



Kicking the dust  
the past, present and future of  
young farmers in the  
Mid North of South Australia

Ann Clarke, 2009

## **Declaration**

I, Ann Clarke, hereby declare that this research is entirely my own work, unless indicated otherwise.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Dated: \_\_\_\_\_



## Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge all of the Aboriginal groups that lived on this land, and respect their continued, important cultural connections to this land.

This dissertation has taken the past three years to complete. There are many people I wish to acknowledge who have contributed to this research through their love, support, knowledge, time, skills and reflections.

I would firstly like to acknowledge the contributions from young farmers to this research. I would like to thank them for their time, commitment and reflections over the process of this research. No words can express the admiration that I have for their determination to make farming their lives, and the tenacity they have shown—particularly in the Mid North of South Australia which has experienced consecutive years of hardship and drought.

The young farmers interviewed in this research are the future of farming. I am proud of their commitment to farming and the respect they have shown to past generations of farmers from their own families, as well as the hopefulness they have exhibited by encouraging their children to continue to be involved with farming.

Next, I would like to thank a special person: Bradley Morgan, my best friend and also my research assistant. Bradley provided much needed support for the interviews and analysis phase of this research.

I would like to offer a very special acknowledgement to my supervisor, Associate Professor Colin MacDougall from Flinders University, Colin has provided the guidance that I have needed to finish this research. He has exceptional skills, that have helped in understanding the lives of young farmers, and has provided me with “food for thought” at many times during the research. Colin and his family are committed to supporting farmers in South Australia and I am pleased to consider Colin a colleague and a friend. Mitchell Fitzgerald, Information Officer, Discipline of Public Health and Southgate Institute for Health, Society and Equity, and Colin’s assistant, also provided timely assistance.

I also wish to acknowledge the support of my colleagues at Mid North Health who have supported me throughout this research. These are the

people that work daily with farmers, and who know intimately the farming issues discussed in this research. Country Health SA have also kindly assisted with the provision of study leave for Bradley and myself to collect the data from young farmers, and provided us with additional time to conduct some of the analysis phase.

I would like to thank Georgia Girdham from Melrose, and Bradley Morgan from Jamestown, for many of the images in this dissertation. A lot of time and effort has been put into telling the story through these photographic images and they are fantastic.

Thank you also to Leticia Supple and Daniel (Foss) McIntosh at Brascoe Publishing for assistance with editing of the final draft, typesetting of the submission, and adjustment and optimisation of all photographs.

I would also like to acknowledge the support of Katrina, a friend and colleague who lives in Islamabad in Pakistan. Without Katrina's encouragement and friendship I would not have managed to finish the dissertation.

Finally, I would like to thank my family: Alan, Jenny, Ben, Chris, my Mum and Dad, my sister and brothers, and my large extended family for supporting me through the past 20 years of University study to finally reach this pinnacle. They, too, are farmers and understand and support this research and its implications. Without their ongoing love and support this research would never have been contemplated or completed.

I am proud to be the first university graduate in my family and am hoping that this dissertation may contribute in some small way to the knowledge surrounding young farmers in South Australia.

## **Contacts:**

**Ms Ann Clarke**  
annclar@bigpond.com

**Associate Professor Colin MacDougall**  
Discipline of Public Health  
School of Medicine and Southgate Institute of  
Health, Society and Equity  
Flinders University, South Australia  
colin.macdougall@flinders.edu.au

## **Abstract**

This research explores the lives and experiences of young farmers in the Mid North of South Australia in relation to public policy. The research uses qualitative research methods with a case study approach underpinned by action research principles. The research addresses the question: “What do the lives of young farmers in the Mid North of South Australia tell us about public policy?”

Twenty young farmers (16 males and 4 females) from the Mid North of South Australia were interviewed during this project. These farmers were in the 18–35 year age range.

This research reveals that young farmers are coping well with farming and they are positive about their futures in farming despite the many challenges they are currently facing of a global and structural nature. Some of the structural challenges include; lack of control over global influences, rural decline and low participation and representation of young farmers in public policy.

This research argues that a purely economic rationalist, neo-liberal philosophical approach to policy making in agriculture has minimised the voices of young farmers. It has not enabled them to influence public policy decisions that affect their lives.

The few policy areas that young farmers can influence are local ones in which they have some control: in the areas of, for example, education, new farming technologies and succession planning. The importance of the meaning of farming, and the inter-generational nature of the family farm, are highlighted throughout this research, as is the importance of young farmers feeling that they have some positive control over their futures.

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chapter 1:  
Introduction

## Why young farmers research?

The idea for this research developed from a combination of my personal interest in farming, my work with farmers' mental health, and from a general curiosity about how young farmers viewed their current farming situation.

I was interested in the extent to which public policy could support, or not support, young farmers. I also have an interest in the impact of rural decline on small rural communities. Mid North Health<sup>1</sup> (my employer at this time) was supportive of the research proposal, and encouraged the exploration of young farmers' mental health. I was also hoping to be able to identify from this research how the current government could support young farmers with policy decisions based on young farmer's voices and experiences.

Many of my work colleagues were also interested in the mental health of young farmers, and raised concerns about the health status of young farmers, their current issues relating to the viability and sustainability of agriculture, and the lack of advocacy and participation on a policy level by young farmers. It was hoped that any research results would inform future policy directions and plans for health, and would also be utilised by agricultural agencies and farm related organisations.

I decided to use action research principles with a case study approach that featured reflection, learning and action as a continual part of the research process. Knowledge transfer was an integral part of the process, ensuring that there would be some outcomes for young farmers from the research.

The research question and objectives were developed over time as a result of talking with farmers in my local area, of discussing the issues relating to policy with my colleagues and by exploring the literature available relating to young farmers and public policy. After several months of research and refinement, and some assistance from my supervisor, a research question was formulated. This question was: "What do the lives of young farmers in the Mid North of South Australia tell us about public policy?".

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<sup>1</sup> Mid North Health is a small, federally funded health program for communities with populations under 5,000 people. Mid North Health services small towns including, for example, Orroroo, Booleroo Centre, Jamestown, Peterborough, Wirrabara, and those people living on the farming land around these small communities. Mid North Health provide health education, health promotion and rural policy development.

## **Researcher's background and reflexivity**

It is important for me, as a researcher, to state my values and background experiences, as these are closely related to the young farmers involved in this project. This research is not excessively influenced by the researcher, in what is a qualitative piece of research: however, I believe that it is ethical to think carefully about the researcher's personal impact upon the research.

The values that I hold reflect my view that agriculture should be valued by society, and that people involved in agriculture and related rural industries deserve respect and support. The agricultural industry is important to the ongoing future of Australia, and as a country we need people to be able to choose to live and work in rural communities and not be disadvantaged for making that choice.

I believe that my background in agriculture, my skills as a mental health professional, and the respect that I have within the local research area from those involved with the project, has assisted me, particularly with the interview phase.

Most young farmers have had few opportunities to talk openly about their lives and experiences, and this project provided a valuable chance for them to share this information in a safe and supportive environment. The use of action research principles with a case study methodology also encouraged solidarity amongst the young farmers. It helped them to recognise their strengths, and to promote within them a sense of empowerment. I had hoped that one of the additional benefits of this research would be to encourage young farmers to become active in representing their needs regarding not only their economic viability and sustainability, but also their social needs around living and working in small rural communities and on isolated farms.

## **Definition of farmers**

In this research, a farmer has been defined as a person who reported his or her main occupation as a farmer, and was receiving the majority of his or her income from farming. This definition is similar to the Australian Bureau of Statistics' definition which refers to a farmer "as a person or spouse/

partner in a family who reported their main occupation was a farmer or farm manager” (ABS, 2006, 7104.0.55.001). The Australian Bureau of Statistics offers another interesting and comprehensive definition of farmers from the *Australian Social Trends* (2003) report:

Farmers and farm managers plan, direct, coordinate and perform farming activities in agricultural establishments. Tasks performed typically include managing and participating in farming operations to breed and raise livestock, produce fish and aquatic stock, and cultivate crops; managing physical and natural resources; managing business capital, maintaining and evaluating records of farming activities, monitoring market activity and planning production to meet contract requirements or market demand. They include farmers and farm managers who own their farming properties, and those who are employees undertaking these farming activities.

(*Australian Social Trends*, 2003, 4102.0).

## **Importance of farming to Australia**

South Australia has 14,901 farms, which is approximately 10.8% of farms nationally (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2005/2006). Australian farms are important to the ongoing wealth of Australia, with farms producing \$103 billion a year. This is approximately 12% of the Gross Domestic Product (*Australia's Farm Dependent Economy Report*, 2005).

In 2006–07, exports from Australian farming earned the country \$27.6 billion, which represents about 20% of total commodity exports (Abare, 2007). These statistics highlight the importance of Australian Agriculture to the ongoing economy of Australia. Further statistics are available in Appendix 5, which shows some of the other facts about Australian farmers, derived from the National Farmers Federation Website ([www.nff.org.au](http://www.nff.org.au)).

## **South Australia's Mid North area: What is it like?**

South Australia is a dry state and is classified as arid or semi-arid. The climate in South Australia consists of hot dry summers and cool winters, with most of the rainfall occurring from May to September. Around 80% of South Australia receives an average rainfall of 250 mm, with only 4% of the state receiving more than 500 mm a year (Government of S.A. 2000-2008, *Australian Natural Resources Atlas*).



## Mid North area

The nearest large regional city in the Mid North area is at Port Pirie.<sup>2</sup> Small rural towns in the research area included: Melrose, Peterborough, Wirrabara, Jamestown, Orroroo, Booleroo Centre and Murraytown.<sup>3</sup> The term ‘the Mid North’ refers to a region within South Australia. However, for the purpose of this research, the Mid North area stretches from approximately 60 km to the north of Orroroo, east to Hallett, west to Wirrabara and Melrose, north to Morchard and Orroroo, and encapsulates the farming area in between these approximate boundaries. Please see map located in Appendix 1.

The area has some of the best agricultural and pastoral land in South Australia. The Mid North area is well known for high yielding cereal crops, with many farmers now growing new crops such as canola and lupins. The Mid North is also well known for producing quality merino sheep and wool, with farmers diversifying into growing cross-bred sheep for meat as a result of continuing poor prices for wool.

In more recent times, some farmers have diversified into other areas in an effort to support their viability—such as growing grapes or producing olive oil—and some have ventured into on/off-farm activities such as tourism and running bed and breakfast establishments for tourists. Many farmers and their partners are also working off-farm in an attempt to generate further income. In parts of the Mid North, at Jamestown and Wirrabara, there are government established and run softwood and hardwood plantations, which also provide the Mid North area with a timber industry.

## Income

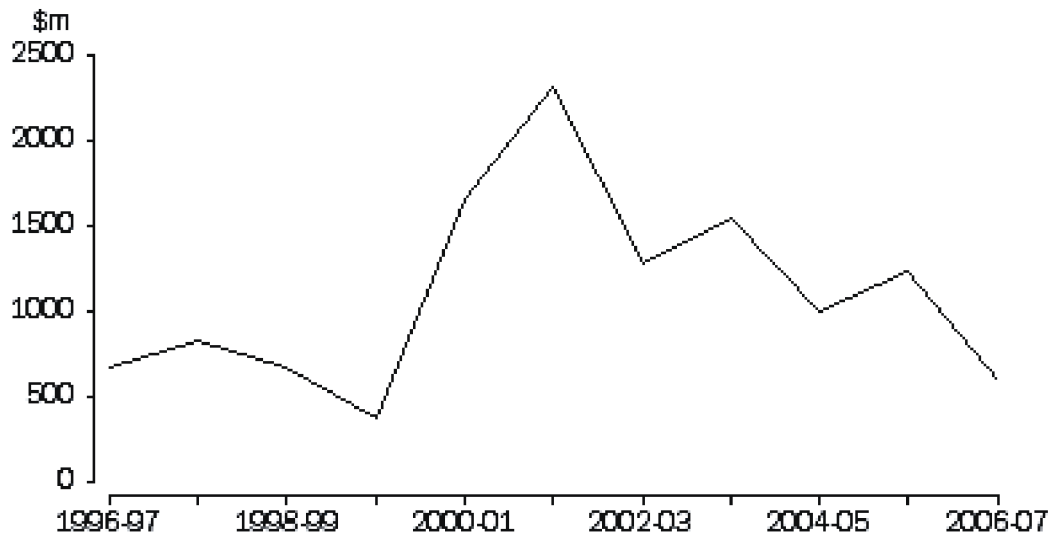
Of particular concern at the current time is the impact of the drought on agriculture. The statistics relating to agricultural income are concerning, with agricultural income falling by 51.7% from \$1,233 million in 2005–06 to \$596 million in 2006–07. There has been a general decline in income from the agriculture industry over the last six years, from a peak of \$2,311 million in 2001–02 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006, 1345.4).

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<sup>2</sup> Port Pirie is a regional city of 15,114 people and is the sixth most populous city in South Australia. It has the world’s largest lead smelter and smelts lead, copper, zinc and gold. Port Pirie is located on the Spencer Gulf. (Australian Tourism Network, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Towns in the Mid North Region are often very small rural communities for example population figures include Booleroo Centre 333, Peterborough 2,000, Melrose 300, Wilmington 273, Jamestown 1,300, Morchard 10. These are approx figures only. (Australian Tourism Network, 2007).

Reports from the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006 *Census of Population and Housing* highlight the median income for farming families is \$1,222 per week with just over half (54%) having a gross family income between \$500 and \$1,399 per week: 30% earned a gross income of more than \$1,400 per week. Negative or nil income was reported by 3% of farming households (ABS, 2006, 7104.0.55.001).



Source: ABS, Australian National Accounts: State Accounts, data available on request

Figure 1.1. National Agricultural Income 1996-97 to 2006-07

## Mining—Roxby Downs

A recent development in the far north of South Australia is the expansion and further development of the mining operations at Roxby Downs. The mines at Roxby Downs are situated 570 kms north west of Adelaide, and approximately 370 kms north of the Mid North Area.

Roxby Downs is owned by BHP Billiton and contains one of the largest known ore bodies in the world. The mine produces copper, uranium, silver and gold. The average age of the population in Roxby Downs is 29 years, with about 38% of the population under 15 years of age (Roxby Downs, 2008, *The Facts*).



The continuing development of mining, which utilises a fly-in and fly-out work<sup>4</sup> arrangement (current estimates are around 900 contractors fly in and fly out to work each week), has had an impact on the Mid North area and will continue to do so. Many farmers both young and old have ventured north in the search of better incomes from working in the mining industry.

Some farmers have attempted to continue with farming, putting additional strain on other family members who are left to run the farm. Many skill shortages are also being experienced in this area due to a migration of skilled farmers to the mines. Many farmers are not able to find labour at busy times of the year such as at harvest, seeding and shearing, and are also unable to match the high incomes available in the mining industry.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics reports that the number of people employed in mining in South Australia annually has increased from 3,175 in 1999–00 to 11,175 in 2006–07 (ABS, 1345.4, 2008). I have not been able to find reliable statistics for how many of these have been from farming backgrounds in South Australia: however, local anecdotal evidence from the Mid North region indicates that many young farmers and potential young farmers have moved to Roxby Downs for increased job opportunities and greater incomes.

Many of these young people would have entered farming or farm-related work areas (such as shearing, labouring, contract spraying and harvesting) if mining positions had not been available at Roxby Downs.

The statistics show that people employed in mining in South Australia earn considerably more than the average South Australian worker. Statistics show that since August 1994, “the average weekly full time adult total earnings for a person employed in the mining industry has doubled from \$913 to \$1,831” (ABS, 1345.4, 2008). Incomes in mining have increased at a faster rate than the average South Australian wage. The Australian Bureau of Statistics reports that in August 2007 the average weekly wage for a person involved with mining was \$1,831, however, the average for all other South Australians was \$1,065 (ABS, 1345.4, 2008).

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<sup>4</sup> BHP Billiton uses a fly-in and fly-out program to move workers from the capital city of Adelaide up to the mining site. Workers are flown in and out of their work site, and time away depends on their current shift arrangements: some are three weeks working with one week off, but it varies for each worker.

## Drought

Drought has been a part of Australia's farming history, and continues to be an ongoing challenge for many farmers across Australia. From the article "A Hundred Years of Agriculture", Pollard says that the first two decades of Australia's history was impacted on by droughts. The first drought Pollard refers to as the "Great Drought" occurred from 1895 to 1903, and it affected the entire country. During this time, sheep numbers were reduced by half and cattle numbers by 40% (Pollard in ABS, *Year Book*, 2000).

The next drought noted by Pollard was in 1944–45: however, this was not as serious as the "Great Drought". From 1958–68 Australia experienced the next most significant drought and the most severe since 1903. During this time crops and pastures failed, sheep and cattle numbers were reduced significantly and most of the country experienced some water shortages. The most severe part for south eastern Australia was during the years 1965–68 (Pollard in ABS, *Year Book*, 2000).

Drought has recently featured again in South Australia's farming history. The Mid North area has experienced significant negative impacts from the recent drought and has been declared an Exceptional Circumstances<sup>5</sup> area by the government of South Australia. This then allows farmers and small businesses affected to apply for interest rate subsidies or weekly income support from the government.

The northern parts of the research area have, in the pastoral country, been in drought for in excess of five to seven years. However, most of the research area has experienced drought over the past three years, resulting in significantly reduced incomes and production, with many farmers qualifying for Exceptional Circumstances payments and income support from Centrelink. This research is not a drought study, but one question the participants were asked was about the impacts of the current drought, as this has been an important and significant concern for young farmers in the area. The research would not have been complete if the context of drought and some of its impacts on individuals, and its effects on rural communities, had not been explored. It also provided opportunities for the researcher to

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<sup>5</sup> Exceptional Circumstances payments provide assistance to farmers in a region that is experiencing a severe downturn due to drought. EC assistance ensures some protection to viable farmers through payments to assist them to "ride out" a drought. Two payments can be accessed EC Relief payments and EC Interest Rate Subsidies.

provide important support information to young farmers and their families about existing and emerging drought resources.

## **History, values and meaning of the farming experience**

This research explores the history of the family farm and its relationship to the meaning of farming, and the motivation of young farmers to remain farming into the future. Another element it explores is the concept of control, and the opportunities for young farmers to be able to have a say in the future of the family farm. Control has close links to empowerment, and also to representation and participation in policy influence.

The values of the family farm play a part in the shared goals and vision for the farm: this was also explored in the interviews with young farmers.

## **Main arguments of this research**

This section provides a brief overview of some of the main arguments put forward by the researcher, as drawn from the data analysis and interpretation process. A more comprehensive discussion is included in chapter five.

This research has explored the participation of young farmers in the policy process and has found that they have limited opportunities to be involved with representation and participation within the public policy process. The health and well-being of young farmers is socially determined by a number of influences. These determinants include history, meaning and values, stress and social supports, work, income, decision making (succession and inheritance), education and the impacts of globalisation.

This research also argues that a purely neo-liberal and economic rationalist approach by the government to policy making in agriculture disregards many of the current values and ideologies held by young farmers. The neo-liberal, economic rationalist approach has not been able to support young farmers adequately, and has not supported rural infrastructure maintenance—the elements so important to a satisfying life in rural areas. As discussed further in chapter five, the restraining forces in farming of a structural and global nature are much stronger than local

forces in which young farmers have some control. The result is a lack of participation in policy.

Young farmers reported that they are well educated and capable young business men and women: however, their futures do not solely depend on their own abilities as in many other workplaces. Instead, young farmers find themselves impacted upon by government policies and regulations, neo-liberal government philosophy, global world trading environments, supply and demand issues on a global scale, inconsistencies in climate, and the variability of commodity prices and rising costs. Young farmers are not able to have any control over, or power to influence, many of these issues. This results in a challenging environment for young farmers and their families, and may ultimately see the family farm under immense pressure.

The next chapter is the literature review, which examines literature from Australia and overseas. The review focuses on young farmers in the 18–35 year age bracket; it explores a broad range of topics that may be relevant to the lives and experiences of young farmers, and to those farmers' relationships with healthy public policy.

## **Structure of the dissertation**

The literature review in chapter two synthesises important contributions about young farmers and public policy from articles in Australia and overseas. This chapter critically examines the literature in relation to the research into young farmers, and attempts to highlight the most relevant points in the literature. It also justifies the need for the research, and the design chosen for the project.

The third chapter is the method chapter, which justifies the choice of method being used. The research question and objectives of the research are stated, and a discussion is included on quality and ethics, including the audit trail and reflexivity. The next section of the method chapter describes the process of the research and this includes recruitment and sampling, data analysis process, saturation and peer debriefing.

The fourth chapter provides the results of the research and highlights the “voices” of young farmers throughout the discussion. The results

are organised under broader determinant headings, and include: history, meaning and values, stress and social supports, work, income, decision-making (succession and inheritance), education and the future of farming. The policy discussion defines areas of policy directly identified by young farmers. These include: communication infrastructure, environmental issues and protection, drought, trade and global issues, general policy issues, advocacy, and the representation and perception of farming.

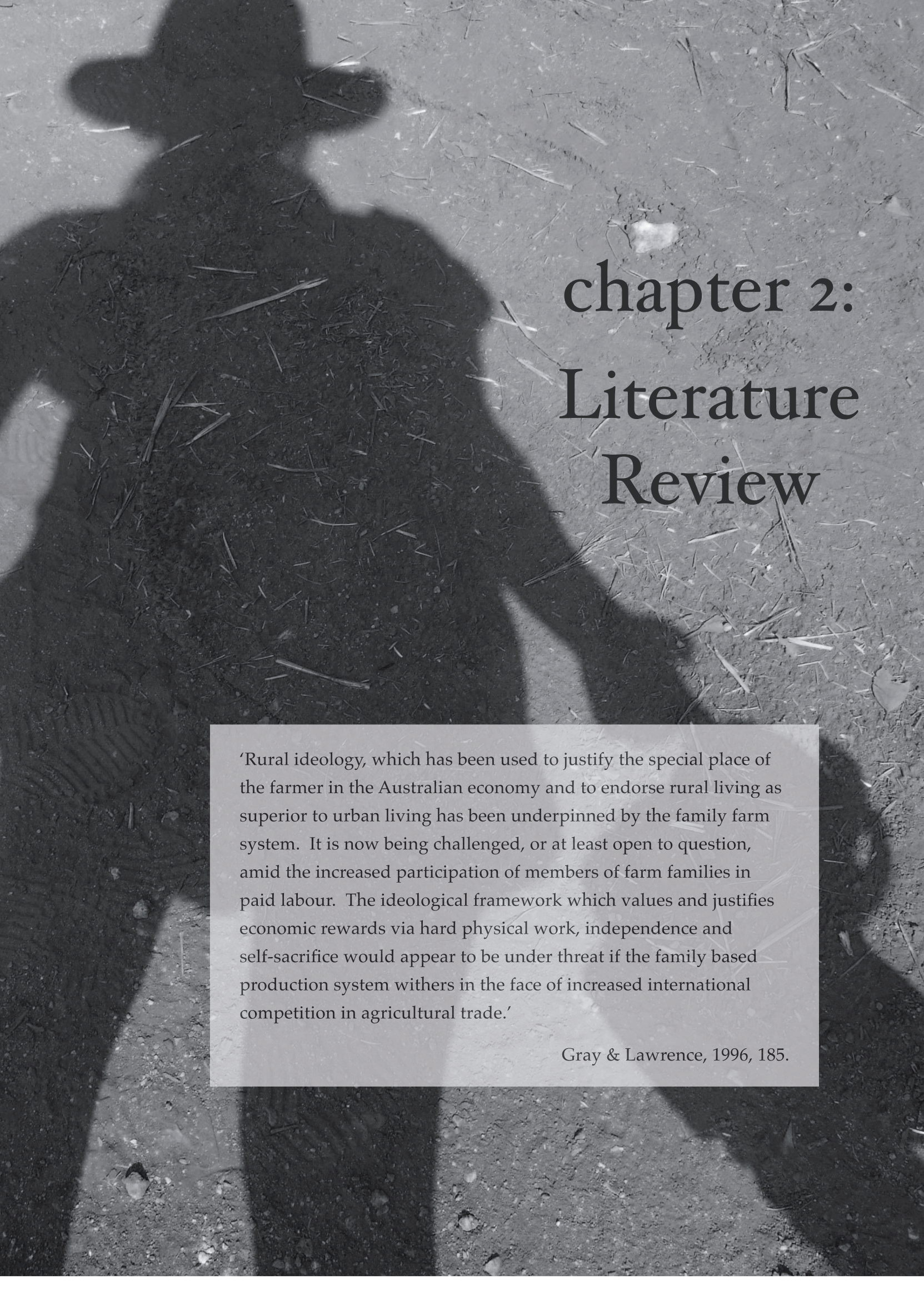
The fifth chapter is the discussion chapter. In this chapter, the research is discussed against theoretical and conceptual frameworks. This chapter argues that there are five broad aspects to the overarching question posed at the beginning of this research. The first part of the discussion focuses on the importance of family history on the lives of young farmers, the second part discusses the influences of the meaning of farming, the third part elaborates on participation and control, the fourth part moves towards proposals for policy action and the fifth part is a force field analysis that attempts to draw together the findings and suggests some areas for policy action.

The sixth chapter is the knowledge transfer chapter. This chapter lists the knowledge transfer activities that were undertaken, and provides the researcher's reflection of the knowledge transfer process.

The final chapter is the seventh chapter—the conclusion. This reiterates the main ideas of the research and presents some personal reflection.

It is important to note that the literature review and the analysis of data in this dissertation were both completed by September 2008. This means that the literature and analysis presented here pre-dates the Global Financial Crisis.



A black and white photograph of a person's shadow cast on a dirt path. The person is standing with their hand on their hip, and the shadow is cast to the left. The ground is uneven and covered with small twigs and debris. The lighting is dramatic, creating a strong contrast between the dark shadow and the lighter ground.

## chapter 2: Literature Review

'Rural ideology, which has been used to justify the special place of the farmer in the Australian economy and to endorse rural living as superior to urban living has been underpinned by the family farm system. It is now being challenged, or at least open to question, amid the increased participation of members of farm families in paid labour. The ideological framework which values and justifies economic rewards via hard physical work, independence and self-sacrifice would appear to be under threat if the family based production system withers in the face of increased international competition in agricultural trade.'

Gray & Lawrence, 1996, 185.



The literature review relating to the young farmers research focuses on available material from Australia and overseas. There are few articles written specifically about young farmers in the 18–35 year age range. Most authors concentrate on the more general farming population, particularly farmers in the 55+ age range, which is getting closer to the average age of Australian and overseas farmers of many countries.

There are a number of articles that explore the mental health of farmers. These predominately begin from a symptom or illness/suicide focus and concentrate on treatment, rather than exploring the causes of the issues. Most of the articles are quantitative in nature.

The articles reviewed cover the topics that are relevant to young farmers in their day-to-day lives and includes a focus on public policy. The literature review discusses the broader influences on young farmers' lives, and includes areas such as globalisation, neo-liberal philosophies of government, and the impacts of rural decline on young farmers.

