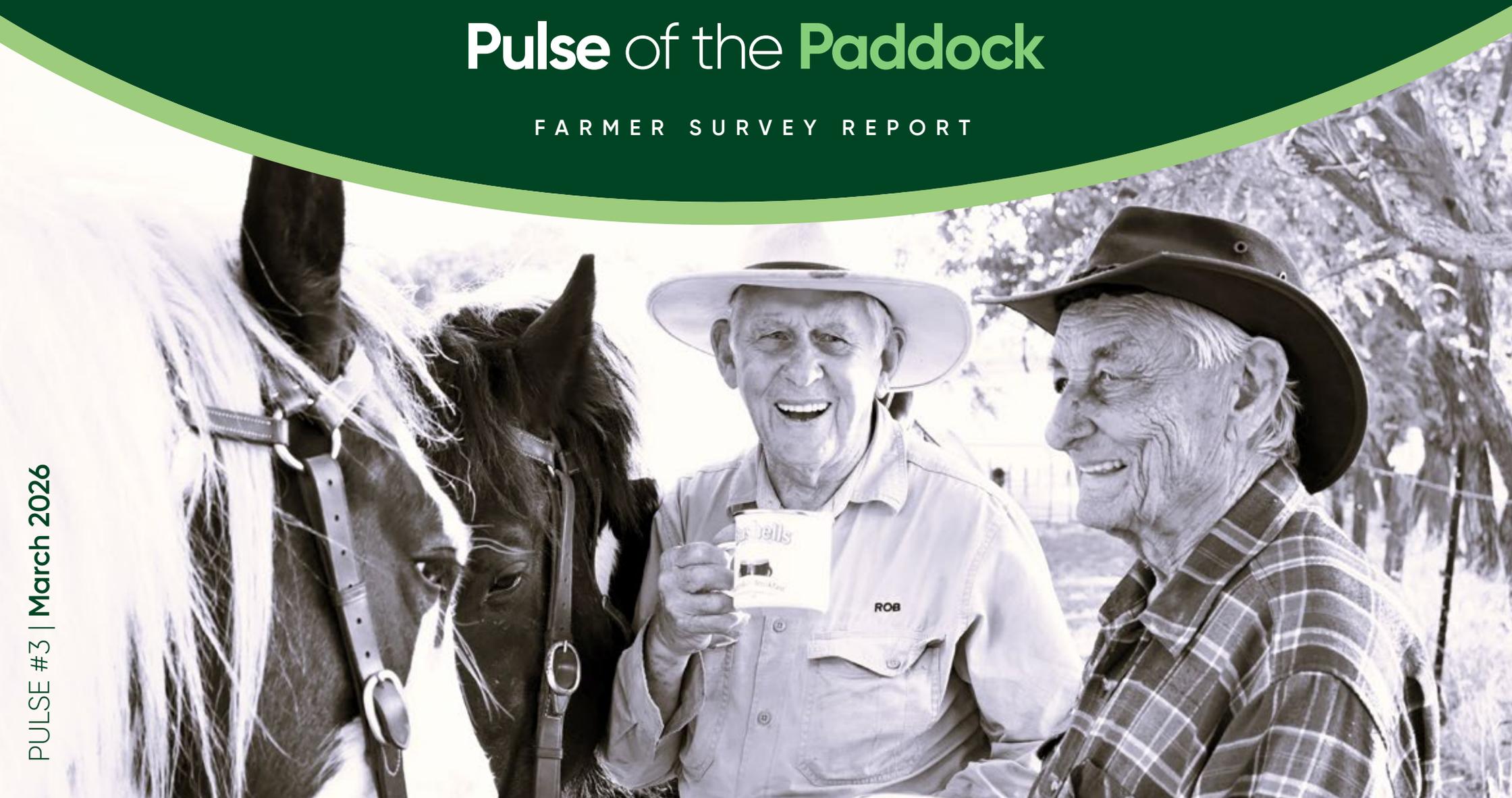




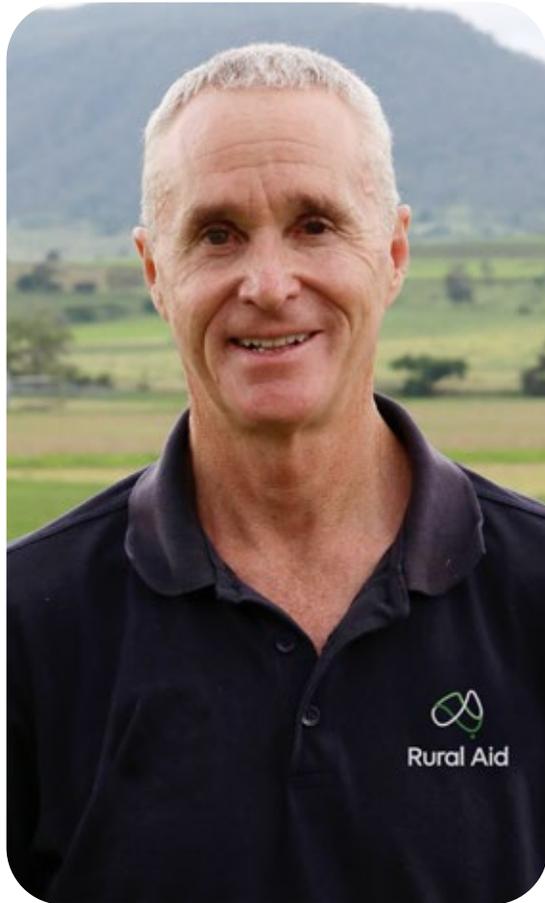
Rural Aid

Pulse of the Paddock

FARMER SURVEY REPORT



From the CEO's desk



I am proud to introduce Rural Aid's third annual Pulse of the Paddock report, a vital reflection of the lived experiences of Australia's farming communities. This report exists because farmers across the country chose to share their experiences and help shed light on the challenges they face every day. Their collective voice provides a clear and compelling insight into the pressures shaping life on the land, and the resilience that continues to underpin our agricultural sector and rural communities.

This year's findings reflect a period of significant challenge across rural Australia. Communities across the country have been impacted by a range of natural disasters and extreme weather events, placing sustained strain on farm viability and household wellbeing. This includes prolonged drought in South Australia and devastating floods in Western Queensland, with many communities navigating recovery alongside ongoing financial and emotional pressure. Together, these conditions highlight the reality that farmers are living with sustained uncertainty, where environmental, economic, and personal pressures intersect.

Participation in the Pulse of the Paddock survey nearly doubled this year, with almost 1,400 farmers taking part. Participants represented every state and territory.

The findings confirm that sustained pressure remains a defining feature of rural life. Disasters, financial stress, succession planning, workforce shortages, and limited access to essential services continue to influence daily decisions and long-term planning. These pressures extend beyond productivity, affecting family relationships, safety on farm, and the mental health and wellbeing of farming households.

Community connection emerges as a critical theme throughout the report. Strong local networks and

neighbour support remain powerful sources of resilience, helping farmers cope during times of uncertainty. At the same time, isolation, population decline, and the loss of local services are weakening these connections in some regions, increasing vulnerability and compounding stress. Where community ties are strong, farmers report greater confidence, wellbeing, and capacity to plan for the future.

