Future-proofing the family farm

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We do not inherit earth from our ancestors;

We borrow it from our children.

- Chief Seattle

Executive summary

This report explores the challenges and opportunities facing Australian family farming businesses, with a focus on sustainability, policy engagement, and long-term resilience, while acknowledging that removing emotion from the family farm opens up new opportunities. Drawing on both national context and international insights, it provides a roadmap for how family farming businesses can evolve, remain competitive, profitable, and environmentally responsible.

Objective 1 identifies strategies to help family farms adapt and remain sustainable in an environment of increasing land values, climate volatility, and rising input costs. Case studies from Tasmania and the United Kingdom (UK) highlight how innovative farmers are embracing change through diversification, water infrastructure, agri-tourism, education, and renewable energy integration. These strategies demonstrate how farms can future-proof their businesses while maintaining strong ties to community and environment.

Objective 2 considers the importance of agricultural policy and the role of farmers in shaping the regulatory environment. Policies such as inheritance tax in the UK and the proposed unrealised capital gains tax in Australia could significantly impact the viability of the family farm. The report stresses the importance of early succession planning, active engagement with policymakers, and distinguishing between landholders and active land managers to ensure fair and effective policy outcomes.

Objective 3 addresses the future of family farms in Australia. The report identifies that there is an opportunity to look into collaborative funding models and partnerships, the need for greater education to build public understanding and industry capacity. Family farms remain central to Australia's agricultural identity; they are the custodians of 88% of agricultural land and play an important part in environmental stewardship. However, they must embrace innovation, diversify income, and engage meaningfully with both markets and communities to thrive.

The Tasmanian case studies, along with examples from the UK, New Zealand, Brazil, and Zimbabwe, offer valuable insights into sustainability, diversification, conservation and community engagement.

Key recommendations:

- increase funding and support for agricultural education and farm-based learning
- encourage collaboration and open communication between farmers, policymakers, and the public
- support diversification efforts, including agri-tourism, value-added products, and renewable energy
- develop equitable policies that support working farms and succession planning
- foster the connection between urban and rural communities through on-farm experiences and storytelling.

In conclusion, the future of the family farm will depend on the ability to balance people, planet, and profit. With strong leadership, thoughtful adaptation, and inclusive collaboration, family farms can continue to thrive while playing a pivotal role in Australia's agricultural and environmental future.

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Foreword

As a sixth-generation family farmer from Swansea on the east coast of Tasmania, agriculture has always been a central part of my identity. Growing up immersed in farm life, my passion for the agricultural industry was nurtured from an early age. I consider myself incredibly fortunate to have been mentored by experienced individuals who encouraged me to pursue a career in agriculture, and I have remained committed to learning, adapting, and growing within the industry ever since.

To strengthen my knowledge and broaden my horizons, I studied at Marcus Oldham College. I graduated with a Bachelor of Agricultural Business, a program that provided me with a comprehensive understanding of agricultural practices, both within Australia and on a global scale. My time at Marcus Oldham helped shape my perspective on the opportunities and challenges that exist in our sector, and it fostered my curiosity about what the future of farming might look like in an ever-changing world.

After a brief but rewarding period working as a sheep and wool advisor, I made the decision to return to our family property, ‘Kelvedon Estate’. Over the past decade, I have gradually assumed greater responsibility on the farm and now manage the business alongside my father. This journey back to the family farm has reinforced my belief in the importance of innovation, resilience, and sustainability in maintaining a successful agricultural enterprise.

Farm diversification is not new to our business. In the 1990s, we transitioned away from our cattle operation and began exploring viticulture. In 1998, we planted our first hectare of Pinot Noir, marking a new chapter for ‘Kelvedon Estate’. Today, our vineyard spans nine hectares and includes Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Sauvignon Blanc varieties. Two-thirds of our grapes are sold under contract to ‘Hand Picked Wines’ for their globally recognised ‘House of Arras’ label, while the remainder is produced into wine for our own label, ‘Kelvedon Estate’.

In 2019, we made the decision to cease mulesing, a change driven by discussions with wool buyers and a genuine desire to listen to the evolving expectations of our customers. With wool representing just 0.9% of the global textile market (International Wool Textile Organisation, 2025), it is clear we are producing a niche product, not a commodity. We believe that responding to consumer concerns is critical in maintaining the premium positioning of our wool and ensuring the long-term viability of the enterprise.

More recently, investments in pivot irrigation have opened up new possibilities for land use and production, along with the opportunity to further vineyard expansion, the development of agritourism initiatives, or entirely new ventures. We are constantly evaluating opportunities to strengthen and diversify the business, many of which were inspired by insights gained during my Nuffield Scholarship.

It was the question, “What’s next for family farms?” that prompted me to apply for a Nuffield Scholarship. As I travelled and spoke with farmers, my original study topic, which initially focused on policy, evolved to incorporate a broader view of diversification strategies. While policy certainly influences decision-making, it became clear to me

that innovation, adaptability, and forward planning are just as critical to the success of family farming businesses.

My Nuffield journey took me across the globe, including visits to Brazil, Argentina, Zimbabwe, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Georgia, Ireland, Italy, Germany, and New Zealand. These travels offered valuable perspectives on how different agricultural systems approach sustainability, resilience, and change.

I remain deeply passionate about the future success of agriculture. As the global population continues to grow and farmland becomes increasingly scarce, the role of family farms in feeding and clothing the world is more critical than ever. I look forward to continuing to contribute to an industry that has not only shaped my life, but also holds the key to a sustainable future.

