



An Australian Government Initiative

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Dairy Australia

The mental health of people on Australian farms

The Facts – 2008

Facts and Figures on Farm Health and Safety Series #12



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Australian Centre for Agricultural Health and Safety

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Foreword

The information contained in this booklet summarises currently available data relating to mental health issues in farmers, farm families and others in the agricultural industries in Australia.

This document is a product of the National Farm Injury Data Centre which aims to improve the data and evidence base for agencies and individuals working to reduce risk associated with working and living on farms in Australia, and those who work to improve access to effective mental health services to the rural sector. The publication is available electronically for use by educators and speakers to raise awareness and promote farm safety, and for those whose role is the development of public and industry policy to improve safety in agriculture.

The information contained within the document will also be useful for:

- Defining key hazards associated with agricultural production in Australia
- Defining program needs for agricultural industries throughout Australia
- Developing effective health and safety programs that address key risks.

The project was funded by the research and development corporations contributing to the Farm Health and Safety Joint Venture – Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation, Grains Research and Development Corporation, Australian Wool Innovation Limited, Cotton Research and Development Corporation, Sugar Research and Development Corporation and Meat and Livestock Australia. The Joint Venture is committed to improving the well-being and productivity of the agricultural industries through careful investment in research and development programs that assist industry to manage Occupational Health and Safety risks in a cost effective way.

This report, a new addition to RIRDC's diverse range of over 1800 research publications, forms part of our Human Capital, Communications and Information Systems R&D program, which aims to enhance human capital and facilitate innovation in rural industries and communities.

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Peter O'Brien

Managing Director

Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation

Executive summary

What this report is about

This chartbook provides available relevant data relating to the mental health and wellbeing of the people in agriculture – the changing structure of family farms, the ageing profile of farmers and farm managers, common pressures reported by farmers that are difficult to cope with, available data relating to prevalence of mental health disorders, and suicide data relating to the farming population in Australia.

Target audience

The target audience for this Chartbook includes policy makers, program planners and those who deliver programs that aim to influence the mental health and wellbeing of the farming population in Australia. This will include those in agriculture industries, the health industries, and rural communities.

Background

Farming has long been associated with a unique set of characteristics that can promote great satisfaction with quality of life. However, apart from the well recognised risk of physical injury and accidental death, people living and working on farms are also subject to a number of environmental, climatic, economic and social stressors which may impact on their sense of wellbeing and also on their mental health.

Method

Deaths data was extracted by the National Farm Injury Data Centre from the National Coroner's Information System, research studies, states' Workers Compensation Scheme claims data held by the Australian Safety and Compensation Commission and Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

Findings

Farmers have reported on the pressures on their businesses, their families and themselves that they find most difficult to cope with. Business pressures include finance, drought/weather, meeting government requirements, family pressures, lack of time and recruitment of labour. Family pressures are similar, but relate to family life. Lack of time, and lack of relevant skills such as marketing and computing and IT skills pose difficulties for individuals.

The data indicates that while self-reported levels of distress in farming and rural communities are high, there is need to work with farming families to reduce the high levels of suicide in this sector of the population.

Implications for relevant stakeholders

The data is available for development of strategic approaches to improving and maintaining the mental health and wellbeing of Australian farming people. The NSW Farmers Blueprint for Mental Health is presented to demonstrate one of the most important initiatives being undertaken to address the issue of mental health for Australian farms.

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1. Introduction

Farming has long been associated with a unique set of characteristics that can promote great satisfaction with quality of life. However, apart from the well recognised risk of physical injury and accidental death, people living and working on farms are also subject to a number of environmental, climatic, economic and social stressors which may impact on their sense of wellbeing and also on their mental health.

It is recognised that around one in five people in Australia are affected by a mental health problem annually (Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care and Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 1999). However, only about 38% of adult Australians with a mental disorder receive help for their mental health problem (Andrews et al., 2001). While there is no information available regarding rates of mental health conditions for the farm population, suicide rates of male farmers and employees have been reported as higher than the Australia population (Page and Fragar, 2002).

It is becoming clear that a proportion of the people in agriculture may have unrecognised mental conditions – the commonly occurring conditions being depression and anxiety states. These conditions, in addition to causing significant distress for the individual and for family members, are associated with significant loss of productivity.

Apart from the severe impacts of depression or anxiety states, prolonged psychological stress can have an effect on the ability of people to work and manage their day to day activities. Loss of concentration, exhaustion, effects of medication or alcohol, indecision, and lack of energy are some of the symptoms which can increase the risk of injury to people working in hazardous, isolated environments without supervision and support.

The reasons that some people feel that they can't cope, that some people suffer mental disorders or that some people commit suicide are very complex. Key risks include factors in the life and work environment, as well as genetic and social factors. While medical and mental health services are important for early and effective treatment and relief for those with mental health disorders, treatment interventions alone cannot achieve significant reductions in personal, social and financial burdens associated with mental health problems and mental disorders and therefore interventions are required earlier in the development of these

conditions. Effective action to promote mental health and prevent the development of mental health problems and intervene early in mental disorder requires the cooperation, commitment and partnerships that reach well beyond mental health services (Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care, 2000).

