The Resilience and Mental Health and Wellbeing of Farm Families Experiencing Climate Variation in South Australia

Final Report

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Key Messages

This project examines the resilience and mental health and wellbeing of farm families experiencing climate variation in South Australia.

Resilience is a dynamic process wherein farm families display positive adaptation (i.e. will get by) despite experiences of significant adversity due to drought.

Our findings indicate that in achieving the positive outcome of ‘getting by’ in the domains of livelihood and mental health and wellbeing during drought, adult members of farm families exhibited a stance which informed the way that they negotiated with their context (spheres of influence) to utilise particular resilience processes (resources and strategies). These three components of resilience are examined in detail in the report.

- The stance was gendered and influenced decision-making and actions in ways that produced different outcomes for men and women.
- The context consisted of three spheres which influenced the opportunities and constraints within which farm families made decisions and took action: the micro sphere of the farm and family; the meso sphere (regional level) of community, industry and environment; and the macro sphere of government, economy and society.
- The processes were the resources and strategies that farm families utilised to get by in the areas of livelihood and mental health and wellbeing. The interaction between processes was also important.

Consultations with service providers and policy practitioners indicate that the research has policy implications. These include:

- Services in rural areas need to be continuous (at a base level) with less reliance on crisis driven responses
- Focusing on regional development initiatives, including community capacity building, leadership development, and creating employment
- Ensuring that rural women’s needs are met as well as those of rural men, and recognising the gender dimension of policy and service provision
- A systemic view of policy and service provision, involving integration across policy areas

On the basis of this research the goal of attaining psychological wellbeing in the South Australian State Plan requires:

- A salutogenic, strengths-based approach to health
- An understanding of the personal, social and contextual factors that facilitate health and wellbeing
- Measures that incorporate changes across a range of health, livelihood, environmental and social domains
Executive Summary

Background

This project investigated the resilience and mental health and wellbeing of farm families experiencing climate variation in South Australia. Resilience was defined as a process wherein individuals display positive adaptation despite experiences of significant adversity. We examined resilience processes in two domains relevant to adult members of farm families being able to get by during drought: livelihood, and mental health and wellbeing. The outcome, ‘getting by’, was self-defined by participants. The research sought to not only identify the resilience processes, but understand how farm families used them to achieve a positive outcome, which we call ‘getting by’.

The project was part of SA Health’s Strategic Health Research Program, which funded four projects on resilience. Our project takes a salutogenic (strengths-based) approach to resilience to shift the discussion toward understanding the contextual, social and personal factors which shape how people achieve health and wellbeing even when facing adversity.

Research Questions

Within the broader research topic, the project has four objectives, or sub-questions:

- What personal, social and contextual factors enable farm families in drought-affected areas of South Australia to get by?
- How do these factors differ across age, gender and region?
- How do personal, social and contextual factors impact on the experience of getting by for farm families operating in drought-affected areas of SA?
- What do these findings suggest for existing understandings of resilience, and how resilience may be enhanced across the farm population?

Methodology

The research was designed within a constructivist model of resilience as a process. This model is phenomenological and understands resilience processes as multi-dimensional, complex and contextually specific. In operationalising the research, we conducted two waves of interviews, 12 months apart, with farm families in four regions: the Central Eyre Peninsula (CEP), the Lower Lakes and River Murray Corridor (LLRMC), the Mid North (MN) and the Upper South East (USE). Of the original 80 farm families (148 participants), 75 families (132 participants) participated in the second wave of interviews. Participants completed the GHQ12 and subjective measures of general and physical health in both waves and a broader demographic questionnaire in wave one. Additional data were collected from rural service providers through holding six focus group consultations in March 2009. The study was conducted over a two year period – 2007 to 2009.

The data indicate that there are age, gender and regional differences in the process of resilience engaged in by members of farm families. Differences due to ethnicity could not be analysed due to the lack of diversity in the sample.
Findings

In presenting the findings we stress that our sample was comprised of participants who had self-selected on the basis that they were ‘getting by’ during drought. Our sample indicates:

- That people with psychological distress or who have diagnosed mental illness can have positive outcomes when faced with adversity;
- That people who exit (or lease) the farm when faced with adversity can have positive outcomes.

The resilience of farm families was therefore not about the absence of psychological distress, but about how such distress was managed; nor was it about the capacity to stay on farm, but about the capacity of farm families to maintain a source of livelihood.

The identification of resilience processes is the most detailed section of the analysis (chapter 6). In examining the personal, social and contextual aspects of these resilience processes we realised there was a need for a different level of analysis in order to account for the complexity of resilience as a process. In meta-coding the data, we reveal three components that contribute to people having positive outcomes following adversity: stance, context and processes (see Table E.1).

We argue that, in achieving the positive outcome of ‘getting by’ in the domains of livelihood and mental health and wellbeing during drought, adult members of farm families exhibited a stance which informed the way that they negotiated with their context (spheres of influence) to utilise particular resilience processes (resources and strategies). These three components of resilience as a process are:

- **Stance**: the position from which participants make decisions and take action. It:
  a. Is gendered and this contributes to qualitative differences in outcomes between men and women;
  b. Influences the ways in which decisions are made about health, wellbeing and livelihood;
  c. Is fluid or amenable to change and reconstruction.