Table 1. Travel itinerary

Travel date	Location	Visits/contacts
February 2024	Perth	Evoke Ag
March 2024	Canberra	Pre CSC
March 2024	Brazil	Contemporary Scholars Conference (CSC)
April 2024	Argentina	Maximo Gallia – Fuhrmann Mill and Farms Chargeurs Wool Mill
June/July 2024	Kunanurra	Global Focus Program (GFP)
June/July 2024	Zimbabwe	GFP
June/July 2024	United Kingdom	GFP
June/July 2024	The Netherlands	GFP
June/July 2024	Georgia	GFP
October 2024	United Kingdom -England -Wales	London - the Woolmark Company Martin Hole - Montague Fam Jamie Everett - Rathfinny Estate Nuffield Scholar - Polly Hilton - Find and Foster Cider Tommy Grimshaw - Langham Wine Estate Nuffield Scholar - Jenifer Hunter & Andrew Wear - Fernhill Farm Nuffield Scholar - Natalie Hepburn

		Forage Farm Shop Nuffield Scholar - Lucy George Nuffield Scholar - Amy Stoner - Samworth Brothers
October 2024	Ireland	Nuffield Scholar - Molly Garvey Pat Dunne - County Wicklow Nuffield Scholar - Nick Cotter – Cotter Agritech Tommy Relihan – Adare Farm Caroline Rigney – Rigneys Farm Tamara Fitzpatrick – Irish Independent newspaper
October 2024	United Kingdom - Scotland	Nuffield Scholar - Neil McGownan Hugh Chaimberlan - Blair Athol Estate Robert Mackenzie - Cullise Nuffield Scholar, Vic Ballantine - Clynelish Farm
October 2024	England	Nuffield Scholar - Amy Stoner Harry Barnes – Barnes Dairy
October 2024	Italy	World Food Forum
October 2024	Germany	Nuffield Scholar, Olivia Eberwein Landfarm Hohenstein Sun Farming
October 2024	England	Nuffield Scholar – David Tavernor – Fly2Feed
December 2024	New Zealand	Rhys Roberts - Align Farms Sam and Vic Bishop - Fairle Mathilde van Baarle and Wilby Coombes – Ruawai Farm Hennie, Gea and Ard Amtik - Dairy farmers - Southland Nuffield Scholar - Peter Templeton – Harakeke Dairies

		Adrian Frei – Frei Dairy Nuffield Scholar - Ed Pinkney – Jericho Station Nuffield Scholar – Steve Wilkins – Wilkins Farming Nuffield Scholar - Carlos Bagrie – Royalburn Station Felton Road Winery

Acknowledgments

Firstly, a heartfelt thank you to Nuffield Australia for awarding me this scholarship. I have grown so much personally and professionally as a result of my Nuffield experience.

To Rabobank Australia, thank you for investing in me. I am grateful for the support and conversations throughout my Nuffield journey. I look forward to exploring new opportunities for my farm business as a result of my Nuffield experience and as a long-term Rabobank client, I look forward to strengthening our relationship as the 'Kelvedon Estate' business grows.

To the Nuffield community I visited and stayed with whilst traveling, thank you for welcoming me into your homes and for the insightful and challenging conversations. The Nuffield mantra is reciprocity; I certainly felt this during my travels. I look forward to welcoming travelling Nuffielder's into the future and continuing the conversations, learning and creating new friendships.

To the people I met, visited and interviewed during my Nuffield travels, thank you for the open and honest conversations which have allowed me to shape my report.

To the country hosts for my Global Focus Program for the time and effort in planning each visit. To the nine scholars I spent five weeks travelling with; Alex Melotto, Carlos Bagrie, Catherine Marriot, Claudia Benn, Hans Riensche, Laura Bennett, Martín Chávez, Natalie Schliz and Stephanie Tabone. The GFP was undoubtedly one of the highlights of my Nuffield Scholarship - thank you for the post-visit debriefs, challenging conversations and for making the GFP so memorable. We began our trip as friends and ended as family. I look forward to reuniting with you all soon!

Programs like Nuffield do not exist without a dedicated team working in the background, to this I would like to thank Jodie Redcliffe, Tessa Dimond and Carol Millar for hours spent ensuring the Nuffield experience ran seamlessly.

Most importantly, thank you to my family, thank you for the encouragement and support in applying for this scholarship and for taking on the extra workload to allow me the freedom to make the most of my scholarship year.

Abbreviations

AASF	Australian Agricultural Sustainability Framework
AWI	Australian Wool Innovation
CSC	Contemporary Scholars Conference
GFP	Global Focus Program
GSP	Gross State Product
LCA	Life Cycle Assessment
LEAF	Linking Environment and Farming
NFF	National Farmers Federation
NFFN	Nature Friendly Farming Network
NZ	New Zealand
PEF	Product Environmental Footprint
RWS	Responsible Wool Standards
SMSF	Self Managed Super Fund
UK	United Kingdom

Objectives

- Objective 1: To identify strategies to adapt and evolve farm businesses to remain sustainable and resilient into the future
- Objective 2: To identify the impact of Agricultural policy - how farmers can help shape the future
- Objective 3: To determine where the future lies for family farms in Australia.

Introduction

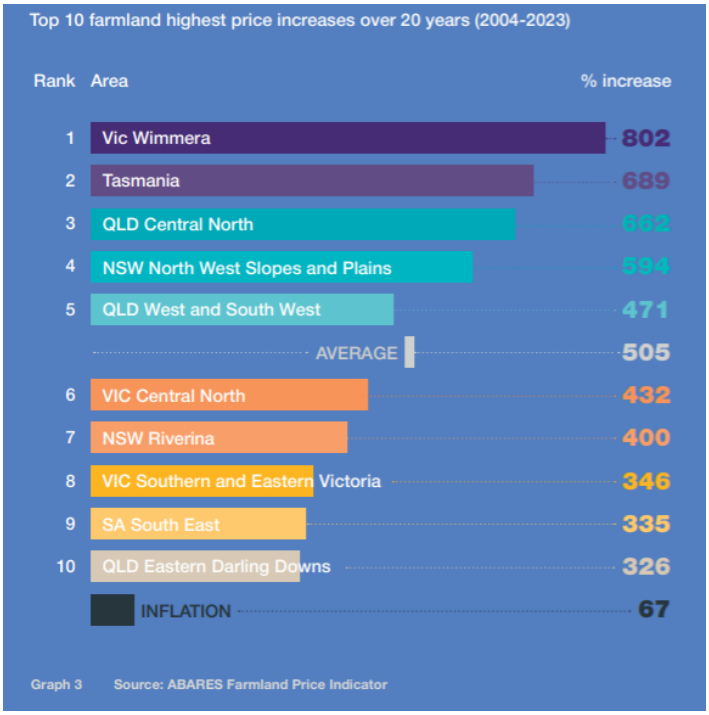
Setting the scene

The family farm is an important part of Australian agriculture, with 99% of Australian agricultural business being Australian-owned, and Australians owning 88% of the agricultural land (National Farmers Federation, n.d.).

