

*pulse*  
of the  
**paddock**

RURAL AID'S FARMER SURVEY REPORT  
PULSE #2 | FEBRUARY 2025

# FROM THE CEO'S DESK



THE second annual Pulse of the Paddock report provides the collective voice of almost 700 Rural Aid registered farmers from across Australia.

This report provides a candid insight into many of the challenges farmers confront on a daily basis, particularly when it comes to their mental health and wellbeing, aided and abetted by ongoing financial pressure which continues to weigh heavily on families – especially those impacted by recent disaster events.

The Pulse of the Paddock tells us that all is not well on the farm, with one in five producers (21pc) stating that their mental health and wellbeing declined during the previous 12 months, while 58 percent of respondents said their mental health is average or below.

Fundamentally, if our food producers are stressed and anxious, this represents a significant challenge for agriculture and our nation. That fragility costs lives, can fracture families and put personal relationships under enormous strain, increases the risk of work related injuries and can compromise good decision making when managing a successful and profitable farming enterprise.

The report confirms and highlights the critical need for rural mental health services. Rural Aid, through its team of locally based rural counsellors, is an important part of the solution and can play an even greater role with additional resourcing support.

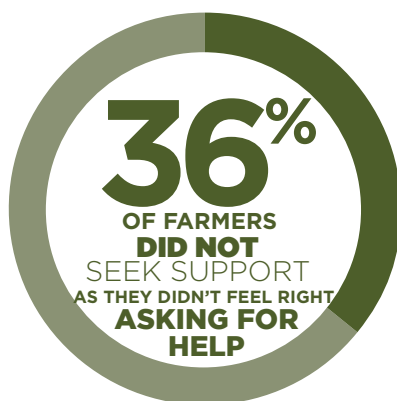
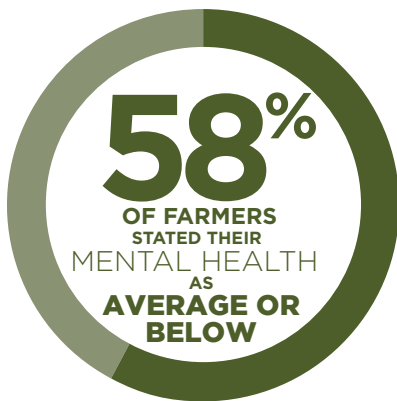
The Pulse of the Paddock also tells us that attitudes on the farm towards mental health and wellbeing are changing – even if slowly. There is a shift, at least within Rural Aid's cohort of registered farmers, towards an increased willingness to talk about their issues and a new-found confidence to reach out for support.

Encouragingly, one-third of surveyed farmers reported a shift in their attitude towards accessing support. Producers said they were not only more aware of available services, but accessibility to those services was improving and the increasing openness in talking about mental health was helping to break down barriers.

Seventy-five percent of farmers said they would reach out to a counsellor for support for their families and 61pc of survey respondents said they would do likewise for support for themselves.

Let's keep the momentum going and commit to continuing the conversation. It can and is making a difference.

John Warlters  
RURAL AID CEO



# ABOUT THE SURVEY

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



**687**  
FARMERS  
PARTICIPATED



**96%**

WERE PRIMARY PRODUCERS



**39%**

1001-10,000 ACRES

**40%**

101-1000 ACRES

**271**

SHEEP  
FARMERS



**211**

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

**476**

CATTLE FARMERS

Note: farmers may be represented more than once.

# MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING



*Mental health is becoming more talked about. I come from a family where you never talked about anything, just worked harder. Farming is always weather dependent, but the last few years have really proved to be very challenging—from ongoing drought to raging fires, then flooding back-to-back.*