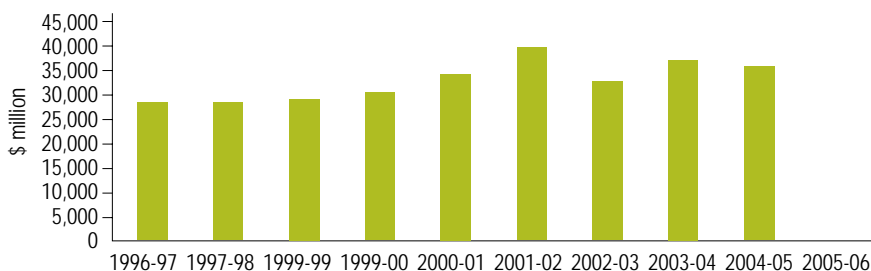
The information presented in this brief publication provides a basis for those who are considering how best to address the objective of improving and maintaining the mental health and wellbeing of the people in agriculture in Australia.

The data was sourced from a range of sources including the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and research projects such as the *Pressures of Farming Project* conducted by the Australian Centre for Agricultural Health and Safety, and drought projects conducted by the NSW Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health.

2. The people and the structure of Australian agriculture

The contribution to the Australian economy by agriculture and horticulture production, measured by gross value of agricultural production was \$35.6 billion at year ending 30 June 2005 (ABS, 2007) (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Value of agricultural production (\$m), Australia 1996/97-2004/05

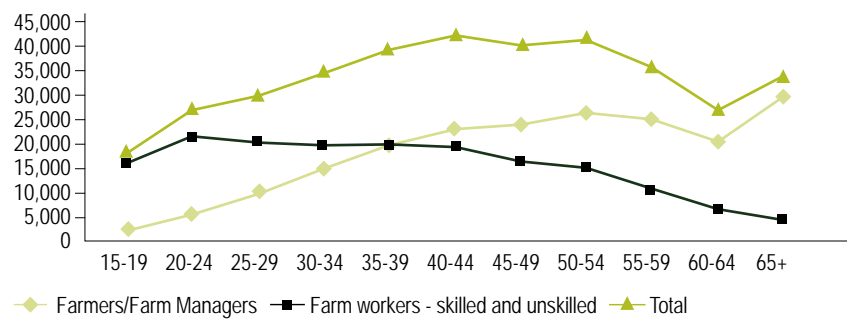


Source: ABS, *Agricultural Commodities, Australia* (7121.0).

In August 2007 there were 181,800 males and 47,800 females employed fulltime in agriculture in Australia, and a total of 310,900 persons including part-time workers. This represented 2.98% of the employed workforce in Australia (ABS, 2007).

The age structure of farmers and farm managers and of those employed in agriculture as reported in the 2001 census is demonstrated in Figure 2.

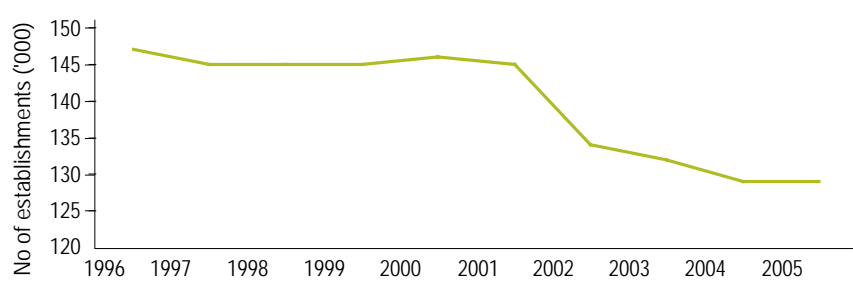
Figure 2: Occupation by age in agriculture and horticulture



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001 Census of Population and Housing.

The Australian agriculture sector experiences continual restructuring in response to changing technical, economic and social conditions. At times the pressures for restructuring are greater – for example during times of high interest rates, when commodity prices are low, and when production is difficult due to drought. The number of farms (Figure 3) and people employed (Table 1) have been declining over time as farm size increases to achieve economies of scale.

Figure 3: The decline in number of agricultural establishments¹ with EVAO >\$5,000 in Australia 1996-2005



Source: ABS, Agricultural Commodities, Australia, (7121.0)

¹ EVAO= Estimated Value of Agricultural Output. Defined in the Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification (ANZSIC), 1993 edition (1292.0).

Table 1: Persons employed* in agriculture and services to agriculture, Australia 2000-2006

Year	Males ('000)	Females ('000)	Total Persons ('000)
2000	284.8	130.8	415.6
2001	269.0	132.4	401.4
2002	278.6	133.6	412.2
2003	239.8	110.0	349.8
2004	236.5	109.2	345.7
2005	227.0	109.7	336.7
2006	224.1	106.8	330.9

Source: ABS, *Labour Force, Australia* (6291.0.55.001).

Note * Employed persons include persons who worked without pay for at least 1 hour per week in a family business or on a farm. Persons working in another industry and in agriculture are classified to the industry of predominant activity.

At 30 June 2005 the majority of the 129,900 businesses with an annual value of agricultural operations of \$5,000 or more classified their primary activity as agriculture (128,515), while the remainder were undertaking agricultural activity as a sideline to another main business. The majority of agricultural businesses were engaged in either beef cattle farming (35,979), mixed grain/sheep/beef farming (17,195), sheep farming (12,956), grain growing (12,719), or dairy cattle farming (9,881) (ABS, 2007).

