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# Turning the tide on the anti-farming agenda

*Written by:*

Claire Taylor NSch

**August 2025**

A NUFFIELD FARMING SCHOLARSHIPS REPORT

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Farming Scholarships

Date of report: August 2025

*"Leading positive change in agriculture.  
Inspiring passion and potential in people."*

Title	Turning the tide on the anti-farming agenda
Scholar	Claire Taylor NSch
Sponsor	Royal Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland
Objectives of Study Tour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To investigate whether anti-farming sentiment is rising globally, and how it is manifesting across different regions and sectors.</li> <li>• To identify the key individuals, organisations, and narratives shaping public conversations about agriculture.</li> <li>• To explore the barriers preventing effective communication and engagement between agriculture and wider society.</li> <li>• To uncover and learn from individuals and organisations that are proactively and positively responding to rising scrutiny.</li> </ul>
Countries Visited	England, Canada, New Zealand, Indonesia, Japan, Australia, Scotland, France, Tanzania, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Italy, Argentina, Brazil, The Netherlands and Northern Ireland.
Messages	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. One of the biggest threats to agriculture isn't growing scrutiny, but our defensive and divided response to it.</li> <li>2. To rebuild trust and relevance, more engagement needs to take place outside the farming 'echo chamber'.</li> <li>3. We must move beyond trying to educate and instead listen, connect, and have open, values-led conversations with the public.</li> <li>4. Agriculture needs fresh, more inclusive leadership that reflects the diversity and direction of the sector's future.</li> <li>5. Fragmented messaging and siloed advocacy are limiting agriculture's influence - coordinated voices and shared purpose are essential.</li> </ol>

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The agricultural industry is facing unprecedented scrutiny from multiple fronts—media, activist groups, government agendas and increasingly conscience consumers — all contributing to what many farmers perceive as a growing anti-farming sentiment.

Governments worldwide are advancing policies that often prioritise climate action over food security. Public interest groups are expanding their influence on policy, while farmers are caught in the crossfire of headlines and agendas.

Many in the agricultural community feel under attack, a sentiment intensified by the growing disconnect between urban and rural populations and widespread misconceptions about modern farming.

In response, farmers globally are becoming more defensive. Protests, division, and fragmented messaging are increasingly common, creating barriers to constructive dialogue with policymakers, media, and the public. This has been compounded by industry bodies working in silos, leading to further disunity across the sector.

Through being awarded a Nuffield Farming Scholarship, I embarked on a journey to investigate whether anti-farming sentiment is gaining momentum worldwide, why communications are breaking down, and what needs to change to reposition agriculture more positively.

My travels have taken me across Europe, Africa, South America, Australasia, and Asia, where I have met with farmers, lobbying groups, policymakers, journalists, scientists, and industry experts to understand how agriculture is responding to growing scrutiny, and how effectively it communicates as an industry.

At the heart of this report lies a central question: How can rising scrutiny be transformed into an opportunity for meaningful engagement? An opportunity to shift how agriculture tells its story and reconnects with audiences beyond its own echo chamber.

This research identifies the urgent need for a communication overhaul. The sector must adopt more strategic, values-based engagement and cultivate fresh leadership that challenges entrenched mindsets and inspires change.

Drawing on case studies from Brazil, Kenya, New Zealand, Australia, and the UK, the report highlights individuals and organisations who are embracing scrutiny as a catalyst for better connection. These examples demonstrate the power of messaging that reaches beyond traditional audiences, adapting tone, language, and tactics to build trust and relevance.

To turn the tide on the perceived anti-farming agenda, this report concludes that the agricultural community must shift from a defensive stance to more proactive and constructive engagement with critics. This will require a willingness to connect

with diverse audiences, break down industry silos, and work collaboratively to develop clear and unified messages that resonate beyond the agricultural echo chamber.

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## **DISCLAIMER**

The opinions expressed in this report are those of the author alone and not necessarily those of the Nuffield Farming Scholarships Trust, of the author's sponsor, or of any other sponsoring body.

Please note that the content of this report is up to date and believed to be correct as at the date shown on the front cover.

Photos are the author's own unless otherwise stated.

## **CONTACT DETAILS**

Claire Taylor

Orange, NSW, Australia

**Email:** [claire@agvocacyconsulting.com](mailto:claire@agvocacyconsulting.com)

Australia: +61 (0) 489 241 264

UK: +44 (0) 772 621 9687

**Website:** [www.agvocacyconsulting.com](http://www.agvocacyconsulting.com)

**LinkedIn:** <http://linkedin.com/in/claire-taylor-4135714a>

Nuffield Farming Scholars are available to speak to NFU Branches, agricultural discussion groups and similar organisations.

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email : [office@nuffieldscholar.org](mailto:office@nuffieldscholar.org)  
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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

I grew up on a small beef farm on the west coast of Scotland, on the outskirts of Ayr, where my family breed Belted Galloway cattle and run a kennels and cattery business.

My childhood was spent outdoors on the farm, riding ponies and working with cattle. I always loved being around livestock and surrounded by nature, but it wouldn't be until my mid-twenties that I would find my way back to rural life.

Leaving school at 17, I studied at Edinburgh University, completing an MA (Hons) Degree in International Relations and Politics. I wasn't a member of Young Farmers, spending most of my time outside of my studies training and competing for Scotland in athletics as a sprint hurdler.



**Figure 1: The author Claire Taylor at home on the farm, in Ayr, with some of her Belted Galloway cattle.**

In 2014, I kicked off my working career in the media, beginning with a four-year stint at the BBC. I was predominantly based in the News department, where I worked as a researcher and later as a TV producer on political debates.

It was during my time at the BBC that I first became aware of the disconnect between rural and urban, with coverage primarily focused on areas and issues centred around mass populations — our cities. There was no agenda to sideline rural communities, but an apparent lack of knowledge and connection with people and businesses in regional areas.

I left the BBC in 2017 to become a news reporter at Scotland's national farming paper, The Scottish Farmer. It was an opportunity to reconnect with my rural roots and get my teeth into covering farming stories. Very quickly, I became versed in farming matters and worked my way up to become Political Editor of the paper. I made it my mission to engage with cross-party politicians and ensure farming issues were firmly on their radar.

During five years at The Scottish Farmer, it became clear that most of the stories I was sharing on a weekly basis were being directed at an echo chamber. We were a farming paper speaking to farmers. Having worked outside the farming bubble



**Figure 2: Bringing rural stories to the attention of non-farming audiences in my weekly, Herald Column.**

at the BBC, I was acutely aware that we weren't cutting through to wider audiences: those with the collective buying power to influence and impact farming livelihoods.

