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There are, broadly speaking, two approaches to Agroforestry R&D: (1) the design and evaluation of preferred "best-bet" options which are then promoted to farmers (usually with cost-share grants), and (2) the facilitation of farmer-led design and evaluation aimed at identifying appropriate systems that reflect each circumstance. Concerned that the former had become the dominant paradigm, I purchased my own farm in 1987. I wanted to demonstrate that agroforestry was not a set of distinct land management options, but a design process that could lead to elegant solutions that fit neatly into the agricultural landscape; a diversity of practices that reflect the diversity inherent within the community. I wanted to make forestry attractive to farmers.

On our own farm, we planted multipurpose forests for conservation, biodiversity and stock shelter and are now harvesting timber, seed and other tree products for our own needs and for sale. In our community, we formed the Otway Agroforestry Network which listens to farmer concerns and aspirations and directs government funds away from cost-share grants into farmer engagement and peer support. At the university, I changed the way Agroforestry was taught and developed a non-accredited farmer course: the Australian Master TreeGrower program which is now being delivered in Africa, Southeast Asia and in the Pacific.

Recognising the need to engage farmers¬–alongside researchers, industry and government–in the diagnosis and design of appropriate systems challenges much of the conventional thinking about agroforestry research, education, extension, profitability and policy. It requires powerful stakeholders to be willing to 'let go' of their preferred options and acknowledge that it is the farmers that ultimately make the land management decisions that will determine how their land is managed and the products and services it provides, or the lack of them.