- **Context**: the personal, social, natural, political and economic environment within which decisions are made and action taken. It:
  a. Presents farm families with opportunities and constraints on the options available to them in accessing and utilising resilience processes;
  b. Consists of three spheres of influence: the farm and family contexts in the micro sphere; the regional contexts of community, environment and industry in the meso sphere; and the broader contexts of government, economy and society in the macro sphere;
**E.1: Summary of findings: Resilience as a process for members of farm families in SA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stance</th>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Processes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Men</strong></td>
<td><strong>Micro Sphere</strong>&lt;br&gt;• Farm&lt;br&gt;  o Place&lt;br&gt;  o Business&lt;br&gt;• Family&lt;br&gt;  o Source of strength&lt;br&gt;  o Responsibility&lt;br&gt;  o Intergenerational opportunities&lt;br&gt;• Farm-Family interaction</td>
<td><strong>Mental Health and Wellbeing</strong>&lt;br&gt;• Social interaction&lt;br&gt;  o Communities of practice&lt;br&gt;  o Community and civic participation&lt;br&gt;  o Friends&lt;br&gt;• Mental disengagement from farm business&lt;br&gt;• Comparative advantage&lt;br&gt;• Significant other&lt;br&gt;• Managing physical health&lt;br&gt;  o Regular check-ups&lt;br&gt;  o Self-care&lt;br&gt;• Managing psychological distress&lt;br&gt;  o Self-care&lt;br&gt;  o Help-seeking&lt;br&gt;  o Help-providing&lt;br&gt;• Spirituality&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;<strong>Meso Sphere</strong>&lt;br&gt;• Community&lt;br&gt;  o Social capital&lt;br&gt;  o Business, services, employment&lt;br&gt;• Environment&lt;br&gt;  o Location&lt;br&gt;  o Climate variability / change&lt;br&gt;• Industry&lt;br&gt;  o Support, extension and services&lt;br&gt;  o Industry politics and change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Macro Sphere</strong>&lt;br&gt;• Government&lt;br&gt;  o Regulatory environment&lt;br&gt;  o Superannuation&lt;br&gt;  o Drought support&lt;br&gt;  o Service provision&lt;br&gt;• Economy&lt;br&gt;  o Globalisation of agriculture&lt;br&gt;  o Global financial crisis&lt;br&gt;  o Regional / local economies&lt;br&gt;• Society&lt;br&gt;  o Gender&lt;br&gt;  o Information technology&lt;br&gt;  o Attitudes towards farming / farmers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Farming as a business lifestyle&lt;br&gt;• Positive construction of self&lt;br&gt;  o Attachment to land&lt;br&gt;  o Moral meaning in work/farming&lt;br&gt;  o Interaction with natural environment&lt;br&gt;  o Sense of achievement&lt;br&gt;  o More than ‘just’ a farmer&lt;br&gt;• Contingent optimism (default)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Active decision making&lt;br&gt;  o Bounded rationality&lt;br&gt;  o Reflexivity&lt;br&gt;  o Healthy scepticism</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Women</strong></td>
<td><strong>Micro Sphere</strong>&lt;br&gt;• Farm&lt;br&gt;  o Place&lt;br&gt;  o Business&lt;br&gt;• Family&lt;br&gt;  o Source of strength&lt;br&gt;  o Responsibility&lt;br&gt;  o Intergenerational opportunities&lt;br&gt;• Farm-Family interaction</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Meso Sphere</strong>&lt;br&gt;• Community&lt;br&gt;  o Social capital&lt;br&gt;  o Business, services, employment&lt;br&gt;• Environment&lt;br&gt;  o Location&lt;br&gt;  o Climate variability / change&lt;br&gt;• Industry&lt;br&gt;  o Support, extension and services&lt;br&gt;  o Industry politics and change</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Farming as a business lifestyle&lt;br&gt;• Positive construction of self&lt;br&gt;  o Involved in meaningful role&lt;br&gt;  o Relative autonomy&lt;br&gt;  o Connection with place&lt;br&gt;  o Sense of achievement&lt;br&gt;• Contingent optimism (hope)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Active decision making&lt;br&gt;  o Self-in-relation&lt;br&gt;  o Latent sources of power&lt;br&gt;  o Insider/outsider perspective</td>
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c. Suggests a need to engage in ‘resilience thinking’ beyond the individual. This could include integrating a ‘health in all policies’ approach into and across the spheres of influence.

- **Processes:** the resources and strategies used to facilitate a positive outcome in dealing with adversity. The processes:
  
a. Helped to protect farm families from the livelihood and mental health risks associated with experiences of prolonged drought;

b. Can be cumulative, overlapping or reciprocal;

c. Were differentiated according to whether they were protective of livelihood or mental health and wellbeing. In practice, there was a relationship between ‘getting by’ in the domain of livelihood and ‘getting by’ in the domain of mental health and wellbeing (and vice versa);

d. Were essential but not sufficient to explain or understand the resilience and mental health and wellbeing of farm families.

This research contributes to understanding farm families’ mental health and wellbeing and resilience within a framework of complex systems. There is still more to do, but viewing resilience through the lens of complex systems means that a particular approach to facilitating resilience is required: one that addresses the multiple layers (stance, context, processes) and the social, institutional and relational determinants of health. This is likely to require, at minimum, a whole of government approach in which a salutogenic concept of health in all policies is adopted.

**Policy implications**

The project involved consulting with service providers (prior to the second wave interviews) and policy practitioners (toward the end of the project). They imparted insights on the applied implications of the project.