Encouragingly, the report also reveals a shift in mindset. While uncertainty remains, farmers are increasingly open about the challenges they face and more willing to seek support earlier. There is growing recognition that personal wellbeing, business sustainability, and environmental resilience are deeply connected, and that long-term stability requires more than responding to a crisis alone.

The impact of timely, practical support is clear. Among farmers who accessed Rural Aid services in the past 12 months, 94 percent reported positive outcomes for their daily life or household. These outcomes are reflected in reduced stress, clearer thinking, stronger relationships, and a renewed sense of control during difficult periods.

This report is not just a measure of where we are now, it highlights the continued and growing need for support across rural Australia. At Rural Aid, we remain committed to providing the right assistance at the right time for farmers, their families and rural communities.

I thank the farmers who contributed their time and voices to this report. Their honesty is what makes the Pulse of the Paddock a meaningful and credible reflection of rural Australia.

John Warlters
RURAL AID CEO

About the Survey

Rural Aid's third Pulse of the Paddock was conducted during October and November 2025 and was a mix of open-ended and multiple-choice questions.



1,358
farmers
participated

Farm Size

14% Less than
100 acres

13% 101-1,000
acres

38% 1,001-10,000
acres

9% More than
10,001 acres

Farming Type

978 Cattle &/or
Dairy farmers

538 Sheep &/or
Goat farmers

306 Broadacre cropping

51 Beekeeping

100 Horticulture &/or
Viticulture

147 Poultry, Aquaculture &
other farming enterprises

Note: farmers may be represented more than once



Each day I get more comfortable talking about my mental health issues and I feel I need to educate and normalise it for my two young children.



Mental Health & Wellbeing

This year's survey reveals a meaningful shift in how farmers approach mental health and wellbeing. Across the country, farmers are increasingly recognising that wellbeing is an essential part of overall health and the long-term sustainability of their farms. At the same time, the data shows that more farmers reported a decline in their mental health than an improvement, highlighting that while awareness is growing, pressures on wellbeing remain significant and ongoing.