Combined with the recent decline in the number of people employed in the agriculture sector, these are resulting in *growing physical and social isolation* for those who undertake agricultural production in rural Australia.

Further, as agriculture contributes to a significant degree to the economic base of most rural communities, a decline in numbers of people in the farming sector contributes indirectly to the size of rural towns, availability of services, and ultimately to *access to medical and medical and mental health services*.

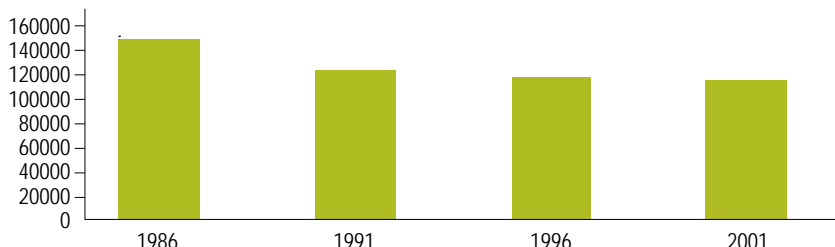
3. Farming families

In 2003 the Australian Bureau of Statistics released a report titled *Australian Social Trends, 2003*, that described changes that have occurred in the demography of family farms in the 15 years between 1986 and 2001 (ABS, 2003). The following information has been derived from that publication.

In 2001, the majority of farms were owned by family-operated businesses, with around 99% of broadacre and dairy farms operated by owner-managers.

During the period 1986 to 2001, the number of farming families (that is those families where the reference person and/or spouse or partner reported that their main job was a farmer) declined by 31,800, or 22% (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Number of farming families reported at census 1986 to 2001, Australia



Source: ABS, 2003.

The ABS report indicated that farming families may leave agriculture for a variety of reasons, including personal (e.g. retirement), economic (e.g. industry restructuring) or environmental (e.g. drought). However, “between 1986 and 2001, the number of farmers leaving agriculture was greatest during periods of high commodity prices, as land values were high and neighbouring farms had the financial capacity to expand.”

Farm family structure

In 2001, over half (54%) of farming families consisted of a couple with children living with them, a greater proportion than for all Australian families (47%).

A further 42% of farming families were couple families without children (compared with 36% of all Australian families). Almost two-thirds of these couple-only families were older couples, where the male partner was aged 55 years or over.

Farmers getting older

“In 2001, 15% of farmers in farming families were aged 65 years and over. In 1986, only 9% of farmers in farming families were aged 65 years and over. The median age of farmers in farming families increased from 47 years in 1986 to 51 years in 2001.”

“In addition to farmers partnering at a later age, fewer young people are becoming farmers.”

Women in agriculture

“Women have always played a key role in Australian agriculture, with activity ranging from livestock care to business management. Women tend to spend less hours on farm work than men, although they may cook for farm workers or undertake farm-related bookkeeping and not report this in the census. Women also complete most of the household work and child care in farming families. Further, women commonly support farming families through gaining off-farm employment to supplement and stabilise family income.” In 2001, one-third (52,500) of farmers in farming families were women. The number of female farmers in farming families decreased by 20,800 between 1986 and 2001.

The majority of female farmers in farming families had male partners who also farmed (87%). However, 10% of farming women in 2001 were farmers when their male spouse or partner was not.

Off-farm income

In 2000-01 off-farm income from all sources was a significant proportion of family income for Australian farming families. “Small farms with lower incomes, rather than medium or larger farms, are more likely to be dependent on off-farm income.” (Table 2).

Table 2: Farming family Income 2000-2001, Australia

Average annual net income per farm	Farm type	
	Broadacre	Dairy
Farm income	30763	44472
Off-farm income	29259	35672
Total family income	60022	80144

(a) For broadacre and dairy farms with an Estimated Value of Agricultural Operations of \$22,500 or more per year (representing 73% of farms of this size).

(b) Includes income earned off-farm from wages and salaries, investments and social security payments

Source: ABARE 2003, Australian Farm Surveys Report 2002.

4. Difficult pressures reported by farmers

Pressures of Farming Project

Information from farmers in north-west New South Wales was gathered as part of a larger Farm Family Business Project undertaken by the Australian Centre for Agricultural Health and Safety during 2002-2003. The project aimed to improve understanding of key pressures on farmers and other people in rural communities who interact with farming families. Farmers and farm family members provided information through a workshop, a series of focus groups and all farmers in 4 shires had opportunity to fill in a questionnaire to contribute to the information. These formed a series of case studies. This summary is derived from the publication by Henderson and Fragar 2007 (In press).

Pressures that are hardest to cope with

Table 3 indicates those ***pressures on the farm business*** that farmers find most difficult to cope with.

Table 3: Key types of business-related pressures reported by farmers

Business-related pressure	Reasons reported for pressure being difficult to cope with
Finance	Lack of money for bills/farm maintenance/ development, high costs, low commodity prices Keeping a viable business
Drought/weather	Severe drought resulting in financial impacts, emotional reaction for loss of stock
Meeting government requirements	Feeling of loss of control over the business, lack of appropriate assistance, compliance difficult
Family	Family needs impacting on business direction- conflict, succession planning
Time	Lack of time to undertake/complete tasks appropriately and/or safely
Employees	Lack of finance to employ, difficulty in attracting and retaining workers, limited skilled workers available

Table 4 indicates those ***pressures on the farm family*** that farmers find most difficult to cope with.