The literature reveals that the government departments associated with farming are generally a reliable source of information about farming and farmers. The Australian Bureau of Statistics provides most of the statistical data relating to farming: again, however, this is limited to certain topics and certain age breakdowns, and farming situations are often put together with fishing and forestry, which is not always helpful. The Department of Primary Industries and Resources SA provide a lot of information of a general nature about agriculture, and there are many other government departments—including the Department of Health—that offer some limited information about farmers.

It was difficult to find research that focused specifically on the lives of young farmers in the 18–35 year age bracket, which supports my reason for choosing to bring the lives of young farmers into focus, as well as my desire to make a difference to their lives. Many of the most useful articles related directly to agricultural policies and trends with an economic and political perspective.

It was difficult to find articles that explored the social, political and environmental influences on the lives of young farmers, particularly from a causal perspective. No one author stands out as being a “special” contributor in this area: however, there are many researchers such as Alston, Stayner,

Gray and Lawrence, and Fragar, all of whom regularly highlight the different concerns of farmers. Even amongst academic journal articles it was difficult to find many with a public policy focus that actually explored the causal factors impacting on the lives of young farmers.

The articles reviewed in this literature review differ in quality and type. I believe that the nature of this topic—farming, and, in particular, young farmers—has encouraged me to include a wide variety of literature types. I have attempted to find a balance in this review. While I preferred to use academic journal articles, I have used other forms of literature including some media articles, government reports and industry articles. Much of the literature relating to farming is reported upon over a wide variety of formats.

There are academic journal articles written by authors who have spent most of their lives researching farmers. The academic articles have been reviewed by peers or editors and can generally be relied upon to provide accurate information. Some of these academic journal articles are qualitative studies, and some are quantitative studies: still others used a mixed mode of both qualitative and quantitative methods.

There are many articles written from an industry perspective. These articles are also useful and are again often written by academics or “experts” in the fields of economics, policy, politics or health for example. Some of these more industry types of articles are included in journals such as the *Farm Policy Journal*.<sup>1</sup> There are also some interesting articles that appear on particular websites managed by organisations such as the National Farmers Federation<sup>2</sup> and the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics.

Amongst the literature there are many places that offer information at a local level. However, often this is not formal research and is gathered and presented more as local needs assessments or outcome reports.

There are many articles presented in the media and these vary greatly in type and quality. One of the more reliable sources is the weekly Australian farming publication *The Stock Journal*. This journal provides a wide range of articles both of an educational nature, and also provides information that assists farmers in the management of their farms. This journal does however represent many different opinions.

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1        The *Farm Policy Journal* is the journal produced by the Australian Farm Institute and published quarterly.

2        The National Farmers Federation represent Australian farmers in policy areas.

There are many statistics quoted in media articles, especially in more daily newspapers, these articles have increased recently as a result of the drought and the hardship that the drought has caused farmers. One such example is *The Advertiser*, the daily newspaper in South Australia.

The literature has been organised to cover main topics of interest that are relevant to young farmers and public policy. The policy areas relate to political, social, environmental and economic policies and includes the complexity of globalisation, neo-liberal philosophy as well as Australia's trading environment.

## History—impact of time

The history of farming is well documented on the Primary Industries and Resources South Australia website ([www.pir.sa.gov.au](http://www.pir.sa.gov.au)) and provides the most comprehensive history of agriculture in South Australia. This history was written by John Radcliffe, who graduated in Agricultural science in 1960 and was appointed as Director General of Agriculture in South Australia in 1985. John Radcliffe has spent three decades working in various positions within agriculture and education.

The development of agriculture in South Australia as described by Radcliffe really started to get going in the 1850s and 1860s, and this long history of farming has had an impact on past, present and future farmers. The concept of time is important in farming and linked closely to the meaning that farmers gain from the entire farming experience (Radcliffe, no date).

Agriculture, as an industry, was present in South Australia from the commencement of the settlement of South Australia (from 1836 onwards) around the area which is known as Adelaide. Some early settlement statistics from 1845 for South Australia include a population of 22,460 people, with 7,700 hectares planted to wheat, 45 hectares of vines, 120 hectares of horticulture, with approximately 1,800 horses, 56,000 head of cattle and 600,000 head of sheep (Radcliffe, 1). In early South Australia, wheat cropping dominated. Agricultural and pastoral expansion continued rapidly from this time. The development in South Australia of the stump-jump plough in 1876,<sup>3</sup> as well as the Ridley stripper in 1843 for harvesting

<sup>3</sup> The Ridley grain stripper was invented by South Australian JW Ridley in 1843 and Robert Smith another South Australian invented the stump jump plough in 1876.

wheat, also increased the rapid development of agriculture in South Australia (Radcliffe, 1).

The best parts of South Australia to live and work were also the most productive for agriculture. This included places like the Fleurieu and Yorke Peninsulas,<sup>4</sup> the Mid North and the Barossa Valley: these areas also became the most populated (Radcliffe, 2). Rapid improvements to both biological and chemical controls of pest animals and pest plants increased since World War II, which impacted positively on the viability and sustainability of farming in South Australia.

Within South Australia, education has also been an important part of the government's role in agriculture. Roseworthy Agricultural College was established in 1883, and the first research and development agricultural institute the South Australian Research and Development Institute was established in 1993. In 1875, the first Minister of Agriculture was appointed, and the first Department of Agriculture was created in 1902. The Department had many experimental farms that were established in 1905 in the Adelaide Plains, the South East, the Barossa Valley, metropolitan Adelaide, and in the northern Murray Mallee. The Waite Agricultural Research Institute was also established in 1924 in Adelaide, and this gave individuals the opportunity to study and gain Agricultural Science degrees. All of these organisations were initiated and supported by the South Australian government (Radcliffe, 5).

Rapid changes continued in farming, especially from the 1950s onwards, with developments in tractor technology and new grain varieties. These advances resulted in better crop yields. Diseases in crops were now able to be controlled with new pesticides and herbicides, and new ways of managing soils were used, for example: minimum tillage, crop rotation and increased uses of fertiliser. These all improved productivity and viability (Radcliffe, 7).

Of recent times, new awareness by farmers of the importance of water and soil conservation has seen farmers taking an even greater stewardship over the land. The environmental movement of the 1970s has continued on and farmers are very aware of their responsibility to manage their land for future generations of young farmers (Radcliffe, 7).

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<sup>4</sup> The Fleurieu and Yorke Peninsulas, the Mid North, and the Barossa Valley are all well known farming areas within South Australia.

The past generations of farmers have had a direct influence through each new generation of young farmers, based on the inter-generational farming model that we have seen as an integral and continuing feature of the family farm in South Australia. Older farmers pass on their skills to the younger generation and a piece of history and identity is passed on with them.

Each generation of farmers has contended with its own challenges. However, as each farmer enters farming, he or she is influenced by not only the past generations of farmers, but also goes onto influence the current generation. This thus reinforces and increases the meaning of farming to each generation, strengthens their identities as farmers, and increases their links to their land.

## **Stress and conflict**

The majority of the articles that have been reviewed focus on rural people and mental health, though little has been written specifically about young farmers. Many of the articles appear to discuss the symptoms (mainly depression), rather than exploring the causes of stress and mental health issues in this group. There are many articles written about suicide in rural areas; however, these do not focus on young farmers in particular, but rather on young rural males in the wider rural community.

The article “Depression in Farmers and Farming Families”, written by the Centre for Rural Mental Health (2005), was funded by Beyond Blue.<sup>5</sup> This article explores the causes of depression in farmers, and looks at barriers to care for this group. The research reported in the article involved interviews with 32 farmers of mixed ages, and it used qualitative methods. The research explored determinants like characteristics of the farm, satisfaction from farming, positives and negatives of farming and the nature of stressors in farming. Semi-structured interviews were used to gain data, and thematic analysis of the data was conducted (Centre for Rural Mental Health, 2005).

The research by the Centre for Rural Mental Health has some similarities to this dissertation, in that it used interviews with farmers and qualitative methods. This research did, however, start from a symptom basis: that is, it explored depression in farmers.

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<sup>5</sup> Beyond Blue is the national independent organisation that has been created to serve all states in Australia. It helps to assist with addressing issues associated with depression, anxiety and substance misuse.

This research reported in the article contained sections describing the background to the study and the results, but lacked any in-depth discussion in the conclusion. Some of the results included: all farmers identified financial concerns as stressful, and self-reliance was developed to a high level but was less adaptive as a coping mechanism, and was even seen as a barrier to seeking help from health or other helping agencies. As expected, unpredictable weather events were seen as stressful by farmers, as were some of the responsibilities and decision making parts of farming. Most farmers reported enjoying the experiences of working as a family farming business (Centre for Rural Mental Health, 2005). The article reported that farmers coped with stress mainly through talking with their family and close friends, and this was identified as a preference over seeking help from health agencies. Work was also identified as a positive coping mechanism, with long hours a feature. Stigma around mental health was identified by this research, and farmers had little knowledge about available services (Centre for Rural Mental Health, 2005).

This article concluded that farmers experience a wide range of stressors related to their occupation and life: however, only a very small minority suggested that these had contributed to their mental health issues. The research found that farmers had developed positive strategies to deal with their own stress, and had a positive outlook and generally good support systems. The authors suggested that the best way to assist farmers was “to be sensitive to the pre-existing culture within these communities” (Centre for Rural Mental Health, 2005).

Marotz-Baden and Mattheis (1994) propose an interesting idea that high levels of stress in daughters-in-law in two-generation farm families, is directly correlated with the daughters-in-law’s lack of integration into the farm family business and their acceptance into the new farm family (Marotz-Baden & Mattheis, 1994, 132). The study was conducted in North America and is a quantitative piece of research with both researchers coming from a clinical interest focused on counselling and human development.

The study highlighted the stress that daughters-in-law feel concerning the financial viability of supporting two generations on the one farm. Some other concerns include finding a place on the farm in which a daughter-in-law can have meaningful and satisfying input, finding a comfortable place between personal and business opportunities, and trying to find a niche as



a new family member and a business partner (Marotz-Baden & Mattheis, 1994, 133).

Marotz-Baden and Mattheis conclude by reporting that daughters-in-law are the most stressed of all farm family members. This stress arises from the inequality experienced in the farm family business. Competing demands stemming from trying to fit into a new family also cause stress, and highlight and magnify any stress. It would seem that daughters-in-law are only accepted into the business once they have established themselves in the farming family. The three main acceptances were named as labour, management and ownership (Marotz-Baden & Mattheis, 1994, 133). The authors go on to say that keeping daughters-in-law satisfied provides the key to an easier transition through succession, and to successful inter-generational family farm businesses.

The article by Marotz-Baden and Mattheis raises the importance in the present research project by highlighting the stress experienced by female partners in the family farming environment.

Fragar (2001) describes some of the factors driving change in agriculture and how it has impacted on the health of farmers. Some of the factors that have been identified by Fragar include technological advances, economic factors affecting the farm business, social factors affecting the farm family, and ongoing pressures for restructuring of farm businesses (Fragar, 2001, Table 1). Fragar provides several tables containing data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics to support the argument. Fragar aptly summarises rural health policy in Australia by saying:

Rural health policy in Australia needs to be accompanied by a comprehensive policy for improved social and economic wellbeing. This requires an engagement between industry, resource allocation, business development, education and training; and it necessitates a dialogue between those who make public health policy and those who make social and economic policy

(Fragar, 2001, 158).

Hegney and his colleagues explored 10 stories from rural men from Queensland in an attempt to identify what helped them in adversity and how they coped with their stresses. These rural men already had contact with health agencies and were not farmers. All were interviewed using semi-structured interview methods, with the main areas explored being their inner and individual strengths, and their support systems and strategies (Hegney et al, 2003).

The findings of Hegney's research highlighted the importance of the rural men's family and friends, and of having a purpose and meaning in life. For these men, physical isolation was not a factor they were concerned about, stigma was a barrier to help-seeking, and all felt well connected to their communities (Hegney et al, 2003). Whilst this research makes for interesting reading, there were problems with recruitment to the research because participants were drawn solely from already existing contacts with Mental Health Outreach teams. Such an approach may have narrowed down the range and scope of what was already a small study.

The research of Gray and Lawrence (1996) focuses on isolating those factors responsible for causing stress in Australian farmers. This was a large study, with a sample of 245 people from 106 farms, from four different agricultural industries. Farms were purposively selected with the aid of local farming organisations, to allow for a range of different farming experiences. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were chosen, including an interview and a survey (Gray & Lawrence, 1996, 177). This study found that globalisation was having negative impacts on many farmers in the study, that financial stress was a major concern due to long periods of structural adjustment, and that social factors were just as important factors as economic ones when predicting stress in Australian farmers (Gray & Lawrence, 1996, 184).

In an article from America, Beeson (1998) discusses policy and rural mental health. This article attempted to tease out some of the issues around making rural mental health policies supportive and appropriate for those people living in rural America. Beeson spent the majority of this article discussing the issues of equity and participation issues of rural policy making. As Danbom (1995) says in Beeson (1998), "Rural residents are not only declining in number, they are also rapidly losing political power and influence and consequently policy influence". And, as Dyer (1997) adds in Beeson (1998), "Rural people feel powerless and disenfranchised because they are powerless and disenfranchised". Beeson concludes by saying that American rural residents may need to seek justice and equity through legal avenues and legislation changes.

There are several studies of job-related stress in UK farmers with one of the largest being a study conducted by Deary, Willock and McGregor (1997). These researchers examined various "domains" of farm stress to

study the effects of age, sex and farm type on the stress levels of farmers (Deary, Willock & McGregor 1997, 131). This study found that there were six major “domains” causing stress in these participants. These were: farming bureaucracy, financial worries, isolation, uncontrollable natural forces, personal hazards and time stress (Deary, Willock & McGregor, 1997, 131).

The study’s results indicated that women experienced higher levels of farm stress than men, and that farmers who kept livestock had higher stress levels than cereal or dairy farmers. There have been many more studies focusing on the mental health of farmers in the UK: however, these have often been very large studies using mainly quantitative methods, and they do not have many similarities to the present research project because of their scale and type. Whilst many of these articles acknowledge the various stressors experienced by farmers, the general conclusions from the articles reviewed were that farmers were coping well with stress and had support systems that were relevant and appropriate to their various situations.

## **Farming identities**

Young farmers are faced with many changes in today’s world, including the increasing challenges of global agricultural environments, social change and the impacts of agricultural restructuring and farm adjustment. An important part of understanding the lives and experiences of young farmers is an exploration of their values, goals and identities.

This section of the literature review has provided discussion on identity, masculinity and masculinities. Masculinity in farming is dominated by social constructionist thinking, and there is a gap in knowledge in research from other ideological approaches. The articles presented are, however, interesting when considered alongside feminist ideologies, agricultural restructuring, and the neo-liberal views of government. The research may also highlight challenges to the traditional ideologies around farming identities. It may also provide some insights into a new, emerging and more sophisticated ideology that young farmers are developing for themselves, which keeps pace with a farming environment that is now focused on a global context with fast moving technological, social and political advances.

Saugeres (2002) states that there appears to be much more sophistication around the way that young farmers think and approach their ideas about “self” compared to how their fathers and grandfathers constructed ideas of “self”. (Saugeres, 2002, 379). This article provided the opportunity for the present researcher to make some assessment from the interview process about what young farmers currently think about their farming identities, and to determine whether identity is still linked to traditional ideas about farming; or if, in fact, it has shifted to become a much more sophisticated representation of self.

Saugeres (2002) says that masculine identities are never static and are being re-negotiated and re-shaped through discourse and practice. Saugeres describes identity as multiple because of the various different contexts that people find themselves in, with some of these including variables such as gender, economic, social, familial, religious and regional—to name a few. Saugeres also reports that gender identities are multiple because an individual acquires his/her gender identity in several discourses on gender, which sometimes may contradict and conflict with one another (Saugeres, 2002, 379).

Coldwell (2007) supports the existence of emerging multiple masculinities in the study of young male dairy farmers in northern Victoria. Coldwell attempts to explore how young farmers construct their masculine identities and how these identities are shaped by farming practices (Coldwell, 2007, 87). As Coldwell says:

It has been suggested that the struggle to survive in farming is, for many men, a struggle to maintain their masculine identity, and therefore a large number still identify as traditional farmers and traditional men. However, recent research suggests that alternative masculinities are beginning to emerge alongside the turn toward alternative forms of farming practice.

(Coldwell, 2007, 88).

Coldwell goes on to outline how traditional farming identities were linked to values like hard work, independence and self-reliance; however, lately this has changed, and the prominent values are now maximum production/profit, technical efficiency, management skills and innovation (Walter, in Coldwell, 2007, 89). Many farmers have found belonging to a global agri-business, agri-food industry very challenging, prompting an entire rethink

of their own values. This includes being able to identify those values that will get them through many of these challenges. Many of the traditional constructions of masculinity have persisted like those of hard work, self-reliance and independence, however there are new constructions beginning to emerge alongside the more traditional constructions of masculinity (Coldwell, 2007, 92).

Coldwell suggests that young farmers are building their identities in two main ways: by contrasting themselves with other young men (generally not farmers) who may not be considered “tough” but who may have other important qualities such as being technologically advanced and good managers; and secondly by contrasting themselves with older farmers who may be “tough” but who may not be either good managers or technologically capable (Coldwell, 2007, 95). This provides young farmers with the opportunity to describe themselves using more than one experience or discourse. Coldwell goes on to say that many young farmers see farming as more of a business venture than a way of life, which is a significant change from how farming was perceived by former generations.

According to Coldwell, young farmers will need to find new roles such as caring for the environment, continued diversification, off-farm work, and re-negotiating past rigid gender constructions of farm women. They will, continue to become more reflexive and open in their farming ventures and the way they perceive their own masculinity. Coldwell says that most young farmers want to find a balance between lifestyle, sustainability and family, and the values important to their masculinity, including things like sharing their concerns and worries, connecting more with family, being more switched-on, caring for the environment, and having a stronger social and political voice (Coldwell, 2007, 100).

Laoire (2002) explores the changing nature of masculine identities amongst male farmers in contemporary Ireland. Laoire says that changes in agriculture threaten the status of young farmers, impacting on inheritance and family systems (Laoire, 2002, 16). Laoire uses a case study approach with a theoretical social constructionist viewpoint. Laoire (2002), as common to also Coldwell (2007) and Saugeres (2002), says that agriculture has undergone a significant ideological shift:



Agricultural industrialisation has brought into ascendance a commercial variant of the romantic, agrarian mythology that transformed the fundamental virtues of independence, hard work and self-reliance into individualism, maximum production and technical efficiency.

(Laoire, 2002, 17).

Laoire (2002) is able to identify, in interviews, changes in the way that young farmers identify their roles and identities, to include, for example, more sharing of concerns, and better connection to family. Laoire highlights the idea that the traditional agrarian ideology does remain, even though multiple masculinities are expressed throughout the interviews conducted (Laoire, 2002, 24).

Laoire is not as convinced as Saugeres (2002) or Coldwell (2007) that traditional masculinity is being replaced, and believes that in Irish young farmers in particular there is a real persistence of traditional masculinity, which is closely related to the construction and reproduction of discourses of farming masculinities (Laoire, 2002, 25).

Campbell and Bell (2000) also explore rural masculinities using a social constructionist theoretical approach. Their ideas focus on two concepts: the masculine in rural, and the rural in masculine. As Campbell and Bell describe:

By masculine in rural means the various ways in which masculinity is constructed within rural spaces and sites and the rural in masculine we mean the way in which notions of rurality help constitute notions of masculinity.

(Campbell & Bell, 2000, 540).

Campbell and Bell conclude that masculinity is socially constructed in different spaces, and believe that masculinity is often invisible—whilst femininity is more often visible and highlighted for extra attention. They go on to say that plural masculinities often exist in complex power relations with one another, and with various constructions of femininity, as also described by Saugeres (2002).

Bryant (1999) offers an interesting discussion on the detraditionalisation of farming occupations in South Australia. Bryant puts forward the idea that there are three main occupational identities in farming. These identities include the traditional farmer, the dual occupational farmer and the entrepreneurial farmer (Bryant, 1999, 244). Bryant also talks about three reasons why farming identities have been shifting. These include: “diversity

in the meanings associated with self and family, shift in gender patterns and characteristics, differences in relationship between self and market by identity and gender” (Bryant, 1999, 249).

Halpin and Guilfoyle sum up their argument as follows:

Significantly governmental neoliberal discourses insist on Australian farmers taking personal responsibility and control for any socio-economic hardship or farm viability explanations. In this article we argue that the neoliberal discursive environment creates the potential for self-blame where farmers “fail”.

(Halpin & Guilfoyle, 2004, 93).

Farmers in Australia now find themselves in global markets, needing to compete with European Union and North American farmers in particular. Many farmers have been forced to adopt a more business-like approach to farming. With the government’s current stance on governance in agriculture, if farmers are not able to be successful and business-like, then the follow on conclusion is that they would see themselves as failures and may apportion blame as described in attribution theory (Halpin & Guilfoyle, 2004, 94).

Halpin and Guilfoyle go on to say that this is why there has been such a steep increase in the current farm business courses, and that is in line with neo-liberal intentions. Halpin and Guilfoyle also say that farmers are judging their own farm viability by their business skills, when in reality it is a very complex combination of business skills, rainfall, government policies, trade policies and global issues. Farmers can often start to interpret their own ability as managers, rather than considering remote structural factors as being the reason behind viability—and then attribute blame to themselves for a lack of farm viability (Halpin & Guilfoyle, 2004, 95). Farmers in this example have constructed a discourse around themselves of “self-reliance” and “self-blame”. Even though a large proportion of respondents in this study identified structural concerns as the main problem in farming. Each still believed it was their individual responsibility to address these, rather than calling on the government take action on many farming policy decisions.

As Halpin and Guilfoyle aptly point out, “Neo-liberal modes of governance promote an individualism which in turn hinders more recent attempts at community capacity building via collective forms of action” (Halpin & Guilfoyle, 2004, 106).

## Farm entry

The future of farming relies on young people entering agricultural industries. However, problems with family farm succession, and the declining incomes and increasing costs involved with farming, is causing ongoing concerns for the continuation of the traditional “family farm”.

Stayner (1997) provides discussion centred on how young farmers enter farming, and highlights the financial and family factors that contribute to this discussion. Stayner reports that many farms have difficulty meeting the financial needs of two generations seeking a living from the one property, and that there are many inter-generational challenges with running a complex business. Many business and management skills differing between generations, he goes on, can result in communication issues and conflict (Stayner, 1997, 111). These situations are often magnified when farmers and their children often live and work on the same property—and many live in the same house.

Stayner says that the majority of new entries into farming come from a farming background; however there are some young farmers who come from non-farming backgrounds, often achieving an ownership position as a result of working for another farmer, or of managing another farm (Stayner, 1997, 111). Unfortunately, many young farmers wanting to enter farming have to wait for either the death or retirement of the current farming generation, especially on those farms that may be marginally viable (Stayner, 1997, 111).

Stayner’s next article is a review of the literature available on entry into farming, with most of the work he cites focused on Australia. The first study commenced in 1995 and was conducted by the Rural Development Centre. This was a large study funded by the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation: it included three major surveys and over twenty case studies. Stayner also explores in this review the 1996 Rural Development Survey which included a large sample of some 1,250 farmers across Australia (Stayner, 1997, 112).

Some of the important points raised by Stayner include: the importance of factors relating to the intrinsic characteristics and rewards of farming. These include: “interest in the work”, “the outdoor work”, “opportunity to

be your own boss” and “farming offers a challenge”. These were reported as being very important factors in attracting young people to farming (Stayner, 1997, 112).

Stayner goes on to say that of less importance were instrumental rewards of farming such as “money earning potential”, “availability of employment” and “it offers a secure future”. Young farmers, according to Stayner, placed greater importance on intrinsic rewards of farming rather than the instrumental rewards. Those young farmers who decided not to enter farming did so only after careful deliberation of an assessment of the risks and rewards of the farming life (Stayner, 1997, 113).

Stayner also said that young farmers who entered farming later, after being in another career, were no less motivated, or innovative, or successful, than those who entered straight from school (Stayner, 1997, 113).

Some of the difficulties facing young farmers were also highlighted by Stayner and these included a lack of business and succession planning, no plans being made for managerial responsibility transfer, difficulties arising from approaches by the older generation around management and decision making, and uncertainty around family plans for the farming business (Stayner, 1997, 116).

The following quote summarises Stayner’s argument:

When young people do enter existing family farming businesses, the conditions of their involvement are often such as to undermine their continuing commitment and ... Family businesses need to pay early and explicit attention to planning the involvement of succeeding generations in the business, and to recognise formally their contributions of capital and labour.

(Stayner, 197, 118).

## **Farm succession**

The next article for review focuses on daughters-in-law and stress in two-generation farm families. I have included this article because this group is especially important when considering the issues surrounding succession planning and long term viability of the family farm. Many young farmers in the target group for the present research have either married or are in long-term partnerships, and their issues are relevant to this research because

partnership satisfaction has long-term impacts on the success or failure of family farms.

A recent study undertaken by Barclay, Foskey and Reeve (2007) explores the transfer of managerial and farm skills between generations, with a particular emphasis on farm succession and retirement across many different countries. The main points from this survey, which was a large study with 1,180 responses from 5,000 farm families across Australia, was a recognition of the difficulty and complexity of succession planning on farms. The difficulties surrounding succession planning were responsible for conflict in farming families with different competing priorities, including the need to maintain a viable farm business for the next generation, the need to treat all farming children fairly around succession and inheritance, and the need to provide financially for the older generation when they reached retirement (Barclay, Foskey & Reeve, 2007, 56).

This study also reported other major problems impacting on succession. These included droughts, low commodity prices, taxes, lack of communication between family members, and harsh eligibility criteria for older farmers nearing retirement.

In the summary and recommendations of this research Barclay, Foskey and Reeve (2007) conclude:

It is recommended that the Government continue to support and further promote farm succession educational programs for farmers to assist this movement away from traditional inheritance practices and encourage discussion between farmers and within farm families on these issues. The study also recommends that current policy regarding assets tests for the aged pension be reviewed to assist those farmers wishing to retire who may be legitimately trapped by their financial and legal situation.

(Barclay, Foskey & Reeve, 2007, 64).

Marotz-Baden and Mattheis (1994) report that daughters-in-law often feel left out of decision making and managerial decisions on farms. According to Marotz-Baden and Mattheis the most important reason for inter-generational transfer failure appears to be poor family dynamics and unresolved conflict, especially if the daughter-in-law feels powerless and excluded, which can result in divorce and legal problems associated with separation (Marotz-Baden & Mattheis, 1994, 132). Agriculture has often been defined as a male dominated industry, and women in particular have not been prepared by their families to



expect to inherit the farms. If this does happen, it is usually a rare occurrence or there is no male heir (Marotz-Baden & Mattheis, 1994, 133).

A study by Weigel, Weigel and Blundall from Iowa supports the findings of Stayner (1997) and Marotz-Baden and Mattheis (1994), reporting that inter-generational conflict on two-generation family farms can have serious and ongoing implications that will affect succession and business plans. Concerns were also raised by these authors about family members living and working together on a daily basis, along with conflict surrounding control and authority often producing conflicts and differences in farming families. Weigel, Weigel and Blundall conclude their argument by saying that the younger generation appear to be more stressed but because the family farm involves both generations, interventions to assist must include both generations. Some suggestions were made about resolving conflict through open and positive communication and by talking about the conflict early, which increased the chances of a better outcome for all involved.