Lived experience is driving much of this change. Farmers who have navigated their own mental health challenges, or supported family and community members through difficult periods, report a deeper understanding that these struggles are common, manageable, and deserving of care rather than something to endure alone. Reduced stigma is emerging as a strong theme, with more open conversations taking place within families and communities.

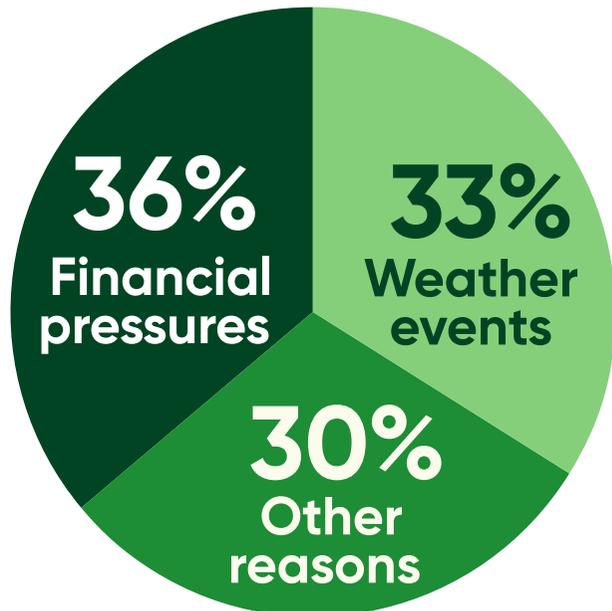
Many farmers are consciously modelling openness for younger generations, seeking to normalise discussions

around mental health and seeking help. This cultural shift is reinforced through initiatives such as Rural Aid's Mustering Growth program, which builds mental health literacy and resilience among children in rural communities, helping to reduce stigma and encourage open conversations from an early age.

The ongoing pressures of farming – including drought, flooding, rising input costs, and prolonged uncertainty – continue to take a toll, reinforcing that wellbeing is inseparable from farming conditions. These challenges extend beyond the individual farmer to the whole family. Many respondents expressed deep concern for their children's futures, particularly around financial stability, access to education, future employment opportunities, and their children's mental health.

While access to services and support remains a challenge for some, farmers report growing confidence that help is available when needed. This reflects a sector that is increasingly willing to acknowledge mental health challenges, seek support, and take proactive steps to protect both their own wellbeing and that of their families.

Main causes of mental health decline:



Farmers reported their mental health over the past twelve months has;

- 14% Improved
- 22% Declined
- 60% Stabilised
- 4% Unsure

65%

of farmers have or would reach out to a counsellor for themselves or their family.

Sustainability

Against a backdrop of increasing climate variability, rising input costs, and ongoing workforce and service constraints, farmers continue to take an active role in strengthening the sustainability of their operations. Across regions and sectors, they are making practical, often incremental changes to stock management, water security, soil and pasture health, and business planning to better manage risk and support long-term viability in an increasingly uncertain operating environment.

Learning remains central to this work. Farmers are engaging training organisations, government agencies, Landcare groups, industry networks, and online resources to build knowledge and skills, with learning translating into on-farm action. These changes are delivering tangible benefits, including improved land health, healthier and more resilient livestock, more efficient resource use, and more informed and confident business decision making.

While progress can be constrained by seasonal conditions, financial pressure, and limited time, curiosity and motivation remain strong. Rural Aid's investment in education and training supports this momentum by reducing barriers to learning, strengthening capability, and helping farmers adapt to complexity while maintaining focus on long-term sustainability.





Community

Community continues to play a critical role in supporting farming families and sustaining rural life. Farmers consistently describe their local communities as essential, providing connection, shared understanding and practical support during periods of ongoing pressure.

Overall levels of community connection remain mixed with 17 percent of farmers report feeling less connected to their community than they did a year ago. This highlights an increasing pressure on social capital, local networks, and trusted relationships that are vital to farmer wellbeing.

Access to services remains uneven across rural and regional Australia. Distance, time pressures, limited availability, and rising travel costs continue to create significant barriers for many farming households, further contributing to feelings of disconnection and isolation.

Rural Aid recognises the importance of strong, connected communities and invests in community development initiatives that strengthen local relationships, support local action, and improve access to essential services across rural Australia.

94%

of farmers identified their community as being important to accessing services

38%

of farmers identified barriers for accessing services for themselves & their families



The damage of drought goes far beyond the physical. It quietly erodes hope because there is no clear end. Our counselling work supports farmers through that uncertainty, helping them feel heard and supported when the pressure becomes overwhelming.