Service providers across the four regions indicated that our research meant there was a need for:

- **Improving service provision / delivery**
  
  o Client centred, demand driven services (better pathways)
  
  o Service coordination and integration
  
  o Continuity in service provision (not crisis driven)
  
  o Innovative services and modes of delivery
  
  o Capacity building (service providers) re shift to strengths-based model

- **Enhancing community resilience**
  
  o Building social infrastructure
  
  o Strengthen social capital
  
  o Generate collective optimism

- **Creating opportunities for farm families**
  
  o Employment (regional development)
  
  o Climate change
Policy practitioners indicated that the research had implications across four policy areas:

- Health (mental health, rural/country health)
- Families and communities
- Regional development
- Agriculture and climate change

Suggestions specific to each of these areas were made and are outlined in chapter 8. Common threads that extended across more than one area included:

- Continuity (at a base level) of services with less reliance on crisis driven responses
- Community capacity building, including leadership
- Gendered approach to policy-making, ensuring that rural women’s needs are met as well as those of rural men
- A systemic view of policy and service provision, involving integration across policy areas
- Valuing the contribution of farm families to the community, to agricultural and non-agricultural (e.g. tourism, mining) industries and to attaining SASP targets
1. Introduction

This two year project was funded in 2007 as part of the Department of Health’s response to the South Australian State Plan (SASP). Within the SASP, Objective 2 refers to improving wellbeing in the population, with a specific target, T2.7, focused on improving psychological wellbeing. Currently, the measure related to this target is based on the prevalence of psychological distress (as per K10). Both the Department and the State Government more generally realise the limitations of this approach but argue that there is little choice given ‘the absence of a measurable indicator of mental health.’

Along with others funded under the theme of ‘resilience’, this project aims to provide a basis for informing the development of measures of mental health that will more realistically reflect psychological wellbeing (rather than the absence of psychological distress) amongst South Australians. It therefore takes a more salutogenic approach to health than is evident in the current SASP target. The project frames the concept of resilience in a way that can shift the discussion toward understanding the contextual, social and personal factors which shape how people achieve health and wellbeing even when faced with adversity.

The adversity at the centre of this project is a form of extreme climate variation experienced by farm families: drought. Parts of South Australia (SA) have been in drought since 2001, and by 2007 the whole state had been drought declared, a position that continued for the life of the project. At the time that this project began there was little Australian research on the factors associated with drought in relation to mental health or resilience. Since then, several reports have been released highlighting the negative impact of drought on income, productivity, mental health, the environment and communities. Despite this negative outlook, the majority of farm families are likely to withstand these pressures and manage to ‘get by’ during this period of extreme climate adversity. We sought to identify and understand the processes through which farm families achieve such resilience and mental health and wellbeing.

This chapter provides the context for the research problem that our project addresses. It begins by providing a brief overview of the impact of drought on farming in SA. Livelihood (income and work) is one of the key determinants of health and one of the two domains within which we examine resilience in our research. Psychological wellbeing is the second domain within which we examine resilience. The second section of this chapter therefore provides an overview of what is known about the impact of drought on the prevalence of psychological distress – the current measure of psychological wellbeing – among South Australian farm families.

Having defined the subjects of our research (farm families), the adversity (drought) and the domains (livelihood and psychological wellbeing), the third section of this chapter discusses the concept of resilience. This project conceptualises resilience as a process rather than an outcome and here we discuss what this means for the research design. The chapter concludes with a statement of the research objectives.

1.1 Farming and Extreme Climate Variation

Climate variation is a normal element of farming in South Australia. While farmers generally accept climate variation as part of their risk management strategy, when it becomes extreme, prolonged or unpredictable then normal strategies associated with
managing climate variation come under pressure. Climate variability is well recognised as a significant driver of risk in Australian agriculture.\(^4\)

In this project we differentiate between climate variability – which can be seasonal, regional and long or short term – and climate change, which is long term and likely to affect farming more broadly, albeit differently in different regions. Climate variability may well be one of the impacts of climate change, but it can also occur separately from climate change. Extreme climate variation includes droughts, hurricanes and storms; and can create the conditions for bushfires and flooding. This project focuses on drought as a form of extreme climate variation. The term ‘drought’ is currently being phased out of official farming discourses and its use may be contentious.\(^5\) Nevertheless, drought is how farm families understand the lack of rainfall and its impact on farm output and income. For this reason we retain the term drought when speaking of the specific form of climate adversity that farm families faced between 2006 and 2009.

In the 2006 Census there were 11,809 farming families in South Australia, reducing by approximately 1,000 families since 2001.\(^6\) As this project began, the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics (ABARE) predicted that ‘severe drought across southern and central Australia is projected to reduce farm incomes in 2006-07 to their lowest level in over thirty years.’ The potential for widespread financial and psychological stress was high.

In SA, the pattern of farm business losses over the past three years has differed slightly from the Australian average. South Australian farm business losses were 10% greater in 2006-07 and more than six times greater than the Australian average in 2008-09, however the number of farms with a negative business profit was lower than the Australian average until 2008-09 (Table 1.1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Farm business profit (average)</th>
<th>Farms with negative business profit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>06-07</td>
<td>07-08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>-$78560</td>
<td>-$17200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aust</td>
<td>-$70240</td>
<td>-$21300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 08-09 are provisional estimates
Source: adapted from ABARE 2009, pp. 9, 12

Financial stress is recognised as being one of the most salient stressors on farm families, with farmers’ perceptions of the future being closely tied to the success of their farm business.\(^8\) The decline in profitability of farming means that many farms are now pluriactive; that is, they have off-farm income or have developed a second enterprise separately from the farm business.\(^9\) Subject to eligibility, farmers might also supplement their income through Exceptional Circumstance (EC) payments covering interest on loans and income support. In SA, approximately 25% of farm businesses received EC support.\(^10\)

Financial stressors do not only arise as a result of drought. For the past 20 years farmers have been expected to be self-reliant in the face of an increasingly open and competitive national market affecting prices of inputs and outputs.\(^11\) During the 2008-2009 season, ABARE estimated that average cash costs had increased by 7% on broadacre farms and
20% on dairies, with the biggest increases being for fertilizer, fuel, chemicals and interest costs. Farmers have little control over the cost of inputs (except for the quantity used) or the price they get for commodities which creates additional risk factors involved in farming.