Table 4: Key types of farm family-related pressures reported by farmers

Family-related pressure	Reasons reported for pressure being difficult to cope with
Finance	Family needs not being met including education needs for family
Time	Lack of family time together, having to juggle work and family
Drought/weather	Workload on family members, severity, finance implications and emotional impact of losing stock
Government	Compliance difficult, time required eroding available family time
Family	Needs of family members, conflict, relationships, support, roles, succession planning

Table 5 indicates those pressures that farmers find most difficult to handle as ***individuals***.

Table 5: Key types of individual-related pressures reported by farmers

Individual-related pressure	Reasons reported for why pressure was so difficult to handle
Time	Lack of time for personal relaxation, time for social activities and recreation
Physical/medical	Tiredness, physical demands of workload
Marketing	Lack of skills in marketing application, time
Computer and IT	Lack of skills, time, difficult to grasp concepts

Farmers also reported on the adverse impacts that the difficult pressures are having on the business, the family and themselves (Table 6).

Table 6: Key impacts of prolonged pressures reported by farmers

Impact on:	Nature of adverse impact
Business	Impacts on best management of farm's resources Adverse impact on finances Jobs not getting done efficiently/effectively or safely
Family	Imminent family breakdown Excessive conflict Inadequate finance for family needs Lack of time for family/social
Individual	Adverse mental health and wellbeing Physical impacts- tiredness Time for personal relaxation, social time

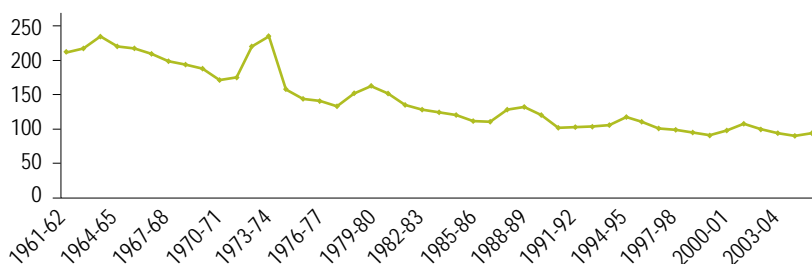
A number of physical, economic and social stressors place external pressures on farm businesses. Australian agriculture is currently experiencing an unprecedented situation in terms of climatic, financial and social factors which are having negative impacts on the mental health of Australian farmers.

Difficult pressures – finance and economic conditions

The pressures reported by farmers do not themselves cause mental ill-health or adverse outcomes. Indeed, a high proportion of the population thrive on meeting difficult challenges in their work or life. However, where a key pressure is unrelieved for long periods, the stress and strain can become intolerable, and certainly add to any other feelings of inadequacy, depression or acute anxiety.

Financial pressures on farm businesses are ongoing. That has long been the feature of operating farm businesses in Australia that are largely family businesses. Figure 5 demonstrates farm terms of trade for Australian agriculture from the early 1960s to the early 2000s. Despite a growing volume of production throughout this period, the value of that production trended to decline. This information represents the aggregate of all farm enterprises, and demonstrates the ongoing economic pressure to maintain viable businesses.

Figure 5: Farmers' Terms of Trade – Australia 1961/62 to 2005/06



Terms of Trade = Ratio of index of prices received by farmers to index of prices paid by farmers.

Source: ABARE 2006, Australian Commodity Statistics 2006, Canberra.

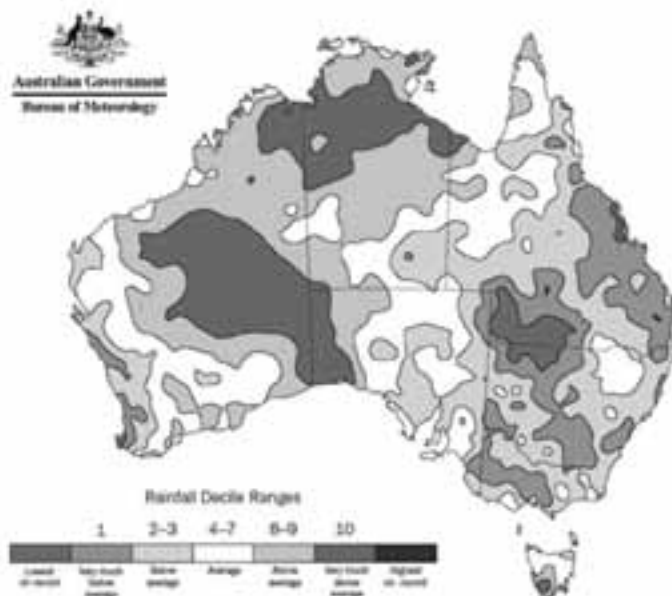
Projections on current and past Australian farm financial performance are available from ABARE at www.abare.gov.au/publications. The 2007 report based on broadacre farm survey results projected that drought across southern and central Australia will reduce farm incomes in 2006-07 to their lowest level in over thirty years (ABARE, 2007).