A study by Voyce (1999), who takes a more legal approach in his article, highlights, as did Stayner (1997), not only the importance of family stability and satisfaction in working together, but also the need to have a viable economic unit to begin with. Voyce reports that in a study completed in Western Australia, only 14% of farmers had a firm succession plan, and 57 out of 67 farmers had significant disagreements that may threaten the viability and continuity of the family farm (Voyce, 1999, 23). As one farmer is quoted as saying:

“...if I give the farm away my wife and I will have no money to live on for the next 5 years until we become eligible for the pension ... Due to harsh conditions we don't have enough profit to support two families”

(Voyce, 1999, 23).

This quote highlights a very important policy area for further research. That area includes an exploration of the effects on older farmers of policies that do not allow a pension because of an enforced wait of five years to disperse assets through succession or sale of properties. This leaves many farmers no choice but to stay farming until very old, thus affecting the future chances of entry into farming by much younger farmers (Barclay, Foskey & Reeve, 2007, 56).

The difficulties surrounding entry into farming for young people also poses many problems, with many of them having to wait for the older generation

to die or retire before they can actually get a start in farming. There are also important policy areas to be explored in relation to older farmers obtaining pension support from Centrelink,<sup>6</sup> which will also impact on young farmers and their families. The present research can make a positive contribution towards this in providing current information relating to succession and entry into farming, and fill the gap in knowledge about what the younger generation of farmers actually thinks about taking over the family farm, as well as some of the problems they face in this important issue. The literature clearly highlights many difficulties surrounding succession and entry into farming, particularly for young farmers. When we put these concerns alongside the challenges of living and working with two generations on the same property on a daily basis, and in many instances sharing the same house, it is no surprise that conflicts will arise.

## Advocacy and representation

Australian farming interest and lobby groups such as the National Farmers Federation (NFF)<sup>7</sup> and the South Australian Farmers Federation (SAFF) aim to provide farmers with representation, and a voice for their farming concerns, to the policy makers in government. The literature provides some insight into the challenges faced by these organisations when attempting to represent a diverse range of opinions and issues.

As the literature highlights, especially over the past 10 years, these organisations in particular are facing many difficulties in providing adequate representation and advocacy. Some of these difficulties coincide with low commodity prices, sustainability and viability concerns, increasing trade liberalism, economic and industry deregulation, greater impacts of European and North American trade policy, and the globalisation of farming, which all exist in a background climate of dwindling direct government intervention and price supports (Gerritsen, 1987, 1992; Gerritsen & Abbott, 1988, 1990).

Stevens (1997), in a summary article featured in the *Australian Farm Journal*<sup>8</sup>, discusses some of the concerns that farmers have with both the NFF and

<sup>6</sup> Centrelink is the federal government welfare department responsible for all payments to people who are unable to work or who require financial support.

<sup>7</sup> NFF is the National Farmers Federation the Federal body that represents farmers in Australia. SAFF is the South Australian Farmers Federation the state body that represents farmers in South Australia.

<sup>8</sup> The *Australian Farm Journal* is a farming journal published by The Australian Farm Institute.

SAFF. In 1997 SAFF threatened to withdraw its members from attending the NFF Council because of financial constraints, and a growing dissatisfaction with the performance of the peak farming body.

Stevens (1997) also raised concerns farmers had with both the NFF and SAFF not using communication strategies that were effective, and was especially critical of the lack of use of new technology. Stevens (1997) highlights the concerns many farmers have with not being able to directly represent their views, instead having to come through elected members who many felt did not represent their views adequately, nor understand their varied concerns. Many farmers also cited problems with structure: there was a top-down approach to issues, rather than the approach being driven by the farming membership base (Stevens, 1997, 20). The article by Stevens (1997) highlights many of the frustrations felt by Australian farmers with both their state-based lobby organisation, the South Australian Farmers Federation, and the federal based National Farmers Federation.

Some ten years later, Pickering (2006) in an article in the *Stock Journal*<sup>9</sup> also highlights many of the same unresolved issues plaguing SAFF. The article ran a headline of “Sharky SAFF battles apathy”. The issues were summed up by a 19-year-old Yorke Peninsula farmer who said, “I haven’t had a lot to do with them—I don’t even know what they do”, that “... many other young people in the area were also not familiar with the state’s peak farming organisation” and “I don’t know anyone involved with it” (Pickering, 2006, 3). Pickering’s article reports on a workshop hosted by SAFF to gain advice from members and interested others about what needs to change. A small sample of some of these suggestions which come directly from farmers comments that attended the workshop to discuss how SAFF could be improved are included below:

“What should the structure of SAFF be?

- Regional-level committees, with commodity-based representation.
- Youth, communications, marketing finance to be represented.
- Membership opened up to all primary producers.

What should the role of SAFF be?

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<sup>9</sup> The *Stock Journal* is the weekly farm journal which circulates to South Australian Farmers and provides general farming information of interest to farmers.

- Representation, advocacy and advisory role with and between Government and Primary Producers.
- Focus on sustainability and profit for farming industries.
- Profile and promote primary industries.
- Offer leadership and develop the farming sector.
- Research and development – help industry to prioritise.

How should SAFF be financed?

- Increase sponsorship.
- Seek Government funding for projects.
- Education and other service provision.
- Investment.

How does SAFF attract new members?

- Relationship building – schools, TAFE, University.
- Sustainable interest groups in commodity areas.
- Different membership types.
- Incentive-based approach to new members.
- More face to face effort in regional communities” (Pickering, 2006, 3).

Pickering (2006) has summarised many of the current and ongoing difficulties that SAFF are experiencing. The recommendations come from “Our future—Our Voice” which was a workshop attended by farmers to recommend vital changes to the way that SAFF is currently operating.

Halpin (2004) provides an historical perspective on the political representation of Australian farmers. Halpin says that since the formation of the NFF in 1979, farmers no longer rely on party politics but rather on their peak farming lobby groups like NFF and SAFF. Halpin believes that this has provided farmers with a united front to present to the government—as the NFF is widely recognised by government as the voice of Australian farmers and that it has changed Australian agriculture and economic policy in particular (Halpin, 2004, 469).

Halpin, as did previously Stevens (1997) and Pickering (2006), identifies some major concerns with representation by the peak farming bodies. These include falling membership, and criticism of some policies by the general public (such as live-sheep trade and mulesing). Dissatisfaction by members and budgetary concerns remain (Halpin, 2004, 470). Halpin puts forward the idea that farmers' representation has always been in transition, and wonders if there is an opportunity for a new farming body to emerge (Halpin, 2004, 489). Halpin writes from a political point of view, and obviously believes that something needs to change in the area of representation and lobbying for Australian farmers.

In another article written by Halpin (2002), the author describes the process taken by the NFF when raising policy issues. Halpin says that the NFF takes an "insider" position on policy making. The "insider" position ensures that the government will not be unduly embarrassed and that each party will follow certain ground rules. As Maloney, Jordan and McLaughlin (1994, 36) say:

The group-Government relationship is exchange-based; Government offers groups the opportunity to shape public policy, while groups provide Government with certain resources (e.g. knowledge, technical advice or expertise, membership compliance or consent, credibility, information, implementation guarantees) which it needs to secure workable policies.

(Halpin, 2002, 489).

Policy making relies on farmers being actively consulted, and it would seem that the current evidence is that farmers and, in particular, young farmers, would not be confident that this widespread consultation process is happening. These farmers cite membership costs and lack of confidence in representation of their issues as being the main concerns (Pickering, 2006, 3). In June 2006, SAFF conducted a phone in hotline called the "Reality Check". The aim of this hotline was to provide an opportunity for farmers to call in and voice their current concerns. Little consideration was given to the fact that it was scheduled in the middle of seeding (one of the busiest times of the year for many farmers), and that there were no structured questions asked of farmers, with results being difficult to interpret and collate. However, there were many mentions made in this hotline of the lack of farming advocacy and representation by both state and federal farming bodies (Eberhard, Clarke & Morgan, 2006, 9).



In March 1987, Slee provided a report generated from a telephone survey conducted by the United Farmers and Stockowners (which later became the SAFF), which highlighted the high levels of stress amongst farmers with associated physical and psychological ill health. It was expected that this report would also provide impetus for changes in the United Farmers and Stockowners: however, there were no major changes made as a result of the research by Slee (Slee, 1988, 9–13).

It is not all bad news for farmers in the area of advocacy and representation. Some new and innovative ways for sharing information and representation are emerging. An organisation called “Yarn” which is funded by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, is an interactive website designed specifically to support young people in rural industries ([www.yarn.gov.au](http://www.yarn.gov.au)). Yarn is an Australian government initiative, and it provides an opportunity for young rural people to share ideas and information with each other. There is also “Women In Agriculture” which is also available via the web and this organisation has a similar function for women.

Farming lobby/interest groups like SAFF and the NFF have an important role to play in Australian agriculture in the areas of both representation and advocacy, and also in the vital area of policy formation and implementation. The literature presented in this review highlights the inadequacy of the current organisations to represent Australian farmers in the complex working environment in which they operate. The present research will provide some information via personal interviews with young farmers about what they currently think about their representative farming organisations.

## **Impact of the internet**

The internet and new computer technologies are an integral part of young farmers conducting their businesses in a mainly global environment, to ensure maximum returns from their farming interests. The present research explores the use of technology, as this has been identified in current literature as an important part of farming business. The 2006 Census has also recognised the importance of the internet generally, and in particular around access. A new question was asked in the 2006 Census about the “Type of Internet Connection (NEDD)” this question explores “the number of occupied private dwellings with internet access by the type of access” (Census Dictionary, 2006, 35).

Groves and Da Rin (1999) have provided much of the work on internet information for Australian farm businesses. Some of these publications include *What's on the web now for Australian farmers* (1996), *The Australian Farmer's Guide to the Internet* (1997), *Demand for and Supply of Internet Content for Australian Farm Businesses and Buying and Selling Online: The Opportunities of Electronic Commerce for Australian Farm Businesses* to name just some of their publications. (Groves & Da Rin, 1999, iv).

Groves and Da Rin (1999) report that more than 20% of Australian farm households are connected to the internet, and that this is growing rapidly. They say that farmers use the internet for a number of reasons, including commodity market reports, pricing information, technical information, weather information, planning, record keeping and financial and supply information (Groves & Da Rin, 1999, 2). Most farmers report that they are using the internet mainly for business with less emphasis on social usage, which is more common to the rest of the general population (Groves & Da Rin, 1999, 5).

There are also many interesting new ways that the internet is being used. An example of this is "Farmscape Online" which uses soil and weather monitoring, crop simulation, group discussions and evaluation to jointly explore the issues around cropping to farmers via the internet (Hargreaves D, Hochman Z, Dalgliesh N & Poulton P, 2001, 1).

Groves and Da Rin (1999) highlight that most of the large organisations involved in Australian agriculture have a website, that websites were growing at an astounding rate, and that these varied in quality and usefulness. They identified some problems with agricultural organisations' internet relationships with farmers and these include the fact that many of the websites were not interactive, many had not bothered to canvass the actual needs of the farm users, many made little effort to promote their websites, the majority did not keep their websites updated and many websites were not designed to cope with poor access specifically dial-up access and speed (Groves & Da Rin, 1999, 34).

Obviously, the benefits in the areas of marketing, selling and purchasing on the internet have enormous possibilities for young farmers to enhance their viability and competitiveness in the future. Groves and Da Rin highlight the many emerging opportunities for sale of commodities, in particular, for

example, the sale of grain and livestock over the internet. The convenience of internet banking, and web-based financial and social services, cannot be underestimated. Many government and health agencies are now offering some services directly through the internet, particularly in the area of telehealth and Centrelink agencies (Groves & Da Rin, 1999, 22).

There are also many benefits of using the internet for the education and training of young farmers. Some of the benefits as highlighted by Groves & Da Rin (1999) include a reduction in isolation, a more affordable and accessible way to access a wide variety of educational opportunities, education can be interactive and self-paced, and more efficient use of both the students' and educators' time. The use of the internet in education may also help to keep young people in rural communities as they will be able to study at home (Groves & Da Rin, 1999, 23).

Healthy public policy to support young farmers in the area of internet usage would ensure the availability of fast broadband connection to all Australians, and would be particularly aware of pricing policies in regional, rural and remote Australia. Groves and DaRin report that there is a need for continued expansion of public access points to the internet, particularly in very remote and isolated communities, to continue development of the internet across a wide range of public services—including health, education and training—to monitor and research the ongoing usefulness of the internet to Australian agriculture and, in particular, to the ongoing needs of young farmers, focused especially on their sustainability and viability (Groves & Da Rin, 1999, 33).

It is clear that the internet has important implications for young farmers in many areas of both their business and personal lives. The present research has provided a further opportunity for exploring the current views of young farmers on the usefulness and effectiveness of the internet as another tool they can use to assist them in engaging with the global farming environment.

## **Agricultural Bureau of South Australia**

The Agricultural Bureau<sup>10</sup> was first formed in South Australia in 1888. This organisation is a non-political volunteer organisation run by farmers for farmers. There are approximately 100 branches across South Australia,

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<sup>10</sup> This information about the agricultural bureau comes from <http://www.agbureau.com.au>

however, many of these have recently closed due to a lack of members attending the meetings. Most groups focus on meetings that share new ideas in farming, they hold discussions around new farming practices, and also keep up with latest developments in farming.

The Agricultural Bureau has three main goals. These are: to support best practice in farming, to keep farmers informed and supported with new farming developments and to assist with managing change in the agricultural industry.

Another advantage of the Agricultural Bureau is the low cost of membership when compared to the South Australian Farmers Federation. Membership of SAFF is out of reach of all the young farmers interviewed for the present project.

The benefits of membership to the Agricultural Bureau are highlighted to members as being part of your local community, which includes community activities such as field days, local field trials, bus tours, meetings and workshops. Another benefit of membership includes being an active member of a state-wide farmer network that has the ability to influence government. The governing body of the Agricultural Bureau is the Advisory Board of Agriculture and this group has a direct link to the South Australian Minister of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries.

The Advisory Board has a strong link to universities, Primary Industries and Resources (South Australia) and the Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation. This should make the Advisory Board of Agriculture a powerful ally of young farmers, enabling them to get their ideas straight to the Minister of Agriculture. However, with a lack of Agricultural Bureaux currently operational, this hampers opportunities for young farmers to, firstly, attend the Agricultural Bureaux and, secondly to provide policy relevant information to members of the Advisory Board who can then influence the Minister of Agriculture or other government organisations such as the Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation.

## Agricultural policy

Overall, Australia's agricultural policies are focused on farmers' self-reliance, with little support provided through government policy. Public policy is defined in many ways in the literature, and Hal Colebatch (1998) offers several definitions including: "whatever governments choose to do or not to do"; "... the notion also embraces general directions and philosophies"; and "... policy is a shorthand description for everything from an analysis of past decisions to the imposition of current political thinking" (Colebatch (1998) in Bridgman & Davis, 2004, 3).

Australian farming is a significant contributor to world trade: approximately 60% of all produce is exported. The farming environment has been dominated by a market driven and export oriented philosophy (Gilmour & Gurung, no date, 1). The history of Australian agricultural policy is dominated by risk management and adjustment policies, and drought policy, and includes a strong focus on minimal government intervention and support, in line with a neo-liberal policy philosophy.

During the late 1970s and 1980s Australia had some risk management policies, particularly in the dairy and wool industries, with reserve price schemes and supply market schemes. By the late '80s Australia had moved towards a more market-oriented policy, which resulted in minimal policy intervention and regulation, and policy makers chose a rather disciplined approach to assisting farmers. This approach included minimal rural community support, and focused mainly on short-term, time-limited household support in times of hardship, access to professional support and advice, and a sustained emphasis on skill development, management, financial planning and commercial responsibility (Gilmour & Gurung, no date, 2).

The national drought policy was also based on principles of risk management and farmers self-reliance. The Exceptional Circumstances policy is provided to assist farmers in times of severe drought and climatic conditions. The Exceptional Circumstances policy operates in association with the National Drought Policy and the Rural Adjustment Scheme. There are six main criteria used to assess whether or not an area of the state will be declared an Exceptional Circumstances area. If this happens farmers are able to apply to the government for financial assistance.



The six criteria for Exceptional Circumstances declaration include: meteorological conditions, agronomic and stock conditions, environmental impacts, farm income levels and the actual scale of the drought. If the criteria are met then Exceptional Circumstances are declared and assistance is available through weekly income support payment and/or through interest rate subsidies. (Gilmour & Gurung, no date, 2).

Another important agricultural policy is the Agriculture Advancing Australia (AAA) policy. This policy began in 1997, and it is an integrated package of programs to help farmers to become more profitable, sustainable and competitive. Some of the programs in this policy include funding for business development, funding support for natural resource management, support for industries undergoing change or adjustment, financial information and referral, funding for training and development in business skills, marketing, and financial management.

Farm Management Deposits are an important part of this policy area. This scheme allows farmers to set aside taxable primary production income in profitable years to be withdrawn in lower income years. Farm Management Deposits also provide tax benefits and interest is earned at market rates on the deposits full amount (Gilmour & Gurung, no date, 3).

Farm Help is another important policy area under AAA. Farm Help is focused on adjustment strategies, and it assists farmers with living expenses. Farm Help is based on the idea of farmers either improving their long term financial prospects by improving their financial skills, by finding some alternate source of income or by re-establishing themselves outside of the farming environment. Re-establishment payments are available to those who choose to leave farming. Farmers have reported that the financial advice available through Farm Help has assisted with long term decision making and has been seen by farmers as a positive strategy (Gilmour & Gurung, no date, 3).

Overseeing all of the agricultural policies and programs sits the Productivity Commission<sup>11</sup> and the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics. These organisations have the task of ensuring that support for farmers is kept low and in line with a neo-liberal philosophy. The Productivity Commission examines things like competition policy, productivity, labour markets, trade and structural adjustment.

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11 The productivity commission website is at <http://www.pc.gov.au>

In 2004, a high level Reference Group commissioned by the Minister of Agriculture made recommendations for the agriculture and food sector, and these included focusing on market and supply, chain responsiveness, competitiveness and adapting to change. Australia continues to pursue, on a global level, trade liberalisation policies and a focus on a neo-liberal economic rationalist approach to agricultural policy. Missing from these policies is the social impacts not only on individual farmers, but, some would argue, more importantly, the impacts on rural and regional communities.

### **Neo-liberal policy impacts**

The Australian government has recently pursued a neo-liberal approach to Australian agricultural policy. Agricultural structural adjustment is the policy mechanism, and the expected outcome of a neo-liberal philosophy. To fully understand Australian agriculture policy decisions, Pritchard (2005) says that not only are the outcomes of policy important but also the ideologies and philosophies behind this approach. Pritchard (2005) writes that the main reason that the Australian government adopted a neo-liberal approach to agricultural policy was to improve economic gains using an open and free market environment. Pritchard (2005) states that the attitude of the government promoting the use of this approach is "... that the farming family should persist only to the extent that it is sustained by the market, and the primary role of government should be to ensure that liberal market conditions are upheld" (Pritchard, 2005, 5).

Unfortunately, for small and medium farmers the "singlemindedness" of this approach has not recognised the important social and environmental issues resulting from neo-liberal policies (Pritchard, 2005, 5). Other important implications of a neo-liberal approach have included declining farm populations, rural decline, increased instability of commodity prices, increased environmental degradation and unequal global trading inequities (Higgins, 1998, 2).

Neo-liberalism is described by Argy (1998) as "economic liberalism taken to extreme". The values underpinning neo-liberalism are decreased intervention in economic matters by the government, and a promotion of individual freedom (Tilzey, 2004). Ideologically, some of these values are in line with many of the values supported by Australian farmers, especially those values

around individual freedom to make decisions, individualism and self-reliance. Australian farmers generally support the value of responsibility, as well as liberal policies aimed at decreasing regulation of small business. However, what a neo-liberal approach fails to support adequately enough is the strong sense of community, family and rural identity that the majority farmers hold as important aspects of living and working on farms and within small rural communities (Fragar, 2001).

Australian agricultural policy has relied upon the deregulation of particular markets to “structurally adjust” those farmers it considers to be no longer viable in their particular industry. Farmers, however, are left with three main options around structural adjustment. These are to attempt to persist and continue with their current strategies, to change what they are currently doing, or to exit the agricultural industry (Vanclay, 2003, 87). Vanclay goes on to say that some farmers also use other strategies, to help them to “adjust” and these are; to exploit their farm resource, they do not replace machinery, work off-farm, “tighten their belts” and borrow more money (Vanclay, 2003, 87).

Unfortunately, none of these strategies provides a long term solution for those farmers who find themselves in difficult situations. Vanclay also highlights the devastating personal effects of “belt tightening” which includes, for many farmers and their families, social isolation, an inability to go out to sport or social engagements and borrowing more money which has the effect of running down equity in their farms. The other effect that structural adjustment has is to reduce the size of small rural towns, including reducing job opportunities in these towns, as well as the number of available services and resources as farmers are forced to exit the agricultural industry thus adding to the effects of the rural decline (Vanclay, 2003, 89).

Vanclay (2003) summarises these ideas:

Australian agriculture is socially, culturally, politically, economically and historically constructed. The structure of Agriculture has been dictated by Government policies that have determined; which areas were available for agriculture, the size of the holdings, the types of crops grown, the amount of expansion that can take place, and so on. Farmers who are currently being structured out of Agriculture were not marginal because of their inability to farm, but because their farmers were situated to be marginal to begin with. Social and environmental considerations mean that a great concern for the welfare of farmers is needed.

(Vanclay, 2003, 90).

Other government strategies around agricultural deregulation include the reduction of import tariffs, the deregulation of the finance and banking sector, the privatisation of state-owned utilities (Vanclay, 2003, 84). Some of the more agricultural focused “adjustment” strategies included the abolition of the wool floor price which had devastating effects on woolgrowers, the deregulation of agricultural marketing arrangements, which is also creating much stress and uncertainty for many farmers unfamiliar with the impacts of globalisation on their current markets, and the privatisation and in some instances removal of commodity marketing boards (Vanclay, 2003, 84).

These strategies have made life very difficult for farmers especially in relation to the inconsistent prices for their commodities, trading inequities from the United States of America (USA) and the European Union (EU) who continue to receive subsidies to support their farming commodities (Fargher, Hewett, 2005, 63). Unfortunately, the expected changes to both the EU and US protectionist policies in agriculture, which would have seen both of these countries either significantly reducing, or even completely removing subsidies, has not happened—even though there has been some reduction in subsidies for farmers in the United Kingdom (UK) as a result of the Common Agricultural Policy changes made in 2005. Farmers in the UK will now need to produce food at lower costs or provide higher value commodities to remain competitive (Marsh, 2004, 2).

Subsidies for production by the USA and EU in particular have resulted in an uneven “playing field” for Australian farmers. This has resulted in difficulties remaining competitive, with increasing issues of viability and sustainability. With unknown prices for commodities as well as difficulties with high prices for fuel, fertilisers and technology, and with a recognition that many of these are necessities for good farming practice, farmers must rely on global interests for their availability and supply (Vanclay, 2003, 82).

In an article from 2004, “Agriculture and Human Values”, Alston discusses the changing social aspects of farming in the 21st century and the impacts of globalisation on Australian farmers, and the Australian government’s policy responses to neo-liberal philosophies, are highlighted. The author raises concerns about the need to improve equity and development in rural areas. Alston talks about the social consequences of neo-liberal philosophies; for example, unemployment, education, rural poverty, health and welfare, and loss of social capital, and highlights the difficulties that this is creating for those living in rural communities (Alston, 2004, 43).

As Alston states, “The neoliberal response to globalisation has left farm families and their communities exposed and largely unsupported”; and “A move away from neoliberal market mantra appears necessary to ensure a viable future for rural people and rural communities” (Alston, 2004, 44). Alston calls for the government to consider the types of agricultural policy responses used by the European Union, which support regional development as a positive example of what Australia should be using in agricultural policy making: policy decisions that clearly take into account the social, cultural and environmental issues relating to farmers and rural communities (Alston, 2004, 44).

The Cole Inquiry, which was the federal government’s inquiry into the Australian Wheat Board, highlights how Australian agriculture has been damaged by the mismanagement of the Australian Wheat Boards “Oil for Food” trade arrangement. Australia was found by the United Nations to be one of the world’s largest indirect contributors to Saddam Hussein’s regime whilst we were sending Australian troops to fight the very same regime. These actions by a few have put the reputation of Australian farmers at risk globally, whilst recognising that individual farmers had no control over trade arrangements or neo-liberal ideologies behind these decisions, and this has caused stress for Australian farmers and embarrassment in the global environment (Cole, 2006).

Some writers believe that Australian farmers should receive partial support from the government. Higgins (1998) argues that there are two main arguments for state support of farmers. These are that farmers not only have to deal with market fluctuations, but are also dependent on nature for their living. Higgins says that the state has a responsibility to intervene in severe weather distortions such as fire, drought and floods. In fact, we have seen this happening in South Australia recently, with the implementation of Exceptional Circumstances payments and interest rate subsidy support for farmers in drought declared areas (Higgins, 1998).

Higgins also argues that the process of farm “adjustment” does not encourage environmental sustainability or responsibility, and in fact would often result in further degradation of natural resources as farmers are forced to overgraze and overcrop their land in an attempt to continue to be viable. Higgins says the state does have a role to intervene to “protect a finite



resource". The third point Higgins makes is that the ideology behind the neo-liberal approach fails to recognise that many of the problems faced by farmers are structural and global by nature. An individual farmer alone will not be able to solve all of these issues, as they sit outside of his/her control, and certainly cannot be solved by the individual farmer receiving numerous "business course" opportunities. Pritchard (2005) and Alston (2004) both support Higgin's arguments. Alston (2004) says that:

A move away from neo-liberal market mantra appears necessary to ensure a viable future for rural people and rural communities. In making this move, it may be necessary for Australia to refocus its response to WTO rhetoric by incorporating support for regional areas into its policy initiatives.

(Alston, 2004, 44).

The neo-liberal government policies have resulted in a loss of skilled farmers to the Australian agricultural industry, which has an ageing farming population and minimal entry into the industry by young farmers. This paints a grim picture for agriculture unless policy makers can consider a new political ideology that balances the goals of profitability, efficiency and competitiveness inherent within neo-liberal philosophies, with values that farmers hold as important.

There is also a need to consider the environmental and social implications for small rural communities of continuing with a "one-eyed" economic agenda, as currently the neo-liberal approach has not been able to adequately support these important areas. The present research project will provide opportunities to examine the impact on young farmers of the neo-liberal approach to farming philosophy. It will also determine the importance of the need to review the neo-liberal philosophical approach to Australian agriculture, especially in how it relates to globalisation and trade, and how this approach is also impacting on the viability and sustainability of young farmers.

## **Social determinants**

This next article, titled "Barriers to Addressing the Social Determinants of Health: Insights from the Canadian Experience", has been included because it highlights some interesting arguments about why the social determinants have failed to have an impact in addressing those determinants of health

that are socially influenced. Exploring the social determinants provides opportunities for policy makers to then address the causal factors influencing a population's health and well being. Raphael, Stevens and Bryant (2006) discuss how Canada has failed to address the social determinants of health.