In response to the escalating risks associated with farming, Australia’s agricultural research, policy and service delivery efforts have focused on increasing the adaptive capacity of farms. This has two elements. One is to advocate a risk management approach, based on the process of identifying risks and making informed decisions involving collating and analysing advice from a range of sources including specialist advisers and government. The second element is to examine the conditions for adaptive capacity. This literature bears some similarities to the resilience literature except that the focus is the farm business rather than individuals:

Adaptive capacity contributes to the more dynamic concept of resilience, defined as the ability of farm households to recover their livelihoods following stress or shocks.

Three factors are viewed as enhancing adaptive capacity: farmer education, the diversity of on and off-farm income sources; and the levels of income. In a relatively comprehensive overview of the capacity of farms to adapt to climate change, ABARE developed an index of human, social, natural, physical and financial capital which recognised the importance of context within which decisions are made. Whether or not farmers will (or can) adapt will depend on the outcomes from each of these areas, and the overall net benefit of adapting.

Such analyses provide important indicators of the adaptive capacity of the farm business, but how this links to the resilience of farm families is not clear. In this study livelihood is one of our key domains in researching the resilience and mental health and wellbeing of farm families experiencing extreme climate variation.

### 1.2 Psychological Distress and Farm Families

The group of people at the centre of this project are members of farm families. Drawing on the ABS definition of family as ‘two or more persons, one of whom is at least 15 years of age, who are related by blood, marriage (registered or defacto), adoption, step and fostering and who are usually resident in the same household’, we define a farm family as a family wherein at least one of its members describes his or her main occupation as farming. In this section we examine what is already known about the psychological wellbeing of this sub-population.

With a rate of 14.8 suicides per 100,000 people (2000-2005), South Australia has the highest rate of suicide amongst all mainland states. The same study indicates that the rates of suicide increase for each category of remoteness, with men having higher rates of suicide than women. In relation to farm families, two studies (one in Victoria, one in SA) indicate that the rate of male farmer suicide is higher than that of the non-farm rural population and of the male population more generally. In their study of farm suicides in SA between 1997 and 2001, Miller and Burns found that farm men were more than 40% more likely than non-farm rural men to commit suicide (Table 1.2).
Table 1.2: Comparing average annual suicides among different population categories in South Australia, 1997-2001 (rate per 100,000)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SA Farm</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA Rural</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA All</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Miller and Burns 2008, p.329

Although these statistics appear alarming, Judd et al argue that it is important to bear in mind that the vast majority of farmers do not commit, nor consider committing, suicide. They found, though, that once farmers do consider suicide the pathway seems to be shorter and more intense than for other groups, with more lethal consequences.

Mental illness and depression are known to significantly increase the likelihood of suicide. However, for farmers this link appears less straightforward. From population based surveys there is little to suggest that rural areas have higher levels of mental illness than their metropolitan counterparts. Studies on the mental health of South Australians, for example, found no statistically significant differences between ARIA (remoteness) categories; and that, if anything, those from moderately accessible and remote areas were less depressed. Most researchers using these studies indicate that the use of broad categories of metro-rural in mental health analyses masks differences and argue that more sensitive measures are required in order to examine different occupational groups and compare regional outcomes. There appears to be no reliable population based data that can be used to comprehensively interpret the mental health of farmers and farm families. In addition, the cross-sectional nature of these data means that making claims of a link between psychological distress and drought is difficult: for links to be clear it is necessary to have longitudinal data starting prior to the onset of a stressor such as drought. In the absence of such data, it is difficult to measure what the impact of drought is on the levels of stress and depression among farm families.

Despite these difficulties a small number of quantitative studies focusing on mental health and drought have been conducted in the last couple of years. The largest of these is a 2007 cross-sectional study of 8,000 people living in rural and regional areas - 45% of whom had at least one person in the household involved in an agricultural industry. Mental health was measured by the SF36 and two measures of drought were used – official rainfall observations and a social definition (self-defined by participants). The social definition of drought proved to be the most useful for assessing the impact of drought on health. Figure 1.1 illustrates the relationship between the social definition of drought, the probability of mental health problems and selected occupational groups. In particular, it shows where there is no drought, farmers and farm managers are no more likely than other occupational groups to have mental health problems. Being in a current drought, however, significantly increases the likelihood of mental health problems for farmers, farm managers and those not employed (who possibly rely on seasonal agricultural related employment). The study found that although drought (socially defined) increased mental health problems and the use of medication, there was no evidence of an impact on the levels of alcohol consumption or self-medication.
The relationship between drought, farming and increased psychological distress is also evident in a much smaller study of 309 South Australians in farm families. Using the K10 measure, Gunn found that 66% of her participants were experiencing at least moderate levels of psychological distress, with 9% experiencing very high levels. These scores were found to be significantly higher than levels of psychological distress in the general Australian population. It is possible that the high levels of psychological distress are due to selection bias.

Several qualitative studies have also found that members of farm families experience increased levels of psychological stress during periods of drought. These studies tend to highlight the complexity of assessing the impact of drought on farm families and in particular the relationship between the financial, social and personal impacts of drought. They recognised the context within which farm families experience drought and that these experiences differ across regions, generations, farm type and viability.

In 2008, the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry released a report into the social impact of drought in which the links between drought and stress were well documented in submissions and the findings. The Expert Social Panel stated:

The Panel is deeply concerned by the extent of distress in drought-affected communities in rural Australia. Too many farm decisions are made under stress and without adequate consideration of the needs of the family and in the absence of prior thought and planning. Family and business are intricately linked for the majority of farm families, but decision-making mostly occurs in separation and often at the expense of each other.

Evidence of the relationship between farm families’ experience of drought and psychological distress is strengthening. That farm families are deeply affected by drought is not in question. However, identifying what might assist these families to alleviate such distress is not the same as identifying the factors that influence the resilience pathways of farm families when dealing with drought. Our focus on resilience draws upon a strengths-based approach to health and well-being: it focuses on people’s strengths rather than deficits when dealing with adversity.

