening to strangle their livelihoods.

The compost is tailored to each paddock using a base of straw and manure mixed with elements and minerals specific to each area of the farm. Their bulls are now growing up to 30 per cent faster, while their pastures are almost weed-free. "We haven't looked back. It was the best thing we ever did," says Sally.