The article argues that the way that health professionals, the public, and policy makers understand and consider a particular issue has a vital impact on how the problem is dealt with in policy. The authors are suggesting that the social determinants are not well understood or taken seriously by many groups (Raphael, Stevens & Bryant, 2006, 2). The authors also highlight that individualism and a neo-liberal philosophy weakens support for the social determinants approach to health promotion.

The ideology of a positivist approach, which originates from health sciences and epidemiological studies, is based on scientific studies—often quantitative in nature—and they often fail to examine the broader environmental factors and causes of ill health. The positivist approach often does not consider either the political, economic and social influences that are responsible for causing ill health. Objectivity is the approach used by researchers using a positivist ideology, and researcher bias is often unrecognised in many of these types of studies. Raphael, Stevens and Bryant (2006) go on to say that the traditional health sciences approach leaves health problems individualised, localised, desocialised and depoliticised with policy solutions under conservative neo-liberal ideologies as residual and desocialised—with many programs succumbing to cuts and an eventual loss of funding (Raphael, Stevens & Bryant, 2006, 7).

Raphael, Stevens and Bryant (2006) go on to point out that individualism itself also erodes the social determinants approach. As Travers (1997) says,

Individualism is the belief that one's place in the social hierarchy – their occupational class, income and wealth, and power and prestige as well as the effects of such placement such as health and disease status – comes through ones own efforts.

Individualism in health thus creates the understanding that the health problems of an individual are individual problems rather than societal problems as well as placing the blame for these problems internally. That is, that it must be some fault within the person. It fails to say much at all about how societal structures could be modified to better support a person within the environment, rather than blaming them for their situation.

Raphael, Stevens and Bryant, go on to state that an increasing market orientation also weakens support for the social determinants. The rise of capitalism and a market economy also came at the same time as strong beliefs in individualism. These ideologies have resulted in minimising government interventions, and a growing belief that markets are the best and only way to allocate resources in production and distribution. They also resulted in the belief that societies are made up of individuals motivated by economic gains, and that competition is the only way to achieve in life (Raphael, Stevens & Bryant, 2006, 8).

Raphael, Stevens and Bryant conclude their argument by stating that there are three main ways that the social and political supports by which public policy could support the social determinants of health.

The first way is to develop social and political movements in support of health and these could be social development or social advocacy groups. The vehicle described by the authors of implementing these changes is through education. The authors believe that the general public, in liberal political economies, is uninformed about the impact of the social determinants on their lives. The business-oriented, market-driven approach results in a form of governance that increases income and wealth unequally, and poverty remains persistent in society, with ongoing problems in the population health profile. The authors go on to state that health researchers should collect stories about the impact of the social determinants on people's lives, highlighting the need for community action. An example of that they provided is the Peoples Health Assembly. Raphael, Stevens and Bryant suggest supporting political action in support of health, with a recognition that the quality of the social determinants of health is shaped by the political ideology of governments (Raphael, Stevens & Bryant, 2006, 14-17).

The authors summarise these ideas by stating: "Dominant ideologies typical of the health sciences, public attitudes towards personal responsibility, and increasing market influence all work against having a social determinants of health agenda implemented" (Raphael, Stevens & Bryant, 2006, 16).

This article is important to the present research as it highlights many of the structural barriers to young farmers making positive changes to their own lives and those of their local rural communities. The article describes the difficulty with populations like young farmers influencing the health

agenda due to the reliance in health on the health sciences' problem-focused approach, a reliance on individualism and the impact on governance of a neo-liberal and economic rationalist approach to policy making.

It is clear that if governments continue with a narrow focus, relying on fixing problems rather than using the causal social determinants approach, then we will continue to see persistent poverty, poor population health profiles in rural communities and increasing income and wealth inequality between urban and rural communities.

In another article examining the effectiveness of the social determinants of health Baum (2008) also highlights the need for civil society lobby and advocacy groups to advocate for equity oriented policies. Baum also agrees with the need to create health and equity promoting environments, not just simplistic programs aimed at the individual making simplistic behavioural changes. Baum calls for a commitment to fairness and justice in all health and social policies with increasing recognition of the importance of social capital. (Baum, 2008).

## **Trade**

Australia's trading arrangements are complex, and beyond the scope of a full analysis in this literature review. Over the past 30 years Australia has pursued agricultural trade liberalisation in the hope that multilateral trade liberalisation would benefit exporters (farmers being one of these), and that any of these benefits would also make its way through the rest of the economy. Unfortunately for Australia, because of a narrow focus on the economic benefits, many of the social and environmental benefits particularly in rural and regional communities have not been experienced.

As Pritchard (2001) says,

... the national benefits of agricultural trade liberalisation have been "over-sold" and, because of institutional and political factors, debates have been truncated. Questioning free trade is positioned discursively "against the national interest", as "emotional" not "rational". For farmers forced off the land or rural towns in crisis, hardship is interpreted as personal rather than policy failure. The hardships of rural Australia remain largely unseen and unmeasured by an agri-trade bureaucracy more interested in attempting to model (things like) how the funding of hedgerow protection in Europe represents a hidden subsidy that hurts Australian farmers.

(Pritchard, 2001, 4).

Pritchard calls for a much more open debate surrounding the policy of trade liberalisation and this includes a separation of research and advocacy functions within and outside of Government departments (Pritchard, 2001, 4).

The National Farmers Federation provides a trade policy brief and their priority is achieving significant new export market opportunities and reducing distortions in global markets through agricultural trade reform in the World Trade Organisation (WTO).<sup>12</sup>

South Australia has an export council, and it is its role to treble South Australian exports by 2013, to double the number of exporting firms by 2006, and to diversify South Australia's export base. The Export Council has five main strategies. These are: to listen to the export industry, to lead industry sectors to achieve plans, to identify any export barriers and to make recommendations to government for ways to support exporters (South Australian Export Council, 2004, *Exec Summary*).

Trade and export are a large part of selling much of the commodities grown by young farmers and organisations such as the South Australian Export Council the National Farmers Federation, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation all have a role to play in supporting young farmers into the future in trading negotiations for their commodities.

## Government reports

The Government report written by Land and Water Australia, and titled *Australia's farmers: past, present and future* provides one of the most comprehensive reports on the demographic structure of Australia's farming population between 1976 and 2001.

There is some important information relating to young farmers in this report, particularly those entering and exiting farming. The number of young males entering farming has declined rapidly: for example, between 1981 and 1991 the number of teenage males entering farming has declined by 40% and has not since recovered (Land and Water Aust, 2005, 1). Of concern also is that the rate of exit of young men from agriculture rose significantly in the 1980s and has remained high ever since.

<sup>12</sup> Website reference to be found at <http://www.nff.org.au>



Between 1981 and 1991 the number of young men leaving agriculture over a five year period rose from 2000 to 3620 ... This represents an exit rate rising from three per cent to ten per cent (in the same period the base number of young farmers has been declining)

(Land and Water Aust, 2005, 17).

The decline of entry into agriculture by young farmers has been reported to be in response to rural structural adjustment with many young people not being encouraged to begin a career in farming, with competition from other industries such as mining that successfully attract young people with more wages and better conditions, and with low commodity prices and high costs involved in farming in recent times (Land and Water Aust, 2005, 1).

This report also raises some interesting discussion about the impact of the changing social values and structures within Australian society and how this is currently impacting upon Australian farming. The first is the increasing urbanisation of Australia, with more and more people living in and moving to urban areas. This has resulted in the culture of farming having less impact on the values of Australian society, with further declining political influence by farmers and rural communities. Many urban dwellers have also taken advantage of acquiring rural "hobby farms", or lifestyle properties, and this has also had an impact on the nation being able to maintain land use solely for agriculture (Land and Water Aust, 2005, 32).

The second issue discussed is the decline of farming as a lifestyle, and how it is now regarded by young farmers as more of a business that must make profits. The third issue discussed is the lack of attractiveness of farming as a career for young people. This latter is reflected in low entry rates into farming and high exit rates by young people with farming seen as less attractive than many other careers. Some now say it is just "not trendy" to be a farmer (Land and Water Aust, 2005, 3).

The fourth issue highlighted is the changing gender relationships on farms, with women now taking an active place in all aspects of farming, including decision making, physical work and off farm work. Better career options in urban areas have also posed difficulties for women who would like to stay working on farms but can see better opportunities elsewhere (Land and Water Aust, 2005, 33).

In 2004 the South Australian Farmers Federation released its report titled

*A triple bottom line for the bush.* This report provided a current snapshot of South Australian farms and farmers, and it included sections on the economy and farming, the environment and farming, and the social environment and farming. The aim of the report was to develop a new policy initiative to raise the social, economic and environmental viability of all farmers and other country residents, and to stabilise rural and regional populations. At the heart of this new policy initiative was the creation of more non-agricultural work opportunities for farmers in rural communities. Another part of this strategy was the provision to pay farmers for environmental management similar to some policies already in existence in the United Kingdom (SAFF, 2004, 9). This new policy initiative also called for increased support for rural infrastructure by both state and federal governments.

## Conclusion

Advocacy and representation of young farmers is an important area. The articles discussed in this chapter paint a disappointing picture of the lack of representation of young farmers with young farmers not having any “real” way of making their voices heard. Unfortunately, even when their voices are heard, it appears that until only very recently farm lobby groups have not responded to their recommendations.

Another area of concern for the future of farming is the lack of young people entering farming, and the numbers of young farmers exiting farming in the search of better incomes and conditions. Many of the young farmers who were discussed in these articles are not able to enter farming without the full support of their parents, and many cannot see how they will be able to expand their farming enterprises. Financial problems, low incomes, low commodity prices and high input costs have exacerbated young farmer’s attempts to enter and to stay in the agricultural industry.

The past 30 years of a neo-liberal philosophy of government has been dominated by a loss of farmers from the industry, structural adjustment, economic rationalist dominated policies, deregulation, and many infrastructure losses to rural communities, with a worsening of the rural decline.

The economic rationalist governmental approach has left farmers unsupported, and needing to compete with those countries receiving

subsidies. Unless this approach changes in some way, then we may no longer have the diversity and choices that we currently experience in the agricultural industry in this country. Agriculture can be run by large corporations, but with this comes many new problems such as price fixing, lack of choice, and a continued rural decline for rural and regional communities. The family farm has many advantages and has remained persistent over the past decades with the literature demonstrating that there are many more reasons than just the economics keeping people on their family farms.

The articles about stress, reviewed earlier, have mostly not been written specifically about young farmers. Most articles agree that farmers carry relatively high levels of occupational stress: however, nearly all agreed that this stress was not responsible for serious problems with mental health. Common causes of stress discussed included the weather, the amount of paper work and regulations, costs, financial and economic concerns, long working hours and low incomes for many farmers. Many of these issues are out of their control. The literature highlighted that farmers were receiving high levels of support from their families, friends and neighbours who all understood their current concerns.

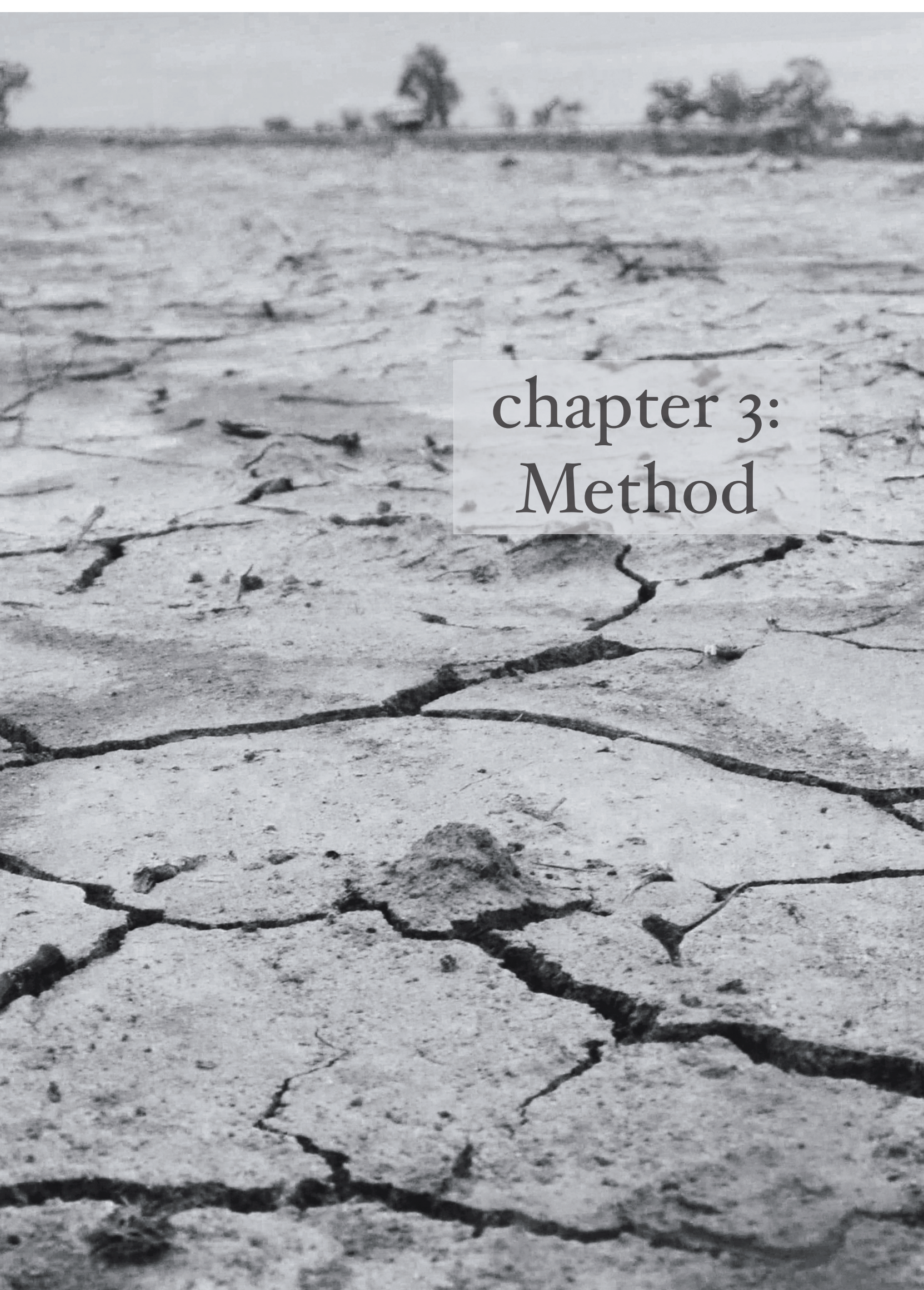
The government reports that have been reviewed are brief, and include some demographic data on farmers, as well as a report from the South Australian Farmers Federation on the recommendations for improving farming in rural and regional South Australia. Trade is a complex area, and this has been covered briefly. Trade policies are outside of the expertise of the present researcher; however, trade issues are important to the overall sustainability and viability of Australian farmers.

The literature has supported the need for the present research with young farmers, as farming relies on young farmers entering and staying in the industry long-term. The literature review also highlights some serious issues for the future viability and sustainability of farming especially for those already in the industry. It is clear that young farmers do not have any representation or advocacy in the public policy area, and that this will continue to see their needs and opinions unrepresented. Young farmers are clearly unable to influence many of the structural barriers that stand in their way and no amount of education and training or good management will solve these issues.

History has already proved that a solely focused economic rationalist view of farming will, in some ways, assist with the economic viability of the entire country: but it leaves individual farmers and their families unsupported.

For young farmers to experience a satisfying, supported and sustainable farming future, then, as the literature highlights, much more attention will need to be paid to the concepts of participation, control, advocacy and representation along with increased supports to rural and regional communities. Young farmers and their families need to feel that the rural communities that they live within are going to be well-resourced and supported by infrastructure that will allow them to have a viable and satisfying future. This includes the important maintenance of social capital in rural areas.



A black and white photograph of a cracked, dry landscape. The ground is parched and split into large, irregular polygonal sections by deep, dark cracks. In the background, a few sparse, leafless trees stand against a pale, overcast sky. The overall scene conveys a sense of extreme drought and environmental hardship.

chapter 3:  
Method



## Overview

The research project has used a case study design to explore the lives and experiences of young farmers in their own contexts, which in this case is on their own farms in their working and social environments. A case study method was chosen for this research, as it allows for the use of multiple sources of evidence and provides the opportunity for the researcher to engage with the complexity of the case whilst also exploring meaning. (Baum, 1998).

The case study method provides an opportunity for the researcher to gather the accounts and experiences of young farmers within their own contexts, and allows them to tell their stories of their own lives and experiences. This research is dependent on context because farming provides not only a place of work but, for most farmers, it is also their place of residence, which is most often shared with other family members. The farming environment is also an unusual working environment in that the weather and the natural environment have a large impact on the success or failure of any farming venture. This research is exploratory research, seeking out the information from young farmers and then synthesising and analysing this against policies that may be influencing their lives.

Action research principles have also been used throughout this research, especially in the area of knowledge transfer (Baum, 2007). The transfer of knowledge commenced from the initial discussion with young farmers about the selection of questions for the pilot interviews, with the researcher seeking active feedback from two young farmers about the appropriateness of interview questions. This feedback provided an active two-way learning process for the researcher and the young farmers involved: the researcher gained important insights about the questions to be asked, and the two young farmers learned more about the research process. Knowledge transfer continued throughout the research project with two participant feedback workshops being held at the request of some young farmers who wanted the opportunity to get together to discuss the research results, and to decide what areas of policy should be further influenced. Another part of active knowledge transfer has included regular monthly reports to the South Australian Farmers Federation about policy issues emerging from the progress of the research. As Jenkin (2001) and others state:

Research transfer is the linkage between the process of research and the processes in policy and practice, and in relation to behaviour at population, community and individual levels. Research transfer operates in two directions: research-based knowledge can influence decisions, and the problems of the decision-maker and/or consumer can guide the researcher.

(Jenkin et al, 2001, 12).

Action research principles allowed the current researcher to be actively engaged with reflection and action, and encouraged agencies to be involved with planning, responding to, and implementing changes to public policy as new information became available (Baum, 1998, 169). This process was assisted by the timing of the research. The emerging seriousness of the drought has resulted in agencies being more willing to listen to and act on any findings of the research. Many agencies genuinely felt that they wanted to assist farmers and struggling rural businesses as a result of the last few years' persistent drought conditions. The media was also more interested in the stories of farmers due to their heightened awareness resulting from the ongoing drought.

This chapter contains several headings and sub-headings. These are arranged as follows: introduction, case/methodology, piloting, qualitative tools, data analysis and feedback workshops.

## **Objectives of the research**

The objectives (listed below) linked closely to the research question and the questions asked of the participants through the semi-structured interviews. These objectives were chosen because the researcher wanted to examine the broad factors impacting on the lives of young farmers, and to explore the young farmers' lives and experiences. The opportunity to transfer knowledge from the research was included as an objective, as this provided outcomes that could be actioned from the research.

The research objectives were:

- To document what is already known about young farmers both in Australia and overseas
- To explore the policies that have an impact on young farmers

- To understand what it is like to be a young farmer by examining their lives and experiences
- To explore the influences on young farmers health with a focus on upstream causes both within and outside of health
- To identify and engage with agencies and organisations that can assist with knowledge transfer

### **Research question**

The research question was formulated over a period of several months after exploring relevant literature, discussing the topic with local farmers and listening to potential ideas for a research question from my colleagues. I also had the opportunity to discuss in detail the research question with my supervisor, and eventually came up with this question: “What do the lives of young farmers in the Mid North of South Australia tell us about public policy?”. I felt that this research question provides the opportunity to explore the lives and experiences of young farmers using semi-structured interviews and a case study approach with action research principles.

### **Limitations of the research**

There are limitations to this research. This research only presents the voices of one group of young farmers those of the Mid North of South Australia. The research is focused only on those farmers in the 18–35 year age range who identify farming as their main source of work and income.

As a researcher, I was keen to make a difference to the lives of young farmers by raising their profile and their issues, keeping in mind that there were also limitations facing me. Such limitations included a lack of available time whilst working full-time and also trying to achieve some work/life balance.

## Quality and ethics

This research has a three-year ethics approval, granted on the 19th March 2007 by the Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee of Flinders University of South Australia (see Appendix 4). The project number is 3779. As a researcher and social worker I have always been aware of the importance of ethical practice and I provided a commitment to young farmers from the onset of this research that I would be open, honest and transparent in all areas of the research. I spent a long time thinking about how I could maintain the privacy and confidentiality of young farmers in a relatively small research area.

Upon reflection, however, this was not a major concern. The young farmers themselves chose to identify themselves to one another by attending two feedback workshops because they wanted the opportunity to discuss the results with one another. This mirrors much of how communication works in small rural communities, with everyone having the opportunity to discuss common issues of concern in an open and transparent way. Those young farmers who did not want to attend had that option, and their privacy remained protected.

Throughout the conduct of the case study, a checklist for rating a case study approach was used to ensure quality (Baum, 2008, 183).

## Audit trail

The researcher's audit trail consists of journal notes that were recorded from the initial thoughts surrounding the construction of a suitable research question in 2006. This is an important part of ensuring rigour in the research, and of ensuring reflexive practice. It relies on the researcher being able to recognise and understand why a particular meaning may emerge at, for instance, the data collection stage.

The journal consists of the evolution of my thought processes around the research questions, interview questions, and some of the important points raised in the literature review and policy documents that required further exploration. The audit trail also includes notes about how thinking evolved and decisions were made about data analysis and reporting (DePoy & Gitlin, 1998, 204). The audit trail, although seemingly pages of confused thinking

and jottings, does provide some logical pathway through describing why things were done in a particular way, and it provides an opportunity for others to see the evolution of this research.

The ability to reflect is very important to any research, and is also a part of rigorous research. Reflexivity recognises the important process of the researcher examining their own feelings, attitudes, values and reactions to the research process. Reflexivity has been undertaken in this study by the researcher keeping a journal of what the feelings were about the research findings at different points. Being open and honest about how our own life experiences and knowledge has affected and influenced the way we think about the study is an important part of reflexivity (DePoy & Gitlin, 1998, 229).

## **The case/methodology**

A case study method was chosen for this research as it provides an opportunity for the researcher to gather the experiences and accounts of young farmers on their own farms and in their own contexts (Baum, 2008, 181–2). This research project is exploratory research; it involved seeking information from young farmers, gathering data, and analysing and interpreting this information to shed light on the phenomenon of public policies that may be impacting on the participants' lives and experiences (Baum, 2008, 102).

The case in this instance is young farmers in the 18–35 year age range who identify their main occupation as farming, and who spend most of their time working on the farm. The geographical boundaries for this case are the same boundaries as Mid North Health (see map in Appendix 1). The timing of this research includes one of the most persistent droughts in the Mid North area with drought conditions having existed in some places for the last three years, and in other areas for as many as seven years (*S.A. Drought E-News*, Dec, 2008).

## **Sample**

The average age of South Australian farmers is approximately 58 years, and I decided that exploring the lives and experiences of farmers in the 18–35 year age group would provide a satisfactory range of young farmers' experiences,



many of whom were beginning to establish themselves independently as farmers, and some of whom were still living at home with their parents (Land & Water Aust, 2005, 22).

## Recruitment

The catchment area for the research was approximately the same as Mid North Health.<sup>1</sup> This provided a diversity of geographical areas, and a broad scope for recruiting participants for the research (see map in Appendix 1). The estimated population figures for young farmers aged between 18 and 35 is currently unclear, although approximate census estimates for the total number of persons aged 15 to 34 that indicated they were employed in agriculture, forestry and/or fishing in the Mid North is 119 (107 males and 12 females) (Census, 2001). The participants were drawn from those who nominated farming as their main source of work and income.

Using the researcher's local knowledge, and her experience of how small rural communities work, it was decided that the most likely way to get participants interested in the research was to put a small advertisement in local rural businesses like the Elders<sup>2</sup> and Landmark offices (Stock Agents) in the four towns of Booleroo Centre, Peterborough, Orrorro and Jamestown. These are places that are most often frequented by young farmers. A small advertisement was also placed on local notice-boards in each of the four towns, advertising the research and providing the contact details of the researcher, which enabled interested farmers to phone and register their interest in the project (included as Appendix 2).

## Sampling method

The recruitment strategy was successful and a number of young farmers came forward to begin the research process: however, more participants were required for the study from particular areas that were not currently represented. From this point, two more sampling strategies were used.

1 Mid North Health is a Commonwealth funded health agency created to provide additional allied health services to populations of people under 5,000 and living in small and isolated rural communities. Mid North Health focuses on a range of non-clinical programs of a health promotion and early intervention focus.

2 Elders and Landmark offices are stock and station agents that sell merchandise to farmers and assist them to sell their livestock and grain.

The first strategy used was snowball sampling,<sup>3</sup> and this provided an opportunity for those young farmers who initially came forward to then provide names of other young farmers who may meet the study criteria (DePoy & Gitlin, 1998, 171–172). This provided a very useful strategy with numerous referrals to other young farmers in all areas.

The researcher also decided to use purposive sampling<sup>4</sup> to ensure that there was a widespread coverage, particularly in the more isolated and difficult to reach individuals in the pastoral country in the extreme north and east of the Mid North Health catchment area (DePoy & Gitlin, 1998, 171). These strategies for sampling and recruitment worked well: with 20 young farmers being interviewed (16 male and four females), and these participants came from a widespread coverage across the specified catchment area (see the map in Appendix 1).

## Data collection

The young farmers were mailed an information sheet and a suitable time, and venues for interviews were negotiated at this first phone contact with each participant. Consent forms, and letters of introduction, with the additional support services information, were discussed and given to each participant when the interview was conducted (see Appendix 6 for copies of these documents).

This strategy was satisfactory, and the researcher was able to provide additional information to assist participants in several areas. Such information included phone numbers of the local Rural Financial Counsellors, contacts for Centrelink,<sup>5</sup> and referral details to access government subsidies for the satellite broadband services. Being able to provide additional support information to young farmers on the spot was satisfying to the researcher, and beneficial for the participants.

The data collection methods used in this research included in-depth semi-structured interviews, a pilot of the interview schedule with two participants, two participant feedback workshops, and an analysis of

3 Snow ball sampling was the use of referrals from farmers already being interviewed to other farmers who may be interested in participating in the study.

4 Purposive sampling is another techniques used in qualitative research where farmers are chosen from particular areas not covered already so that a more representative sample can be obtained.

5 Centrelink is the Government agency responsible for all types of welfare payments.

written documents and reports. The interviews with the participants provided opportunities for the young farmers to talk about their experiences, opinions, feelings and knowledge.

Participants were given the opportunity to add any information that they felt was useful or important to the research. The interview schedule is available in Appendix 3. All interviews were taped (with informed consent) and the researcher completed all transcription, which provided the added advantage of a sense of “really” knowing the data. Humour was used when appropriate to provide a relaxed atmosphere, and to encourage as much open discussion as possible.

### **Piloting the interview schedule**

The interview questions were piloted with two young farmers, known to the researcher, from the local area. Both expressed a willingness to be involved with the research, and after gaining consent they were both interviewed. These two young farmers provided valuable feedback to the researcher for improvements to the interview questions.

As a local researcher I was able to talk with farmers in general about the proposed research, and they were also able to provide valuable information about the type of interview questions that would be useful and interesting. This provided the beginnings of the two- way knowledge transfer process.

