



pulse
of
the
paddock

The background of the page is a photograph of a man wearing a brown hat and a blue shirt, walking through a field of golden wheat. The sky is filled with soft, grey clouds. The title "pulse of the paddock" is overlaid on the image. "pulse" is written in a light-colored, cursive script, while "of the paddock" is in a white, clean, sans-serif font. A thin white line resembling an ECG pulse runs horizontally across the middle of the image, passing behind the text.

FROM THE CEO'S DESK



Rural Aid's Pulse of the Paddock survey is an invaluable snapshot straight from the farmers' mouths. The results are both sobering and heart-warming. Almost 700 farmers responded to the Rural Aid survey. It's the biggest farmer survey Rural Aid, Australia's most trusted rural charity, has undertaken.

A few numbers really stand out.

It is a wake-up call that 70% of respondents said they had considered selling their farm in the past year due to ongoing challenges like market fluctuations, natural disasters and financial pressures.

This speaks to the toll that consecutive disasters have taken on our bush communities. It's a number that every Australian should listen to and act on. We must take our farmer's fears seriously and help them stay on the land.

Another lesson from this survey is that mental health remains a challenge in the bush. 76% of farmers rated their mental health as poor, very poor or average. Only 24% described their mental health as good or very good. One in two farmers said their mental health has declined in the past 12 months.

An open-ended question about improving food supply chains garnered the most responses. The overwhelming majority of farmers suggested cutting out 'middlemen' along the food supply chain as a solution to easing their financial pressures in this department.

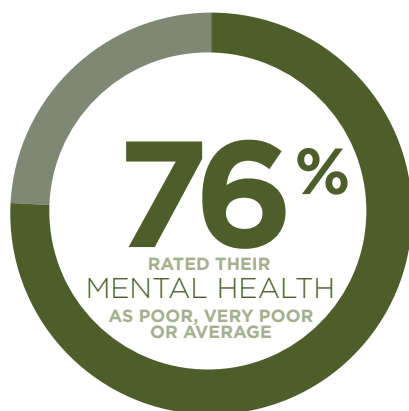
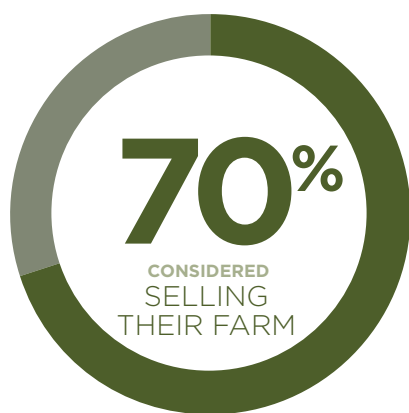
In more positive news, the surveyed farmers were fiercely thankful to Rural Aid and its supporters, with many grateful farmers describing the organisation as 'life-changing', 'amazing', and 'vital'.

Agriculture contributes billions to the Australian economy. At last count, the gross value of ag production sat at \$94 billion. 257,000 people are employed by agricultural industries (ABARES).

This sentiment is welcomed. There's still a huge need for Rural Aid to stand with our mates in the bush.

I invite you to reflect on the numbers in this report - remember that every plate tells a story, and thank a farmer the next time you sit down for a meal.

John Warlters
RURAL AID CEO



ABOUT THE SURVEY

Rural Aid's Pulse of the Paddock survey was conducted in **February 2024** and was a mix of open-ended & multiple choice questions.



680
FARMERS
PARTICIPATED



95%

WERE PRIMARY PRODUCERS



35%

1001-10,000 ACRES

41%

101-1000 ACRES

258
SHEEP
PRODUCERS



133

BROADACRE CROPPING,
FRUIT,
VEGETABLE,
DAIRY,
POULTRY,
AQUACULTURE
& VITICULTURAL

490

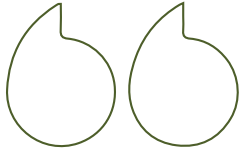
CATTLE PRODUCERS

MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING

Mental ill-health is a huge barrier to farmer success & recovery

The majority of farmers named **financial pressure** as the major reason their **mental health declined** over the past 12 months.

70 per cent of respondents said they had considered **selling their farm** in the past year due to ongoing challenges like market fluctuations, natural disasters and financial pressures.



Rural Aid are there when you are at your lowest.

Their care and support are crucial in times of stress relating to unplanned events on farm.

The first step is to reach out and then someone takes your hand. My husband and I are very appreciative.



FARMER REFLECTION

MARKETS & SUPPLY CHAINS

Market fluctuations dominate farmer fears

The most answered open-ended question on the survey was about improving produce supply chains, with **599 responses**.

The overwhelming majority of farmers suggested **cutting out 'middlemen'** along the food supply chain as a solution to easing their financial pressures in this department.

FARMER REFLECTION



I get there are costs between buying off the farmer and selling to consumer, but honestly help the people producing this food before it is totally uneconomical and then no one wants to do it.



THINKING ABOUT THE YEAR TO COME:



SUSTAINABILITY

The majority of farmers are pursuing sustainable practices to build greater resilience into their businesses.



The ways they were becoming more sustainable were:



Planting trees



Rotational grazing



Reducing chemical use



Increasing water points



Fertilising, mulching & compost improvements



Increasing water security



Diversifying grasses



Erosion control

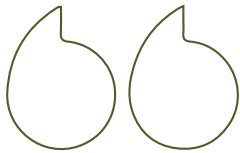


Minimal tillage

The results also underscored a strong desire among our farmers to deepen their understanding of sustainable agricultural practices.

Topics such as soil enrichment, farm resource management, and livestock care were highlighted as areas of keen interest.

FARMER REFLECTION



We are presently trying to improve our capabilities towards more eco-friendly ie: organic, practices



SUSTAINABILITY

Fifth-generation farmer, and Rural Aid board member, Erica Halliday, said the sentiment from farmers about sustainability might challenge a few stereotypes.

"Sometimes as farmers we feel we're being blamed for climate change, when no one has more at stake than farmers," she said.

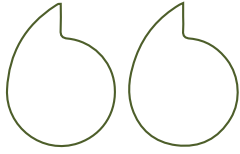
"I don't know a single farmer that isn't trying to do the best by the land. We're living and learning, but if anyone's going to make a real difference, it's actually going to be us farmers," the Walcha farmer said.



RURAL AID'S IMPACT

Rural Aid makes a positive impact in farmers' lives.

FARMER REFLECTION



Rural Aid, in a time of hardship, provided us enough feed to get our breeders through the times of hardship, when our personal finances were unable to cover the costs.

Rural Aid saved our family business!"



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