In a bid to connect farming stories to mainstream audiences, I became a rural columnist for Scotland's largest broadsheet paper, The Herald, and started commentating on farming stories on TV and radio for BBC Scotland and STV.

My focus became: how do I get farming stories into the mainstream? How do I help connect those not from a farming background to rural life?



## CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND TO MY STUDY SUBJECT

During my career working as a journalist within the agricultural industry, I witnessed a significant mood shift in farming.

Climate change rose to the top of government agendas, food security took a back seat, and agricultural practices came increasingly under the microscope.

As the public grew more concerned about their carbon footprint, they became more curious about their food choices and how they could impact the planet.

Farmers were increasingly being asked to demonstrate what steps they were taking to adapt their practices to protect and support their local environment.

At almost every major industry conference, through to small local gatherings, discussions that had traditionally centred around productivity and profitability began to focus instead on how farmers could reduce emissions and embrace more sustainable practices.

The pace of change, coupled with the growing scrutiny, left many feeling that their identities were being called into question and their way of life criticised.

This came against a backdrop of mounting challenges: rising input costs, staff shortages, a growing mental health crisis, and political uncertainty following the UK's departure from the EU.

During the same period, climate action groups and animal rights activists ramped up their campaigns to discredit farmers, while their influence over policymakers intensified.

The media picked up on the attention being placed on agriculture, and farmers found themselves caught in the crossfire of journalists competing for headlines in an increasingly competitive news environment.

Simultaneously, the rise of armchair experts and influencers, along with widespread misinformation about agriculture, dominated news feeds and spread across social media platforms.

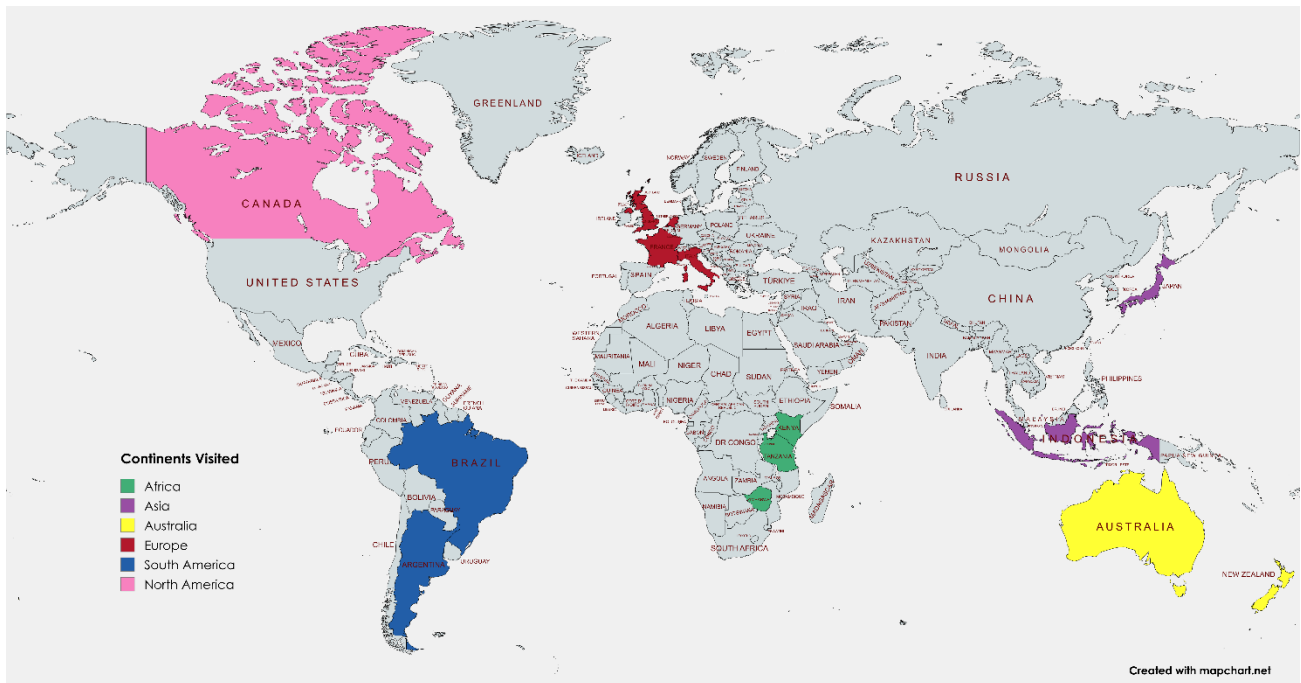
Farmers are feeling increasingly threatened. I was regularly told by those working in agriculture that the media are against them, the government has abandoned them, and the public isn't interested.

I applied for a Nuffield Farming Scholarship to investigate whether anti-farming sentiment is gaining momentum globally—and, if so, to explore how we can turn this around.

This study aims to identify where communication and engagement have broken down, and what needs to change to put agriculture back in the driving seat.



## CHAPTER 3: MY STUDY TOUR



Country	Month/Year	Comments
England	March 2023	Pre-Contemporary Scholars Conference
Canada	March 2023	Contemporary Scholars Conference
New Zealand	March 2023	Global Focus Programme
Indonesia	April 2023	Global Focus Programme
Japan	April 2023	Global Focus Programme
Australia	April 2023	Global Focus Programme
Scotland	July 2023	Independent Travel
England	July 2023	Independent Travel
Tanzania	September 2023	Independent Travel
Kenya	September 2023	Independent Travel
Zimbabwe	Sep / Oct 2023	Independent Travel
France	October 2023	Independent Travel
Italy	October 2023	Independent Travel
Argentina	November 2023	Independent Travel
Brazil	November 2023	Independent Travel
New Zealand	Dec / Jan 2023 / '24	Independent Travel
Australia	Feb / March 2024	Independent Travel
Amsterdam	May 2024	Independent Travel
Northern Ireland	May and Oct 2024	Independent Travel

For my Nuffield studies, I set off around the world to explore how perceptions and expectations of agriculture are shifting, and how farmers, industry bodies, and governments are responding to rising scrutiny.



Over ten months, I travelled across six continents, immersing myself in diverse cultures, climates and conversations. I spoke with more than 500 people, including farmers, researchers, industry leaders and professionals, journalists, policy advisers and ministers, each offering unique insights into the challenges and opportunities facing agriculture.



**Figure 3: Travelling through Australia as part of my Global Focus Programme.**

My journey began in March 2023 with a four-week Global Focus Programme, travelling with 12 fellow scholars through New Zealand, Indonesia, Japan and Australia. While not directly aligned with my research topic, it offered early glimpses into rising tensions in key agricultural nations and how different sectors were responding.