Figure 1.1: Mental health by social definition of drought and occupation

Source: Edwards, Gray and Hunter, 2009
1.3 Resilience as a Process

So far we have used the term resilience without framing it in any particular way. We have, however, defined some of the concepts associated with resilience in this project, including the target population, the adversity, and the risk the adversity poses in two life domains, livelihood and mental health and wellbeing.

This section outlines our approach to resilience. In this project we conceptualise resilience as a process, not an outcome, nor a personality trait: we do not view individuals as ‘being resilient.’ Instead, we are interested in the processes, what we term resilience processes, that enhance an individual’s capacity to have a positive outcome when faced with adversity. From this perspective:

Resilience is a dynamic process wherein individuals display positive adaptation despite experiences of significant adversity or trauma.\(^{30}\)

Resilience is often domain specific. The processes that enhance an individual’s capacity to have a positive outcome when faced with adversity in one domain may not necessarily translate to all life domains. Our focus is on the domains of livelihood, and mental health and wellbeing.

When thinking about resilience as a process, two questions need to be addressed: a) how we will define the outcome and b) how we can best understand the relationship between the processes and the outcome.

The selected outcome – the positive adaptation we sought from farm families – was ‘getting by’ in the face of drought. The actual meaning of ‘getting by’ was left up to the participants to determine. The important point for this research is that farm families who defined themselves as getting by would be able to discuss with us the processes, resources and strategies that enabled them to do this successfully in the two selected domains. This is an outcome, defined by participants, which allowed us to investigate the kinds of processes that produce a positive outcome from the perspective of the participant.

In research that conceptualises resilience as a process, the measures are still in development. The Healthy Kids Resilience Questionnaire\(^{31}\) is a process centred measurement device: it assesses a range of psychosocial resources, skills, capabilities and talents available to an individual to negotiate adversity. Unfortunately, there is no adult equivalent device.

Most resilience measures essentially view resilience as an outcome. According to a systematic review of resilience measures conducted by Ahern et al, the most robust measure is Wagnild and Young’s (1993) Resilience Scale which measures two resilience factors: personal competence and acceptance of self and life.\(^{32}\) The outcome is therefore based on an individual’s performance on the measure: they are defined as resilient (having personal competence and acceptance of life) or not resilient (not having personal competence and acceptance of life). However, it is often not clear why a particular level of achievement is designated ‘resilient’, nor is there evidence that it is relevant to an individual’s lived experience of resilience.

We purposely avoided using outcomes derived from quantitative scales which rely on participants meeting an objective measure of positive adaptation. As discussed earlier, in the mental health field this often means the absence of psychological distress and we were focused on a salutogenic approach to health and wellbeing. Allowing the individual to
self-define a positive outcome allows for a wider view of what is and what is not positive given a person’s lived experience. For example, homelessness might be a positive outcome for an individual if the alternative is family violence. For these reasons we chose to use the outcome of getting by as defined by participants in reflecting upon their own lives.

This project aimed to identify the resources and strategies that farm families said helped them to get by during drought. It also aimed to understand how farm families navigated and used these resources and strategies: that is, the relationship between processes and outcome. To achieve these aims we used a model developed by Canadian psychologist, Michael Ungar, called the constructivist model of resilience as process. This model is phenomenological and understands resilience processes as multidimensional and contextually specific, complex and chaotic. It contrasts with the more deductive approaches which attempt to demonstrate clear pathways between cause and effect. Using the constructivist model opens up space for new questions to be asked about the way people negotiate and navigate their lives to achieve wellbeing, however they define it. Questions such as: What do people discern as healthy functioning or wellbeing? How do these views compete with the dominant discourses on health?

Research using this model can be qualitative or quantitative, but inductive, qualitative studies are favoured. This project uses primarily qualitative methods. It seeks to explore how farm families construct positive lives in the face of drought, to provide an opportunity for the members of farm families to discuss what wellbeing means to them and how they achieve it, and to analyse this information in a way that takes account of the context within which these processes are experienced.

Conceptualising resilience as a process therefore influenced the research design and, ultimately, the kinds of interventions that are likely to inform the development of resilience processes amongst farm families.

The preceding discussion provided the background for the research and clarified the conceptual framework within which the research was developed. To summarise, the following definitions inform the research design:

- **Resilience** - a dynamic process wherein individuals display positive adaptation despite experiences of significant adversity or trauma.
- **Target population** – farm families
- **Adversity** – a form of extreme climate variation, drought
- **Domains** in which farm families are at risk from the impact of drought – a) livelihood and b) mental health and wellbeing
- **Outcome** – getting by
- **Research model** – constructivist, phenomenological, qualitative
1.4  **Research Project Objectives**

This project investigates the resilience and the mental health and wellbeing of farm families experiencing climate variation in South Australia. Within the broader research topic, the project has four objectives, or sub-questions:

- What personal, social and contextual factors enable farm families in drought-affected areas of South Australia to get by?
- How do these factors differ across age, gender and region?
- How do personal, social and contextual factors impact on the experience of getting by for farm families operating in drought-affected areas of SA?
- What do these findings suggest for existing understandings of resilience, and how resilience may be enhanced across the farm population?

The research was conducted in accordance with ethics approval obtained through the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Ethics Committee (ref: 4039).
2. How We Conducted This Study

The project adopted a qualitative approach based on interviews and consultations. The strengths of this approach is that it facilitated the discovery of new or unnamed processes and provided the basis for understanding the contextual specificity within which farm families get by. The core data were obtained through interviews with farm families in four drought declared (exceptional circumstance) areas: the Central Eyre Peninsula (CEP), the Mid North (MN), the Lower Lakes and River Murray Corridor (LLRMC) and the Upper South East (USE). There were two waves of interviews, the first of which was conducted from March to June 2008. A follow up interview with the same farm families took place between March and May 2009. Additional data were collected from rural service providers through holding six focus group consultations in March 2009 and through a policy development workshop held in September 2009. A flow chart depicting the research process is in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1 Methods used in the project

![Flow chart of research methods](chart.png)

2.1 Wave 1: In-Depth Interviews and Questionnaire

A total of 148 adults from 80 farm families participated in the research. The sample of farm families was equally distributed across the four Exceptional Circumstance (EC) areas. Sampling was purposive and targeted members of farm families over the age of 18 years engaged in broadacre or dairy industries who were ‘getting by’ during extreme climate variation (i.e. drought).