Difficult pressures – drought and weather

Droughts can occur in all parts of Australia, and at different times, and place enormous emotional and financial stress on farm families. The severity of recent climatic conditions in the agriculturally important areas of rural Australia has caused significant distress for farm families and impacted on wider rural businesses and communities. A Drought Conference hosted by the Centre for Rural and Remote Health in 2003 (Sartore et al., 2005) and another Drought Summit convened by NSW Farmers Association in 2005 highlighted the need for action to deal with the serious mental health effects occurring in rural communities facing ongoing drought.

Australian Bureau of Meteorology data (see Figure 6) show the long-term, unprecedented drought scenario which has occurred over large parts of the economically and agriculturally important regions of eastern Australia and south-western Western Australia since 2001. The four-year period June 2001-May 2005 was the driest June-May four-year period on record for eastern Australia as a whole (ABS, 2007). Above average temperatures have worsened the impact.

Figure 6: Australian rainfall deciles^(a), June-July 2001/06



Source: ABS, (2007).

Figure 7 shows regions with below average rainfall figures for 2006 alone.

Figure 7: Annual rainfall deciles for 2006, Australia



Source: Australian Bureau of Meteorology, *Annual Australian Climate Statement 2006*, Issued 3rd January 2007.

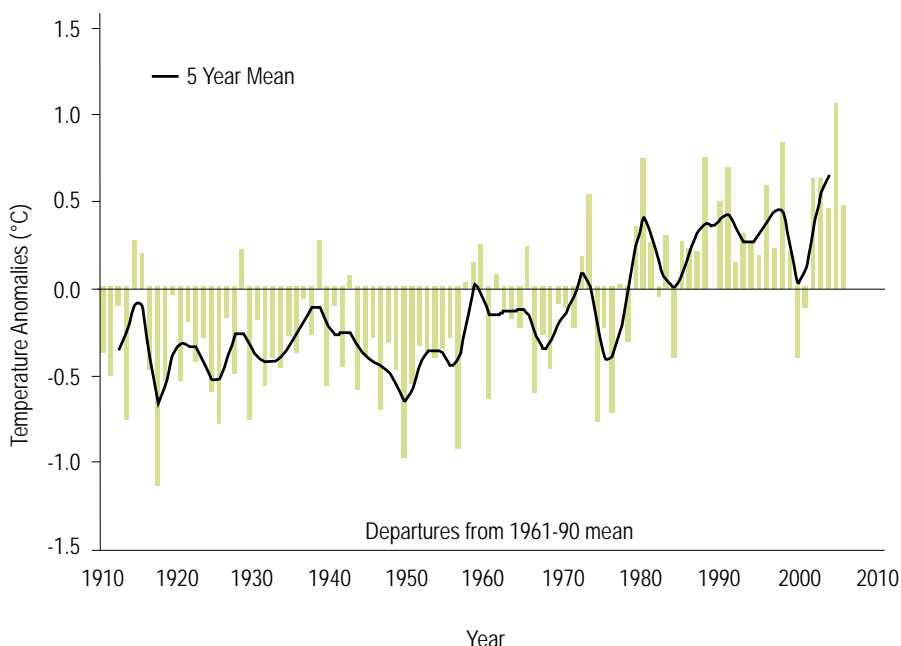
As a result a large area of Australia was declared as experiencing Exceptional Circumstances (meaning farm businesses require interim assistance) by the Australian Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

Climate change

Statements and data regarding climate change can be sourced from the Australian Bureau of Meteorology on www.bom.gov.au and indicate that recent climatic trends appear to fit patterns forecast for climatic change. The implications for Australian agriculture and concern about climate deterioration add further stress to farmers already battling with a number of drought years and the uncertain nature of weather.

Australian Bureau of Meteorology data demonstrate that, while temperatures vary from year to year, there has been a consistent warming trend in Australian temperatures. Temperatures in Australia were relatively stable from 1910 until 1950, and have since then followed an increasing trend, with an overall increase during the period 1910-2005 of approximately 0.7°C. The observed warming over Australia appears to have accelerated in recent years (see Figure 8).

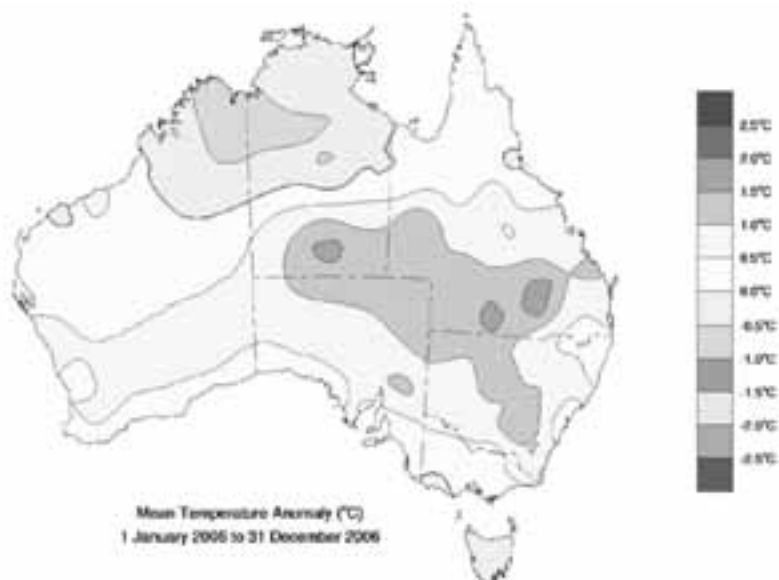
Figure 8: Australian annual mean temperature anomalies (compared to the 1961-90 average) since 1910



Source: Australian Bureau of Meteorology, *Annual Australian Climate Statement 2006*, Issued 3rd January 2007.