In recent years, agricultural land has increased in value due to the greater interest from investment funds and high net-worth individuals. This increased competition for land has made it difficult for family farms to expand or for first-time farmers to buy in. A report published in the Weekend Australian stated that in the last decade the national median price for a bush hectare has risen from $2000 a hectare to $10,000 a hectare and in some instances as high as $28,000 (Trinca, 2025).

The table below shows the significant increase in the value of Australian agricultural land over the past 20 years. As a result of the increases in land value, traditional farming businesses will need to look to more profitable enterprises to make a return on their investment.

Table 2: Land value increases (Source: Verley, 2025)



Climate variability

Modelling indicates that Australia will continue to see an increase in climatic extremes (Bureau of Meterology , 2025). The table below outlines some of the climatic changes we are likely to experience over the next two decades.

Across the country, the effects of climate change are being felt with widespread flooding and crippling drought, stock losses and growing farm debt to cover the cost of these natural disasters.

Table 3: Projections of Australia's future climate condition (Source: Bureau of Meteorology, 2025)

Economic uncertainty

Trade wars and global unrest are putting pressure on commodity prices. The wool industry is particularly susceptible to global uncertainty. Wool makes up just 0.9% of the global fibre market (International Wool Textile Organisation, 2025) with woollen clothing and items seen as a discretionary purchases. The table below outlines the wool exports by volume and value, noting that China remains one of Australia's most important customers, purchasing more than 80% of the wool clip (Australian Wool Innovation , 2024). There was a seven percent reduction in wool sold through the auction system in the 2023/24 selling season at a value of $2.24 billion, compared to $2.42 billion in the previous selling season (Australian Wool Innovation , 2024).

Table 4: Australian wool export destinations (Source: Australian Wool Innovation, 2024)

Export destinations for Australian wool 2023/24 season (up to May 2024)

	Volume	$ value
China	86.4%	84.0%
India	5.0%	4.5%
Italy	2.7%	5.1%
Czechia	2.3%	1.4%
Others	3.6%	4.7%

Source: ABS

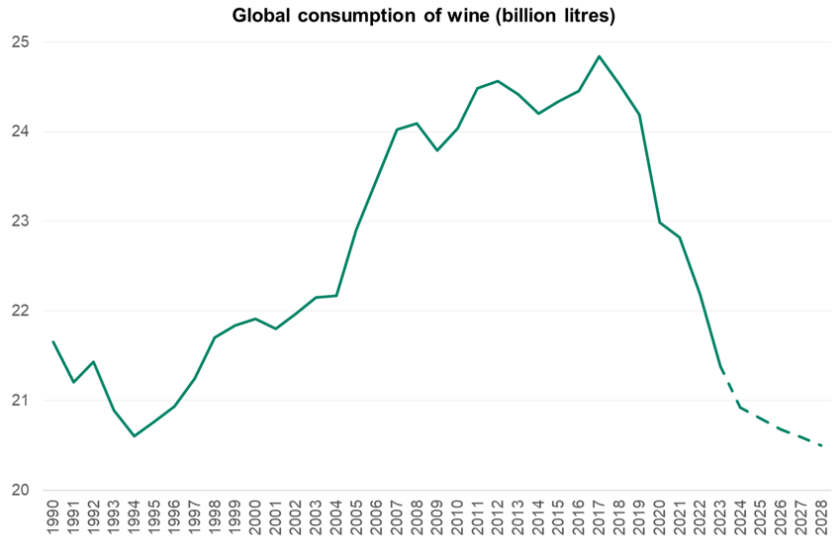
Whilst there are many challenges ahead for Australian agriculture as highlighted above, there are also great opportunities. Through greater agricultural leadership, farm innovations and efficiencies, diversification, agri-tourism and education, this report aims to identify a path forward where agriculture and environmental protection coexist, creating a positive future for all.

Changing consumer preferences

Consumer trends are changing. They are becoming more conscious of the food and fibre that they are purchasing, with increased awareness of their environmental credentials. However, price is still a critical factor in the decision-making, and with the cost of living increasing, priorities change to buying products that are within the consumer's budget.

The global consumption of wine has been decreasing steadily. Data captured in the five years to 2023 found that consumption of still wine dropped by 3% per annum. Consumers are swapping to low and no-alcohol beverages which have seen increases of 13% for no-alcohol wine and 21% for low-alcohol wine. This trend is projected to continue; the graph below highlights this projection. (Wine Australia , 2025)

Table 5: Global consumption of wine (Source: Wine Australia, 2025)



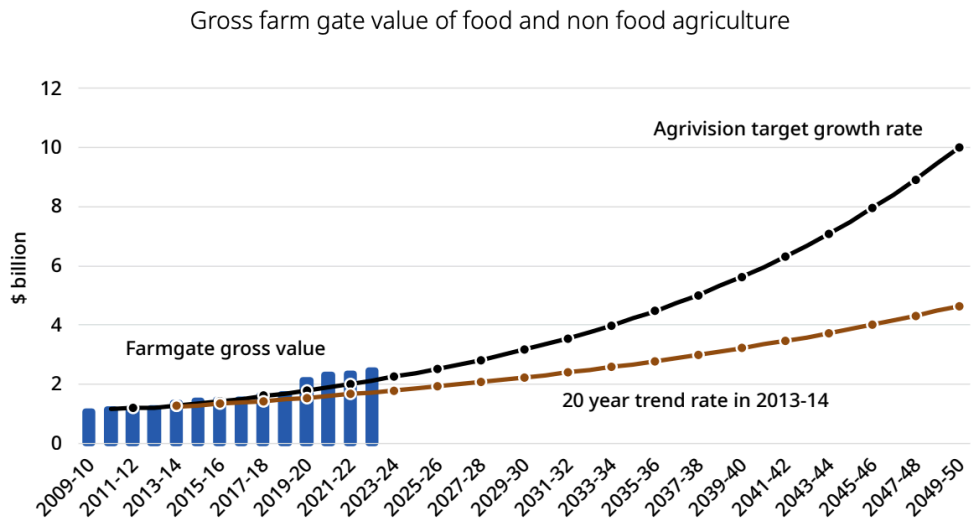
Agriculture is an ever-changing landscape, with costs increasing and policies changing; farmers need to be proactive, listen to the markets and act accordingly.