I began my independent travel close to home, spending three weeks in Scotland and eastern England. I wanted to understand how scrutiny was playing out on my own doorstep, and how conversations were evolving across a broad mix of systems, from arable to poultry, flowers to red meat, and from conventional to regenerative practices.

Throughout my travels, I made a conscious effort to gather a diversity of voices and visit a wide range of operations.

Internationally, I prioritised countries where agricultural tensions had surfaced in recent years.

In Brazil, I explored the complex realities behind deforestation, beyond the headlines. In New Zealand, Argentina and the Netherlands, I examined the impact of government policies that had triggered disillusionment and protest.



I visited feedlots in Japan, Indonesia, Brazil and Australia, often at the centre of public criticism, to better understand the realities on the ground and why emotion and misinformation are dominating the discourse.



**Figure 4: Meeting with some of the chiefs of different Maasai tribes in Kilimanjaro, Tanzania.**

In Africa, I spent several weeks engaging with farmers and organisations where agriculture is deeply tied to public health, economic development, and national security. I came to realise how easily the sector's vital role in food and human security can be overlooked and often sidelined in global discussions.

Everywhere I travelled, water access emerged as a recurring source of tension, along with pressure on agriculture's environmental footprint and role in climate change. While

there are clear challenges, particularly in how the sector responds to scrutiny, I also found countless examples of individuals and organisations embracing transparency and working to position agriculture as part of the solution.



## CHAPTER 4: AGRICULTURE UNDER FIRE

### 4.1 Scrutiny intensifies

Farmers play a crucial role in feeding and clothing the world, whilst protecting our natural environment. However, with this responsibility comes increasing scrutiny.

As extreme weather events like fires, floods, and droughts become more frequent, farmers are expected to demonstrate how they are addressing the challenge of feeding a growing global population while minimising their environmental impact and reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.



**Figure 5 & 6: Farmers in Queensland, Australia, were devastated by flooding in late March, 2025. Helicopters were critical to relief efforts, carrying fodder to stranded livestock. Photos from Andrea Speed.**

Governments worldwide are grappling with the realities of climate change and pushing ahead with progressive policy agendas and targets. While agriculture is not the only sector under scrutiny, it is increasingly in the spotlight.

Despite being an industry which has stood the test of time, it has been slow to adapt and accept change. This is partly due to its conservative nature and the generational pressures which can come with inheriting land, presenting barriers to embracing new ways of thinking and working

Although change is necessary, the current modus operandi by governments is setting unrealistic targets, in equally challenging timeframes, without the collaboration and support of the wider agriculture sector. This top-down approach is making many in the industry feel backed into a corner.



## 4.2 Policy red tape

Policy development in Europe has ramifications for agriculture globally, with many voicing frustrations at the EU's Green Deal, which aims to achieve climate neutrality by 2050.

Policies touted by the EU in recent years have included proposals to halve pesticide use by 2030, reduce fertiliser use by 20%, double organic production to 25% of all farmland, and designate more land for non-agricultural purposes, such as leaving it fallow.

Globally, agricultural exporters are under pressure to comply with the EU's Deforestation Regulation (EUDR), introduced in 2021, which requires companies to demonstrate that products placed on the EU market are not linked to deforestation or forest degradation. Like many of these ambitiously set policies, lawmakers have failed to account for the time needed by various stages of the supply chain to comply, resulting in delays.

The European Commission shelved plans to cut pesticide use in 2021, postponed rules on land set-asides in early 2024 and proposed a 12-month delay to the EUDR.

Copa-Cogeca, the leading agricultural lobby for farmers in the EU, criticised the EU's 'Farm to Fork' strategy as "top-down, poorly designed, poorly evaluated, and poorly financed," arguing it offered few alternatives for farmers.

## 4.3 Farmers take to the streets

What's happening in Europe is a microcosm of global trends, as confidence in policymakers remains low and frustration over burgeoning red tape and tight deadlines has sparked protests worldwide.

In India, between 250,000 and 300,000 farmers rallied in late 2020 against agricultural reforms seen as favouring corporations over smallholders. In 2021, Dutch farmers protested nitrogen reduction targets that threatened fertiliser use and livestock numbers, attracting more than 40,000 participants.

This sparked widespread unrest across Europe. Thousands of French farmers marched in 2021 over environmental



**Figure 7: Farmers in the UK took to the streets in response to Labour's Inheritance Tax proposals in 2024 and 2025.**



regulations and rising costs, with similar demonstrations in Italy, Spain, Germany and Poland continuing into 2024.

In the UK, the Labour government's proposal to remove Inheritance Tax Relief and the abrupt closure of a key farm payment scheme triggered nationwide protests lasting over six months.

One of the most extreme examples occurred in Sri Lanka, where an overnight ban on chemical fertilisers and pesticides in 2021 led to crop failures, food shortages and mass protests. In April 2022, 300,000 people stormed government buildings and set the Prime Minister's residence on fire.

These protests reflect a broader pattern: poorly designed policies and unrealistic timelines are pushing farmers to the brink and forcing them to fight for their future in the streets.

#### **4.4 Public interest groups**

In this period of rising scrutiny, various public interest groups have gained prominence, increasing their influence over politicians and the media.

In Australia, the animal rights group Aussie Farms, aims to raise awareness of factory farming. Their 2016 initiative, the 'Farm Transparency Map,' published hundreds of farm addresses, resulting in unauthorised visits and protests at people's homes, creating a culture of fear among farmers, according to the National Farmers' Federation of Australia.

Activism has also intensified in the UK, where groups like Animal Rebellion have staged protests against animal-based agriculture, including road blockades, targeting supermarkets and occupations of food distribution centres.

In France, coordinated attacks against butchers by vegan activists in 2018, involving acts like spraying fake blood on their premises, garnered global attention and prompted government intervention to ensure their safety.

#### **4.5 Anti-farming sentiment in the media**

Compounding the issue is the growing anti-farming sentiment fuelled by influential media figures. Journalists like George Monbiot, a well-known environmentalist in the UK, have been vocal in calling for an end to livestock production, arguing that meat production, particularly from ruminant animals, is exceptionally damaging to the environment.

His claims resonate with a broader narrative that has been picked up by the media, where journalists compete for headlines in a changing landscape that often prioritises sensationalism over nuanced reporting. This trend frequently overshadows the complexities and sustainability efforts within the agricultural industry.