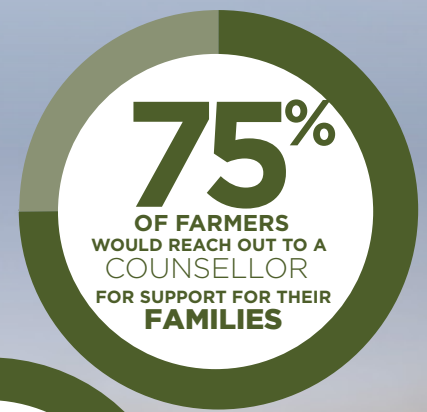
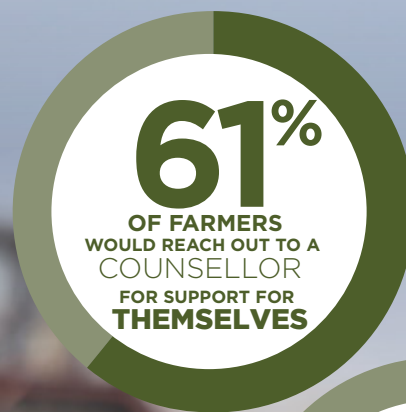
*Reaching out and using Rural Aid has given me so many tools to use and equally someone to reach out and talk to.*

*Speaking to someone with an outside perspective is awesome.*



Mental health in rural areas is shaped by a combination of environmental, financial, and personal circumstances. Experiences vary widely, with some farmers demonstrating resilience and finding support, while others continue to face significant struggles.

- Over the past 12 months, one-third of surveyed farmers reported a shift in their attitude towards accessing mental health support.
- For many, this change reflects an increasing openness to talking about mental health, breaking generational norms of silence.

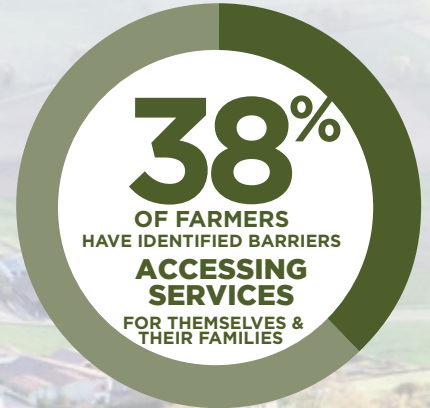
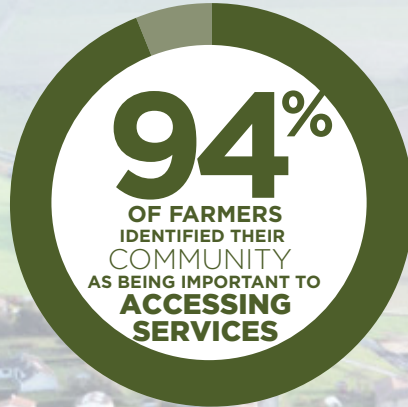


While this is an improvement from the last survey, it still shows that farmers are facing uncertainty and a lack of security that impacts their daily lives.

There is a growing awareness and willingness to engage in conversations about mental health. This highlights the importance of continued support and resources for farmers, their families and rural communities.

# COMMUNITY

Farmers identified that their community is an important part of being able to access services such as; post office, childcare, aged care and doctors.



Barriers identified include:

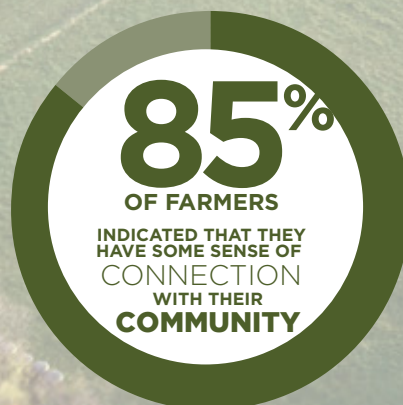
**Isolation:** Long travel times, poor transport, road conditions, and high fuel costs.

**Service Access:** Limited healthcare, specialists, trades, and poor connectivity.

**Financial Pressure:** Low income, high living costs, and restricted support eligibility.

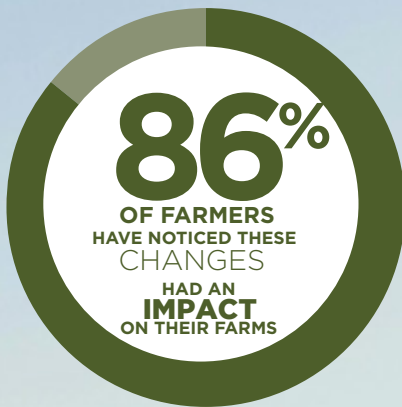
**Time Constraints:** Farming demands and navigating complex processes.