Figure 9 shows regions across Australia with above average temperatures for 2006 alone.

Figure 9: Annual mean temperature anomalies (°C) across Australia for 2006



Source: Australian Bureau of Meteorology, *Annual Australian Climate Statement 2006*, Issued 3rd January 2007.

Difficult pressures – meeting government requirements

Australian farmers are faced with an increasing burden posed by legislation emanating from both federal and state governments, which affect the day-to-day running of their businesses. These include:

- Regulatory requirements on small businesses involving additional paperwork such as the Business Activity Statements (BAS) required following introduction of Goods and Services Taxation
- Native vegetation legislation requiring higher levels of farm planning and regulation of activity
- Meeting the training and paperwork requirements of states' Occupational Health and Safety legislative requirements
- Meeting training requirements in New South Wales for pesticides application.

While the intent of each of the regulatory provisions has been accepted by most, the impact on small farm family businesses has been identified as difficult by most.

Difficult pressures – social isolation

The major restructuring of Australian farming over recent decades has contributed to a decline in populations of most small rural communities in which farmers derive social interaction and dependency.

Changes that have impacted on farming communities include:

- Declining public infrastructure e.g. loss of Department of Agriculture offices, regional banks
- Lack of access to health services e.g. general practitioners, specialist.
- Lack of facilities and services such as telecommunications.

Other issues that impact on farm family wellbeing may include:

- Intergenerational/succession issues in an increasingly difficult economic environment
- The aging farmer population
- Information and bio-technology revolutions
- Globalisation.

The above issues contribute to a growing sense of uncertainty and loss of control for farm families and rural communities.

5. Mental health disorders of farming people

Rural population studies

Almost one in five adults interviewed in the 1997 National Survey of Mental Health and Well-being in Australia experienced a depressive, anxiety or substance use disorder in the past 12 months (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1997). Mental health disorders account for nearly 30% of the non-fatal burden of disease in Australia (Mathers et al., 2001).

The New South Wales Population Health Survey collects information from adults on a range of health indicators including mental health (psychological distress). In 2006, 10.7% of adults overall had high or very high levels of psychological distress. The proportion was higher in females than males, and increased by level

of socioeconomic disadvantage. The proportion did not vary between urban areas and rural areas (NSW Department of Health, 2007).

Table 7: Per cent persons with high and very high psychological distress persons aged 16 years and over, NSW 2005

Region	Males (95% CI)	Females (95% CI)	Persons (95% CI)
Urban	9.8 (8.2-11.5)	14.3 (12.8-15.9)	12.1 (11.0-13.2)
Rural	9.3 (7.7-10.9)	13.6 (12.0-15.1)	11.5 (10.4-12.6)
NSW	9.7 (8.4-10.9)	14.1 (12.9-15.3)	11.9 (11.1-12.8)

Source: New South Wales Population Health Survey 2005 (HOIST). Centre for Epidemiology and Research, NSW Department of Health.

Beyondblue has supported research in South Australia that also shows that the prevalence of depression is the same across rural, remote and metropolitan communities. However, suicide rates are higher in rural communities and rural people are much less likely to seek help for depression (Eckert et al., 2006).

Farm population studies

At the time of publication there are no similar data relating specifically to the farming population. Studies are taking place across rural NSW, funded by the National Health and Medical Research Council, that will provide useful information in mid 2009 (Australian Rural Mental Health Study, Chief Investigator Professor Brian Kelly, Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health, Orange, NSW).

The *Depression in Farmers and Farming Families* project was conducted by the Centre for Rural Mental Health at Monash University and funded by the *beyondblue* organisation. A study of 371 farmers in the Mallee, Victoria, compared with 380 non-farmer rural residents, and a series of semi-structured interviews with 22 farmers were used to gain a richer understanding of how the context of farming and mental health interact (Judd et al., 2006). The study reported that “the elevated rate of suicide amongst farmers does not seem to be simply explained by an elevated rate of mental health problems. Individual personality, gender and community attitudes that limit a person’s ability to acknowledge or express mental health problems and seek help for these may be significant risk factors for suicide in farmers.”

Mental health disorders in the agriculture workforce

Workers' compensation data only covers persons who are employees, and in Australian agriculture the higher proportion of the workforce are self-employed farmers. However, it is worthwhile to consider claims for mental health disorders in the agriculture industry. Figure 10 indicates the trend in claims for the agriculture industry and services to agriculture industries (2005/06 are preliminary data).