### **Interview method**

The use of a semi-structured interview schedule allowed young farmers the opportunity to expand upon some of the questions posed in the research. The interview questions were designed to provide a broad snapshot of the lives and experiences of young farmers in the target area, to highlight the policy areas of interest. The interview questions were focused on exploring the broader social determinants of health, and included questions under the following headings: background, economics, income, work, education, social, policy, environment and general questions (Wilkinson & Marmot, 2003, 7).

## Data analysis

The taped interviews were recorded onto compact disc for future reference and for auditing purposes, and were then transcribed by the researcher, who took the spoken narrative and created a written log of the interview conversation. This resulted in hard copy that was more easily managed for exploring themes and patterns in the research.

Each transcribed conversation was read and re-read several times in order to gain a full understanding of the content. Categories were developed from looking through each question asked in the semi-structured interview: these questions were separately recorded, and each participant's responses were listed under each of these separate questions. This provided the opportunity to look at each person's singular response under each interview question. During this process, emerging themes were able to be recognised.

This process allowed for the researcher to check for similar responses between individual participants, and any different or outlying responses to each question asked were also able to be recognised and recorded. This process is described in Baum by Ritchie and Spencer (1994) as 'charting', and involves taking original data and arranging it according to themes (Ritchie, Spencer 1994 in Baum, 1998). Agar (1996) says that "from the simple process of establishing topics, categories and codes you begin building a map of the territory that will help give accounts of what those people are like" (Agar, 1996, 278).

## Triangulation

The researcher encouraged young farmers to discuss any items in detail if they felt that they needed to enlarge upon their responses to certain questions. The researcher and research assistant attended all of the interviews together, and this provided an opportunity for one researcher to ask the questions whilst the other was able to observe and make any notes. This approach has supported triangulation, with different researchers noticing different things, being able to discuss the findings, and importantly checking for consistency and bias (Patton, 2002, 247).

Triangulation of the data in this research involved the information obtained from the participants via taped interview, the researchers' observations (via note-taking and audio recording of the interview), and also the information from the literature review which contains a review of local, national and international articles relating directly to the research. I believe that using several combinations of methods to collect the data assisted in testing for consistency, and that it also provides opportunities to explore any inconsistencies or differences which highlight areas for further exploration and understanding. Triangulation was also used in the sampling strategies: both snowball and purposive strategies were used to ensure further expansion of the study and to provide a wide coverage of the catchment area (DePoy & Gitlin, 1998, 171).

### **Saturation**

Saturation of data is another important indicator for the researcher to ensure rigour in a naturalistic inquiry. Saturation was reached in this research at around 15 interviews, with no new information coming forward via the interview process. As a researcher I was able to predict at this point the most likely answers to all questions posed to the young farmers.

Interviews were continued past 15, as the last 5 young farmers had already been booked in to conduct interviews and were looking forward to the opportunity to share their knowledge, so I decided that they should also be included (DePoy & Gitlin, 1998, 229).

### **Feedback workshops**

Responding to several requests from the young farmers to have the opportunity to talk together, it was decided to invite all young farmers to attend a dinner workshop in October, 2007. The workshop was well attended: 30 young farmers and their partners attended. This workshop provided an opportunity for the researcher to identify whether or not the interpretations made from analysing the data were correct, and whether they accurately reflected the insights of young farmers from the interview process. This process also allowed for researcher bias to be corrected, and for the participants to confirm the interpretations made from the findings



of the research. Following on from the successful October feedback session, the participants suggested a further follow-up dinner, which was held in February 2008. This dinner provided the opportunity for further reflection of the policy analysis of the research, and provided the participants with additional discussion time as a group. This dinner was also well attended. Fifteen young farmers were present, and this group included those young farmers more interested in policy transfer of knowledge from the research. This workshop also provided important direction for the knowledge transfer process from the research and an opportunity to further clarify and validate the current policy issues relating to young farmers. Young farmers had the choice not to attend any of these sessions thus respecting their rights to privacy and confidentiality.

### **Peer debriefing**

The project provided opportunities for both the researcher and research assistant to be involved in the analysis of the data. Participation of both allowed the researcher and the research assistant to take some of the raw data and repeat the analysis process, and then to discuss any points of agreement and disagreement or points of interest. This provided further opportunities for discussion about the interpretation of the data, formation of the categories, and discussion about some of the findings of the research. Such process is another strategy used in triangulation (DePoy & Gitlin, 1998, 204).

The Port Pirie Regional Health Services provided more formal support for debriefing when required.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have provided my understandings for selecting a qualitative case study method using action research principles for the research project with the original idea for this research coming from my working environment and my experience of living in a small rural community in the Mid North of South Australia.

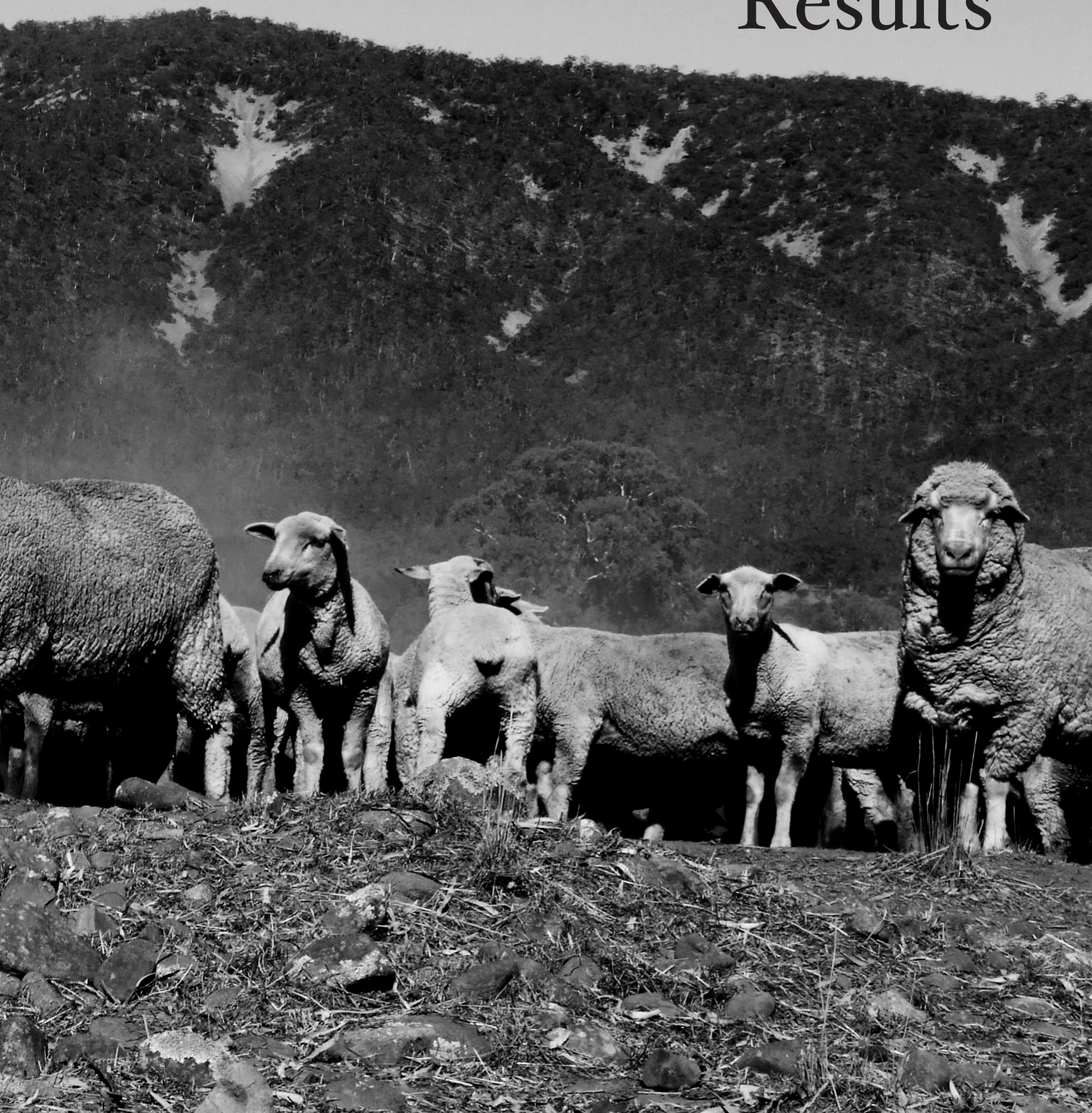
The process of the research included development of the research question and the objectives, recruitment, sampling and debriefing of participants,

reflexivity, data analysis and quality and ethics. The participants provided positive feedback about their involvement with the data collection process, and I believe that this is important to the evaluation of the appropriateness and effectiveness of the research.

The next chapter represents the “voices of young farmers” and describes the results of the semi-structured interviews. The second part of the next chapter includes the policy issues identified by young farmers from the results of the research.



# Results





This chapter represents the accounts of young farmers from the semi-structured interviews and includes analysis and discussion of the results. This section concentrates on addressing one objective of the research—“To understand what it is like to be a young farmer by examining their lives and experiences”. The results chapter begins by describing the sample, and then presents the voices of the participants under several headings: history, meaning and values, control and stress, isolation, work, impacts of the mining industry, income, decision making, education, policy, communication infrastructure, environmental issues, drought, trade and global issues, advocacy and the future of farming. These headings reflect the information provided by the participants at interview.

The results reflect the importance of the inter-generational family farm in Australia’s agricultural history. All young farmers talked with pride about belonging to a family farm, and expressed many strong values associated with farming of hard work, tolerance and shared goals and visions. All participants gained a strong sense of meaning from living and working on the family farm, and this provided ongoing motivation for them to, firstly, enter farming, and then to continue farming in the current challenging circumstances. Having a sense of control over their future and their decision making was also very important to young farmers.

However, all participants expressed concerns with the current lack of opportunities for advocacy and representation, especially as it relates to global issues and were concerned about the barriers to them having their voices heard. These concerns will be discussed further in chapter five.

## **Sample of young farmers**

The following table provides a summary of information of the young farmers interviewed. Names have been changed to protect the participants’ identities.

Table 4.1 and the in-text comments from the participants both contain information about their type of farming enterprise for example tourism, shearing or cropping to assist with getting to know a little more about each of the participants. Two of the local young farmers provided the researcher with feedback about the following table, suggesting I remove the column previously included “acreage” to protect the identity of the participants. Both

of these young farmers then agreed that the rest of the table was appropriate and protected the privacy of those involved with the research.

**Table 4.1. Sample of participants**

Name	Location	Age	Marital Status	Children	Farm Type	Years in farming
Mr. A	Tarcowie	23	Single	No	Cropping Livestock	7 years
Mr. B	Bundaleer	34	Single	No	Cropping Livestock	20years
Mr. C	Bangor	30	Married	1	Cropping Livestock	12 years
M/s D	Melrose	29	Married	12	Cropping Livestock	2 years
Mr. E	Bangor	26	Married	No	Cropping Livestock	4 years
Mr. F	Belalie North	30	Married	No	Cropping Livestock	13 years
Mr. G	Bundaleer	34	Married	1	Cropping Livestock	16 years
Mr. H	Willowie	26	Married	No	Cropping Livestock	5 years
Mr. I	Mannanarie	30	Married	No	Cropping Livestock	13 years
Mr. J	Wirrabara	26	Married	No	Cropping Livestock	8 years
Mr. K	Booloroo Centre	28	Married	2	Cropping Vines	11 years
M/s L	Carrieton	26	Married	No	Livestock Tourism	8 years
Mr. M	Hallett	31	Married	3	Cropping Livestock	12 years
Mr. N	Orroroo	26	Partner	No	Livestock Tourism	3 years
Mr. O	Washpool	31	Married	No	Cropping Livestock	7 years
Mr. P	Peterborough	22	Single	No	Cropping Shearing Livestock	3 years
Mr. Q	Wirrabara	31	Partner	No	Cropping Livestock	15 years
M/s R	Belalie East	35	Married	2	Cropping Livestock	15 years
Mr. S	Booloroo Centre	27	Married	No	Cropping Livestock Shearing	10 years
M/s T	Carrieton	34	Married	3	Livestock	10 years

**Notes:**

- 1 Farms ranged from 1,000 to 40,000 acres. Pastoral properties (rangelands) were the largest of these.
- 2 Please note that three young farmer's families were expecting babies at the time of interview.

## History

All of the participants reported that they came from generational family farms of up to five generations: three generations was the minimum family occupancy. Most of the farms had been built and established by young farmers' families and they continue to farm the property together with their families. All participants described the history of their farms with pride, and this is evident in many of the descriptions about the settlement and history associated with their farms.



Many young farmers illustrated the feelings associated with the history of their farms: “The farm has been in my family since it’s been station country. There is a strong sense of progression and connection, and I guess the history is my great grandfather worked it, then the farm went to my dad, and now I am working on it” (Mr. E, Bangor, cropping, 2007); “It is an old family farm: my great grandpa came here in 1910 and started it off, and since then my family has continued here” (Mr. M, Hallett, cropping, 2007); “We are the original settlers fifth generation and I am proud of that” (Mr. N, Orroroo, cropping, tourism, 2007). All participants described the pride that they felt when talking about their long history with the land and their family connections with that piece of land.

There is also evidence of challenges associated with the history of these farms, with many describing the hard work and difficulties for their parents, grandparents and great grandparents. All participants reported that their families were amongst the first settlers in the Mid North of South Australia, with many dating back to early settlement around the mid 1830s. Some comments include: “Yes my great grandfather had chooks<sup>1</sup> and never had any land, and when my grandfather came home from school they built the chooks up, and my grandfather died and dad slowly brought a bit of land, and they had pigs and poultry and about 500 acres, then brought another 270 acres and then brought another 600 acres” (M/s. R, Belalie East, cropping, 2007); “Dad started with two blocks here and Pekina<sup>2</sup> and he went shearing<sup>3</sup> to pay for it. He did 34 years of shearing to pay for it, and built it up” (Mr. K, Booleroo Centre, vines and tourism, 2007); “My grandpa and dad were veggie growers out at Bundaleer<sup>4</sup> then my grandpa moved where my dad lives now, then my dad built a house down there and dad is a true-blue<sup>5</sup> workaholic” (Mr. B, Bundaleer, cropping, livestock, 2007).

Six young farmers reported that their families had moved to farm in their current region from other farms nearby, and fifteen young farmers reported that their farms had undergone expansion. This expansion was mainly initiated by their fathers, although some had reported expanding the farming

1 “Chooks” is an Australian slang term for hens or chickens.

2 Pekina is a very small town in the Mid North of South Australia (population under 100 people)

3 Shearing is removing the wool from the sheep using a shearing machine and is hard work for the shearer.

4 Bundaleer is a farming region which is just outside the town of Jamestown in the Mid North of South Australia it is also the home of the Bundaleer forest.

5 True Blue is Australian slang word with many meanings, which are usually context-dependent, including for patriotic, and down to earth. In this instance it indicates someone who is a genuinely hard working person.

property themselves. This expansion process had been slower over the past few years as a result of recent droughts, high land prices, and low prices for many farming commodities. All participants expressed a sense of frustration around the possibility of not being able to have the opportunity to expand their farms in the future.

All participants raised some concerns about the current challenging farming situations including the current effects of drought, unstable commodity prices and high costs and were unsure about how the farm would continue past their own generation. All participants clearly indicated that they wanted to continue farming, and did not want to be the generation responsible for either losing or /leaving the farming family property. Some comments include: "... probably no reason would I ever leave" (Mrs. T, Carrieton, livestock, 2007); "we are not going to be told to leave" (Mr. K, Booleroo Centre, cropping, vines, 2007); and "only if there was family conflict or it was financially too hard" (M/s, R, Belalie East, cropping, livestock, 2007). The level of commitment expressed by participants illustrates the importance to these young farmers of the inter-generational nature of farming and highlights the sense of responsibility and in some instances the burden of carrying on the family farm.

## Meaning and values

The research project explored with participants the meaning of farming. This provided information about the one of the objectives of the research which was to describe the lives of young farmers.

All participants were clear about their reasons for becoming a farmer. Some came straight onto the farm from boarding school or local high schools, whilst half of the participants completed various trade qualifications and then returned to the family farm. Some started with jobs like shearing or working for other farmers before starting to work on their own family farms.

Some of the young farmers comments included: "Well it's generally what I know and what I have been raised to do" (Mr. F, Belalie North, cropping, livestock, 2007); "I have always known since I was 10. When I was younger I helped dad, when I was younger I always knew I wanted to be a farmer" (Mr. P, Peterborough, cropping, livestock, shearing, 2007); "It's

just something I have always wanted to do it's in my blood. When I was at school it was pretty much what I wanted to do" (Mr. N, Orroroo, livestock, tourism, 2007); and "I have not really been interested in anything else. At the time I thought it would be a good career everyone needs to be fed" (Mr. I, Mannanarie, cropping, livestock, 2007).

There is clearly a strong sense of commitment by the project's participants to the career of farming which is well supported and encouraged by their parents and family. Some participants also said that it would be almost impossible to enter farming these days without the support, financially and emotionally of their parents.

The participating young farmers also discussed what they most enjoyed about farming. The main ideas that young farmers reported included being able to work in the environment with the open spaces, the general lifestyle associated with being a farmer, the freedom to be their own boss and to make decisions, the flexibility to take time off when needed, and the day to day variety of tasks that many farmers found to be both enjoyable and challenging.

Some of the other common reasons given for becoming a farmer included the interesting and varied lifestyle and the variety of tasks that farming has to offer, including the technical side of working with machinery on the farm. All participants talked about the open spaces, the fresh air, the physical nature of the tasks to be done, and being able to use the land for enjoyment and family gatherings. There was a strong connection between the appreciation of the physical environment and the reasons for choosing farming as a career.

All participants reported that the decision to become a farmer had been their own choice, and had not been unduly influenced by family members. Young farmers reported that their parents were supportive of them becoming farmers, with three accounts noting that it was assumed and expected by their parents that they would take farming on as a career. When exploring those three comments further, it appeared that those young farmers were experiencing less satisfaction from their farming situation than others, and that conflict may have been involved within their family. This suggests that satisfaction of farming is linked to both choice and control over whether or not that farming is undertaken as a career.

Half of all participants parents had recommended that they undertake a trade or some other qualification so that there would be a “fall back” position in the event that farming did not continue as a viable career.

Some of the comments made about parental support included: “They have always encouraged us to be involved” (Mr. M, cropping, livestock, 2007); “Yes dad was pleased that I wanted to continue the family farm and he would not have worked so hard if he had not wanted me to come home. Yes he made the effort and is still making the effort so it can carry on” (Mr. I, cropping, livestock, 2007); and “Yes very supportive. They did not have any problems with me doing any of the tasks that need to be done (M/s. R, Belalie East, cropping, livestock, 2007).

The participants stated that: “Generally it’s the freedom. We spend a lot of time on the land, not in the house. We feel the air, see newborn lambs, the cycle of life” (Mr. N, Orroroo, livestock, tourism, 2007); “You can do your own thing. You do different things all the time. I like the animals and open spaces” (Mr. N, Orroroo, livestock, tourism, 2007); “I enjoy being my own boss working outdoors and when it is a good year getting a result growing good crops and growing good lambs and doing things differently” (Mr. A, Tarcowie, cropping, livestock, 2007).

Many of the young farmers talked about the values of pride, hard work, tolerance, resilience and trust as being important to them, especially because they were working in partnership with other family members. Pride in particular was raised by many of the participants as being a family value that was linked closely to why they became farmers, and wanted to continue as farmers, and was linked to the sense of responsibility they had for being “good” farmers. The participants were clear about their own identities, roles and purposes. Some of the comments illustrate this: “The family values are strong in farming. Pride in their work and the farm” (Mr. N, Orroroo, livestock, tourism, 2007); “Farming people are friendly and when you see your neighbour you stop and talk” (Mr. A, Tarcowie, cropping, livestock, 2007); “If you’re fifth generation, with all that work of all those generations it’s the identity” (Mr. F, Belalie North, cropping, livestock, 2007); and “It’s a shared vision with dad and the family, we don’t talk about much else I have been raised to be proud of the farm” (Mr. I, Mannanarie, cropping, livestock, 2007).

When considering these responses it illustrates that there are important and complex links between the history associated with the participants' properties, their reasons for choosing to become farmers, and the values and meanings associated with the farming experience. Many of these complexities do not exist in isolation, but rather within the entire experience of being a farmer. The enjoyment that comes from the farming experience is also a result of this complex mix of working alongside family members, and working within the physical environment. The enjoyment also comes from the important satisfaction that young farmers derive from the meaning and values contained within the farming experience.

The distinctiveness of working within a multi-generational family business, living and working near other family members, is challenging at times but also provides a strong sense of meaning. The values and meaning associated with farming also have a strong association with the level of commitment and dedication that the participants have to their land, as evidenced in their comments, attitudes and the amount of work time they are willing to dedicate to sustaining the family farm.

## **Control/stress**

The participants talked about the importance of having a sense of control over their own lives. This sense of control related to being able to participate in active decision making and was described as a general feeling that ones contributions to the farming unit are acknowledged and valued.

The management of stress is important to the health and resilience of young farmers and there has been significant media coverage (in part due to the recent droughts) about how farmers are coping.

Fifteen participants reported that farming is not that stressful overall. They felt that their own stress levels were within their means of coping, and that many of the stressors experienced are expected in the agricultural industry. Five participants felt the effects of stress more often than the others due to their financial concerns (large debts), and they were also experiencing family conflict and/or the effects of physical isolation. Half of all participants talked about the difficulties coping with the stress that the weather brings (in terms of a lack of rain, drying winds, no feed for stock and droughts), however



they were clear that these environmental stressors were things that were out of their control so there was little point in stressing too much about them.

The participants reflected on stress, saying: “I tend to stress about everything. The weather can be stressful if you let it be we have a large debt which is stressful and a big commitment over a long period of time (Mr. J, Wirrabara, cropping, livestock)”; “Just inconsistencies I guess the weather and sometimes not knowing what is going to happen is stressful” (Mr. N, Carrieton, livestock, tourism); “I get stressed about having to organise everything and also worried about my family and income or lack of it” (Mr. S, Booleroo Centre, cropping, livestock, shearing).

The participants said that a lack of control over commodity prices was stressful, with huge variations over the past few years for commodities, and increasing costs of planting crops, fertiliser and diesel costs were causing some additional stressors. Some participants carried large debts, and combined with a lack of private income this was also causing some stress. Some comments were also made about feeling stressed over the long term commitment associated with farming and this included a continuation of “being in debt” for most of their lives.

When analysing the participants’ comments about control, there seems to be a sense that control (either having / not having control) plays an important part in farming. On the one hand, a lack of control of the weather or natural disasters is to be expected in farming, and is not considered that stressful. The participants had a level of acceptance about environmental issues that are out of their control.

On the other hand, however, there are the very real stressors of large debts, poor prices, high costs. The participants feel that many of these things should be within their control but because they are not it does cause additional stressors.

The participants said the following in relation to control: “the hot windy days, watching the crops die, is stressful at times but we can’t control the weather” (Mr. I, Mannanarie, cropping, livestock, 2007); and “Making it work really and commodity prices, we don’t have any control over those prices or markets” (Mr. B, Bundaleer, cropping, livestock, 2007).

Many young farmers talked about feeling stressed at exceptionally busy times of the year, including shearing, crutching, harvest and seeding. Even though this was expected, it was still stressful. Several participants talked at length about the demands of having to be multi-skilled, and expected to be “brilliant” at everything from mending a tractor tyre, to completing complex budgets and marketing grain on the world market. However, all young farmers expected that these complex tasks would, at times be stressful.

A quarter of the participants reported some difficulties and conflicts in relationships, particularly with their fathers. This illustrates the challenges of working with family members, and may be expected as many fathers and sons are constantly living and working together. Some of the comments from young farmers about stress included: “Just inconsistencies I guess the weather and the rainfall which everyone faces. I don’t always work well with my dad” (Mr. G, Bundaleer, cropping, livestock, 2007); “The weather and having to organise things when you are busy. There seems to be so much more organising to do these days” (Mr. F, Belalie North, cropping, livestock, 2007); “Well at the moment seasonal conditions. Before the last few years the uncertainty of if you are going to make an income. The constant expenses, particularly on the cropping side of things” (Mr. J, Wirrabara, cropping, livestock, 2007); and “As a rule no, but on occasions yes. Shearing and harvest and seeding is stressful. Generally it is okay” (Mr. E, Bangor, cropping, livestock, 2007).

The participants were asked about who they would talk with if they were stressed. All participants could also identify family members that they could talk to about their stress. All young farmers commented that they also felt they could talk with their parents and siblings and many young farmers said that they would choose their mothers when they needed to discuss their current stressors, because their mothers often provided a more neutral person to approach, than were their fathers, for a general discussion and support. The majority of participants talked about the support that they also received from close friends, many of whom were farmers themselves.

The analysis of responses around support for stress were encouraging, as all young farmers were able to find a family member, partner or friend to discuss their stress with. This resulted in increasing their feelings of support, and improving their resilience to their current challenges in life.

The researcher did check out the possibility of participants under-reporting stress, by asking young farmers to honestly reflect on their current feelings, and by reassuring them that if they were feeling stressed that there was help available to them. Young farmers reported that the comments they had made did reflect their current experiences of stress and farming, and that they were being transparent about their feelings. From further analysis, it would seem that although the participants do experience multiple stressors, for all of the young farmers interviewed, stress was not outside of their realms of coping. They did have adequate family support and have managed to be resilient despite challenging times in farming.

## Isolation

Almost all of the participants reported that they do not feel isolated. Many young farmers separated isolation from loneliness, with a couple reporting feeling lonely but not isolated. The participants defined loneliness within personal terms, whereas isolation was more about physical isolation from other people or local services. Most participants reported being within a reasonable distance (less than one hour's drive) to small towns and were interacting regularly with family, neighbours and friends.

Those participants living further out on pastoral properties<sup>6</sup> were experiencing isolation as expected, due to the distance from other people and services. Some of the comments about isolation include: "Sometimes I feel isolated. You have your good and bad days" (Mr. G, Bundaleer, cropping, livestock, 2007); "I see people all the time I do like being outside doing my own thing. Dad and I do jobs together because it is easier. During seeding I would be on my own all day" (Mr. E, Bangor, cropping, livestock, 2007); "No not really. We go to town quite a bit and go see our friends" (Mr. P, Peterborough, cropping, shearing, livestock, 2007).

Most participants reported being involved with some kind of sport, and the most common venue was the local hotel for catching up with friends. Most young farmers also mentioned entertaining at home with family and friends. Some farmers were involved with farmers groups like the local Agricultural

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<sup>6</sup> Pastoral properties are located in the Upper Northern study area and are large properties of between 20-40,000 acres. They are mainly wool growing and tourist ventures, isolated from any towns and services and have low rainfall and difficult soils.

Bureaux or local soil groups.<sup>7</sup> Most participants reported working on part of the weekends and many reported not having much time off, with only a holiday for one to two weeks a year.

