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## BROWNLOW HILL CASE STUDY SOCIAL REPORT

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### Colonial Heritage

The current owners of Brownlow Hill, Edgar and Lynne Downes, are the fifth generation to call Brownlow Hill home. As one might expect the sense of responsibility and attachment to this property is strong.

The original homestead has undergone renovations to restore the property and the gardens to respect the property's colonial past, and their home is a reminder of a time when craftsman built a dwelling from the resources at hand - sandstone, hardwood timbers and originally a shingle roof.

### All in the Family

Edgar and Lynne Downes have three children, Henry, Max and Clare. They grew up on the farm and the sense of belonging remains, with all children contributing to the farm. Henry is employed full time on the farm, Max is working part time on the property and Clare uses the revered garden setting for an annual music festival.

Brownlow Hill is a stacked enterprise, with two working dairies, irrigated cropping, Bio banking, quarrying, movie making and music festivals all competing for time and resources. Edgar holds regular meetings to discuss business matters and address the multitude of tasks that need to be managed. Three adult children are working cooperatively to run the complex business. Succession planning and the gradual increase in responsibility handed over to the children will ensure that future generations of the Downes clan continue to manage this property.

Edgar is patriarch, farm manager and overseer, organising work, dealing with external parties, managing staff and contracts. Lynne manages the family and household duties while Henry is working the farm, managing stock, irrigating crops and pasture and Max manages the accounts and Bio Banking operations. Clare is the social media and events manager.

Every year the family holds a reunion, welcoming extended members back to the homestead. It's a time to reflect on the legacy that is Brownlow Hill and to catch up on family matters. It's important to Edgar that his extended family spends time at the property. They might not be able to live together but the sense of custodianship bestowed on Edgar is real.

### Urbanisation

Brownlow Hill is on the doorstep to Australia's largest city Sydney. A burgeoning population needs land for housing, infrastructure and recreation, and subdivisions within the Camden shire looked like swallowing up the quaint rural setting that was Brownlow Hill. Coal seam gas exploration licenses

covered large tracts of land around Camden and Campbelltown. Fracking using gas meant that this may have affected the water table and compromised the dairy and irrigated cropping parts of the business.

The Downes opposed coal seam gas exploration in their area, and lodged a claim in the Land and Environment Court, where they were successful in gaining heritage status for the Brownlow Hill Estate.

## Community

The family has been active members of the community, heavily involved in agricultural shows including the Royal Easter and Camden Shows, the Holstein Association, Rural Fire Service and local government. A new generation and a new opportunity saw daughter Clare start a music festival called “The Secret Garden”, which opens up the Estate to a hoard of young people attending the property to enjoy music, with all profits going to local charities.

As surrounding land has been gradually transformed into housing, the field days that used to be held on the farm no longer take place, but there still is strong demand from the public to gain access to Brownlow Hill. Garden clubs, including members of the Royal Botanic Garden, bird enthusiasts and bee keepers all request access to the Brownlow Hill natural asset.

The family pursues creative arts including music, theatre, galleries and movies. In particular, Brownlow Hill has been the setting for movies and advertising, offering local people the opportunity to fill in as extras.

## Content

Now that the coal seam gas and subdivision issues have been solved and revenue from Bio Banking has settled any debt with some left over to fund refurbishment of the homestead and gardens, times are good for the Downes.

The family works together to achieve farm objectives. They share a common sense of purpose, set goals and communicate regularly to ensure each member knows their role and expected contributions.. All staff (including family) keep a timesheet and receive entitlements and having each person working in specialist areas in which they excel, ensures clear expectations around accountability and gains in efficiency.

## Goal Setting

When it comes to goal setting, retention of the farm is of utmost importance. The sixth generation to call Brownlow Hill home may have to face a different set of challenges, but this current generation of the Downes family has a clear future and sense of responsibility. Working with family, running a successful business and leaving the farm in good or better condition rate highly.

## Future

With Sydney on its doorstep and a growing demand for chemical free produce, Brownlow Hill is well placed to take advantage of a growing market. The premium for organic milk is significant and something the Downes will investigate further.

Another benefit of proximity to the city is that some waste products can be used to benefit rural properties. In this case, stable waste from metropolitan race courses serve as a rich source of nutrients for the soil, increasing organic matter and water retention with additional carbon and nitrogen.

There is also the possibility of appropriate trade waste from the local council being piped to the farming district. This would boost the productivity or bottom line for the farm and solve a waste problem for local government.

The Cumberland plain woodland is a rare and endangered ecological community. With future demands for building blocks on the increase, securing this threatened habitat has allowed farmers to benefit from Bio banking, essentially offsetting development blocks with parcels of significant land that safeguard the biodiversity from future development.