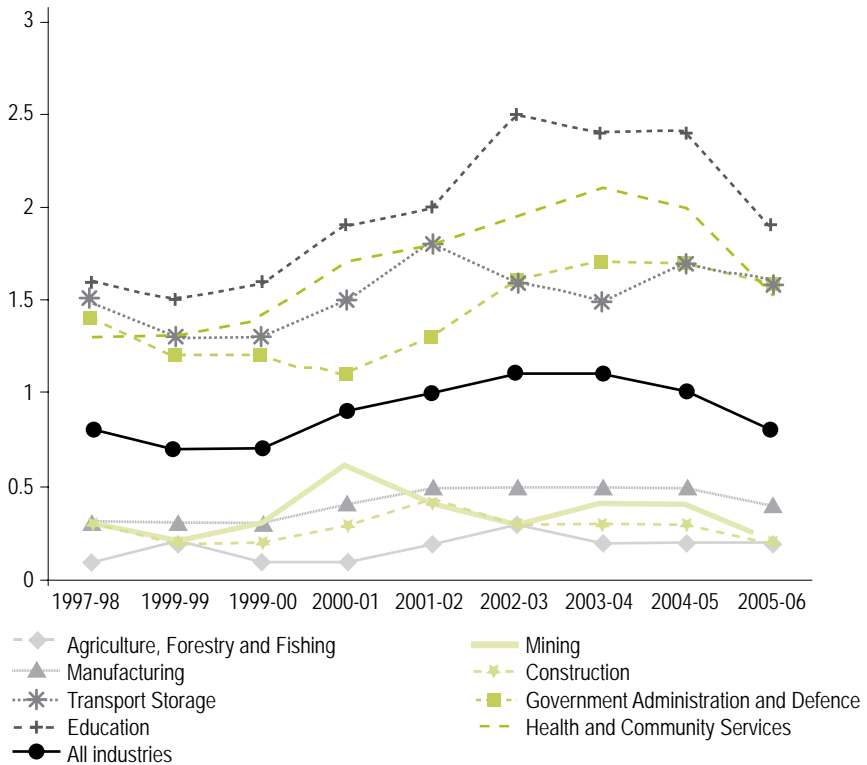
Figure 10: Number of workers' compensation claims for mental disorders in agriculture industry and services to agriculture industries, Australia



Source: NOSI Database, Australian Safety and Compensation Commission.

Figure 11 displays the incidence of workers' compensation claims for mental health disorders for all industries, along with rates for agriculture, forestry and fishing, and selected other industries (incidence is the rate of claims per 1000 workers). This information tends to confirm the limited population data for rural and remote populations, in that employees in the rural industries have the lowest claims rates of all industries. Other industries with lower claims rates include the construction and mining industries. Industries with higher claims rates include education, health and transport industries.

Figure 11: Incidence rate of workers' compensation claims for mental disorders in selected Australian industries and all industries (incidence = rate per 1000 workers)



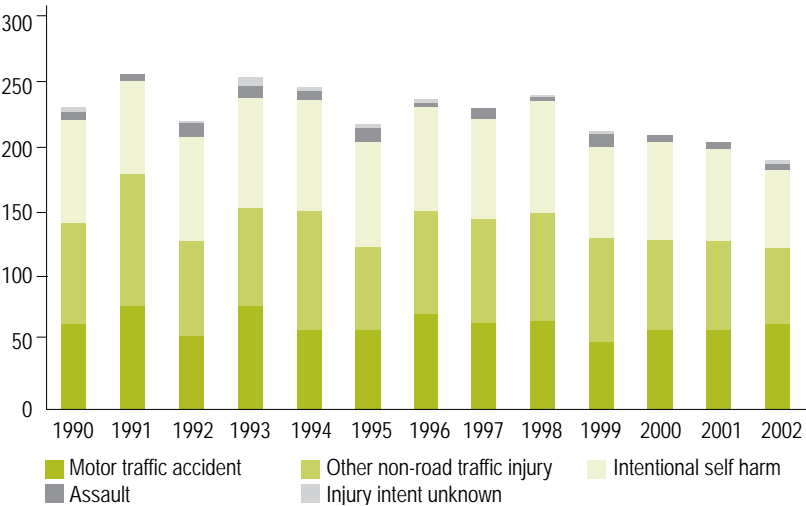
Source: NOSI Database, Australian Safety and Compensation Commission.

Suicide in the farming population

Suicide in the occupational groups of male farmers and farm managers, and male agricultural labourers and related workers comprised around one third of all injury and poisoning deaths in these occupational groups over the period 1990 to 2002 (Figure 12).

Figure 13 indicates the number of suicides, male and female, in the two occupational groups for the period 1989 to 2001.

Figure 12: Number of injury-related deaths of male farmers and farm managers, and male agricultural labourers and related workers by year and broad cause of death grouping, Australia



Source: ABS Cause of Deaths By Occupation.