Documentaries have significantly shaped public perception, with titles like *Cowspiracy* (2014) and the BBC's *Meat: A Threat to Our Planet* (2019) exploring the environmental impacts of factory farming. Similarly, the Australian group behind the Farm Transparency Map produced *Dominion*, in 2018, which used drones and hidden cameras to expose what they termed the “dark underbelly of modern agriculture.” In New Zealand, the six-part series *Milk and Honey* (2021) aimed to reveal the “true cost” of dairy farming, focusing on freshwater contamination and declining soil health.

#### 4.6 A vocal minority

While these examples may suggest a rising anti-farming agenda, they represent only a vocal minority.

Many people remain curious about agricultural practices rather than critical. As New Zealand dairy farmer Mark Gascoigne aptly noted, “We too often step in dog shit when we can so easily step around it,” highlighting how those in agriculture can become fixated on negativity, risking overlooking the swell of support surrounding them.

Initially, this Nuffield study set out to explore whether there was an anti-farming agenda. But what became clear is that the real issue lies in how agriculture responds to scrutiny. Too often, the industry goes on the defensive, reacting in ways that shut down dialogue instead of opening it up.

A culture of blame is creeping in, where responsibility is deflected rather than addressed. This not only weakens collaboration but also risks damaging agriculture’s reputation and standing on the global stage.



## CHAPTER 5: AGRICULTURE ON THE DEFENSIVE

### 5.1 The Blame Game mentality

Discussions around agriculture, much like those surrounding climate change, have become deeply polarised in recent years.

"We have evolved ourselves into a circular firing squad. Reducing our options to the binary and unhelpful mentality of who is right and who is wrong, and we are descending into a place of who is to blame."

The words of Christiana Figueres - one of the world's leaders on climate action and the main architect behind the 2015 Paris Accords - spoken during a presentation I attended at COP26 In Glasgow in November 2021.

She pleaded with delegates that the climate debate cannot continue to be dominated by ignorance and blame, explaining that real change will require everyone to stop shouting and start listening.

The same thinking and plea can be applied to agriculture which in recent years finds itself in a similar mentality, passing the blame or shaming others in the face of scrutiny.

#### Case study – Deforestation in Brazil

Deforestation in Brazil, particularly in the Amazon, often serves as a focal point for global critiques of agricultural practices.

While it is true that around one million hectares of forest are lost annually, with 90% occurring illegally, the wider picture is more nuanced, and positive progress in agriculture is often missing from media reports and public discussions.

For instance, Brazil's protected areas for native vegetation surpass the total land area of the European Union, totalling 564 million hectares.



**Figure 8: In the Cerrado region of Brazil, I visited numerous farms where 35% of their land had to be set aside as 'legal reserve'.**

Under Brazil's Forestry Code, farmers must set aside a significant portion of their land for preservation, with farmers in the Amazon biome required to allocate 80% without compensation.

This strict regulation limits agricultural expansion and drives the necessity for sustainable practices. A notable advancement is the annual expansion of



integrated crop and livestock farming, now covering two million hectares, alongside 12.6 million hectares devoted to crop-livestock-forestry integration.

During a visit to Insper University in São Paulo, Professor Marcus Jank noted: “Agriculture in Brazil faces many challenges, including issues related to indigenous people, deforestation, and chemical use, yet there are also significant advancements that need to be recognised.

“The progress around new techniques, social mobility, and tools like satellite monitoring and rural registries (CAR)—which track land use—which are crucial for enforcing the forestry code. People often seek someone to blame and, in doing so, ignore the larger picture.”

This progress is frequently absent from global discussions, revealing a tendency for countries to promote narratives that support their agendas. Consequently, misinformed opinions about agricultural practices spread, often fuelled by protectionist regimes in countries reliant on subsidies and wary of international competition.



**Figure 9: Pulitzer journalist Gustavo Faleiros, known for his investigations into agriculture’s role in Amazon deforestation, offered a far more nuanced and balanced perspective than is often seen in mainstream media. He reflected that many journalists fail to immerse themselves in the broader context, instead opting for clickbait headlines that oversimplify complex issues.**

## 5.2 Internal mudslinging

This research revealed that blame within agriculture is not only directed outward but increasingly inward, with growing tension between farming systems.

The rise of regenerative agriculture has sparked friction, with some advocates publicly criticising conventional practices. Regenerative farming events have become popular platforms for sharing knowledge and showcasing innovation, but the language used at times undermines other approaches, creating division rather than encouraging change.

The reverse is also true. Farmers who shift away from traditional systems can find themselves isolated or criticised within their own communities.



## Case Study – Regenerative farming backlash

Neil Heseltine farms in the Yorkshire Dales National Park, where he runs 180 Belted Galloways. In the early 2000s, he reduced his sheep numbers from 800 to 100 and introduced native cattle to address overgrazing, adopting a more regenerative approach.

Neil has since become a prominent advocate for nature-based livestock systems, sharing his journey through social media and television. However, his visibility has attracted significant criticism from within the farming community.



**Figure 10: Visiting Neil Heseltine at Hill Top Farm, Malham, in North Yorkshire.**

He recounted being accused of spreading anti-farming sentiment and betraying fellow farmers. The backlash escalated to heated arguments and even physical confrontations in his local pub, prompting him to withdraw from public speaking for a time.

“When I fitted into their mindset, we all got on well. But now there has been a distancing and parting of ways,” Neil explained. “We were working seven days a week, barely making money and damaging the environment. By prioritising nature, we improved biodiversity and saw financial gains.”

Neil’s experience highlights how the harshest criticism can come from within the sector, and how internal division can undermine progress.



### 5.3 Tall Poppy Syndrome

*\* Tall Poppy Syndrome - a social phenomenon in which individuals are criticised, resented, or undermined because of their achievements, success, or willingness to stand out or embrace change. \**

Tall poppy syndrome in agriculture is holding back innovation and advocacy, with farmers often fearing criticism from their peers.

This culture of negativity can divide communities and discourage people from sharing successes or promoting new practices. As a result, valuable ideas and role models are lost, keeping the industry stuck in the status quo and slowing its ability to adapt.

Discussions with farming influencers and communicators in the UK, New Zealand, and Australia revealed that, despite receiving praise for sharing honest accounts of farming, there is ongoing pressure not to appear overly successful or positive.

Agricultural journalists echoed this concern, often struggling to find farmers willing to be profiled or recognised publicly. James Wagstaff, editor of Australia's *Weekly Times*, said reluctance to apply for Farmer of the Year awards led them to shift to automatic nominations from existing coverage.

In Scotland, similar hesitance surrounds the Scottish Agriculture Awards. However, those who do step forward see the value of visible role models and ambassador networks to showcase the sector's strengths.

### 5.4 Passing responsibility

Across the world, farmers are voicing frustration at lobbying bodies and industry groups, often blaming them for not pushing back hard enough against growing scrutiny. But this blame is not always matched with action.