Recruitment of participants began in December 2007 through a media release from Flinders University Press to South Australian media agencies; an article in the monthly SAFF Member’s Update (Dec 2007 – Feb 2008); and a general email to PIRSA’s regional contacts, followed by a targeted email direct to individual SAFF members and PIRSA contacts. Potential participants contacted the research team and were provided with an information sheet. Once they had agreed to participate, interview arrangements were made and they were asked to promote the study among their neighbours, friends and families.

The first wave interviews were in-depth and exploratory. They provided an opportunity to understand the factors and processes relating to the capacity of farm families to get by...
during adverse climatic events. Nearly all interviews were conducted in participants’ homes (two interviews were conducted in another mutually convenient location), requiring researchers to undertake extensive travel. Where more than one participant was in a farm family we interviewed them separately (in nine cases only one partner was interviewed). Separate interviews provided participants with more freedom to express their own individual views and more privacy for discussing sensitive issues, other household members, relationships, etc. Interviews went for approximately one hour.

The interviews centred on three questions:

- What is it like to farm around here
- How did you ‘get by’ during the drought
- Where do you see yourself / farm in 5 years

Within these questions, resilience processes relating to the following themes were discussed (see mind map in appendix B.1):

- Work and livelihood
- Health and wellbeing
- Social networks
- Climate variation

Qualitative interviewing requires high level skills in listening, developing rapport and empathy. To enhance the quality and consistency of the interview process, the research team – including two additional research assistants – participated in an intensive workshop about the interview technique, strategies for dealing with difficult issues, strategies for dealing with emotional or distraught interviewees, personal safety and writing post-interview notes.

In addition to the in-depth interview, a short questionnaire was developed with input from members of SAFF, PIRSA, Country Health (SA) and the Department of Health. This covered background information on participants’ age, gender, education, health and the farm. The questionnaire (appendix B.2) also included the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ12), an instrument that provides a general measure of mental health and wellbeing, and subjective measures of overall health.

The interview schedule and questionnaire were piloted and refined before being taken into the field. The questionnaire was completed by participants after the interview had taken place and then collated by the researchers before leaving the farm. All participants provided signed consent forms allowing the interview to be digitally recorded. The interviews were transcribed verbatim using a professional transcription service. Data collected via the questionnaire were analysed using SPSS. Qualitative data was analysed using NVIVO8.

Coding of first wave interviews was done inductively, that is, they emerged from the research. However, the process was also informed by the literature on resilience, drought and farming. Ten interviews were randomly selected for detailed analysis and discussed amongst the research team, resulting in the identification of the core coding structure. These codes were then refined throughout the analysis. All coding was reviewed by the Chief Investigator. In addition to the coding of individual interviews, farm profiles were
developed for each farm family. This provided an excellent summary of the farm family and was a useful reference for checking coding and emergent themes.

To protect the identity of participants their names are not used in this report. Instead we use an identifier based on their: region (CEP, MN, LLRMC, USE), family number (1-80), gender (male, female) and age (in years) as at the 2008 interview.

2.2 Wave 2: Follow Up Interviews

Participants in the first wave were asked for permission to reinterview them in 12 months time. All participants consented and were contacted early in 2009. Of the original 80 farm families, 75 participated in the second wave interviews with 132 people being reinterviewed (89%). Most of those withdrawing from the process did so because they were unavailable during the time period due to seeding or other work commitments.

The second wave interviews were conducted via the telephone and went for approximately 30 minutes. These interviews were more structured with the questions designed to:

- Understand factors affecting the capacity to continue to get by over time
- Clarify issues evident in first wave data
- Collect further information about emergent themes from the first wave

Slightly different questions were asked of men and women (appendix B.3). Questions relating to the GHQ12 and subjective measures of overall health were asked of everyone. Again, the interviews were recorded on digital recorders, professionally transcribed and de-identified. Quantitative data was entered into SPSS and qualitative data was entered into NVIVO8.

Coding of second wave interviews was achieved through auto-coding on the basis of each question, which meant that all the answers for a particular question were grouped. The findings within each question were then analysed for common themes and differences regarding age, gender and region.

2.3 Service Provider Consultations and Policy Development

During March 2009, a series of six consultations with rural service providers were organised across the four EC regions. These were held in:

- CEP (Wudinna) – 3 participants
- LLRMC (Murray Bridge, Renmark) – 9 participants
- MN (Clare, Orroroo) – 10 participants
- USE (Naracoorte) – 4 participants

Recruitment was by invitation. Key service providers were identified within each of the regions through an internet search of local government websites and websites of larger state-wide service providers. This included health, adult education, local government, financial, rural and community services. Telephone conversations with service providers and key members of the community in each region were used to broaden the pool of potential participants and to identify representatives from the various organisations. Invitation letters and information sheets about the preliminary research findings were
disseminated to 84 representatives from the identified service providers via email and were then followed up via telephone. Four of the consultations were held in regional Colleges of Technical and Further Education (TAFEs), and two were held in community meeting rooms. In total, 26 people participated in the consultations from services in the field of:

- Mental Health / health (6)
- Regional Development (4)
- Local Government (3)
- Agri-business (5)
- Bank (2)
- Rural Financial Counselling (2)
- Centrelink (2)
- TAFE (1)
- Women in Agriculture & Business (1)

The workshops were structured as a consultation rather than a focus group interview (appendix B.4). This facilitated the development of a conversation about the (interim) research findings, and generated specific discussion on issues that service providers thought were important including the relevance of the research to their area of service provision. The same facilitator led every group and was accompanied by a research assistant who took extensive notes. A debriefing session was held after the consultations and ideas generated from one consultation were fed into the agenda for the next. As participants came from a range of service areas, the data generated from the consultations varied according to the interests of those attending. The format for the consultations was semi-structured; they lasted between 60-90 minutes; were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. The data were analysed using NVIVO8. Findings from these consultations informed the discussion in Chapters 5 and 7.