There are environmental stressors and natural disasters involved with farming and these will continue to cause young farmers stress in the future (droughts, floods and fires). However, all participants were expecting many of these stressors as an inevitable part of farming. Isolation within the farming environment also appears to be something that young farmers expect and are not unduly concerned with: however, those living further out on pastoral properties did experience both isolation and loneliness.

From the analysis of the findings the majority of the participants were satisfied with their social outlets, even though there were not many opportunities to meet new people or to do different activities, as are more readily available in larger and more urban environments. A lack of choice is a common issue running through many of the experiences of young farmers, particularly as it relates to social outlets, entertainment and meeting new people.

The research suggests that young farmers experience stress just like many other people: however, they are able to get satisfying and adequate support from their already existing, close and natural support systems, which include people like their parents, partners, siblings, neighbours and friends. The benefits for young farmers of working closely with other family members cannot be underestimated when considering stress, and although at times the participants spoke of stress with their fathers, generally these relationships were very positive and supportive, and were in no way affecting the ongoing viability of the farming situation.

The majority of young farmers had extensive social networks, with most involved in some sort of sport locally. The main issue was a lack of opportunity to meet new people, and a lack of available choice in being involved with different types of relaxation activities.

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<sup>7</sup> Agricultural Bureaux meet in local farming areas to discuss all aspects of farming. They are attended by farmers and those interested in farming and are non government organisations. Local soil groups are groups where farmers get together to discuss issues relating to cropping.

## Health services

More than half of all young male farmers who participated in this research do not attend a doctor regularly, and would only attend a doctor if absolutely necessary. Some of the reasons put forward for not attending formal medical services included not feeling comfortable in the health service environment, not having confidence in the medical services, and health strategies have not been useful in the past. The participants reported that the language barriers of some newly arrived overseas doctors makes it difficult to understand and be understood, and often young farmers, when they have attended medical services, have felt blamed or judged. Some young farmers mentioned difficulty in taking time off work to attend clinics. A few of the young farmers, including the female farmers, reported finding medical services helpful, and felt they would attend if they needed assistance. However, these were in the minority and related to medical procedures or childbirth.

Young farmers reflected upon their experiences with medical agencies with the following comments: "Yes I would go to a doctor if I needed to, it is always good to get reassurance from them but they can't do anything real" (Mr. I, Mannanarie, cropping, livestock); "I don't know I probably would not go to the doctor. I don't feel comfortable with the local doctors. Our doctors are all overseas ones and the language barrier makes them hard to talk to, and I feel uncomfortable. They don't understand farming and also having to wait hours" (Mr. J, Wirrabara, cropping, livestock).

There is a lot of "food for thought" in the responses from young farmers for those providing health services, as young farmers had neither the confidence or the inclination to utilise these services unless absolutely necessary. Much more work will need to be done in the area of appropriate health service provision to encourage access to these services by young farmers and their families.

## Work

All young farmers are working long hours: between 60–70 hours per week, with a minimum of 45–50 hours per week. At least five participants were working in excess of 100 hours per week on a regular basis. Most



participants do not employ outside labour to assist on the farm, so as a result of the constant and complex demands involved with modern day farming they felt it necessary to work these long hours. Some of the participants' accounts relating to work include: "The only time we don't work is at night. We sell wood as well. We work over 100 hours per week. I love working but it has an effect on my knee" (M/s L, Carrieton, livestock, tourism, 2007); "I probably work around 10 hours per day and in daylight saving more than 60–70 hours per week (Mr. M, Hallett, cropping, livestock, 2007); and "I would work around 60 hours plus per week more in seeding and harvest and busy times" (M/s R, Belalie East, cropping, livestock, 2007).

Seventeen participants work off-farm to supplement the farm income. They take on many different roles, including shed hand in shearing sheds, working in a plant nursery, shearing sheep, working in tourism, working for other farmers and undertaking contract spraying and harvesting. Eighteen participants reported that their partners all normally work off-farm to supplement the farming income. However three partners did not work because they were expecting babies, or had recently delivered, and two of the participants were single. Some of the comments relating to off-farm work include: "I do off farm shearing shed work" (Mr. F, Belalie North, cropping, livestock, 2007); "I work for another farmer helping plant crops, look after general duties" (Mr. E, Bangor, cropping, livestock, 2007).

Most young farmers worked on weekends, choosing mainly to work on Saturday mornings so they could have some time off for sport and relaxation on Saturday afternoons and Sundays. Most participants wanted to have more time off, but could not see a way to make that happen, considering the current complex demands of farming the high costs of labour, and the lack of available farm labour.

The participants reported that if they were not farming then they would be involved with other agriculture related industries, such as working for another farmer, going further into providing contracting services for farmers, take on shearing sheep, or work in shearing sheds, or with helping other farmers at busy times of the year like seeding, harvest or crutching time.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Crutching time is when the excess wool is removed from around the sheep's crutch to prevent blow fly strike without this procedure carried out by the shearer then sheep would die. It is normally done once or twice per year and especially after lambing with female sheep. Seeding time is when the seed is planted in the ground and later is harvested. In Australia seeding takes place in autumn and harvest in summer.

Other participants mentioned more mechanically based occupations as an option, such as mechanics, engineering, boilermakers and welders. Some participants were interested in tourism and working with soils, such as landscaping, gardening and nursery work.

Half of all young farmers would consider leaving the farm for two main reasons: either if they could not make an adequate income to support their families, or if there were serious family conflicts or breakdowns that affected the farming structure. However this, was always in the context of a “last resort”. Half of the participants said that they would not leave the farm, and some said that the only way that they would leave was “in a wooden box”. Some comments from young farmers included: “... wooden box dragged off. We are not going to be told to leave the farm” (Mr, K, Booleroo Centre, cropping, vines, 2007); and “Only one reason and that would be financial” (Mr. F, Belalie North, cropping, livestock, 2007). These comments were intended to provide some humour at interview, but one could see the seriousness of the commitment and dedication behind these comments made by many of the participants.

### **Impacts of the mining industry**

Another issue relating to work and farmers in the Mid North is the increasing number of farmers going to northern South Australia to work in the mining industry. The participants reported that it is increasingly difficult to find labour to assist with tasks on the farm, and they also cannot compete with the high wages paid to miners. Many of the participating young farmers felt this was “depressing” for the farming industry, and most interviewed said they would not go into mining as they did not want to be away from their families or their farms for extended periods of time. They also felt disappointed at the loss of potential farming skills to the mining industry.

Participants also said that there was a real possibility that land prices would become very expensive as some miners attempt to locate their families in local farming areas. The young farmers in this research had thought a lot about the impact of mining on farming. Some comments included: “I know some ways it’s heaps good and heaps bad. If we did not have mining for employment for the northern farmers it would be harder. Its good money and an income. Farmers are not used to working in mining they are too used

to using their own initiative (Mr. A, Tarcowie, cropping, livestock, 2007); “Yes the effects are pretty dramatic. If you are young you would have to consider mining because of the income to help the farm survive (Mr. G, Bundaleer, cropping, livestock, 2007); “many farmers are part time and up in Roxby Downs mining. I have thought about it plenty of times” (Mr. H, Willowie, cropping, livestock, 2007).

Further research on the effects of mining, on both local, small rural communities and on the farming industry, is indicated from this research. All participants talked about the difficulties in finding suitable skilled farm labour and this was attributed to the number of young people exiting farming to go mining for better pay and conditions. On a more positive note, young farmers were hopeful that rural infrastructure may be improved as a result of local mining, and as more people were attracted to the beauty of living in the Mid North of South Australia.

The research project illustrates the importance of work to young farmers and that they are willing to work long and hard to maintain their farming enterprises. I can identify consistent themes relating to work, some of which were indicated above. This includes the fact that seventeen participants are now currently working off-farm to supplement their farming income, and eighteen of their partners are working off-farm, also to provide extra income for the farm and to maintain their lifestyle options.

For those interviewed, mining was not an attractive option, with most only choosing this option as a very “last resort” mainly due to the prolonged periods of time away from their families, children and the farm.

Work provides meaning, and importantly, confirms and validates many of those other issues already raised like the values within farming, the reasons for becoming a farmer, and the importance of working with family towards a shared common vision and goals.

## **Income**

The majority of young farmers reported that they were not receiving enough income from the farm to meet their own personal needs. Some of the accounts relating to income included: “No we are not making anything off

the farm. I think basically if I did not work we would have a pretty ordinary life. I barely think we would make ends meet and that is just the way it is these days" (M/s. R, Belalie East, cropping, livestock, 2007); "I think if you split the farm into the two areas the cropping would not have made anything but since then it would have been a loss. Sheep prices have been good but wool not so good" (Mr. P, Peterborough, cropping, shearing, livestock, 2007); "We are going backwards with no improvements. It is all dictated to us the prices we have no control" (Mr. O, Washpool, cropping livestock, 2007); "Not much money made, especially the cropping. We made a loss last year and the years before. We have also had to stop our spending" (Mr. M, Hallett, cropping, livestock, 2007).

As indicated under work and mining above, the majority of partners of participating young farmers were currently working off-farm to supplement the farming income out of necessity. The majority of young farmers themselves were taking off farm work to supplement the income of the farm.

Half of all participants reported they were receiving either the interest rate subsidies or weekly income support<sup>9</sup> from Centrelink<sup>10</sup> as a part of the government's support policies around the drought declaration of Exceptional Circumstances in South Australia. Others were still in the process of exploring their eligibility for government support as part of the Exceptional Circumstances package.

Participants in this project described many difficulties in the area of making a reasonable income, with the last few years being particularly difficult due to dry seasons, high input costs and variable market prices for livestock and crops. Many also reported that not much money had been made from cropping because of the high costs involved, and the lower and often inconsistent prices for grain due to frequent volatility in world grain prices. Some comments included: "Never enough income, I have been doing it hard" (Mr. E, Bangor, cropping, livestock, 2007); "No not from the farm. I barely think we can make ends meet and that is just the way it is these days" (M/s R, Belalie East, cropping, livestock, 2007).

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<sup>9</sup> Interest rate subsidies and weekly income support are two strategies put in place by the Australian governments Exceptional Circumstances funding support for drought. Each area affected by drought puts in an application to be a "declared area of drought" and if successful farmers may then apply for interest rate subsidy support or weekly income support. Both payments are income tested.

<sup>10</sup> Centrelink is the agency that provides welfare payments to those eligible. It is a nationwide agency.

Whilst the participants appeared to be satisfied with receiving low incomes, it does raise serious concerns about longer term sustainability and the level of sacrifice required by young farmers and their families to keep the family farm viable and sustainable. However, all young farmers were hopeful that with better rainfall and recent improvements to grain prices many of them could still make high enough incomes with which to support their families.

## **Decision making, succession and inheritance**

Most young farmers reported that they had significant control over, and the ability to influence the decision making processes relating to the farm. Some comments from the participants included: “I am really lucky I get to do the work and make the decisions probably most of the decisions” (Mr. B, cropping, livestock, 2007); “It is pretty equal we are not too bad that way we all have our say” (Mr. I, Mannanarie, livestock, cropping, 2007); “I have a lot of control about decisions but not about the weather, prices and global issues” (Mr. C, Bangor, cropping, livestock, 2007).

All participants said that the decision making processes involved consultation with partners in the property, and this mainly included parents, siblings and partners. There were some reports of difficulties with conflict over decisions that were made, and this was between fathers and sons/daughters: however, these situations were perceived by young farmers as not that seriously affecting the viability of the farming enterprise. Most farmers enjoyed making decisions on the farm, and were happy to work within an inter-generational farming environment. One of the real positives of shared decision making was that all members carried the burden for both the positive and negative outcomes, and the family worked together towards a shared vision and goals.

All but two participants had discussed the issues surrounding both succession and inheritance of the family farm. The two that had not discussed these issues had been in conflict with their fathers. There were mixed feelings about the success of these discussions, from some who felt quite confident that the issues surrounding succession were sorted out, to others who have utilised professional assistance to sort things through, but still waiting for things to be finalised, to those who still fear some uncertainty about their future demands from siblings outside of the current farming partnership.



All participants felt some trepidation about these important issues, and this also reflects many of the same tensions raised in the current literature on succession and inheritance. Many participants also felt that it may be difficult to consolidate and expand in the future, as a result of having to “pay out” other siblings for their share in the family farm. Most young farmers discussed the importance of effective communication and the need to utilise professional services to assist with the complex legal issues surrounding inheritance and succession. The analysis highlighted in this area that the participants who felt that they had positive and valued input into decision making and responsibility for the farm, resulted in them feeling more secure, and it increased their meaningful connection to both the farm and their farming family partners.

## Education

All young farmers have completed post-secondary qualifications, including certificates and diplomas in agriculture with technical colleges, apprenticeships, and some have had been university educated. Half of all young farmers interviewed had completed either Certificate 2 or 3 in Agriculture<sup>11</sup> from technical and further education colleges. Half of all young farmers recognise the value of lifelong learning and were keen to extend their knowledge in all areas. A quarter of young farmers reported that they would have liked to have done a trade qualification before coming back to the farm; however, they also recognised that the learning they had from active participation in farming straight from high school was very valuable. Some of the comments about education from the interviews included: “I did Year 12<sup>12</sup> and a couple of years at Roseworthy Agricultural College”<sup>13</sup> (Mr. M, Hallett, cropping, livestock, 2007); “I have done Year 12 and some technical and further education courses” (Mr. F, Belalie North, cropping, livestock, 2007); “I have finished Year 11 and did a trade for 4 years and also did Certificate 3 in Agriculture (Mr. N, Orroroo, livestock, tourism, 2007); “I have done a Bachelor of Applied Finance and Certificate 2 in Agriculture” (Mr. P, Peterborough, cropping, shearing, livestock, 2007).

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11 Certificate 2 or 3 in Agriculture teaches farmers basic farming skills and also contains a component of on farm training. These courses are competency based.

12 Year 12 is the last year of Secondary Schooling in South Australia and prepares students for University Entry.

13 Roseworthy Agricultural College was established in South Australia to provide opportunities for people to get a degree level qualification in numerous agricultural related areas.

Many participants said that courses were often too long and at inconvenient times, with more courses needed, especially around the new grain marketing arrangements, the high level of computer skills now required to complete many of the administrative demands of farming book work, and continued improvements to small business management skills. Participants did, however, talk about their frustration at needing to be proficient in all of these areas. Some felt that their strengths lay in the production of livestock and grain—not in the marketing of grain to overseas customers or in completing lengthy and difficult paperwork.

## Policy

In the next section, the focus will be on the results from participants interviews relating to policy areas. These are policy areas that the young farmers themselves have been able to identify and to speak about in terms of policy.

Participants reported difficulty in identifying public policy issues affecting their farming circumstances. After listening to their difficulties with this task, the closest description that came to mind was that policy was like a “maze” to young farmers. Because it is not easy to identify, they had no real way of influencing it. Participants could not find their way through it, and the government was not transparent about policy decisions that affected young farmers’ farming experiences and made on young farmers’ behalf. This difficulty in talking directly about policy also appears to be related to the complexity of policy making in agriculture, and highlights the lack of opportunity for young farmers to be involved in the policy process. In a recent report by the Australian Farm Institute<sup>14</sup> (2005) it is noted that when talking about farm policy:

Farm policy development in Australia is fragmented and reactionary. It is fragmented across purposes and in its implementation. More often than not it takes the form of a new program, often using old money, to address in a partial and fragmented way a problem that ideally should never have arisen. At other times it takes the form of adding to the regulatory pile with limited attention to the use of complementary instruments such as research and education and with limited analysis of likely or realised impacts. Increased dependency on marginal project based funding has limited the amount and quality of independent policy analysis and advocacy of alternative ways forward.

(Australian Farm Institute, 2005, 50).

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<sup>14</sup> The Australian Farm Institute conducts research into farming in Australia. They also publish a journal called the *Australian Farm Journal*.

## Communication infrastructure

The majority of participants reported patchy mobile phone coverage with some having no mobile phone coverage at all over their properties. The majority had already changed from the past CDMA network to Next G services.<sup>15</sup> There was considerable dissatisfaction with the mobile phone services, with many participants talking about concerns with safety issues on the farm, and the inconvenience of not being able to get grain price updates via their mobile phones. Some of the comments included: “No we don’t get coverage over the whole property, only over 50% and over the rest nothing” (Mr. J, Wirrabara, cropping, livestock, 2007); “No. You can get it here but it is scratchy” (M/s L, Carrieton, livestock, tourism); “The mobile drops out all the time and we don’t get coverage over most of the farm. And these days people expect to be able to get onto you straight away. No one can get us on the mobile” (M/s D, cropping, livestock, 2007); “The internet, we went onto satellite. It’s not as fast as I thought and it also cuts out” (Mr. F, cropping, livestock, 2007).

The majority of young farmers have satellite broadband services available, and have used the government subsidised service to get onto the satellite broadband connection. Whilst they reported satisfaction with the government subsidy, they were still concerned about the quality and reliability of the satellite internet services. The majority of participants reported using their computers for internet banking, emails, marketing grain and for important farming information about issues such as the use of chemicals. There is still a lot of general dissatisfaction amongst the participating young farmers about communication infrastructure in the Mid North of South Australia. This has given them a good deal of frustration, especially considering the great importance of communication when linked to their overall viability, sustainability and safety on the farm.

## Environmental issues and protection

The participating young farmers reported concerns relating to the environment, including the availability of water, the problems with climate change, and the conservation of soils. All young farmers expressed great

<sup>15</sup> In country areas the mobile phone services have recently changed moving from a CDMA non-digital service to Next G (Next Generation) digital mobile phone service.

concern and care for the environment seeing themselves as “caretakers of the land”. Many participants felt that it was a heavy responsibility caring for the environment, for future generations, and that it was further complicated by the continuation of dry seasons. Some of the areas mentioned, relating to the environment, included concerns over water, the River Murray crisis,<sup>16</sup> lowering of some local water tables, less catchment and run off of water into dams for stock, and the implications to the environment (soils in particular) of several years of drought conditions.

The participating young farmers reported mixed views on climate change, with some young farmers convinced that the recent droughts were a direct reflection of climate change. Others believed, looking back over old rainfall records, that these current challenges with the climate had shown similar patterns in the past.

The participants held mixed views on climate change. Some of these accounts included: “There have been dramatic changes over the years and with more research into it then we know more. I think it is the thing of the moment. It does not mean I won’t be careful, but it makes you think about the whole water issue with the Murray a wake up call. I think it’s a wake up call I don’t know whether it is a huge issue” (M/s R, Belalie East, cropping, livestock, 2007); “I am sure its happening its warmer and drier and the seasons are shorter. Back in 60s and 50s it was dry as well, and dad has been keeping a chart for over 70 years and the graph is up and down. There is nothing out of the ordinary or over the average” (Mr, Q, Wirrabara, cropping, livestock, 2007). All participating young farmers reported that the debate on climate change was often presented as one-sided with only some interests being represented—usually those of the government or other states.

The majority of young farmers who are cropping use no till and direct drill<sup>17</sup> their crops, and are continually looking for improvements in farming practices in relation to environmental care. Other young farmers who are

<sup>16</sup> Currently in South Australia the River Murray has reached a critical low flow rate. This has caused nation wide debate as the Murray River involves four states in Australia (Queensland, South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales) and has been further complicated by droughts. There are currently water restrictions in South Australia and little or no water allocations for many farmers relying on irrigation from the River Murray for vineyards and citrus in particular.

<sup>17</sup> No till and direct drill are modern farming practices where the soil is not worked over more than once. Seeding is carried out at the same time as working up the ground to plant the seed. These practices conserve soil type and structure and are considered essential to modern farming practices they also save time and fuel costs.

more involved with stock are using new practices such as cell grazing,<sup>18</sup> feed lotting of sheep (for protection of soils in drought) and rotational grazing to assist with the management of environmental issues. Most young farmers were concerned about the amount of chemicals that they felt they needed to use in the cropping process due to resistance in weeds, and as a result of continuous cropping methods.

Some pastoralists in the north of the study were very concerned about the environmental impacts of locust spraying, with all reporting significant negative effects on the local flora and fauna in the areas sprayed (relating examples of both short- and long-term effects). Pastoralists were also growing saltbush to control salinity and to provide roughage for stock.

Whilst the participants had numerous concerns about the environment, they all reported great concern and took care of maintaining their biggest asset (their land and their soils), and realised that without diligence and constant attention they would be compromising their future. Many also reported the value of planting trees and using contour banks not only for the viability of the property but for also aesthetic reasons of improving the overall enjoyment of the environment for future generations, with many young farmers regularly taking their children, family and friends on picnics and “rides in the ute” around the farm.

## Drought

It was not the original intention of this study to explore the effects of drought on the lives and experiences of young farmers. When this study was first designed, the drought in South Australia was in its early stages and exceptional circumstances had only been declared in the more northern parts of S.A. It soon became clear that the drought was here to stay and that further areas of the state would be included in the Exceptional Circumstances declaration. The participants in this study were provided with an opportunity to talk about their concerns, and it also provided an opportunity for the researcher to discuss exceptional circumstances supports that were becoming available, and to refer the young farmers to any other supports that were necessary.

<sup>18</sup> Cell grazing is a method of managing sheep to feed in small paddocks and rotate around in an effort to control erosion and to ensure weeds do not get too prolific from under-grazing in some areas of the pasture.



All participants reported that they had received decreased income due to a decrease in crop yield and an increase in general expenses as a result of the drought. Almost all young farmers were experiencing an increased workload, due to the demands of feeding stock regularly, and for some young farmers carting water for stock was a daily task. All of those young farmers who were feeding stock talked about the high prices of purchasing extra stock feed, as many had been unable to cut hay due to a lack of rain. Hay and grain purchases were very expensive as a result of the ongoing drought in many areas of S.A.

Some of the accounts from the young farmers about the drought include: “It has affected me major for starters my crop is halved” (Mr, C, Bangor, cropping, livestock, 2007); “Feed is going to be a problem and water is a problem” (Mr, C. Bangor, cropping, livestock, 2007); “It affected the grain side of the business negatively of course probably in order of reducing our profit by at least half and it will be a real battle to keep the sheep going with no feed and little water in the dams” (Mr, E, Bangor, cropping, livestock, 2007).

It was clear that the issues associated with the drought were going to affect young farmers over the next few years and most realised that it would take several years to recover from the severity of the current drought conditions. The National Farmers Federation is currently working to raise the policy issues surrounding drought with the government and have formulated current recommendations called the “National Drought Policy Priorities”. These policy recommendations talk about drought preparedness, farm management deposits, drought declarations, farm family support, farm business support and climate variability research and can be found on the National Farmers Federation website (NFF *Policy*, 2006, 1–3, [www.nff.org.au](http://www.nff.org.au) ).

The majority of young farmers who participated in this project are aware of the availability of support through the government’s exceptional circumstances package, with half of the young farmers receiving either interest rate subsidies or weekly income support and the remainder were in the process of checking their eligibility or currently applying for assistance. Participants reported that they thought that this was one area in which the government support was appropriate and had been a positive initiative, as it provided major ongoing assistance for many people in the area hit hard by the current drought conditions.

## Trade and global issues

All young farmers reported difficulties with issues relating to trade and marketing in the agricultural industry. These difficulties included not being able to clearly identify what was currently happening with trading arrangements with other countries, especially as it related to those countries with whom Australia is in direct competition for the sale and export of agricultural products. Many young farmers expressed dissatisfaction with the amount of what they referred to as “vested interests”: those people that “value added” to their products after they left the farm gate. Young farmers perceived that it appeared that many of these interests were making substantial returns from their products, that young farmers were not receiving adequate prices for their products, and that there was little transparency in the marketing of their products from the farm gate to the consumer.

Some comments from participants included: “There is a middle-man making an absolute killing. We should all get together and try to cut out the middle-man” (Mr. B, Bundaleer, cropping, livestock, 2007); “The whole trade situation I am mind boggled about how it will happen there is not enough information about trade. Anything global has an effect on us and the subsidies and different nations competing to be the super power and trade is easily influenced by big brother. Australia is only a small nation with little strength in many of the global issues” (Mr. K, Booleroo Centre, cropping, vines, 2007); “When I had pigs they got cheap pork from Canada and flooded our market and our prices went right down” (Mr. P, Peterborough, cropping, shearing, livestock, 2007).

The participating young farmers expressed an informed knowledge of the effects of globalisation on their farming enterprise understanding that anything that happened in other countries including war, oversupply of certain foods, the changing world stock market, and the changing value of the Australian dollar, disease, famine, terrorist activities, changes to diesel, chemical and fertiliser availability and prices, embargoes, and subsidies and sanctions around trading contracts with some countries, were all having an impact on their farming business. Young farmers were aware that global issues are impacting their farming business in many ways.

All participants reported pride in being self-reliant and efficient, and did not want subsidies as is seen in the United States, European Union and

the United Kingdom. They reported that not having subsidies gave them freedom from interference and reliance on the government. However, they all reported that this also placed them in a non-competitive environment as far as competing and pricing were concerned in the global environment. All young farmers talked at length about their awareness that global productivity and demand for their products is affecting the prices that they receive for their produce. The young farmers were all unsure about how they were going to be able to compete with farmers who received subsidies from around the world.

The participants reported that globalisation was also having a big impact on the prices of fertiliser and diesel fuel in particular, and this was causing great concern.

Some young farmers recognised that globalisation also provided opportunities to market their own products to the world, which included marketing wool to China and wheat dough to India. Three young farmers were involved in marketing products to China and India. All young farmers were able to see how globalisation also offered many opportunities into the future, provided these opportunities were carefully researched, planned and implemented, and were being supported by an overall Australian agricultural policy strategic plan.

## General policy

There were a number of local general policy related issues raised by young farmers. All participants reported concerns for water and food security highlighting the problems of ongoing drought, the current state of the River Murray and dropping water tables, and lack of run-off into dams for stock water. Some comments made included: "Water, not because of the drought just generally. Everyone above us is taking more than their fair share. If the Murray dries up everything will be affected" (Mr. O, Washpool, cropping, livestock, 2007); "I suppose the water table dropping every year. It used to be good lucerne country but now it's not that good. Salty ground as well. We need to be mindful" (Mr. I, Mannanarie, livestock, cropping, 2007); and "Water. We do all the time worry about it and climate change and we need to be careful in the future" (M/s T, Carrieton, livestock, 2007).

All participants reported difficulties with maintaining the current compliance issues on farms, especially the costs associated with attending and updating the myriad of occupational health and safety related courses, as well as many of the demands for physical structures to support these compliance requirements. Some general comments from young farmers included: “Yes we do have ongoing issues with compliance we do have some silos without guards around them, it is so expensive to comply with everything” (Mr. B, Bundaleer, cropping, livestock, 2007); and “Yes we have issues if anything happened accident-wise the cost of compliance is astronomical and we can’t do it all” (Mr. E, Bangor, cropping, livestock, 2007).

All young farmers reported difficulties with keeping up with the many fees associated with licenses, registrations, compliance requirements. This related not only to the costs, but also the time that it was taking to complete the associated paper work involved.

All participants talked at length about the general rural decline, with concerns for themselves and the future rural populations—particularly with maintaining essential services in rural communities—and also around social outlets, with little choice into the future for social and entertainment choices. Some of the comments made by young farmers relating to rural decline included: “The effects of rural decline are devastating with so many fewer people out here we are more socially isolated and disadvantaged because of a lack of services” (Mr. N, Orroroo, livestock, tourism, 2007); and “Yes I have just bought a house in the town because I can access a few more services” (Mr. P, Peterborough, cropping, livestock, shearing, 2007).