A Tasmanian perspective

For the benefit of this report, a greater focus will be placed on Tasmania and the future of Tasmanian farms. However, the strategies identified for the future of farming can be applied Australia-wide.

The target of reaching farm gate value of $10 billion by 2050 was a target set by the Tasmanian Government on behalf of the state's agricultural industry. The graph below shows that Tasmania is on track to meet the 2050 targets. (AgriGrowth Tasmania , 2023)

Table 6: Tasmanian gross farm gate value (Source: AgriGrowth Tasmania , 2023)



The author firmly believes, there is great potential for Tasmanian producers to capitalise on the strength of 'Brand Tasmania'. The state's clean, green image provides a powerful marketing tool, similar to how New Zealand has successfully positioned itself globally, across sectors such as produce, fibre and tourism.

A great example of this brand positioning is the Tasmanian Government's "Come Down for Air" campaign, which encouraged Australians to holiday at home. The campaign placed a strong emphasis on agri-tourism, showcasing Tasmania's natural assets and rural experiences (Tourism Tasmania, 2024).

Over the past two decades, agriculture in Tasmania has undergone substantial transformation. The development of statewide water schemes has enabled primary producers to expand and diversify into new enterprises. This has supported rapid growth in areas such as viticulture. However, the author is concerned about the rapid growth and questions: Have we gone too far? How can Tasmania continue this growth trajectory to meet its 2050 goals, especially in light of evolving consumer preferences?

Tasmanian SWOT Analysis

Table 7: Tasmanian SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
- The Tasmanian image - Climate - Water availability and Irrigation - Governmental support for agriculture - Diverse agricultural products - Biosecurity - Export orientated products	- Tunnel vision - Reluctance to change, - Inaccurate weather forecasting making farm planning difficult. - Isolation - Access to Labour - Input costs
Opportunities	**Threats**
- Agri-Tourism - Agri-education - farm-based learning - Low and no alcohol beverages (wine) - Horticulture expansion and extended growing season - The decline Merino sheep numbers should create demand - Water expansion - Value adding products - Innovation and technology	- Cost of living - Urbanisation taking up arable farmland - Increasing land values - Salmon farming - potentially damaging Tasmania's social licence and clean green image - Traditional superfine merino flocks disappearing and being replaces by prime lambs or cropping. - Property development restrictions (clearing of land for irrigation purposes) - Rapid expansion of large-scale vineyard plantings in Tasmania - Regulations and compliance pressures

A global perspective

From the discussions held over the past 12 months, in the many countries visited, it is apparent that nature and conservation are high on the agenda.

Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe, it was shown that trophy hunting can benefit conservation, with wealthy individuals willing to pay thousands of US dollars for the experience. In turn, the money received is going back into the estates to help fund conservation efforts and train staff to help protect against poachers.

Brazil

The author visited Brazil for the Nuffield CSC in 2024 and her learnings from her time there were eye-opening. They are an innovative, forward-thinking nation that has the potential to be a major contributor to global exports in the future.

Their care for the environment with 66% of the land being preserved is clearly demonstrated and it is legislated that farmers need to protect their land.

They are openly adopting regenerative practices and investing in alternative fuels.

United Kingdom and the Netherlands

Visiting the UK and the Netherlands, the author observed these countries to be finding a balance between food production and nature conservation.

Chapter 1: Agricultural policy

Impacts of policy

Inheritance tax in the United Kingdom

Inheritance tax is not new to the UK; however, from 1992 individuals inheriting farmland have been exempt from paying the tax. This has allowed high net-worth individuals to invest in farmland and not necessarily farm it, but to use it as a tax shelter, resulting in a significant increase in land prices. This has in turn limited the capacity of new entrants with an interest in farming buying farmland, simply because they cannot afford the purchase price (Sustain-Latest, 2024).

The re-introduction of the inheritance tax is encouraging farm business succession conversations. A way to safeguard businesses is through intergenerational transfers made seven years prior to a death in the family. Other reliefs include exemptions for the first £1 million, assets will then be taxed at 20% thereafter (Sustain-Latest, 2024). However, with the average acre of arable land selling for £11,300 (Osbourne-Sherlock, 2024) and agricultural assets and buildings being of high value, many farms will be at risk. This highlights the importance of acting now and creating a plan for the future.

While this tax serves to prevent the wealthy land banking, the reality is it will impact middle to large family farmers the most. By distinguishing landholders farming the land to provide food and fibre from the high net-worth individuals seeking tax breaks will go some way to alleviate the issue.

Unrealised capital gains in Australia

Similar to the inheritance tax in the UK, the proposed unrealised capital gains tax in Australia will capture agricultural land and assets held in Self Managed Super Fund (SMSF) exceeding $3 million. Like the inheritance tax in the UK, this tax is a blanket approach intended on targeting the super-rich. However, with roughly 17,000 farms held in SMSF and of those, 3,500 farms have a value greater than $3 million (Grain Growers , 2025).

Taxes such as these have the potential to severely impact a business, reducing its capacity to grow and create employment.

Product environmental footprint (PEF)

The PEF is a life cycle developed by the European Commission to measure the environmental performance of products and services through the use of Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) principles (Australian Wool Innovation, 2024).

Through the current method of reporting, natural fibres score poorly compared to synthetic and mined materials as the methodology does not take into account the biodegradability and long-life span of these products compared to synthetics.

Australian Wool Innovation's (AWI) 'Wear Wool, Not Waste' campaigns have created great awareness of the damage synthetic fibres are doing to the environment. The film was viewed more than 40 million times in the first three weeks of the campaign. To test the impact, consumer surveys were conducted after the launch of the campaigns, 79% of those surveyed agreed with the following statement (Australian Wool Innovation , 2025).

"Made me think twice about the environmental impact of my clothes"

New Zealand - farming consent

In New Zealand, farming consents are required under the Resource Management Act to regulate agricultural activities that impact the environment, such as effluent discharge, irrigation, and land-use changes. These consents help protect water quality, soil health, and biodiversity, while also promoting sustainable practices and enhancing market access through environmental accountability (Environment Canterbury Regional Council, 2025). However, they can also impose financial and administrative burdens on farmers, reduce operational flexibility, and create frustration due to inconsistent regional rules. Balancing environmental protection with practical farming needs remains a key challenge within the consent system.