**Figure 11: Meeting with AgForce President Georgie Somerset during a research trip to Brisbane.**

Many organisations reported aggressive emails, phone calls and confrontations at events, with staff bearing the brunt despite working tirelessly behind the scenes. Low morale and staff turnover are ongoing challenges.

In New Zealand, Sam McIvor, CEO of Beef and Lamb NZ, expressed concern that while many of the 9,000 farmers he represents are vocal about anti-farming sentiment, few are willing to engage directly with the public. "Research shows we should open our farms and connect with the public, yet many are unwilling to do so while still criticising farm bodies. It's not just their role. Everyone in agriculture must ask, what can I do?"



In Australia, Georgie Somerset, former President of AgForce, highlighted similar challenges. At The Ekka, Queensland’s largest agricultural event, drawing half a million visitors, securing volunteers to represent the sector proved difficult despite a membership of over 6,000.

“This was a fantastic opportunity with a curious audience, yet our members didn’t want to participate,” she said. “We are abdicating responsibility and expecting someone else to do it for us. We all need to show up.”

With 85% of Australians living within 50km of the coast, the rural–urban divide continues to grow. Events like The Ekka are vital moments to bridge that gap. But farming’s voice can only be heard if those within the industry are willing to step forward and speak.

## 5.5 Talking in silos

As pressure builds on farming bodies to represent their members, the agricultural advocacy space has become increasingly fragmented. Multiple organisations often work in isolation, duplicating efforts, communicating mixed messages to government, and risking confusion and reputational damage for the sector.

### Case study – Advocacy orchestra

A 2022 Australian Farm Institute (AFI) study identified around 270 organisations claiming to represent agricultural interests. The issue, it found, was not the number of groups but their conflicting messages, creating confusion and weakening trust.



Figure 3: An orchestra comprises multiple instruments, people and skillsets to create a whole greater than the sum of its parts. Source: MITO SettembreMusica

#### 2.2 Orchestrating a symphony

Where Australian agricultural advocates could be

*“We can’t impose our will on a system. We can listen to what the system tells us, and discover how its properties and our values can work together to bring forth something much better than could ever be produced by our will alone.” (Meadows, 2008)*

#### Figure 12: An extract from the AFI Report.

*operating as a coordinated group utilising different instruments and skills, deciding where to play in unison and where in complementary harmony, to create a cohesive, multi-layered whole: an advocacy orchestra.”*

The report called for streamlined structures, better collaboration, and a focus on doing fewer things better. It proposed an advocacy orchestra model.

An extract from the report reads:

*“Rather than an array of one-person bands, the Australian Agricultural Advocacy (AAA) landscape should be*



## 5.6 Farmers on the march

When lobbying falls flat, farmers around the world have increasingly turned to public protest to demand attention. While these demonstrations can feel empowering, they often carry unintended consequences.

In France, February 2024 protests made headlines when farmers dumped manure on the steps of parliament. The dramatic action drew media attention but left behind reputational damage, alienating parts of the public and complicating relationships with decision-makers. In discussions with political aides, I was told such protests had raised new barriers to engagement and weakened trust.

### **Case study – Groundswell NZ**

In 2021, thousands of tractors took to the streets in 70 towns and cities across New Zealand to protest proposed environmental regulations. The movement, led by Groundswell NZ, gained more than 100,000 supporters, over half of whom were from outside the farming sector.

Founder Bryce McKenzie explained that farmers felt their voices were being ignored in discussions about sustainability and regulation. The aim was to unify rural voices, promote the value of farming, and challenge government overreach.

However, the message quickly unravelled. Racist and abusive signs among protesters shifted the focus, linking the movement to Trumpism, anti-Māori sentiment and climate denial. The result was a loss of credibility and growing public disillusionment.

Protests can be powerful, but only when guided by clear leadership, consistent messaging and a focused call to action. Many recent demonstrations have instead caused internal division and confusion, making it harder for governments to know who to listen to.

As North Otago farmer Jane Smith told delegates at the Zanda McDonald Impact Summit in Queenstown in 2024, "A pen is better than a pitchfork." She explained: "There is a risk with protests that we can look entitled. We can look a lot like rednecks who don't care about our environment. While activists may see protests as a way to build short-term momentum, long-term we risk painting the wrong picture."



## CHAPTER 6: CHANGING THE NARRATIVE

### 6.1. Farming's golden opportunity to engage

A key finding of this report is that agriculture often defaults to a defensive mindset, viewing scrutiny as a threat rather than an opportunity. In reality, scrutiny can be a chance to challenge misinformation, build trust with non-farming audiences, and share a more authentic, positive story.

#### **Case Study: CLEAR Center, UC Davis**

Dr Frank Mitloehner established the CLEAR Center at UC Davis to improve public understanding of livestock's role in sustainability. The centre combines scientific research with communications expertise, aiming to make complex data about emissions and livestock systems accessible to the public, policymakers, and the media.

Dr Mitloehner emphasises that many farmers struggle to explain their practices in ways that resonate. For example, "improving feed efficiency" may be technically correct, but it means little to most people. A better comparison is a fuel-efficient car, using less fuel, producing fewer emissions, yet still performing well.

"We need to adapt our messaging to find relevance in people's everyday lives," he said. "We are great at talking to each other and terrible at talking to people in cities."

### 6.2 Building trust in agriculture

Building public trust in agriculture starts with connection, and consumers have never been more interested in the story and standards behind their food and clothing.

Angus Street, CEO of NZ Merino, explained how the company has built a trusted brand by making transparency a competitive advantage. Through open communication about farming practices, environmental stewardship and animal welfare, they have positioned themselves as leaders in ethical supply chains.

They share detailed information about how sheep are raised, the care taken during shearing, and efforts to minimise environmental impact. Farmers are actively involved in the storytelling, helping humanise the brand and foster deeper consumer connection.

"Honesty is the next big disruptor," said Mr Street during a presentation at Lambex in Adelaide. "While millennials pushed for purposeful brands, Gen Z are demanding proof. Trust is an anchor for customer loyalty and takes decades to build and minutes to lose."



## Case Study: Kakuzi Farms, Kenya

Kakuzi Farms is a 14,000-hectare operation in Thika, Kenya, producing timber, avocados, macadamias, tea, blueberries and Boran cattle.



**Figure 13: Kakuzi Farms, Kenya. Inside the cutting-edge macadamia processing factory.**

The farm faced intense scrutiny during the COVID-19 pandemic, when a legal firm accused it of over 200 human rights abuses. The allegations made global headlines, costing Kakuzi contracts with UK supermarkets and damaging its reputation.