All participants had something to say about local policy issues relating to agriculture and rural communities; however, many felt that the issues were “bigger than them”. The issues were often in the realm of globalisation and government requirements, and policy making, and the young farmers felt powerless to influence many of these areas. It was also evident that many young farmers felt that there was no way to unite their voices and opinions to influence these policy areas.

## Advocacy and representation

The peak farming body for South Australian Farmers is the South Australian Farmers Federation (SAFF) and the national body is known as the National Farmers Federation (NFF). It is the responsibility of these groups to lobby the government both at a state level and federal level about issues of current concern to Australian farmers. The role of both organisations is to advocate and represent farmers from around the state and country. Both of these bodies are located in capital cities with SAFF located in Adelaide and the NFF in Canberra. Both of these organisations meet regularly with the Minister for Agriculture both at a state and federal level to present farming issues of current concern.

The participants expressed significant levels of dissatisfaction with the South Australian Farmers Federation. None of the young farmers interviewed were current members of SAFF and only a very small number of their parents were members. Most young farmers reported that SAFF lacked strength, did not encourage the views of young farmers, were out of touch with all farmers, and did not have anything useful to offer young farmers in particular.

The participating young farmers also reported that they felt that the leaders from within SAFF were not adequately representing their needs to the government. A number of young farmers felt powerless to influence decision makers from within these farming organisations. The main barriers to young farmers not being members of SAFF mentioned for included the high cost of membership, and not being able to identify how they would have any “real” input into the organisation. The latter is particularly important because most areas do not have current regional meetings that, in the past, would have allowed for regional concerns to be fed into the main organisation located in Adelaide. All young farmers reported that it was important to advocate and represent themselves: however, many felt unable to do this at an individual level. Combined with the current dissatisfaction with their representative body to the government they said that there were little opportunities for their voices to be heard on an ongoing basis.

Some of the comments regarding representation from young farmers included: “SAFF needs to take a more outspoken stance on farming issues, I think there is a voice there but they need to do more. If the membership cost was halved we would have almost everyone as members” (Mr. J, Wirrabara,



cropping, livestock, 2007); “No we are not members of SAFF. I don’t think it can redeem itself. You can’t fight as individuals, we must unite as a body and it’s hard to get farmers to unite. I don’t know how it will happen” (M/s. R, Belalie East, cropping, livestock); “Personally we are not members and a lot of people got out because they don’t get anything out of it (Mr. Q, Wirrabara, cropping, livestock, 2007); and “They are supposed to be the voice but don’t make any real effort to get young farmers involved” (Mr. N, Orroroo, livestock, tourism, 2007).

The South Australian Farmers Federation underwent a restructure of the entire organisation in early 2008, and SAFF also offered reduced membership as a result of the drought, which is encouraging. SAFF has recognised the dissatisfaction amongst south Australian farmers and have taken some positive actions to try to resolve some of these issues. It is hoped that they will also begin to seek feedback at a regional level in an ongoing and thorough way right across the state so that farmers are appropriately and effectively represented and advocated for at the important political level. In early 2009 SAFF has downsized its premises in Adelaide and is continuing with a restructure program. SAFF is attempting to seek more opportunities for consultation with farmers; however, with a much smaller staff it is hard to envisage any improvements with consultation across the state with farmers.

Lobby organisations such as SAFF have been put under pressure as a result of the past few years of both seasonal and viability issues with continuing rural decline, making it difficult for farmers to support them and for SAFF to effectively support farmers. However, SAFF is still considered by the government of the day to be the peak body for South Australian farmers, and they have a responsibility to represent all farmers around issues of rural concern regardless of whether they are members or not of SAFF.

Recently the South Australian Farmers Federation has decided not to renew its membership of the National Farmers Federation, citing the high cost of the state membership. This is an ongoing concern especially in the area of advocacy and representation of South Australian Farmers in the wider national farm lobby environment. This will provide many challenges in raising issues of importance to South Australian farmers at the national level, if South Australian farmers continue to be unrepresented in the national arena.

## Perception of farming

All young farmers reported that the media has a strong influence on how farmers are portrayed now and into the future. Young farmers reported that they felt “let down” by the media, which often reports the opinions of older farmers. They also reported that they risk being misrepresented because the media do not regularly include the opinions of younger farmers.

The participants also reported that they felt that the general public do not recognise the complexity of Australian agriculture, often perceiving and stereotyping farmers in a negative way. The words young farmers used to describe how they felt they were perceived were “slow”, “dumb” “whingeing”, “rich” and “hicks”, to name just a few. Some young farmers cited vehicle advertising as examples of this. The young farmers felt that this was unfortunate as they wanted people living in the cities to understand and be connected in some way to farmers and rural living. Some of the comments about how young farmers feel that they are perceived by others included: “I think it is the stereotype of the simple life of ma and pa however I know that young farmers are more complex and the stereotype needs to be challenged (Mr. N, Orroroo, livestock, tourism, 2007); “I have been watching *Home and Away* and it really annoys me how farmers are portrayed as a tyrant and there are some awful stereotypes out there about farmers (Mr. I, Mannanarie, cropping, livestock, 2007); “Yes they are stereotyped as whingeing cockies. People have no idea about the complexities of farming” (M/s R, Belalie East, cropping, livestock, 2007).

This is an important policy area for young farmers, because the media has the ability to change attitudes both in a positive and negative way about certain groups in society. Many people form their opinions from what is reported in the media, so if young farmers are not represented at all, or are not represented accurately, or are represented in a negative way, then it is possible—and probably likely—that attitudes towards them will remain negative and unchallenged. Many young farmers reported that they would like to see a positive media campaign on the important role that farmers have to play in feeding the world, in looking after the environment, and in helping to sustain small rural communities.

## Future of farming

Participants reported feeling positive about their futures in farming. As farming relies heavily on the environment, the current drought and recent low prices and rising costs for chemicals, fertilisers and diesel must also be kept in mind when thinking about the future. However, more recently, in 2008, there is room for optimism, as we are seeing some indications of much improved prices particularly in grains and sheep meat. A young farmer commented that now all we need is to “just add water” (Mr. F, Belalie North, cropping, livestock, 2007).

Many young farmers recognised there is a need to diversify, and some were considering moving away from cropping to capitalise on high prices for sheep meat: but this also depended on future grain prices. Of further concern to young farmers were the issues of climate change and the environmental conservation challenges, as well as the issues of global trading arrangements.

Many young farmers felt that environmental sustainability may be compromised by a need to make as much money as possible from every hectare, especially in current times of drought. Many young farmers also felt concerned about a continued loss of farming culture and services in local communities and they felt that the rural decline was still progressing. Some comments from young farmers about their futures include: “I am positive about the future of farming in general. As a producer there has to be fair prices”; “Yes there will be less farmers” (Mr. F, Belalie North, cropping, livestock, 2007); “Good as long as land prices are sustainable. I am hopeful” (Mr. O, Washpool, cropping, livestock, 2007); and “Yes there should always be a future in farming it is important” (M/s D, Melrose, cropping, livestock, 2007).

## Conclusion

Young farmers have provided a detailed description of their lives and experiences of farming in the Mid North region of South Australia through the semi-structured interviews. This has met one of the important objectives of this research, which was an exploration of the lives of young farmers and how this relates to public policy. These results have also identified some of the major policy issues currently being experienced by young farmers.

Whilst the participants revealed that there are many challenges facing young farmers, there is also a strong sense of optimism and confidence about their futures in farming. The importance of the history and meaning of their farming experiences provides the motivation to enter and to continue it. Having a sense of control in farming appears to sustain young farmers, and this has important links to resilience and coping with stress. Participants were able to recognise those things that they could control, and those that they could not control and did not waste energy on.

Work also provides meaning and is linked closely to the sense of responsibility and commitment that young farmers have to their farms and to their families. While young farmers work long hours, with many receiving little in the way of financial rewards, it appears that all young farmers remain optimistic that times would change and that farming would provide them with a reasonable income in the future. All young farmers are highly skilled in their own areas of expertise, expressing a strong and clear sense of their own identities, with many participants having been tertiary trained at university and others having a trade qualification.

Policy areas remain difficult for young farmers to participate in, and for them to be able to influence. Young farmers experience a lack of confidence in those farming organisations that are given the mandate to represent them. This also results in those farmers feeling that they have no control over policies that have the potential to negatively affect their future farming experiences. Participants highlighted the concerns they have for the continuing rural decline, and they believe that this will be a major challenge for all young farmers into the future.





chapter 5:  
Discussion



This chapter builds on the presentation of the results provided in the previous chapter. This chapter theorises the findings in relation to the research question, using the review of the literature in chapter two.

This chapter argues that there are five broad aspects to the overarching question posed at the beginning of this research: “What do the lives of young farmers in the Mid North of South Australia tell us about public policy”?

First, the chapter argues how important it is to place the lives of these young farmers on a timeline that demonstrates how a very personal and family history has not only shaped their present, but also exerts a profound influence on the options they are considering for their future.

Second, the chapter elaborates on the historical timeline to suggest that these farmers attempt to construct a meaning and identity for their motivation for, and satisfaction with, farming, that makes sense of what could appear to be conflicting influences from their past, present and future.

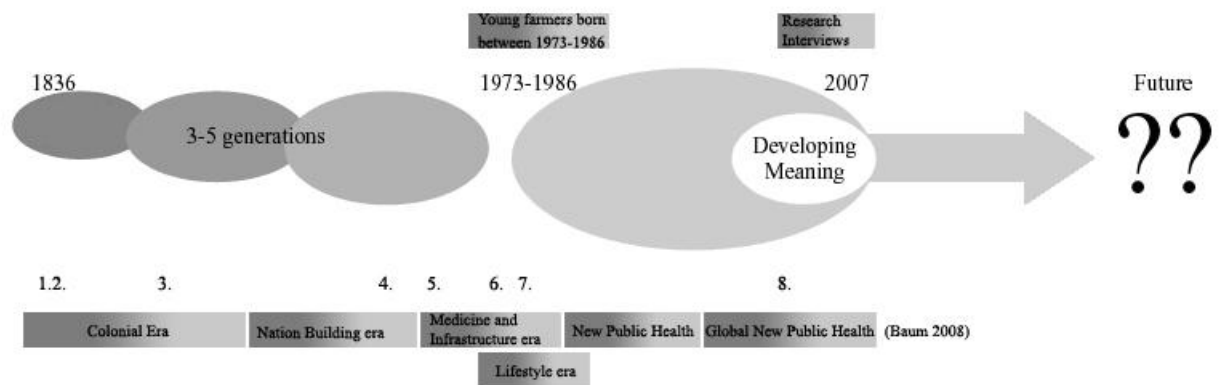
Third, the chapter discusses how participation and control are important as farmers balance their attempts at exerting control over some parts of their lives with the realisation that they have little control over other areas of their lives, and may even have less control in the future than did previous generations on their family farm. The lack of control is exacerbated by the inability of civil society organisations to represent, and advocate to, the satisfaction of these young farmers.

Fourth, the argument moves towards proposals for policy action by showing how the findings from young farmers reflect tensions between global and local policy forces.

Finally, a force field analysis draws together the findings and suggests areas for policy action.

## **The importance of time**

Figure 5.1 (below) places the lives of young farmers on a time line that highlights the twin influences of the contextual impacts of the past, and the uncertainty of the future. The events that are salient in the history that these young farmers carry into their futures also resonates with major themes in the history of Australian public health.



### Legend

1. 1836 White settlement of South Australia
2. 1839 Formation of the South Australian Agricultural Society
3. 1875-85 First Minister of Agriculture and Roseworthy Agricultural College
4. 1930s Great Depression
5. 1949 Council for Scientific and Industrial Research
6. 1973 International Oil Crisis
7. 1980s Neo-liberalist approach to government support for agriculture
8. 2000 Droughts, global uncertainties and financial difficulties

**Figure 5.1. Timeline**

The results chapter highlighted the awareness that young farmers expressed about the influence of the past generations of farmers on their current experiences. All young farmers who participated in this project reported that they were conscious of the impacts of the past. Farming is a distinctive occupation in this way, as children are raised and immersed in the farming environment which is not only their home but also their potential future workplace (Stayner, 1997, 111).

Young farmers reported that the nature of the family farm is that the older farmers pass on their skills, knowledge and experiences to the next generation of young farmers, simply by working together on a daily basis. This helped to shape their values and attitudes, the meaning that they get from farming, the close links that they have with other family members and the responsibilities they carry for the continuation of the family farm.

The participants talked about the establishment of their family farms with pride, and all young farmers in the project came from three to five generations of farming ancestry. All of the young farmers knew the histories

of their farms, and talked at length about the struggles that their fathers, grandfathers and great grandfathers experienced in trying to develop their farms over the generations.

In order to understand the young farmers' pride in their histories some historical context is necessary. Figure 5.1 shows that South Australia was officially settled in 1836 and farming was well underway by the 1850s and 1860s, and agriculture played an important part in the history of South Australia (Radcliffe, no date).

In the early beginnings of South Australia's settlement, governments were very supportive of agriculture. The South Australian colonial government played an active role in the development of farming land and encouraged future farmer's skills. As early as 1839, three years after settlement, the government formed The South Australian Agricultural Society. In 1869 the Strangways Act was passed, which provided government loans to small holders with 20% deposit, to allow land purchase on credit. Also during this year, the government developed another policy to provide access for wheat growers to either a port or railway within 15 miles of their own properties (Radcliffe, no date).

By 1875, the government appointed the first Minister of Agriculture. That year, a Royal Commission was held into agricultural education, with the resultant creation of the Roseworthy Agricultural College. The College commenced in 1882, and by 1885 the Diploma of Agriculture had been introduced. By 1905 the Roseworthy College had become affiliated with the University of Adelaide, after which it became a major driver in agricultural education. Another important development in the empowerment of farmers was the creation of the Agricultural Bureau of South Australia in 1875. The Agricultural Bureau was developed to give farmers a voice and to encourage the development of agriculture in South Australia (Radcliffe, no date).

Many of the events that occurred for these farming families in the early part of the timeline shown in Figure 5.1 reflect significant moments in Australian history. The period from 1836 to 1890 has been described as the Colonial Era (Baum, 2008, 18), when Australian responses to nineteenth century public health problems were influenced by British and European responses that focused on controlling disease and attempting to create healthy living environments. These reforms responded to the dislocation and disease

brought about by rapid industrialisation and urbanisation, especially when in the face of major epidemics of cholera and typhoid. In both Britain and Australia, legislation was used to create public health acts. All Australian colonies passed comprehensive public health acts that were closely modelled on the British Acts (Baum, 2008, 17).

Similar goals and actions are evident in the farming sector. The ancestors of these young farmers benefited from government decisions to establish legislation and structures that enhanced the health of the nation, and attempted to recreate Britannia by establishing farming practices that in many ways built on the colony's European heritage. In this period, government assistance was seen as an essential means for the colonist to maintain traditional culture, especially when faced with brutal competition for daily existence that produced few winners (Arnold, 1996).

The next historical period, from the 1890s to the 1940s has been described by Baum (2008, 18) as the Nation Building era. This period was concerned with strengthening the nation by improving the health and fitness of the "white" citizens. The outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war on the continent of Europe in 1870 indicated a need for a reservoir of fit citizens and plentiful food. So, in Australia, public policy at the turn of the 20th century took much of its initiative from Britain, which was responding to the challenges of the Boer War and German industrial and military expansion, through the re-organization of the education system. The role of education was to train the child through secondary and technical education to become a more efficient and more effective worker, who could then build up the industrial and agricultural strength of the nation. Britain reminded everyone of the importance of the Empire by stating that all members of the Empire should make themselves fit to play their part in the world struggle (McIntosh, 1962).

At the time of Federation in 1901, Australia changed from a colony to a nation. The foundation ideas that underpinned the actions of Australian governments at Federation in 1901 included the White Australia policy, as well as faith in government authority, egalitarianism, judicial determination in centralised wage fixing, protection of industry and jobs and dependence upon a great power (first Britain, then America) for security and finance (Kelly, 1992).

The great depression of the 1930s caused much hardship for farmers, with world markets in oversupply and old farming practices causing destruction to natural resources. During the two world wars, farming production was increased and women also started to play a bigger role in farming as men went to war. Women in South Australia played a very important role during both World Wars, through the work of the Women's Land Army, making sure that production and efficiency in agriculture was maintained (Radcliffe, no date).

In this period, agriculture served the purpose of providing food and fitness for Australia and British Empire, as well as fit and skilled soldiers for the Boer War and First World War. There were some rewards in the agricultural industry for those ex-servicemen who returned from war. Many returned ex-servicemen took advantage of the governments allocated farming blocks (soldier settler blocks)<sup>1</sup> which provided farming land as a reward for the returned soldiers' military service to Australia.

These activities were further supported by the state government of South Australia which had established the Department of Agriculture by 1907. The Department also created experimental farms in South Australia, encouraging research and development in agriculture. The Council for Scientific and Industrial Research was established later in 1949, and this was also supported by the government (Radcliffe, no date).

In relation to women and their roles in agriculture the present study's participants reported that they had noticed many recent changes to gender relationships on farms. The present generation of women is taking more a active role and responsibility in all aspects of farming, including decision making, business, marketing in addition to physical work. All young farmers reported that their female partners were an integral part of the farming enterprise and were contributing in many areas associated with farming including taking off farm work (Land and Water Australia, 2005, 33).

After the Second World War, agriculture experienced some boom times particularly in the wool industry and soldier settlement schemes<sup>2</sup> became popular and were supported by the state government (Radcliffe, no date).

1 Under the War Service Land Settlement Agreement Act 1945 returned servicemen were eligible to receive an allocated farming block that they could farm. These blocks were allocated in certain areas and ranged in size from 80 acres to 640 acres. These soldier settlement blocks experienced mixed success due to several reasons including; the inadequate size of many of the blocks, problems with drainage and salinity on many blocks and a lack of knowledge of farming by some ex-servicemen.

2 See footnote 1.



This fits Baum's (2008, 18) classification of the post war period as the Affluence, Medicine and Infrastructure era, characterised by a belief in the potential of science. From 1945, post-war Australia experienced a period of considerable affluence. Unemployment was low, immigration high and per capita income growing while successive governments continued to invest in social infrastructure. The public health services in each state were concerned with policing standards for clean air, water and food. Economies were also expanding, so as a result health and other sectors could afford to conduct research and pay for the development of new discoveries (Baum, 2008, 27).

Figure 5.1 shows that the sample of young farmers in this study were born between 1973 and 1986. 1973 was an important year for public policy because of that year's oil crisis:

The 1973 oil crisis signalled the end of taken for granted affluence by Western countries. Recession was widespread in the 1970s in developed countries, and unemployment increased around the world. In many countries governments were elected with a mandate to undo the considerable advances made towards the establishment of welfare states. Australia was no exception and from the 1980s onwards the language of economic rationalism became a central discourse of Australian political life"

(Baum, 2008, 30).

Chapter two showed how neo-liberalism ideologies came to inform public policy in general, and farming policy in particular. The increasing support of the Australian government for a market oriented and individualistic focus to farming, alongside neo-liberal philosophies, served to minimise government support and intervention in agriculture. This resulted in the past 30 years of farming being dominated by a loss of skilled farmers from the industry, structural adjustment and deregulation policies, and a continuation of rural decline (Raphael, Stevens & Bryant, 2008, 8).

So these young farmers grew up in an era where the government, instead of legislating to support farmers as in earlier times, was retreating and leaving more and more policy settings to be resolved by market forces. From 1966–80 many changes were starting to be experienced in agriculture with a reorganisation and review of the Department of Agriculture taking place. By 1981 research centres were also under review with many being closed or shifted to another location. By the late 1980s and early 1990s support for agriculture by governments had waned (Radcliffe, no date).

Changes in policy direction resulted in government led neo-liberal philosophy, with an increasing emphasis on farmers' self-reliance. This meant less reliance on government support for the industry, with economic rationalism favoured as the overarching economic policy direction. Many markets faced deregulation, many agricultural departments were restructured and faced reduced staffing; farmers were increasingly left to their own devices. While the young Australian farmers who participated in the present study have always valued self-reliance, their lives have become increasingly complex as they have needed to develop new skills in business management and the marketing of their own commodities in an effort to remain viable and sustainable. Halpin and Guilfoyle (2004) highlight these concerns:

Significantly governmental neo-liberal discourses insist on Australian farmers taking personal responsibility and control for any socio-economic hardship or farm viability explanations. In this article we argue that the neoliberal discursive environment creates a potential for self-blame where farmers "fail".

(Halpin & Guilfoyle, 2004, 93).

The present research project's participants reported that they felt that they take more than their fair share of responsibility and risk for any perceived farming failures.

At the same time, significant developments in technology and farming practices occurred while this group of young farmers was growing up. Such developments have included new technology, new scientific developments, improvements to livestock and crop management, changes to government policies, improvements to education, and the introduction of rural adjustment and deregulation policies (Fragar, 2001).

Farmers discussed ways in which, for them, globalisation has been significant. The world has "become smaller" with advances in communication, technology, trade and export changing forever a once rather insular and controlled farming environment. Globalisation, whilst providing opportunities for farmers, has threatened the family farm structure that has shaped the lives of these young farmers. Ever increasing calls for more efficient production has resulted in attempts by many farmers to "get big or get out" (Gray & Lawrence, 1996,).

This resonates with the work of Higgins (1998), who argues that globalisation has raised some serious concerns. Some of these include declining farm

populations, rural decline, an increased instability of commodity prices, increased environmental degradation and unequal global trading inequities (Higgins, 1998, 2).

For some young farmers this has resulted in gains with larger holdings, and better production and efficiency. For others, however, the picture has not been so positive. With a run of dry seasons, large debts and an increasing and overwhelming sense of failure as they have attempted to expand to remain viable, a complex mix of drought, global issues and rural decline has meant that some of them find life to be challenging and difficult. For many young farmers, their best efforts may well result in failure due to this complex mix of events and forces, all of which are often seen as being out of their control.

Baum (2008, 19) describes the period from the mid 1990s up to now as the Global New Public Health. This period is concerned with increased recognition of the impact of the policies and practices of international financial institutions, the shrinking of the state, and privatisation. It has also seen the communication revolution, which has enabled these young farmers to communicate and find information from all parts of the world. This study's participants reported that many of their current challenges fit within the global environment, and that they face many difficulties operating on a world market under the expectations that they will be able to market their own grain internationally without assistance from the government.

Figure 5.1 shows that today's young farmers have been shaped by a past that, for their families who established the farms, were more certain and more supported by governments. These farmers came of age just as neo-liberalism was taking hold, thus replacing certainty and a local focus with uncertainty due to exposure to global market forces. The participants, conscious of the legacies of their families, reported that they are positive about their own futures in agriculture, and often reframe current and future hardships as just one more in a series of the naturally occurring cycles that their forebears faced, and coped with. These young farmers' accounts, however, reveal concerns about the future, especially in terms of their ability to maintain the legacy of their families and to continue to hand the farm down through future generations, thus continuing the story of coping, resilience and continuity.

## Meaning

The previous section showed how this study's participants inherited a farm, its values and work ethos, and a family history that is expected to endure for future generations. However, these farmers differ from their forebears in that they were born at about the time the developed world, in response to the 1973 oil crisis, retreated from the centrality of government to pursue philosophies of small government and individual entrepreneurship. All this presents these farmers with the dilemma of maintaining the momentum from the past whilst trying to preserve the farm, and while facing global competition, reduced government support and climate variation.

On the surface, and in light of the difficulties the young farmers described during their interviews it does not appear to be an easy decision to stay on an inter-generational family farm. This section argues that young farmers re-frame what may be perceived by others as a difficult choice to farm as a satisfying, meaningful and hopeful future for themselves and their families. They did that by seeking meaning from the past, present and future. The analysis of the research interviews clearly showed ways in which the participants searched to create meaning from their experience of farming—meaning that supports their choice to enter the agricultural industry. Meaning provides the motivation to remain farming despite the past several years of facing challenges of an environmental and economic nature.

The meaning that young farmers create from their work is significant. All young farmers worked very long hours for what many people would consider minimal income. All of the participants reported working off-farm to supplement their farming incomes, and almost all of their partners were also working off farm. These two things demonstrate not only their commitment to maintaining the family farm, but also highlights the solidarity of the family working together. The young farmers reported that they enjoyed working alongside their families towards a shared and common goal, and that the values that their families held around the farming experience were common to all involved.

However, the participants reported difficulties with the challenging financial conditions facing them, when not only do they, but almost all of their partners and other family members, need to take on extra work in order to keep the family farm viable. The interviews revealed just how paramount was the

search for meaning to justify, maintain and carry forward the family farm as a viable option for the next generation. The research of Gray and Lawrence (1996) reported that financial factors and globalisation were continuing to cause Australian farmers concern (Gray & Lawrence, 1996, 177).

Young farmers in the interviews that farming is the only career that they have ever wanted to pursue, and that they could not imagine doing anything else in life. The lifestyle of farming contributes to the personal meaning of farming with the opportunity to live and work on the farm with family members who share a common vision. Many young farmers talked about the opportunities for their families to do social activities on the farm, which also reinforced the meaning of the farm to each generation. The farm was not only a place to work, but a place to live and raise their families.

The values associated with farming are also related to the development of the meaning of farming. The values of pride, hard work, tolerance and trust were talked about in every research interview. These values were more than just the personal values of an individual but had also become the farm's values or the operational values involved with running the farm business. Values in the projects participants were reinforced over many years of these young farmers being raised on the farm by parents who held the same or similar values: it is expected that the values would be passed onto the children of young farmers (Gray & Lawrence, 1996, 177).

Young farmers were able to draw on support from their families within the inter-generational family farming unit. Parents provide not only financial support, but significant levels of social and emotional support. Family support served to strengthen the shared meaning of farming, with all of the family working towards a common goal. This fits with the work of Stayner (1997), who reiterated the importance of family factors in operating the family farm. Such factors include the value of positive communication, of conflict resolution and of developing the shared meaning of farming.

All young farmers participating in this study described the high level of commitment they had to the farm. Many were prepared to take low incomes because of the meaning that they created from the experience of being a farmer. All young farmers had the skills, knowledge and education to pursue more financially rewarding careers, but instead chose to stay with farming because of the satisfaction they gained from it. The lifestyle factors



of open air, the freedom to use the farm for entertainment, and the physical nature of living on a farm, were additional benefits that encouraged young farmers to enter and continue farming. All young farmers reported that these features were some of the primary reasons for remaining on the farm.

Young farmers talked at length in the interviews about the importance of belonging to a family farming unit that had shared goals and visions, and which was also willing to share the burdens and responsibilities of farming. The results of this research indicate that the family support provided to young farmers by partners and parents has been responsible for keeping young farmers resilient and able to cope with many farming pressures. In some research in the literature review by Stayner in 1997, he also found that the intrinsic characteristics of farm life such as outdoor work, being your own boss and having a connection to the land, were much more important to farmers than what he called instrumental rewards, such as money earning potential and business-focused strategies (Stayner, 1997, 112–113).

Young farmers also consider living in small rural communities to be beneficial which was another important reason for them staying on the farm. Young farmers and their families gain support and motivation from other members of the community with whom they have things in common: they expressed a sense of solidarity with people who live in small rural communities (Alston, 2004, 44).