Net zero 2050

Australia has committed to achieving net zero emissions by 2050, in line with the goals of the Paris Agreement (Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water , 2025). Given that farmers manage approximately 55% of Australia's land mass (National Farmers Federation , 2024) , the agricultural sector will play a pivotal role in reaching this target.

To meet the 2050 target, a balanced strategy is required, one that ensures the coexistence of agriculture and renewable energy development. This includes enabling farmers to host renewable energy infrastructure such as solar and wind, while continuing to produce food and fibre.

However, policy support, fair compensation, and appropriate land-use planning are necessary to maintain this balance. As Australia moves toward net zero, partnerships between governments, industry, and landholders will be key to ensuring sustainable outcomes for both the climate and rural communities.

Chapter 2: To adapt and evolve

Embrace change

Throughout the course of the author's travels, the open-mindedness of hosts and their willingness to evolve and future-proof their business was humbling. Enterprises that existed in the past generations have been adapted, diversified, and in some cases dispersed to make way for more profitable enterprise mixes. This highlights the importance of removing emotion from farming and once this is achieved, it becomes easier to see new opportunities.

Climate change has been a factor in the decision-making process, and much like in Tasmania, there has been rapid vineyard expansion in the UK with Champagne houses from France buying land in the UK as a result of climate change.

Leadership to drive change

The future of family farming businesses lies with its people, through effective leadership and conversations that help drive positive outcomes. Constructive conversations with key stakeholders help create policy that benefits all.

Un-tapped farm assets

With the UK having such a high population density, the repurposing of farm buildings in the UK to office spaces and event venues has been possible. Tasmania's rich built heritage and landscape lends itself to follow a similar path.

Utilising disused farm buildings not only restores them but also is a great way to diversify farm income streams without a significant impact on the working farm.

Access to water in Tasmania has opened many opportunities that once would not have been a viable enterprise.

Case study - Annadale Farm

2003 Nuffield Australia Scholar, Richard Gardner does not shy away from change; in fact he embraces it. He has been actively developing and diversifying his 2,400-hectare farm business at Tunbridge in the central midlands of Tasmania since the early 1990s. Traditionally a dryland sheep and cropping enterprise, water availability and irrigation have played a major role in decision-making and the ability to change. Having had success growing poppies thanks to water availability, Richard was keen to see what else would be possible (Gardner, pers.comms.,2025)

The development of the Midlands Water Scheme in the early 2000s saw another opportunity for Richard and his family, with the development of a dairy which would not have been possible without access to high reliability water (Gardner, pers.comms.,2025).

Conscious of the growing changing climate issue that was highlighted during his Nuffield study tour, Richard saw the need to begin auditing emissions on farm. Further to this and seeing a need to reduce methane emissions, Richard partnered with Fonterra and Sea Forest to run a commercial trial of the 'Asparagopsis' seaweed additive, a seaweed that grows in abundance in Tasmanian waters. When fed to livestock as a feed additive it acts as a methane inhibitor and has the ability to significantly reduce methane emissions. Richard passionately believes in the need to reduce emissions, but questions the importance of sustainability to consumers and whether or not they are ready to pay for a 'sustainable' product (Gardner, pers.comms.,2025).

While the sustainability pathway and the community-focused initiatives have created new opportunities within Richard's business by creating employment for his children and making Annadale an employer of choice; it remains only a piece of the pie when it comes to future-proofing the business. Maintaining focus on a low cost of production system to maximise the return on the commodities sold, whether that be milk, lamb or crops, remains central to profitability. Continuing the sustainability mindset, Richard converted his dairy herd to once-a-day milking, something he describes as a "business sustainability move, good for people and animals". Not only better for his staff, and providing improvement in herd health and fertility, once a day is proving to be as profitable as conventional systems (Gardner, pers.comms.,2025).

Richard is also the founder of 'Seedhouse', a leading Tasmanian-based animal feed manufacturer, supplying the Tasmanian community. The value proposition of this product was simple; provide retail customers with timely delivery of quality feed and build great relationships. Seedhouse grew out of the need to diversify the family business after the financial impact of the 2006-7 drought (Gardner, pers.comms.,2025).

The diversification into irrigated dairy and Seedhouse have ensured the future of the Gardner family farm. Now actively working with his own exit strategy in mind, Richard is committed to a sustainable future for his family's businesses (Gardner, pers.comms.,2025).

Case study - Barnston Estate

Multi-generational family farmer Ed Barnston of 'Barnston Estate' has continued to evolve the 1800-acre family estate in rural Cheshire in the UK. Since taking over from his father in 2015, Ed has been diversifying the business which, up until the 1990s, was reliant solely on agriculture. In recent years the farm business has diversified into several different enterprises that complement the existing and support the community. These diversifications include the following (Barnston, pers.comm.,2024).

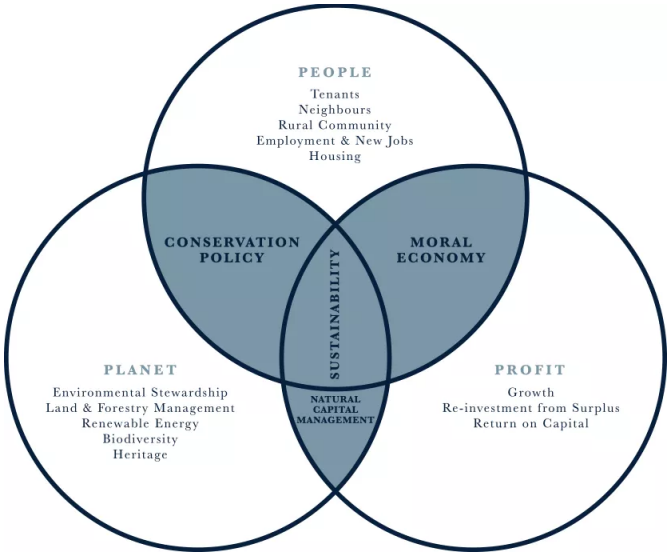
- Residential and commercial property letting
- Dairy farming
- Forestry
- Historic property restoration
- Landscape protection and recovery
- Housing Development
- Renewable Energy Generation
- Managing a Natural Burial Ground

Ed has regular meetings with the estate trustees to discuss visions and set out long-term plans. With changing of the inheritance tax regulations, Ed and the trustees are always planning seven years in advance (Barnston, pers.comm.,2024).