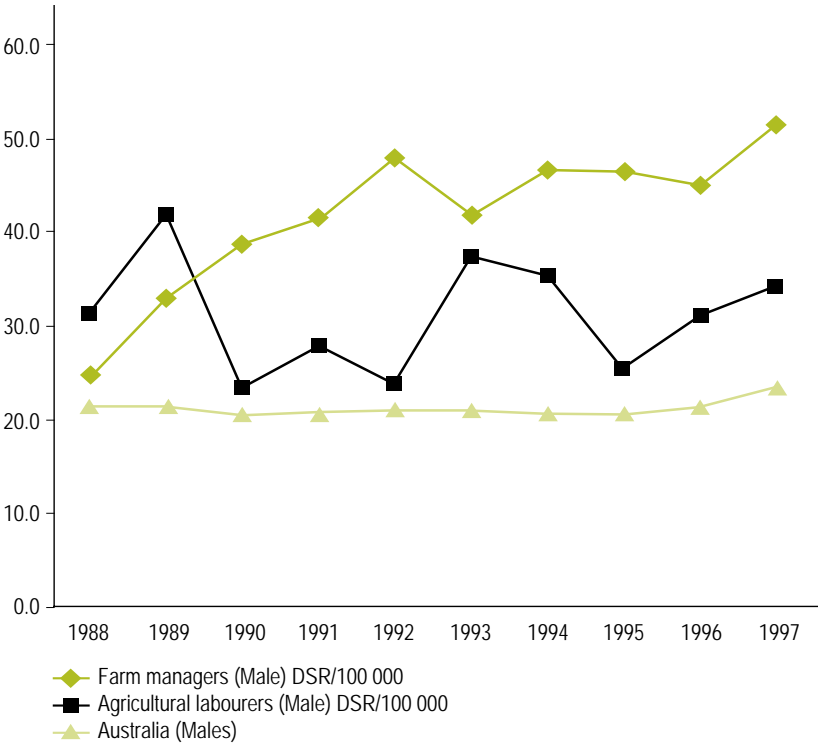
Figure 13: Number of suicides of male and female farmers and farm managers, and farm labourers and related workers by year, Australia



Source: ABS Cause of Deaths By Occupation.

Page and Fragar (2002) reported that while the rate for the working aged population remained fairly steady for the period 1988 to 1997, the rate of suicide death increased for male farmers and farm managers to more than double that of the Australian male population (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Estimated direct age standardised rate (DSR)/100 000 for male farm managers and agricultural labourers, Australia 1988-1997



Source: *Suicide in Australian farming* (Page and Fragar, 2002).
Note: 'Australian (Males)' is the age standardised rate per 100 000 provided for reference purposes (ABS, 1998).
Estimated direct age standardised rate (DSR)/100 000 for farm managers and agricultural labourers, 1988-1997

In males, the rate of intentional self harm in older farmers and farm managers appears to be higher than that for younger farmers/farm managers, and workers. Farm workers and labourers showed a higher rate of self harm in the 15-54 year age group (Table 8).

Table 8: Intentional self harm fatalities of male farmers and farm workers, by occupation and age group, Australia 1999-2002 (number and age standardised fatality rate* per 100,000 employed in agriculture)

	Intentional self harm		Rate /100,000	
	15-54 yrs	55+ yrs	15-54 yrs	55+ yrs
Farmers & farm managers	119	109	36.7	54.4
Farm workers	97	9	20.7	17.1
Total	223	112	27.1	44.0

Source: ABS Mortality Data (HOIST), January 2006.

Notes: Occupation codes used include 1400 (Farmers & farm managers) and 8200 (Agricultural labourers & related workers). *Age standardised rate based on 2001 ABS Census Occupation figures (agriculture and horticulture).

Common means of suicide used by males in farming during the period 1989 to 1997 are shown in Table 9.

Table 9: Suicide method as percent of male suicides farmers and farm managers and agricultural labourers and related workers, Australia 1988-1997

Method	Farm managers %	Agricultural labourers %
Hunting rifle	25.5	23.45
Hanging	16.39	25.17
Shot gun	13.41	9.66
Other and unspecified firearm	13.25	12.07
Motor vehicle exhaust gas	12.25	10.69
Agricultural and horticultural chemical and pharmaceutical products	6.13	3.45

Source: *Suicide in Australian farming* (Page and Fragar 2002).

The data shows that, despite general low reporting of mental health disorders, suicide rates among male farmers and farm workers have been higher than for the Australian male population.

6. Key programs – the NSW Farmers Blueprint for Mental Health and Wellbeing

In 2005 NSW Farmers Association convened a Drought Summit which exposed the significant and widespread emotional impacts of the severe and ongoing drought being experienced by many farmers in NSW. Key stakeholders were brought together to address issues related to rural and remote mental health issues and the event was seen as a turning point for rural communities by acknowledging and seeking to address the growing problem of mental stress in these communities.

The forum led to the creation of a Rural Mental Health Network and *NSW Farmers Blueprint for Maintaining the Mental Health and Wellbeing of the People on NSW Farms* (see <http://www.aghealth.org.au/blueprint/>).

The Blueprint is a summary of key risk factors and planned actions to address those factors, based upon evidence for reducing risk of adverse mental health and suicide. It has formed the basis of reporting of activity by members of the Network that meets quarterly to review collaborative actions and policy actions including lobbying for funds to assist rural mental health in NSW.

Further details about the Blueprint can be obtained from the Australian Centre for Agricultural Health and Safety website www.aghealth.org.au/blueprint.

(See over).

More recently other states have initiated programs involving partnerships with the agriculture industries, mental health services, and other related service providers.

Beyondblue has produced a range of resources that focus on mental health for rural people, and these may be accessed at www.beyondblue.org.au/rural.

NSW Farmers Blueprint for Mental Health and Wellbeing



Source: Fragar et al., 2008.

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