In September 2009, a workshop was conducted to discuss what the research means for policy development, particularly in the areas of mental health and farming. The project reference group generated a list of 20 people to invite based on their position and knowledge of the policy focus areas and the SA Strategic Plan. Of these 14 attended. Four members of the reference group, the project manager with SA Dept of Health and four members of the research team also attended, bringing the total number to 23. Prior to the workshop a draft of the final report was distributed to participants in the workshop. A brief recap of the main findings was presented at the workshop and the aims of the workshop were outlined. The main aims were to a) develop policy recommendations, and b) clarify policy implications emerging from the findings (appendix B.5). These are reported in Chapter 7, with the main points outlined in the Key Messages.
3. Participant Profile

This chapter provides background information on the four regions selected for the study and an overview of the participants. The regional profile is based primarily on information gained through the first wave interviews. Information about the participants in the research is drawn from data collected in the questionnaires and second wave interviews. Individual responses are used to provide an overview of selected demographic characteristics of participants. This is followed by a descriptive analysis of their responses to the GHQ12 and other health measures. In the final section, farm based responses are used to summarise how participants thought the drought had impacted on the farm. Where data was collected in both 2008 and 2009 we have compared the results.

3.1 Regional Profile

This section provides a very brief overview of the four regions selected for this project. All had been declared an Exceptional Circumstance area at the time of the first wave of interviews (Figure 3.1) and were selected because of the different drought histories.

Figure 3.1: Map of South Australia indicating the four Exceptional Circumstance regions relevant to this project

As can be seen in Figure 3.2, parts of the regions selected have had their lowest rainfall on record over the past 3 years (July 2006 - June 2009) with the remaining areas being declared severely deficient. Despite the widespread experience of low rainfall, each region was slightly different in its history of drought and of the lived experience of farm families in dealing with drought.
Central Eyre Peninsula (CEP)

The Central Eyre Peninsula is the most vulnerable of the four regions to drought. All of the farm families we interviewed in this region were dryland farmers and therefore relied on rain to fall at appropriate times. From the interview data, participants discussed drought as occurring in the region about once every three to four years. This regularity meant farm families on the CEP were accustomed to operating in drought conditions. The 2006/2007 drought differed from previous experiences to the extent that many claimed it to be the worst ever experienced both in terms of length and dryness.

> Well, we’ve had, in the last five years, you could say that we’ve had two rainfall droughts and one financial drought. So the last two years has been below average rainfall, so we just haven’t physically grown the grain we normally have grown. The year before that, we grew a lot of grain, but the price was so low that it was sort of like a financial drought. [CEP11, male, 38yrs]

Early rains in 2007, following from drought in 2006, raised expectations of a good year. Grain prices were also good. These conditions meant that farm families appeared willing to take more risks in the marketing of their grain and entered into forward selling agreements. The lack of follow up rain (i.e. spring rains) meant that many participants could not fulfil their contracts. The financial implications of this meant that, for these farm families, the impact of the drought was exacerbated.
The Lower Lakes and River Murray Corridor (LLRMC)

Exacerbating the impact of drought on the LLRMC was the lack of water in the River Murray system and the long-term issues associated with access to, and quality of, river water for irrigation. For participants along the River Murray and Lakes, drought occurred around one year in every five. Once again the drought was experienced within a period of longer term drying.

In the past 10 years we’ve probably had three or four really good years and then quite a few lean ones and a drought. [LLRMC28, male, 50yrs]

Farm families interviewed in this region included both dryland farmers and irrigators. Most irrigators had a broadacre dryland component to their farm business. This area also included some dairy farmers, some of whom had to make considerable changes to their business to adapt to the new water restrictions.

The Mid North (MN)

There is a key difference among MN farm families depending on their location. For grain producers and mixed farms below Goyder’s line, 2006 and 2007 were considered years of drought. In 2006, rain was lower than average overall, while in 2007 early rain raised expectations of a good year ahead but the rain stopped and there was a dry spring.

Well it’s been a roller coaster since 2000. We’ve had – 2001 was the best year we’ve ever had. 2002 was the worst. And since then it’s been just the same except the last two years we’ve had dry finishes. 2003 was okay; 04 was dry; 05 was quite good; 06 was pretty dry and then 07 was, last year, wasn’t so bad even though it was a really dry finish. [MN57, male, 52 yrs]

For the graziers near or above Goyder’s line, things have been tough for quite a while and their circumstances were similar to those in the drier regions of CEP.

...I have had 18 months in that period [15 years], and that was 2001, that I didn’t have to worry about enough feed for the stock. So it’s thirteen and a half crook and 18 months of good stuff. [MN49, male, 53 yrs]

The Upper South East (USE)

The USE was the region least susceptible to drought. Considered to be a ‘safe’ rainfall area, the USE experienced drought at the same time that moves were underway to restrict access to groundwater (for irrigation). It was clear from the interviews that drought does not occur very often in the South East and that when it did occur farm families were taken by surprise and often did not have the experience to deal with it effectively.