Ed's ethos is to manage the 'Barnston Estate' in harmony with the 'triple bottom line' balancing people, planet, and profit. The goal is to create value for the local community while being environmentally sustainable and financially viable. The table below outlines the vision and values for 'Barnston Estate' (Barnston, pers.comm.,2024).

> *'Our ambition is to nurture and improve the Estate and pass it on to the next generation in a stronger and better condition'* (Barnston, pers.comm.,2024).

Table 8: Barnston Estate vision and values (Source: Barnston, Barnston Estate: About , 2025)



The estate has utilised existing farm buildings, re-purposing them for commercial leases, which include childcare, a gym, and a coffee shop. The regular rental income provides a balance from the fluctuations of agricultural income (Barnston, pers.comm.,2024).

One of the more recent and interesting diversifications is Monument Meadow. A natural burial site developed on the estate, Monument Meadow welcomes all faiths, as an alternative to headstones, an abundance of native species of trees, bulbs, and wildflowers have been planted to create a living memorial (Barnston, pers.comm.,2024).

Seeing the need to collaborate, Ed has been co-investing with his tenant farmers. A great example of this is the partnership between Ed and Crewe Hill Farm. Together they have redeveloped the dairy which now produces 16 million litres for Müller Tesco (Barnston, pers.comm.,2024).

Farming in conjunction with nature is at the heart of ‘Barnston Estate’, with aims to achieve net zero emissions and careful consideration goes into enterprise planning. The Barnston Estate has planted thousands of trees, created new hedgerows, as well as restoring ponds and woodlands. In 2024, 11,000 trees were planted on ten hectares for woodland creation (Barnston, pers.comm.,2024).

The community surrounding ‘Barnston Estate’ is thriving and there are plans to continue constructing housing as the population grows. Development of the houses is under the mantra ‘Sustainable Stewardship for Cohesive Communities’. ‘Barnston Estate’ currently provides housing and indirect employment for around 300 people (Barnston, pers.comm.,2024)

To help create employment in the community a 1,400-square-metres commercial site will be constructed to support this demand. With nature being of high importance, the estate will conserve more land to offset the build (Barnston, pers.comm.,2024).

It is developments such as those outlined above that have earned the trust of the community and council (Barnston, pers.comm.,2024).

Figure 1: Global Focus Program (GFP) visit to Barnston Estate (Source: author)

The two case studies above are great examples of forward-thinking landowners who are not afraid to challenge the norm, to grow their business.

Both Richard and Ed are environmentally conscious and not only do they see the need to protect nature, but also the economic benefits of doing so.

Building resilience

Resilience comes in many forms, personal, financial, and environmental. The author has identified that a combination of all three are paramount to the future success of family farming businesses.

Strong relationships are vital in agriculture, whether it's between farmers and consumers, producers and processors, or neighbours supporting each other. Strengthening relationships across the supply chain builds trust, transparency, and long-term resilience. Within communities, the sharing of knowledge, resources, and experiences builds resilience and friendships. On a broader scale, open communication with policymakers, researchers, and the wider public ensures the industry's voice is heard and understood. As agriculture continues to evolve, investing in people and relationships is just as important as investing in land or infrastructure, as it is people who will drive change and carry the industry forward.

Chapter 3: Where the future lies

In a direct quote from Dan Colthurst's blog post; FFN Opinion: The Future of the Family Farm

'*With the ever-increasing competition for a finite resource, do we need to start thinking outside the box? Is there the opportunity to partner existing family operations and corporates or families and high net wealth investors? Agriculture as it stands today, is still able to generate a healthy return on investment, and coupled with capital growth it becomes a very attractive investment option.'* (Coulthurst)

Rising farm costs

A Mecardo report written by Adrian Ladaniwskyj found that the producer price index for livestock and grain farming has increased significantly, with input prices having risen by over 150% since 2002 (Ladaniwskyj, 2022). Commodity prices have not been increasing at the same rate and for the past five years have remained largely unchanged (see table 9). Coupled with the increased land values, this has seen Australian farmers look to more intensive agricultural systems to generate a profit.

Table 9: Increasing farm input prices (Source: Ladaniwskyj, 2022)

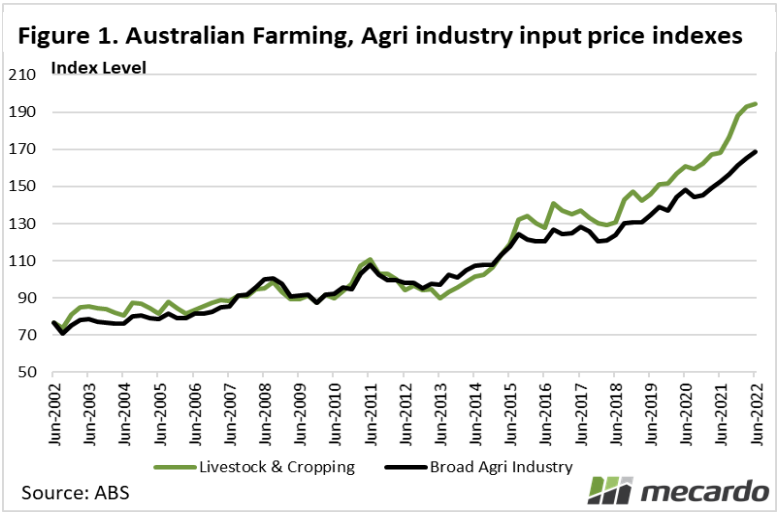


Table 10: Livestock and livestock product values (Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics , 2025)

	2019-20 ($m)	2020-21 ($m)	2021-22 ($m)	2022-23 ($m)	2023-24 ($m)
Cattle & Calves	13,348.7	12,340.7	14,208.7	13,869.6	12,792.3
Sheep & Lambs	4,457.3	3,973.4	4,529.9	4,118.9	3,721.9
Poultry	2,785.3	2,884.7	3,134.8	3,626.3	4,015.9
Pigs	1,442.5	1,421.2	1,429.2	1,526.3	1,674.3
Wool	2,634.4	2,516.8	3,081.8	2,983.2	2,744.9
Milk	4,829.0	4,688.0	4,871.9	6,081.6	6,237.3

Farm funding structures

Australian farm businesses rely almost solely on bank debt as a source of funding. Referring to Dan Colthurst's quote above, is it time to challenge the norm and explore alternative funding structures?