Subsequent investigations revealed the claims were false and part of a paid smear campaign. However, damage was already done and Kakuzi embarked on a process to build back trust in their operation by publicly reporting all incidents on the farm and in nearby communities, along with action plans for resolution.

Simon Odhiambo, Head of Corporate Affairs, explained that they created an Operational Grievances Mechanism, giving workers and community members direct access to a human rights committee to voice any concerns.



**Figure 14: Discussing how Kakuzi rebuilt their reputation with Head of Corporate Affairs, Simon Odhiambo.**

This proactive approach presented its own challenges, whilst supermarkets praised the transparency, they also expected a flawless record, posing challenges for an organisation



managing a large workforce in a country with high poverty levels. Nonetheless, this strategy has gradually helped Kakuzi regain trust and contracts, while building a reputation for honesty and integrity.

What began as a reputational crisis sparked a shift in mindset, with Kakuzi now using scrutiny as a platform to demonstrate openness, integrity and strong community engagement.

### 6.3 Repositioning the narrative

This research uncovered several sectors that have successfully reshaped public perception by taking ownership of criticism and driving change.

A standout example is the Australian cotton industry. Once criticised for heavy pesticide use and water consumption, it is now recognised as one of Australia's most progressive and environmentally responsible sectors.

Adam Kay, CEO of Cotton Australia, explained that the shift began 30 years ago with a full environmental audit. The industry responded by launching initiatives like the Cotton Best Management Practices programme, improving chemical use, education and farm standards.

“Through widespread adoption of efficient irrigation and genetically modified crops, water usage has halved in 20 years, and the number of sprays has dropped from around 20 per season to just two,” Adam noted.

He emphasised how the sector has made considerable efforts to communicate its journey, rebuilding its social license and, in the process, slowly transforming the narrative surrounding the cotton industry.



**Figure 15: Beef feedlot visits in Brazil (top left), Australia (top right), Japan (bottom left) and Indonesia (bottom right).**



The feedlot sector has also faced criticism over animal welfare, environmental impact and transparency. Visits to feedlots in Indonesia, Japan, Brazil and Australia revealed that much of the negativity stems from idealised views of pasture-based systems and limited public understanding of innovations in intensive farming.

Feedlot operators acknowledged that biosecurity restrictions have limited public access, unintentionally allowing misinformation to flourish. One Australian operator suggested that greater openness and engagement could help reshape perceptions and highlight the industry's progress in animal care, nutrition and environmental management.

## 6.4 Bridging the rural–urban disconnect

Connecting with the public, especially younger generations, can turn criticism into understanding and benefit both producers and consumers.

Agricultural shows are a powerful way to bring town and country together. The Royal Highland Show in Scotland attracts over 200,000 visitors annually, with a strong focus on school engagement. The Royal Highland Education Trust (RHET) runs guided tours during the event and organises school visits year-round to help children connect with farming.

Farmer Time, founded by Tom Martin, an arable farmer in Cambridge, links farmers and classrooms via regular video calls. Between 2016 and 2021, it reached nearly 23,000 children across the UK.

“Continuity of conversations is absolutely key,” Tom said. “If we can get one in ten children to know a farmer, it will implement real societal change. If tomorrow’s farmers want to be understood by tomorrow’s politicians, this is essential.”

Open Farm Sunday, launched by LEAF (Linking Environment And Farming) in 2006, invites the public onto farms each year to explore food production and rural life. These initiatives have helped demystify farming and build public trust.

Despite such efforts, a rural–urban divide remains. Rural populations are declining as young people move to cities, and many farmers feel frustrated by what they see as public disconnection from food production. However, this study found that agriculture often overlooks the pressures facing urban communities.

At the 2024 Australian Dairy Conference, Scottish PR specialist Dr Amy Jackson challenged the sector to rethink its approach. “We need to engage, not educate,” she said. “It’s a misconception that misperceptions about agriculture come from a lack of knowledge. The solution is not more information but listening and being prepared to change.”

Julia Jones, Chair of New Zealand’s Meet the Need, a charity that connects surplus meat from farmers and processors with community groups and foodbanks, provided further food for thought: “Rural communities don’t own the exclusive rights to hardship. Stepping outside farming circles reveals the challenges facing



everyday families. Most people questioning farming aren't attacking farmers, they're grappling with guilt about their own lifestyles."

She emphasised that farm businesses should actively seek engagement and build relationships beyond traditional farming circles.

A farm that has embraced this principle is Kingsclere Estates in Hampshire, England. Taking an innovative approach to collaboration, Kingsclere launched their 'Pitch Up!' initiative, offering land, investment, and expertise to budding businesses, transforming the estate into a thriving community hub. Spanning 2,500 acres, Kingsclere hosts a diverse range of enterprises, from a mobile dairy parlour to a car garage, mountain biking experiences, and counselling services.

Meeting with Sharon May of Kingsclere Estates, she emphasised that their goal is to continuously connect and collaborate with the local community. Together with her husband Tim May, they have developed a business model that, if replicated more widely, could transform the relationship between urban and rural communities, fostering greater understanding and a more positive narrative for farming.

## 6.5 Agritourism: An untapped opportunity

Agritourism is proving to be a powerful way to reconnect the public with farming, offering hands-on experiences that foster trust and reshape perceptions.

Visits to agritourism ventures across Scotland, the Netherlands, Japan, Italy, New Zealand and Australia revealed its potential to engage urban audiences, generate on-farm income and strengthen community ties.



**Figure 16: Hobbiton film set in New Zealand welcomes over 500,000 visitors to the farm, owned by the Alexander family, annually (left). Scotland is now seen as home to one of the most rapidly growing agritourism sectors in the world (right).**

Caroline Millar, Sector Lead for agritourism in Scotland, has played a pivotal role in driving the country's agritourism movement, securing strong government



support, and growing the sector into a globally recognised force. Scotland will host the World Agritourism Conference in 2026, a testament to its success.

She noted that while some farmers and industry bodies remain sceptical of agritourism, they often overlook its potential, not just for increasing farm incomes and enabling multi-generational farm continuity but also for strengthening community ties and opening meaningful dialogue with the public.

This two-way engagement was evident at Curringa Farm in Tasmania, run by Tim and Jane Parsons. Beyond sharing their farming insights as they took visitors on tours where they experienced sheep shearing, learned about conservation efforts on the farm and came together for a meal sampling produce from the farm, they saw hosting visitors as an opportunity to embrace new cultures and broaden their own perspectives.