## **Control/participation**

The previous section summarised ways in which the young farmers attempted to make meaning from what could be seen as the very difficult task of maintaining the family farm for future generations. The search for meaning may be interpreted as an important way of farmers finding ways to exert more control over their lives.

Marmot and Wilkinson (2003) describe in their work on the social determinants of health the importance of the social environment on health. This includes the concept of an individual's control over their life. Marmot and Wilkinson say that "A lack of control over work and home can have powerful effects on health" and that differentials in power (or lack of access to power) results in differences in health status (Marmot & Wilkinson, 2003,

12). As Marmot and Wilkinson (2003) point out, the social gradient in health runs right across society and disadvantage has a cumulative effect on an individual's health right throughout its life.

Baum (1998) describes a person's sense of control as empowerment:

Empowerment, in its most general sense, refers to the ability of people to gain understanding and control over personal, social, economic and political forces in order to take action to improve their life situations.

(Baum, 1998, 327).

Baum also recognises the importance of power in relation to participation and decision making and says that this includes the ability for people to have an influence over institutions. Mowbray (1985) agrees saying that often participation on a local level does little to address broader structural inequities and that many governments have used local action as an excuse not to take broader and more difficult actions to address policy inequities (Mowbray, 1985).

The findings of the present research highlight the importance of a sense of control within the inter-generational farming environment. The young farmers who were clearly involved with decision making, who felt they were consulted regularly, and who were encouraged to show initiative demonstrated more confidence and commitment to a future in farming because they had some control over their lives.

This finding is consistent with fundamental principles of the primary health care approach (World Health Organisation, 1978), which nominates community participation as one of its underpinning principles. It is also consistent with a socio-environmental model of health promotion that encourages people to participate in health development and to foster collective action for health (Baum 2008, Labonté 1992). People can only participate fully in decisions about research, services and programs that influence their health if their voices are heard and taken into account.

There are two primary types of community participation summarised by Baum (2008) and they differ in the extent to which participation involves a transfer of power from the state or experts to communities. These are:

1—Consultation, as a means of asking for people's opinions and reactions

to plans for services and policies. The consultation is limited, initiated by organisations outside the community and usually controlled by the organisation initiating consultation.

2—Participation, which can be used to achieve a defined end. Again, it is initiated by organisations outside the community. It is instrumental in that it lasts for the life of the initiative and does not lead to shifts in power.

Baum also summarises two sub-types of participation: substantive participation and structural participation.

Substantive participation occurs when people are actively involved in determining priorities and implementation, but only when the initiative is externally controlled. Although people outside the community may initiate it, this type of participation may, over time lead to structural participation. If the initiative becomes developmental, it may involve a shift in power to the community.

Structural participation is an engaged and developmental process in which community control predominates. The initiative may have come from outside the community initially, but eventually control is handed over to the community. It is a developmental, ongoing relationship, which is driven by the community and potentially hands back power to individuals and, organisations. The scope of activities is as broad as the community wishes (Baum, 2008, 328).

In relation to succession planning, most young farmers had achieved a transfer of power, and therefore enjoyed at least substantial and eventually structural participation. The high levels of succession contributed to a sense of control and would be expected to assist the young farmers to make decisions about the future, using skills and considering options that were not available for their forebears. The analysis in chapter two demonstrated not only the importance of having achieved control through succession planning, but also the lack of control experienced by those few young farmers who lacked input into decision making, were not included in family farm decision making, or were in conflict with parents or siblings. They said they were not as confident and did not have the same meaningful connection to the family farm.

In such cases, control via succession planning can link to time on the continuum in Figure 5.1, such as when a young farmer has to wait for an older family member to die or retire before they have the opportunity to run the farm and make decisions. Such farmers would thus become old farmers before they experience the opportunity to fully manage the farm and exert control over the farm's future. Several authors including Stayner (1997), Marotz-Baden and Mattheis (1994), Weigel, Weigel and Blundall (1987), and Barclay, Foskey and Reeve, (2007) highlight the difficulties and challenges facing farmers with succession of their farms from one generation to the next.

A sense of control in relationships within the family farming unit was discussed by this project's participants. It is maintained through participation, negotiation and compromise. All young farmers reported enjoying working with family members sharing decisions and sharing the burdens of decision making. There was great strength in working towards a shared family goal and vision in farming. As evidenced in an article by Marotz-Baden and Mattheis (1994), the importance of finding a place in the family for daughter-in-laws can make all the difference to the long term outcomes of the farm. It also highlighted the importance of positive relationships in the farming family unit and the benefits of positive communication and shared decision making.

The young farmers in the present study also described educational opportunities as something over which they could have some control. All young farmers were working towards furthering their skills and knowledge: many at tertiary level. The young farmers in this research are very different to their fathers and grandfathers because they have had many more opportunities to gain knowledge and to keep up to date with new farming technologies. They also consider further education and lifelong learning a priority.

The young farmers described many structural and environmental factors as beyond their control: such as the weather, wars, commodity prices, global financial markets and global trading markets. Young farmers expressed a reluctant acceptance of these things as being out of their control. Although at times this caused them to feel stressed and worried, they drew from the past history of their farming family the lesson of not worrying about forces beyond their control. Once again the experience over time of a farming history provided some meaning and comfort to young farmers when faced

with difficult farming circumstances. Young farmers described stressors that are not unique to themselves such as relationship breakdowns, deaths and accidents: but, once again, the participants described resilience and positive coping skills around these things. All young farmers had someone they felt they could go to for support and not one young farmer felt unsupported when times were difficult.

In contrast, the participants described a lack of control over many other aspects of farming; in particular, policy participation and representation. As already mentioned, young farmers have not been able to participate effectively through their farming lobby organisation the South Australian Farmers Federation. Many of the past farming groups like the Agricultural Bureau and Rural Youth Movement who would have provided some avenue for policy advocacy no longer exist in many farming communities in South Australia—another victim of rural decline. Often, when they do exist, they are perceived by young farmers as being more relevant to older farmers. When assessed against the four levels of participation (Baum 2008), there are few effective examples of substantive or structural participation, and many more examples of consultation as a means of achieving a narrowly defined end. Such consultation does not involve a transfer of power, is not long term and thus does not engender a sense of control.

Another important consideration is the impact of rural decline. The young farmers in the present study reportedly felt worried about a lack of the basic resources necessary for a satisfying life in rural communities. These factors include childcare provision, public transport in rural areas, decent well maintained roads, health care infrastructure for their families and educational opportunities for themselves and their children. Rural communities do not have the same choices as those people living in more urban environments particularly in the areas of education, childcare and health resources (Fragar, 2001). Once again, when assessed against Baum's (2008) four levels of community participation, it is evident from the results of the present research that young farmers have no real influence from a community perspective salient to effective influence on public policy. As Baum highlights, young farmers would need to be involved at the substantive and structural level of community participation otherwise influence would be minimal. Young farmers report little evidence of substantive or structural influence in any of the interviews when talking about their local communities and rural decline in particular.



Young farmers reported in the interviews that they had chosen to enter farming and that they do see a positive future for themselves and their families. They also reported that they are willing to sacrifice and go without many of these resources including, for many young farmers, adequate incomes.

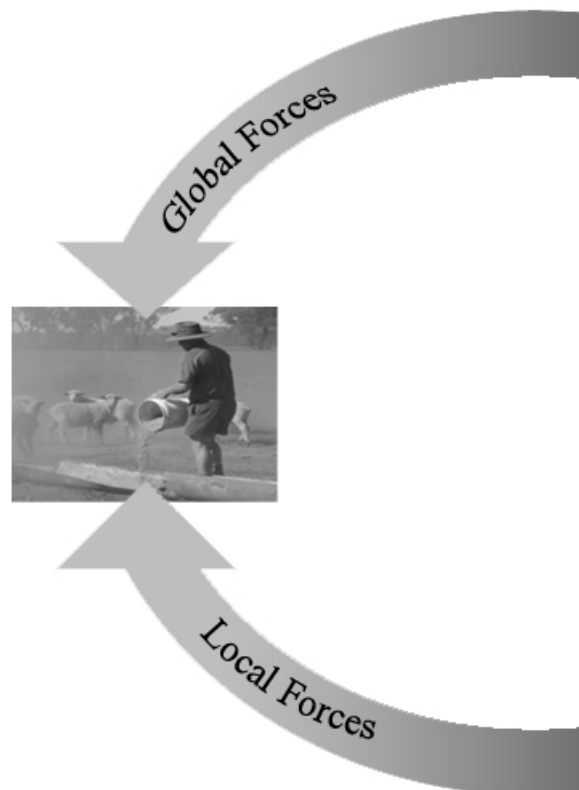
Figure 5.2 summarises the complexity of control as experienced by the young farmers. This metaphor is adapted from the work of Baum (2007) who argues the case for governments to begin acting on the bases of fairness and justice in policy. Such policy work must broaden the focus away from behaviour changes of individuals: in this case, changes in education and skills of farmers with the hope that they then can compete in a global world. My analysis of the accounts of these young farmers is that they have done all they can to improve the capacity of local forces such as succession planning, education, use of computers and internet to communicate and manage, adoption of new technology and practices and accepting the need to incorporate off farm income systematically into their work.

However, farmers did not experience the same control over the global forces acting on them, such as climate change, globalisation of markets and suppliers and rural decline fuelled by the adoption of neo-liberal ideologies. Their lack of control was exacerbated by the decline and perceived ineffectiveness of civil society organisations and advocacy organisations. For Baum (2008) many of the social determinants of health are outside local health systems. Similarly, many of the global forces facing farmers lie outside local farming systems. In the face of these global forces, Baum (2008) advocates the importance of, not only civil society acting with collective action to make policy change, but also of producing linking social capital.

According to this argument, farmers would participate in effective civil society organisations and, in the process, connect with people who have power in organisations and agencies, thereby leading to healthy public policy for the benefit of all citizens (Baum, 2007). For the young farmers involved in the present project, this would create a society high in linking social capital with the following characteristics:

high trust in formal institutions, fair and transparent public policy processes, commitment to redistribution by the better off in society, commitment to activities of state and opportunities for people from different groups to interact in a respectful manner.

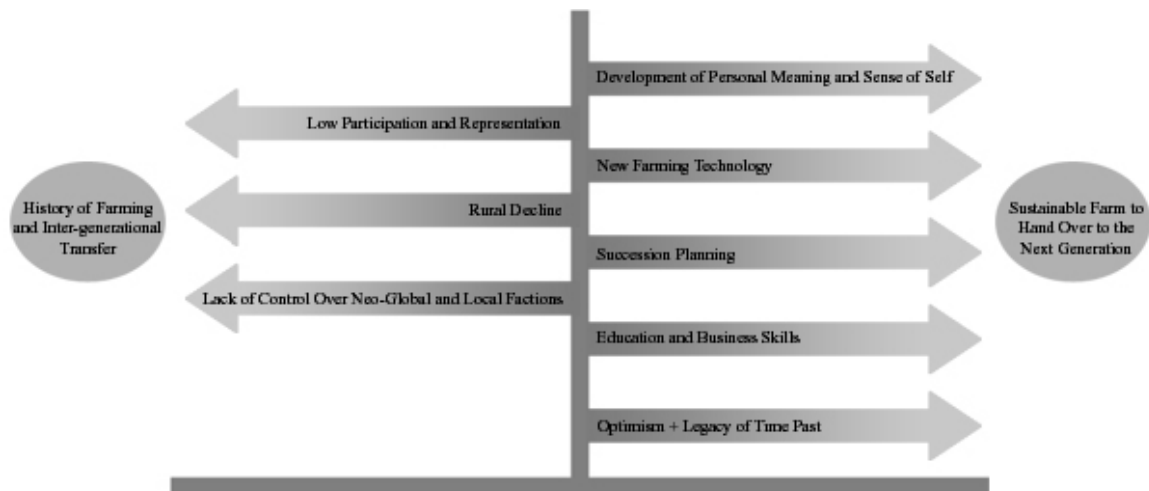
(Baum, 2007, 93).



**Figure 5.2** The nutcracker of global and local forces on young farmers (modified from Baum (2007)).

Baum's (2007) argument helps to explain the findings from this research, because young farmers argued that they saw the importance of lobby and advocacy groups such as the South Australian Farmers Federation. The young farmers said that SAFF should be encouraging governments to take action on policies that are currently affecting young farmers negatively. They also seek formal and systematic input into decisions by governments, which should ensure that fairness and justice are criteria for any policy decision that contributes to the health of both young farmers and rural communities by creating equity promoting environments (Baum, 2007). Finally, I adapt Baum's (2007) argument about the importance of individuals and communities having a voice by proposing that it will be essential that young farmers themselves find a way to make their own voices heard.

## A way forward?




**Figure 5.3.** Force field analysis

Figure 5.3 depicts a force field analysis derived from the work of Kurt Lewin. Force field analysis proposes two types of forces: driving forces and restraining forces. Driving forces push change forwards while restraining forces block change. Change is conceptualised as unfreezing the system so driving and retaining forces can be modified to achieve change, then refreezing when the changes are in place. (MacDougall in Keleher, MacDougall & Murphy, 2007, 339). This is a useful way of summarising the arguments in this chapter about the policy implications of the experiences of young farmers. In my analysis, the restraining forces are principally the structural or global forces depicted in the nutcracker diagram in Figure 5.2. While there are many driving forces, these are principally local forces from Figure 5.2. The result is a power imbalance whereby local forces are not powerful enough to drive change in the face of global forces. For policy change, according to this analysis, it will be essential for young farmers to engage with structures that afford more access to the powers that influence global forces. The overall goal is a sustainable farm that is in good shape for the next generation.

The converse of the argument is that increasing the emphasis on local, driving forces is easier, but it is much less likely to be effective.

The knowledge transfer chapter that follows will provide an overview of the efforts made by the researcher and the project's participants to have an influence on public policy.

A black and white photograph showing the interior of a vehicle with the door open. A dog is sitting on the ground outside the door, looking towards the camera. The background shows a field and a horizon line under a bright sky. The text "chapter 6: Knowledge Transfer" is overlaid on the right side of the image.

chapter 6:  
Knowledge  
Transfer

One of the objectives of this research was “To identify and engage with agencies and organisations that can assist with knowledge transfer”. The initial aim of the knowledge transfer component for this research was to attempt to raise the profile of young farmers, and to engage with available policy makers. In this chapter, I reflect on the outcomes of knowledge transfer process, considered against the discussion in chapter five, in particular Figure 5.3, which sets out enabling and restraining forces in a force field analysis.

## **Knowledge transfer activities**

An analysis of Table 6.1 (next page) shows that most of the knowledge transfer for this research has been limited to the local level only.

The media has provided numerous opportunities to raise the awareness of young farmers’ concerns. Over the past three years the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (regional radio) interviewed the researcher on numerous occasions, discussing both the results of the research and the general concerns of young farmers. On a wider level, the results of the research have been disseminated to over 150 farmers and rural business people at a series of dinner workshops held in the local research area at Crystal Brook, Orroroo, and Appila (March, 2008). The workshops provided the opportunity to raise the views of young farmers. Interest was created in the research with older farmers and with the business community and local politicians who attended: those attendees became more aware of the factors affecting the lives of young farmers.



**Table 6.1. Knowledge transfer activities undertaken**

Letter received on 20th November 2006 from the Rural Sustainability Task Force written by Chris Schacht, Chairperson—this letter offers ongoing support to the present research project.
Presentation to 150 farmers of the research findings. Crystal Brook March 11th, Orroroo March 12th, Appila March 13th, 2008.
Research Participants' Dinners—October 2007 and February 2008.
Feedback to South Australian Farmers Federation on CDMA Communication Network changes on behalf of young farmers' research group.
Media article "Exciting Project" Flinders News (Wed, July 25th, 2007).
Media article "Young Farmers NRM Workshops". (No. 1. September 2007 edition).
Media article "Stock Journal" "Study to focus on Mid North Young farmers". ( <i>Stock Journal</i> edition dated January 18th, 2007).
Media article "Kicking the dust kicks off" ( <i>Stock Journal</i> May, 2007).
Conference paper and presentation. University of Plymouth April 3rd, U.K. 2008.
Report for Country Health SA December 2007. Preliminary Findings.
Website South Australian Farmers Federation. Ongoing website reports.
Reports—Country Health SA.
Media article "Update on the research" (July 30th, 2008). <i>Stock Journal</i> .
Rural Futures Unit. Academic Journal Article. <i>Journal of Farm Management</i> . UK. Volume 14. Number 4.
Radio Interview. ABC. Monday 11th August, 2008.
Distribution of 150 copies of combined Mid North and Mallee <i>Reports of Research Findings</i> .
Meeting with South Australian Farmers Federation to discuss findings of the research on Tuesday 26th August, 2008.
Presentation to Young Farmers Drought Leadership Program—Tuesday 26th August, 2008.
Presentation to Country Health SA – Thursday 28th August.
Presentation to Occupational Therapy Conference Clare on Friday August 19th, 2008.
Radio Interview ABC Regional Radio—Broken Hill, Riverland, South East SA. 15th, 16th, 17th, September 2008.
Article—"Young producers push positive message"—October 7th, 2008 <i>Stock Journal</i> .

The researcher provided two opportunities for young farmers to get together (with their consent) to discuss the results of the research as well as to clarify the analysis of the research. Two feedback workshops were held: the first in October 2007, and the second in February 2008. Almost every young farmer attended. On reflection, I conclude that the importance of these dinners, although only at a local level, cannot be underestimated. Young farmers had the opportunity to meet with each other, to talk about their concerns, and to build a sense of support and solidarity amongst themselves. This is important because, for successful advocacy processes, young farmers must

have not only structural access for influence, but also have the confidence as individuals and as a group to speak out.

This is what the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion describes as “enhancing personal skills” (Baum, 1998, 36). The “enhancing personal skills” in the Ottawa Charter talks about the role that lifestyle and skill development both plays in assisting people to make healthier choices for their lives. This also includes the role of lobbying and advocacy and “the ability to analyse individual problems within a structural framework” (Baum, 1998, 36).

Young farmers raised concerns about the current effectiveness of the organisations available to lobby on their behalf. This is a very important area discussed by Baum (2008), who differentiated between four types of community participation according to the degree that each involves power, justice and equity and the opportunity to change public policy (Baum, 2008). The present researcher, however, gained some exposure for young farmers with the South Australian Farmers Federation through regular attendance at their Mental Health and Well being Task Force meetings which provided the opportunity to raise the current concerns of young farmers about the broader issues affecting their lives. This organisation also regularly featured articles about the research in the *Stock Journal* weekly farming journal, and provided a regular update of the research on its website.

This project has had some international opportunities for exposure when the researcher was invited to present both a paper and presentation at the University of Plymouth’s conference, *Dreams, Dilemmas and Dangers*, in the United Kingdom, in April 2008. The presentation was well received and a peer reviewed paper was subsequently published in the *Journal of Farm Management UK* (Clarke A & Morgan B, 2008, 343–350).

As a result of the research with young farmers, a number of new local partnerships have been formed between Mid North Health (the organisation supporting this research) and the local Natural Resource Management Board, local government and the state department of Primary Industries SA. This happened because young farmers were able to identify opportunities for partnerships with these organisations that would be beneficial to their farming businesses. For example the partnership with the Natural Resource Management Board resulted in a series of workshops that provided specific

information about property and land management and was well attended by young farmers from the research study. The partnership with Primary Industries SA was helpful with the management of many of the issues associated with the recent droughts with young farmers being able to access new information to assist them with managing the impact of drought. These examples demonstrate that it is possible for research to be able to support advocacy through the local health service, to encourage the further development of partnerships with non-traditional health partners, and to be able to increase agencies' responsiveness to the concerns of young farmers.

The principles of action research—of planning, acting and observing, reflecting and then repeating this cycle have been useful in the knowledge transfer process (Baum, 1998, 170). Many of the local activities of knowledge transfer have evolved over the life of the research, with the present researcher changing the emphasis on various concerns raised by young farmers when discussing their issues in different domains depending also on the audience receiving the information.

## **Transfer in the form of further research**

As a result of an interim report on this project Mid North Health<sup>1</sup> argued to Country Health SA for funding to enable the research to be replicated in another region, the Southern Mallee region of South Australia. The funding application was successful and the research was repeated in May and June 2008 with the support of Mid North Health, Mallee Health Service and young farmers from this area. The replication study provided an opportunity to triangulate some of the major results, and to raise the profile of this type of research within the state health authority.

## **Reflection using the discussion in chapter five**

Upon reflection, genuine knowledge transfer can only be achieved if it is able to deal with the powerful restraining forces to change. Representative structures and advocacy organisations that influence global and structural factors must be influenced if genuine research transfer is to be achieved.

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<sup>1</sup> An interim report was provided to Mid North Health about the progress of the research and the preliminary findings.

My reflection is that the conventional avenues of research transfer that were obvious and accessible were not sufficient to help me enable young farmers advocate for change against the restraining forces. I conclude this after analysing research transfer activities against the results of the interviews with young farmers in chapter four, and the analysis in chapter five, and recognising that the participants' identified local lobby and advocacy groups are not powerful enough to ensure their voices are being heard. Until this happens, it will be difficult to create an environment that promotes equity or justice in public policy (Baum, 2007). My reflection in this chapter shows that research transfer was more effective in structures that dealt with the more local forces as depicted in Figure 5.2 in chapter five. While this is a first step in pursuing change, especially in the empowerment of young farmers, it is not of itself sufficient to counter any of the more global and structural forces at work.

I conclude that actions taken on behalf of young farmers by the researcher, and by young farmers themselves, through the knowledge transfer process, have been useful in awareness raising: however, this has not been enough to drive any significant changes or to make immediate changes towards healthy public policy. Importantly, there are currently not any structures in place to support young farmers having any real influence on those global forces that are major restraining factors as described in the force field analysis (Figure 5.5). In that figure, the driving forces are the local forces and the restraining forces are those of a more structural and global nature. The resulting power imbalance between the driving and restraining forces created a situation that was not supportive of positive changes for young farmers. During the interviews, when young farmers identified their current concerns they felt there was "no where to go" to influence global forces such as economic viability, sustainability of the family farm and rural decline.



# Chapter 7: Conclusion





The original thinking for this research came from my background as a farmer and my professional interest in the mental health of young farmers. However, the research questions developed eventually into broader questions about public policy. The research question developed was “What do the lives of young farmers in the Mid North of South Australia tell us about public policy?”.

The results of this research reinforced the value of moving away from an exclusive focus on mental health and mental health interventions and into a broader exploration into the lives and experiences of young farmers.

This research has used qualitative research methods with a case study approach underpinned by action research principles. Current literature was reviewed from Australia and overseas focusing on the current concerns of young farmers especially in relation to public policy. Twenty young farmers (16 males and four females) were interviewed in the 18–35 year age range. Action research strategies were used in the localised transfer of knowledge from this research.

This chapter summarises the answers this research has provided to the overall question, and reflects on knowledge transfer and dissemination.

## **Local and global forces**

The results highlighted the challenges facing young farmers, but especially those of sustainability, viability and control over the participants’ futures. The restraining forces of a global and structural nature as described in the force field analysis in Figure 5.3 (in chapter five), are persistent and dominating, and are hampering the influence that young farmers have on healthy public policy. The local forces that have included young farmers’ determination to stay abreast of technology, of continual improvements to their education, and of ongoing business and marketing skills development. These are all features that young farmers have had control over and have gained meaning from, but they are not powerful enough to challenge and change global and structural forces.

## **Interconnected past, present and future**

Chapter five showed that the young farmers were shaped by a past that, for their families who established the farms, was more certain and more supported by governments. They came of age as neo-liberalism took hold, replacing certainty and a local focus with uncertainty and exposure to global market forces. Young farmers, conscious of the legacies of their families, were positive about their own futures in agriculture, and reframed hardships as just more difficulties in a series of the naturally occurring cycles that their forebears coped with. They were concerned about their ability to maintain the legacies of their families, and to continue to hand the farm down through future generations, thus continuing the story of coping, resilience and continuity.

## **A search for meaning, control and participation**

Young farmers reframed the difficult choice to farm as a satisfying, meaningful and hopeful future for themselves and their families. They did that by seeking meaning from the past, present and future—which reinforces, maintains and sustains the motivation to remain in farming.

The concept of control is also an important part of maintaining young farmers' meaning, enthusiasm and commitment to farming. Young farmers who have control over their decisions and their farms are able to go on planning for their future lives on the farm. Participation and representation emerged as critical problems, because young farmers do not feel able to participate in debates about public policy. They do not see structures for advocacy, participation and representation that work for them.

## **Personal reflection on the knowledge transfer process**

I have learned from the knowledge transfer process that research can only influence and change public policy when there is a structure in place to support the efforts made by researchers, and others to influence policies. As a researcher within the health sector, I have discovered that the obvious structures for transfer are inadequate if I am to make contact with the

structures, policy actors and networks that influence the social determinants of these young farmers' health.

I have not considered this as a personal failure: as it confirms observations that health promotion must accept that, because the determinants of health lie primarily outside the health sector, practitioners must learn from experts within these sectors if they are to contribute to the health promotion debate (MacDougall et al, 2007, 356). As previously discussed in the literature review, specifically in an article by Fragar (2001, 158) practitioners like me will benefit from trying to find what MacDougall, Keleher and Murphy (2007, 355) say:

... guidebooks to take us on a rapid tour to understand key ideas rapidly and more deeply. We aim to learn the languages and customs that we need to form partnerships and collaboration that are essential for community practice and multi-sector working.

MacDougall, Keleher and Murphy (2007, 356) also argue that, in order to deal respectfully with policy actors and networks outside the health sector, it is important to remember that health is not an end in itself, but a means to a better and happier life. That means that in my relationships with other sectors, I must avoid the trap that happens when "... health is accepted as an end and it encourages health promotion to ask partners and collaborators to redefine their activities in terms of health outcomes and agendas. This restricts the scope of collaboration." (MacDougall et al, 2007, 356).

I have been aware that timeliness is important for knowledge transfer and organisations have required findings from this research to be put into various formats, often at very short notice. For a researcher, this underlines the importance of building in opportunistic and immediate transfer opportunities, rather than framing them as barriers to completing a predetermined research timetable.

The research indicates that the sustained efforts made by the participants in their personal lives, and in their commitment to farming, has not resulted in them being able to effectively influence structural barriers. However, using skills and knowledge developed from the local forces in Figure 5.3, young farmers can continue to explore ways of being involved in more active participation and consultation roles in policy making processes. As has already been mentioned, there is a need for many policy areas influencing

the lives of young farmers. This means that political, social, economic and environmental policy makers need to start having more serious dialogue with one another in an effort to provide policies that are both supportive and inclusive of young farmers.

Advocacy will require action, which includes active representation and consultation by those agencies and individuals who currently work with young farmers, and who have many opportunities in their day to day work to highlight the areas of difficulty facing young farmers into the future. Such areas of difficulty includes those that work particularly within the areas highlighted as structural barriers in Figure 5.3.

If that happens, the discussion, in chapter five, about Figure 5.1 would see a timeline that continues into the future, with farming that has meaning, that learns from history, and that ensures the continuity of inter-generational farming - despite a challenging and uncertain future.

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