The author saw many examples of different funding structures on her travels and it was particularly highlighted in the NZ dairy sector, where there were many share-milking arrangements observed - this is a great way for young farmers or new entrants to get a foothold in the industry and gradually take on more ownership of the business.

Adopting a corporate model

Australian farm businesses are becoming more sophisticated, as such, they are relying less on family members to fill roles, instead opting to employing skilled individuals to help manage their business.

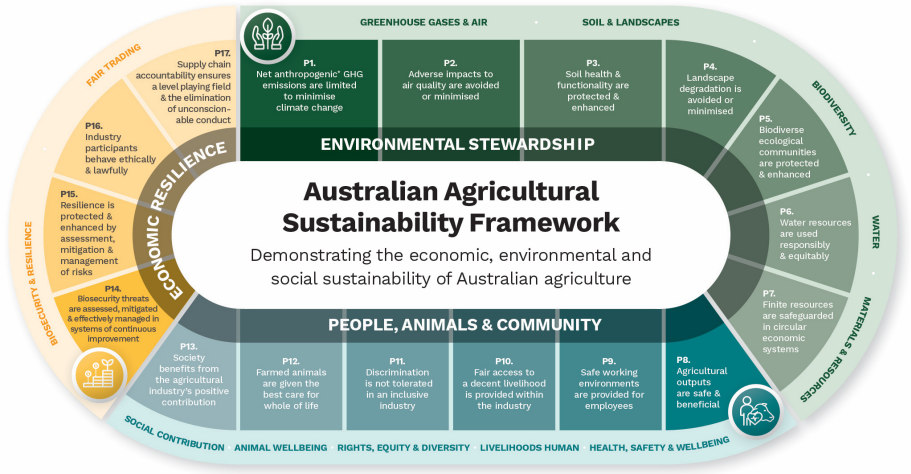
The benefits that family farms have over corporate businesses are their ability to pivot and diversify as they feel necessary without the need to have board approval.

The Australian Agricultural Sustainability Framework (AASF) is a great reference point for farm businesses to assist in decision-making as well as providing farm data. The AASF was developed in partnership with the National Farmers Federation (NFF) and the Australian Government. Development began by recognising the pressures on the Australian Agricultural sector to demonstrate sustainability credentials both Nationally and Internationally (National Farmers Federation , 2025).

With the growing demand for reporting on environmental and animal welfare credentials - this is becoming a necessity if you want to sell your product, for example, in the author's business, assurance schemes such as Responsible Wool Standards (RWS) and Wine Sustainability is becoming essential to selling produce. The AASF is well-placed to assist in preparing for the future.

Having one framework that is aligned to the entire agricultural industry allows for better sector communication.

Table 11: Australian Agricultural Sustainability Framework (Source: National Farmers Federation , 2025)



Succession

While succession has not formed a major part of this report, it is, however, a crucial element in the future of family farming. If a succession plan is not in place, it leaves farm businesses exposed. As highlighted previously, the incoming inheritance tax has the potential to significantly impact family farms throughout the UK if succession is not addressed early, as does the proposed unrealised capital gains tax for Australia.

The Weekend Australian report previously cited estimates that, over the next decade, there will be an estimated $3.5 trillion worth of land changing hands in one of the biggest intergenerational transfers of wealth in the nation. (Trinca, 2025)

It is vital to start the succession conversation early, document thoughts and allow everyone's wishes to be heard. Succession does not have to be equal, it has to be fair.

Farming with nature

Australian farmers are custodians of over 50% of the nation's land mass (National Farmers Federation , 2024), placing them in a pivotal position to influence environmental outcomes. This stewardship carries both a responsibility and opportunity, to manage the land not only for agricultural productivity but also for the benefit of nature conservation.

Initiatives such as the Nature Friendly Farming Network (NFFN) and Farmers for Climate Action (FCA) demonstrate the importance of shifting towards sustainable agricultural systems. Organisations like the NFFN and FCA advocate for farming systems that enhance biodiversity, protect natural resources, and build resilience to climate change. Across the UK there has been on average 19% decline in species numbers since 1970 (NBN , 2023), highlighting the importance to shift focus and combine conservation and species rehabilitation with agriculture. In Australia there has also been a species decline, with over 100 species becoming extinct since colonisation. Australia, like many nations, has signed up to international commitments to prevent any further losses (CSIRO, 2025).

Australian farmers are increasingly aware that their role goes beyond food and fibre production and as custodians, they are key players in the climate solution. By adopting practices that restore and improve soil health, improve water retention, and encourage native biodiversity, farmers can future-proof their businesses while contributing to broader environmental and societal license.

Farm diversification

Diversification within a farm business is an important way of spreading the risk. Different income streams not only add value, but help balance a business through difficult economic times. The author observed many great diversification examples during her travels and left her inspired about what other options may be available for her family farming business.

Agritourism

Tasmania is reliant on tourism including agri-tourism contributing $4.55 billion to the state's economy or 10.8% of the state's Gross State Product (GSP) (Tourism Tasmania , 2025)

Agritourism can supplement farm income, whether that be through farm accommodation, event spaces, cellar doors, and farm shops. The options are only limited to your imagination. The benefit of including agritourism as part of a farm business is that it not only does it supplement income, but also creates conversations and helps educate the customer as to where their food and fibre comes from.