**Figure 17: Tim Parsons of Curringa Farm in Tasmania welcomed 13,000 guests on to the farm in 2019.**

Recognising that most of their visitors came from Asia, Tim has made 14 trips to China in recent years with a view to understand their cultural preferences and tailor the farm experience to help guests feel more welcome.

“We really value our guests and recognise that they make a huge effort to visit our farm. We want them to feel valued in return,” Tim said. “As agritourism farmers, we should all be thinking about how we can truly understand and connect with our customers. In doing so, we not only build lasting relationships but also create a more positive narrative around farming.”



## 6.6 Reimagining communication in agriculture

Agriculture has never had more storytellers. Social media and new forms of media are giving farmers and advocates direct access to audiences well beyond traditional circles.

TV shows like *This Farming Life* in Scotland and *Muster Dogs* in Australia are winning over millions with heartfelt stories about life on the land. These human-centred narratives build trust and strengthen rural–urban connections.

Netflix farming series, *Clarkson's Farm*, is a groundbreaking example of how to effectively communicate and connect the realities of agriculture to millions, through simple messaging, humanising agriculture and taking viewers on a journey.

Season 2 of *Clarkson's Farm* was watched by 7.6 million people in its first 28 days.



**Figure 18: Clarkson's Farm proved to be one of the most powerful examples of how effective storytelling can reshape perceptions of modern farming. Photos provided by Freud Communications on behalf of Prime Video.**

Graeme Parker, better known as The Hoof GP, is a Scottish hoof trimmer who launched a YouTube channel in 2019 to counter misinformation about animal welfare. His videos now attract around 130 million views each month.

“People from all walks of life are watching, and I have this opportunity to shape their understanding of farming,” Parker said. “For me, it’s about showcasing agriculture in a positive light and challenging some of the misconceptions that exist.”

Through more traditional forms of storytelling, such as journalism, innovative communicators are finding new ways to engage with audiences.

In Zimbabwe, journalist Ruva Chirimuta launched *ZimChronicle*, an online magazine focused on sharing positive stories about farming.



Frustrated by the persistent negative portrayal of Zimbabwean farming, Ruva wanted to highlight innovations across different sectors and inspire young people to consider agriculture as a viable career path.

“I launched *ZimChronicle* to change the tone of discussion,” she said. “I want to inspire young people to see that they can build a great future in farming and we’re not going to do that if all we do is publish negative stories and don’t promote the positives farming has to offer.”

Her unconventional and optimistic approach to journalism has gained traction across Africa, challenging anti-farming sentiments and slowly reshaping the public narrative around agriculture.

Over 8,000 miles away in New Zealand, Dean Williamson, CEO of *AgriHQ* and publisher of *Farmers Weekly*, has taken a similarly disruptive approach to agricultural journalism. Founded in 2003, *Farmers Weekly* magazines reach 76,000 farms weekly and instead of following the traditional news cycle and getting caught in the crossfire of sensationalist headlines, they prioritise impact-driven, solutions-focused reporting.

“We don’t need to compete with traditional media or rely on clickbait,” Dean said. “We focus on what truly matters to farmers and avoid getting caught up in the negative news cycle.”

In the UK, *Scribehound*, a media platform launched in 2023, has also sought to revolutionise agricultural journalism. Providing an alternative to conventional media, *Scribehound* offers editorial control to writers committed to meaningful storytelling rather than chasing ad revenue. This has enabled more nuanced, diverse stories about agriculture to reach wider audiences, bringing attention to important issues that might otherwise be overlooked.

Across social and traditional media, agriculture is embracing new tools to tell its story in more relatable, engaging, and impactful ways, shifting perceptions and building broader support in the process.



**Figure 19: Journalist Ruva Chirimuta has been transforming perceptions of Zimbabwean agriculture.**



**Figure 20: Dean Williamson has taken a disruptive approach to agricultural journalism in NZ.**



## 6.7 Rethinking engagement with the next generation

Fewer young people from farming families are returning to agriculture, while many urban youth grow up disconnected from how food is produced. This gap fuels negative perceptions and limits the next generation of agricultural talent.

Agriculture is largely absent from mainstream education. Where it is taught, it often depends on local farming ties or the passion of individual teachers. In regional Australia, agricultural high schools still serve farming communities, but remain rare.

Rather than pushing for standalone agriculture subjects, this study found that many educators argue for embedding agricultural examples into broader lessons. Concepts in business, science or maths can be applied in practical ways to farming, helping students build real-world skills.

In New Zealand, the Agribusiness Programme, founded by Ceri Allan, provides a focused study of agribusiness where students gain an understanding of the entire agricultural operation and are encouraged to find creative solutions to industry challenges. It is currently taught in 125 schools across the North and South Islands, with almost 20,000 students having undertaken the course in the past eight years.

Ireland's ABP Angus Youth Programme engages 15 and 16-year-olds in a hands-on farming competition. Teams rear Angus calves, develop business plans, and partake in numerous activities and educational trips, including visits to agricultural research institutions, cookery schools, and the EU Parliament. Many participants come from non-farming backgrounds. I met participants who went on to form school agricultural societies, launch podcasts, or organise farm visits, creating thousands of new touchpoints between young people and agriculture.



**Figure 21: Learning about the importance of modernising the way we engage young people about agriculture with Silvia Waithira in Kenya.**

In Kenya, a young entrepreneur, Silvia Waithira, is pioneering new ways to engage young people in agriculture through digital platforms. She believes that the disengagement of young people from food production is exacerbating Africa's food security challenges, and that with over 60% of the total population under 25, a shake-up is needed to ensure young talent see a future in the sector. In response, she has developed Food Boma, an interactive app designed to connect and empower young people in agriculture.

"Food Boma is a digital community where young people can share stories, exchange best practices, access information on scholarships and job opportunities, and celebrate successes in the industry," explained Silvia, adding that we need to find more creative, tech-savvy ways of engaging young people in farming. "Traditional methods are no longer



cutting through,” Silvia said. “We need to show young people that we’re listening and adapting to what interests them.”

To engage the next generation, agriculture must modernise how it educates and communicates, bringing farming into the classroom, embracing hands-on experiences, and using digital tools that meet young people where they are.

## 6.8 Reframing agricultural leadership

How agriculture is perceived often depends on who represents it. Effective leaders shape policy, build trust and influence public understanding. Yet many global boards and industry organisations remain led by individuals who no longer reflect the evolving sector, reinforcing outdated views and slowing progress.

Throughout this study, farmers, policymakers and industry leaders expressed concerns about the lack of diversity in agricultural leadership. More inclusive representation across age, gender, ethnicity and thinking is needed to bring fresh ideas and energy to the table.