**Additional Challenges:** Mental health gaps, childcare shortages, aging infrastructure, and climate stress.



This highlights the important need for thriving communities for farmers. Connection in the community gives farmers increased social interaction, such as joining sporting committees and agricultural shows. Shared interests leads to a strong sense of community identity.

# SUSTAINABILITY



Many farmers who participated in our recent survey shared that sustainability education courses have led to impactful changes on their farms.

Farmers have noticed these improvements from implementing what they have learnt.

**Healthier Ecosystems:** Improved pastures, soil, and water retention.

**Better Livestock:** Healthier, faster-growing cattle with easier management.

**Efficiency:** Lower costs, reduced chemical use, and tech-driven time savings.

**Resilience:** Drought readiness, rotational grazing, and carbon capture.

**Knowledge Growth:** Enhanced financial and grazing skills, better decisions.

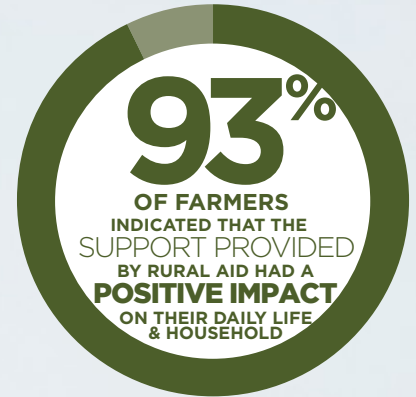
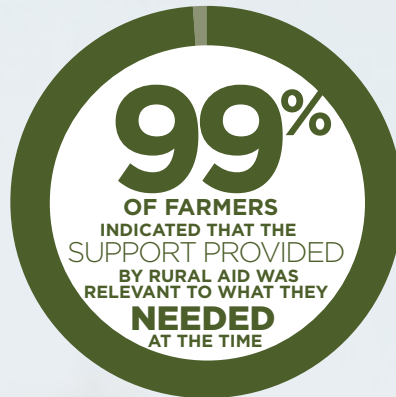
**Increased Yields:** More productive crops and pastures with better feed.

A recurring barrier is the lack of time and financial resources to implement or learn new practices. This highlights a need for accessible, affordable, and flexible training options.

The responses suggest a willingness to learn and adapt, with a strong focus on sustainability, profitability, and resilience in the face of climate challenges.

# RURAL AID'S IMPACT

Rural Aid continues to have a positive impact on farmers' lives.



## THE YEAR AHEAD

More than half of our farmers are cautiously optimistic about what they can achieve this year, despite the hurdles they anticipate. Financial pressure, drought, and market conditions remain the biggest challenges weighing heavily on their minds. Yet, their resilience and determination to press on shine through, even in the face of uncertainty.

However, there is a growing sense of unease. Worryingly, 69% of farmers feel unsure or unprepared to navigate these challenges, underscoring the need for continued, steadfast support and resources. These challenges are not temporary; they require ongoing, collaborative efforts to ensure our farmers not only survive but thrive.

At Rural Aid, we remain unwavering in our commitment to Australia's farmers, their families, and rural communities. Our work is not a one-off solution—it's a constant presence, a partnership that evolves alongside the challenges farmers face. From providing hay, water, mental health and wellbeing to offering volunteer assistance and helping rebuild essential infrastructure like fencing and sheds, we are here for the long haul.

This year, and every year, we stand shoulder to shoulder with our farmers. We understand that the road ahead may be unpredictable and tough, but we also know that through collaboration, dedication, and ongoing support, we can help our farmers overcome any challenge they face. Together, we can build a stronger, more resilient future for rural Australia.





Media contact:  
0447 116 757  
[media@ruralaid.org.au](mailto:media@ruralaid.org.au)

1300 327 624  
[ruralaid.org.au](http://ruralaid.org.au)