Dorothy Crosby | Rural Aid Counsellor for South Australia

Rural Aid's Impact

Over the past twelve months, Rural Aid has been a steady presence for farming families during some of their toughest moments. For those who reached out, the impact was deeply felt, not just in practical terms, but in the way it eased pressure and restored a sense of hope.

Practical support such as hay and financial assistance mattered, but what resonated most was the reassurance that someone understood. Feeling heard, believed and supported by people who know the realities of farming brought genuine relief. Knowing help was available and that it came without judgement, helped many farmers breathe easier and regain confidence during times of stress and uncertainty.

For some, support arrived before situations became overwhelming, providing comfort and stability when it was needed most. For others, simply knowing that support was there made a meaningful difference, reducing isolation and reminding them they were not facing challenges alone.

Attitudes toward seeking help are continuing to shift. More farmers are willing to reach out, reflecting growing trust and acceptance across rural communities. These experiences highlight Rural Aid's role as more than a provider of assistance. It is a source of connection, reassurance and understanding, standing alongside farmers as they navigate ongoing and unpredictable challenges.

31%

increase in the number of farmers who have accessed the services provided by Rural Aid

99%

of farmers indicated that the support provided by Rural Aid was relevant to what they needed at the time

94%

of farmers indicated that the support provided by Rural Aid had a positive impact on their life & household



66%

of farmers indicated that they feel positive about what they can achieve on their farm over the next 12 months

The Year Ahead



Farmers are facing a future defined by uncertainty. Environmental pressures, from changing weather patterns to extreme events, and financial challenges, including fluctuating markets and rising costs, now both play a significant role in shaping decisions about the year ahead. This underscores how closely these factors are intertwined and the complex environment in which farmers operate.

For many, these pressures exist alongside broader considerations, including wellbeing, family responsibilities and the long-term sustainability of the farm. Smaller operations are particularly exposed, making careful planning essential, even when conditions make it difficult to anticipate what lies ahead.

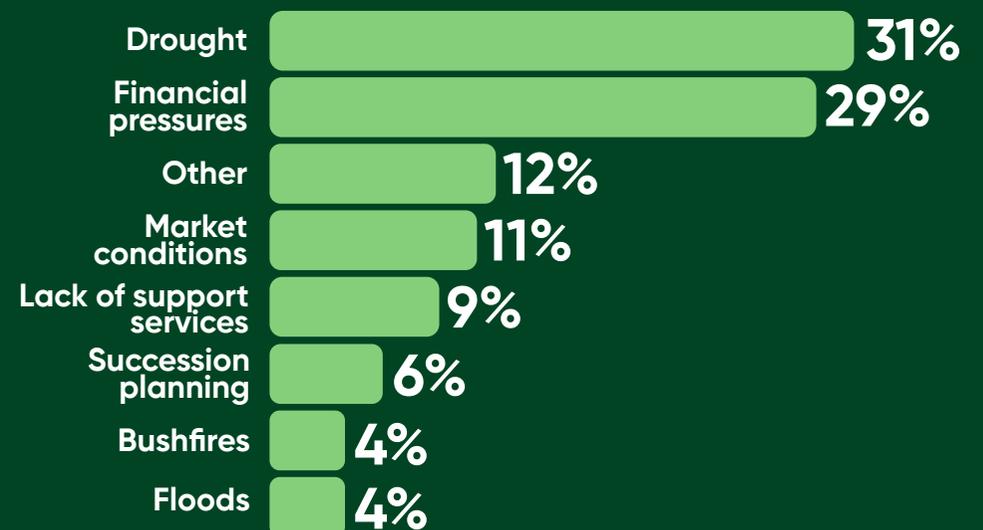
Despite these challenges, there is a clear shift in approach within the industry. Increasingly, farmers are engaging in early, structured planning, focusing on the factors they can manage and influence rather than those beyond their control.

This practical and considered approach is accompanied by a measured confidence in their ability to respond effectively to the year ahead.

While uncertainty remains a constant, farmers are actively preparing and adapting to meet it. They are finding ways to safeguard their operations, make informed decisions and maintain stability in the face of external pressures. Rural Aid remains committed to supporting farmers and their families through these challenges, providing practical guidance, resources, and expertise to help secure both operational strength and long-term viability.

Rural Aid will continue our mission to provide the right assistance at the right time to improve the lives of farmers, their families and rural communities.

Biggest challenge facing farmers over the next twelve months





Rural Aid

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