**Figure 22: Special Agricultural Trade Envoy for New Zealand, Hamish Marr (left) and Australia’s first Special Representative for Agriculture, Su McCluskey (right).**

Many also stressed the need for more farmer-led voices in global discussions. Without lived experience at the table, policies risk being disconnected from real-world challenges.

In Australia, beef producer Su McCluskey was appointed the country’s first Special Representative for Agriculture in 2021. In New Zealand, arable farmer Hamish Marr serves as the Special Agricultural Trade Envoy. Both serve as the eyes and ears of agriculture in international policy discussions, representing their nations at forums like COP29 and the World Food Forum. They bring a grassroots perspective that ensures policies are grounded in farming reality while also showcasing innovation from their home countries.



Across this research, examples of grassroots leadership stood out as powerful drivers of change.

In Tanzania, Maasai farmer Meyasi Mollel is challenging unsustainable grazing practices and rising cattle numbers that are contributing to land degradation and conflict with wildlife. Partnering with his mother Martha, he established a demonstration farm to train women in regenerative practices and to unlock new economic opportunities by bringing previously overlooked livestock into the food system.

“True change is often a ripple effect, beginning with one person’s commitment to a better way and gradually inspiring others to follow suit,” Meyasi shared. “Change must be deeply rooted in the values and realities of those involved and is only possible if you bring people on the journey and demonstrate what is conceivable, rather than imposing change upon them.”

Just as agricultural narratives take time to shift, changing perceptions of farming requires ongoing effort. It is a process of listening, engaging and adapting, while ensuring that leadership at every level reflects the future of agriculture, not just its past.



**Figure 23: Meeting Meyasi Mollel and his mother Martha, at their demonstration farm in Arusha, Tanzania.**



## CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION

This study set out to examine whether anti-farming sentiment is increasing and how agriculture is responding to mounting scrutiny from governments, media, activist groups and increasingly conscious consumers. What emerged was a global picture of a sector under pressure - often reactive, fragmented and internally divided.

Across continents, many farmers feel under siege. Poorly communicated policies, sensationalist media coverage and the growing influence of activist groups have pushed the sector toward protest and defensiveness. Yet the most significant risk is not the scrutiny itself, but agriculture's response to it.

Scrutiny, while uncomfortable, presents a powerful opportunity to reshape narratives, build trust and reconnect with wider society. The most effective responses uncovered in this research were proactive, transparent and grounded in authentic engagement.

However, agriculture cannot communicate effectively if it remains siloed. A coordinated voice, shared messaging and greater willingness to engage outside traditional circles are essential. Too often, advocacy efforts are duplicated or misaligned, weakening impact and failing to reflect the diversity and ambition of modern agriculture.

Leadership was another critical theme. In many countries, those representing agriculture do not reflect the industry's current realities or future direction. This lack of renewal limits progress and leaves opportunities for reform untapped. More inclusive, future-focused leadership is urgently needed to reflect the values and aspirations of the next generation.

Ultimately, agriculture must shift from defence to dialogue. Scrutiny should be seen not as a threat, but as a chance to engage, listen and lead. How the sector responds will determine its credibility, resilience and relevance in the years ahead.



## CHAPTER 8: RECOMMENDATIONS

### The Five C's Framework

In a world where agriculture faces increasing scrutiny, the greatest opportunity lies not in resisting it but in reframing the conversation. The following Five C's outline how the sector can move from defence to dialogue and position itself as a trusted, forward-looking voice in global discussions.

#### 1. Curiosity

Agriculture must step outside its echo chambers and engage in unfamiliar conversations, especially with those who hold different views. Rather than responding with blame or defensiveness, the sector should listen with intent, seek to understand other perspectives and acknowledge shifting social values.

#### 2. Communication

Agricultural messaging needs a reset. We must move away from jargon and reactive language and instead tell stories that connect on a human level. Communication should be transparent, inclusive and grounded in shared values.

#### 3. Conscience

It is no longer enough to ask for a social licence to operate. Agriculture must demonstrate a social conscience—showing its role in addressing climate change, food security, public health and community wellbeing. This means recognising trade-offs, being transparent and acting with integrity.

#### 4. Connection

Avoiding difficult conversations erodes trust. Transparency and vulnerability build credibility. When agriculture shares its challenges as well as its progress, it becomes more relatable and real in the eyes of the public.

#### 5. Collaboration

Agriculture must move beyond a siloed, individual approach and embrace collaboration. Working across sectors, disciplines, borders and generations is essential to building a resilient and unified voice. This also means elevating emerging leaders who reflect the diversity and direction of modern farming.



## CHAPTER 9: AFTER MY STUDY TOUR

Throughout my Nuffield Farming journey, my assumptions were challenged, my worldview reshaped, and a deep desire sparked to be part of something bigger.

Nuffield opened the door to a diverse and inspiring global network, and I'm committed to using that network not just for my own growth, but to connect others and foster collaborative conversations in agriculture.

After presenting my findings at the Nuffield Conference, I relocated to Australia and launched Agvocacy Consulting. Drawing on my background in journalism and insights from my travels, I now support businesses, industry groups and boards to rethink how they communicate. This includes tailored training workshops in media, presentation and facilitation, helping farmers and organisations speak with confidence and clarity.

A key part of my work involves facilitating events and discussions. As an MC, speaker and moderator, I've had the privilege of shaping conversations and sharing stories across Australia, New Zealand, Türkiye, the Netherlands, Tanzania, Canada and the UK.

Alongside my work, my partner Mitch and I have secured a farm tenancy where we are breeding Angus beef cattle and managing a luxury on-farm cabin as part of a new agritourism venture.

I'm also proud to be a founding member of Unstoppable World, a start-up committed to advancing global conversations around mental health in agriculture through offering immersive resilience and leadership tours. Initial programmes are planned for Zimbabwe and South Africa, with ambitions to expand worldwide.



## CHAPTER 10: ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND THANKS

Nuffield has truly been a life-changing journey. It opened doors I could never have dreamed of and built friendships across the world. It offered a glimpse into different countries, cultures, and agricultural systems, and has been as much a personal journey as it has a professional one.

First and foremost, I want to thank Nuffield Farming Scholarships for providing me with this remarkable platform and the opportunity to travel the world with purpose.

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To my partner Mitch, whom I met during this wild adventure - thank you for your endless support and encouragement as I moved my life across the world, launched a new business, took on a farm tenancy and completed this report - all in a matter of months. It has been an exciting, chaotic, and emotional journey, and I couldn't have done it without you.

To my Nuffield year group - what a gift it's been to learn alongside you. You inspired me, supported me, and reminded me that this journey is part of something much bigger. I feel incredibly lucky to be part of a community that will continue to grow and make an impact.

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