Value-adding products

Value-adding agricultural products is a powerful way for farmers to take greater control over the value chain, shifting away from being price-takers of raw commodities to creators of unique, high-margin goods and experiences. By producing items such as wine, beer, cider, spirits, and cheese, farmers can diversify income streams and differentiate their offerings. There is also a growing trend towards innovation in this space, the emergence of low- or no-alcohol beverages reflects changing consumer preferences, as mentioned previously. Farm shops and agritourism ventures offer further opportunities to connect directly with consumers and increase profitability. However, initiatives like farm shops can evolve into demanding operations that require ongoing attention and resources, so it is essential to find a manageable balance. Across the UK and Europe, the author observed that value-adding is thriving, with farmers embracing creative approaches like milk vending machines, pick-your-own pumpkin patches during Halloween, and maize mazes, demonstrating how on-farm diversification can enhance both business resilience and community engagement.

Renewable energy in agriculture

How do we balance managing agricultural land for farming purposes with the increasing need and demand for renewables?

There are many examples of renewables in agriculture coexisting and even benefiting existing enterprises. They have the potential supplement farm income; however, they are also dividing communities.

Renewable energy and agriculture co-existing

Numurkah Solar Farm in northern Victoria is a leading example of how traditional agriculture and solar farming can benefit each other. The solar farm is over 515 hectares and has Merinos grazing amongst the photovoltaic solar panels. The solar panels provide 255,000 megawatt hours of energy to the grid, powering 51,000 homes. The sheep provide the added benefit of grazing beneath the panels reducing the fire hazard, and in turn, the solar panels provide shelter from the elements (Australian Government Clean Energy Regulator, 2024).

The Numurkah Solar Farm has provided a benefit to the community too, by creating over 300 jobs during the construction of the project and now employing six full-time staff members (Australian Government Clean Energy Regulator, 2024).

A visit to the Sun Farming display farm in Germany highlighted options where solar farming and livestock, cropping and horticulture can co-exist.

Figure 2: Visit to Sun Farming display farm - Germany (Source: author)

Education

United Kingdom education examples

Open Farm Sunday

This was a UK initiative managed by Linking Environment and Farming (LEAF), opening farms to the public to share stories and to show the public where their food and fibre comes from. This has been running since 2006 with over 2000 farmers opening their gates to the public welcoming over 3.25 million people (Open Farm Sunday , 2025).

Farm classrooms

Farm Link has provided 40,000 students with insight into where their food and fibre come from. If adopted in Australia this could provide an alternate income stream for farm businesses whilst boosting agricultural knowledge amoung the nation’s students (Farm Link , 2025).

The two examples above not only provide a way to diversify farm income streams, they also play a valuable role in society by connecting and educating both the consumers and farmers.

Case Study - Sophie Gregory - Home Farm

Sophie has long been passionate about educating the next generation of agricultural professionals. She recognised that there was a growing disconnect regarding the environment and farming practices and decided to do something about it. She has been collaborating with local education programmes such as Discover Farming and LEAF Education in the UK. A result of this collaboration, Sophie regularly welcomes school groups to her farm 'Home Farm', which she manages with her husband Tom. Together they run a 600 head, mostly organic dairy operation on 1,600 acres. The decision to run the farm organically was originally driven for financial reasons. Sophie has grown to value this approach to farming, and it aligns with her values. A 380-acre block of the farm is conventionally run with 200 cows farmed there. The conventional system suiting that particular part of the farm, Sophie noting that it is important to recognise that no one system is right for every farm - *'it's about finding out what works for your land, your business, and goals' (Gergory, pers.comm.,2025).*

This year she opened her farm and participated in Open Farm Sunday which was held on the 1st of June 2025, which attracted over 1,400 visitors to the farm. This coincided with the opening of her farm classroom; a dream that has come to life with the support of her landlord. The classroom will serve as a hub for school visits and community engagement. Sophie believes that education is key to the future of agriculture as it builds awareness, informed choices, and public support as well as influencing better policy and environmental awareness *(Gergory, pers.comm.,2025)*

Figure 3: Students using the Home Farm Classroom (Source: Sophie Gregory)

Sophie also uses her profile to create awareness through social media, with a following of 47,000 on her Instagram page. Sophie uses her platform to share the daily realities of dairy farming, to continue educating consumers and strengthen relationships within the community *(Gergory, pers.comm.,2025).*

Sophie was recently named in the ‘Kings 35 under 35’. This honour reflects her dedication to education, and the UK’s organic dairy sector.

Figure 4: Sophie and Anna at the Kings Foundation Awards (Source: Author)

Education reflections

The author firmly believes that education is one of the most important contributors to the future success of the agricultural industry. There is a huge potential to adopt the educational examples mentioned above in Australia, providing school children not only a greater understanding of where their food and fibre comes from, but also with an opportunity to see where a career in agriculture could lead.

Future Study

The future of the family farm will continue to evolve and further study can use this report as a stepping stone to explore practical and scalable models that support the long-term viability of Australian farms. Continuing to research this ever-changing topic with a focus on collaborative funding and ownership structures, the economic impact that diversification and agritourism has had across the regions and the role of education in strengthening social licenses and public understanding of agriculture. Continued analysis of policy design around taxation, succession frameworks and sustainability reporting will help regulators differentiate between passive landholding and active land management. Lastly further evaluation examining how innovation, climate adaptation, and nature-positive farming practices can influence profitability, resilience, and the benefit the wider community.

Conclusions

The future of the family farm is an open-ended question with no right answer. It is how family businesses navigate necessary change and continue to adapt and evolve with open-mindedness and willingness to change, not fear it, that will determine their future success.

The removal of emotion from family farms, or at the very least, the enterprises that are run opens new opportunities.

While there remain more questions than answers, there is no doubt a bumpy road ahead for Australian family farming businesses, while the industry navigates change, moves toward net zero carbon emissions, and balances the use of renewables with traditional agricultural practices.

The future of the family farm lies in education, connection, communication, and diversification that complements the existing farm business.

The future of the family farm - there is more at play than the family who are the custodians of the piece of land they farm; it is about the people the farm employs and the community it supports.

Recommendations

Continued funding for education in agriculture:

- To continue to bridge the gap
- To invite the public on-farm and connect with them, similar to the examples provided from the UK.

Effective leadership:

- To create change that supports farming communities
- To strengthen communication and collaboration - the importance of having a voice in the room.

Diversification

- To adopt diversification strategies that benefit different farming systems
- To farm with nature.

While succession was not looked at in great detail throughout this report, the author highlights the importance of creating a succession plan early and working with advisers to create a positive plan that ensures the future prosperity of the family farm.

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