I know we have ups and downs and this is a very safe area, so theoretically it shouldn’t be very stressful. I reckon in the very initial stage some people were finding it stressful because they’ve never had to deal with stuff like this before. [USE69, female, 48 yrs]
3.2 Demographic Profile

148 participants took part in the first wave of the research: 77 men and 71 women. Nearly 90% of the sample participated in the second wave. Five families and 16 people withdrew from the research in 2009 (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1: Numbers of participants by region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CEP</th>
<th>LLRMC</th>
<th>MN</th>
<th>USE</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Farm Families</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008 – wave 1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009 – wave 2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants (people)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008 – wave 1</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009 – wave 2</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Demographic characteristics central to the project were age, gender and ethnicity. Following the first wave interviews, age and gender were retained as analytical categories, but ethnicity was dropped due to the lack of diversity in the sample. The majority (97%) of participants were born in Australia. Of the remaining participants, two were from New Zealand, one from the United Kingdom, two from Nordic countries and three did not answer this question. Other demographic information gathered was marital status, education, and hours worked on-farm.

Gender

Where possible we purposely interviewed both men and women in farm families to develop a better understanding of how individuals within the farm family are able to get by when faced with an adversity such as drought. In this study, 48% of the participants were women and these were fairly evenly spread across the regions (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2: Numbers of men and women interviewed by region, 2008 and 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CEP</th>
<th>LLRMC</th>
<th>MN</th>
<th>USE</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority (95%) of the participants were living with a partner, of whom only two were not married. Of the 5% of participants who were single, all were male (two men never married and two were separated or divorced).

Farming is a gendered occupation and previous research on women’s experience of drought indicate that the Australian family farm is highly gendered both in the division of labour and in relations of power. Studies indicate that women can have up to four roles within the farm family: providing off-farm income, doing the housework, contributing to the farm business and providing the emotional and social support to the family. On top
of this farm women are also likely to have community involvements. Stehlik and her colleagues conducted a study of farm women in Queensland and NSW in the 1996-97 drought and found that:

- Women’s lack of power and control meant that they were less likely to be able to influence farm decisions
- Women’s participation in off-farm work meant that they were less available as the ‘reserve army of labour’ on farm
- Relationships with children were very important, with women being the primary care-givers
- The inside/outside demarcation of roles (women = inside) meant that many women had taken on the book-keeping role which had become a major stressor

The gendered division of labour was evident amongst participants in our project. While all men worked on-farm and only three had paid off-farm work, 51 of the 63 women interviewed in 2009 worked on-farm and 25 had paid off-farm work. Farm women specified their on-farm work as doing the bookwork only (20 women) or having a supportive role (24 women); with only seven women stating that they were equal partners sharing the decision-making and physical work. Women with pre-school children were less likely to be involved either on-farm or in paid work off-farm. As older children came on-farm to work the women’s on-farm role tended to reduce.

Figure 3.3: Average hours worked on-farm per week by gender, 2008

![Average hours worked on-farm per week by gender, 2008](image)

The number of hours worked on-farm reflected these differences (see Figure 3.3). Average hours worked for full time employed managers in the SA Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing industry is 53.9 hours for men and 46.1 hours for women. Participants in our study reflect similarly long hours for men, but fewer hours for women – possibly because women were more likely to combine on and off-farm work. In this study, men were more likely to work over 50 hours per week than women, while women were more likely to work less than 40 hours per week on farm related tasks. Interestingly, while 7 women said
they were equal partners, 19 women said they worked full-time (40 hours or more) on-farm.

Age

Farming is an ageing occupation. The ageing of the farm workforce has implications for the sustainability of the workforce, the capacity to adjust to structural changes in agriculture and for the provision of health and social services in rural areas. In this study, we explore how age influences the experience of drought and the types of resources and strategies used for getting by. To analyse age the sample was subdivided into three age groups: 20-39 years; 40-59 years; and 60+ years.

Women participants had a mean age of 47 years, which was lower than the mean age of men at 50 years. The average age of a South Australian farm man is 51 years (in 2006). The age range of participants was 25 to 78 years, with the majority of the sample falling within the 40-59 year age group.

There were differences in the age of participants across regions with those in the MN being marginally younger, and those in the USE being marginally older than other areas (Table 3.3).

Table 3.3: Age distribution of participants by region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>CEP</th>
<th>LLRMC</th>
<th>MN</th>
<th>USE</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20-39</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-59</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60+</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean age (SD)</td>
<td>48 yrs (10)</td>
<td>49 yrs (12)</td>
<td>44 yrs (11)</td>
<td>54 yrs (8)</td>
<td>49 yrs (11)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3 Health and Mental Health Profile

Maintaining health and mental health is important for not only wellbeing, but also for productivity and family functioning. We included measures of health in both the 2008 and 2009 interviews. As the numbers of participants were small, it is difficult to draw conclusions from the findings. We stress that all comparisons between groups made below are tentative only and require further research on a larger scale.

General Health

Participants were asked to make a general assessment of their own health against a five point scale ranging from excellent through to poor. The same measure of self assessed health is used in the South Australian Monitoring and Surveillance System (SAMSS) surveys. Although there are differences between the population groups, the results of the SAMSS survey indicate that 16.6% of the general population aged 16+ years rate their general health as fair-poor. This is similar to the self-assessed health of participants in this study in 2009 at 16.2%, although this had risen from 11% in 2008.
As Figure 3.4 shows, there are differences in health status between regions and within regions. Over the time period, the CEP had the highest proportion of participants assessing their health to be fair-poor, while the USE had the lowest. Within regions, the CEP and USE did not change much over the time period, while the LLRMC had a major increase in the numbers of participants rating their health as fair-poor. The increase in the proportion of people ranking their health to be fair-poor over time could indicate an increase in the health effects of the drought.

**Figure 3.4: Proportion of participants with self-assessed health rating of fair-poor by region, 2008 and 2009**

The SAMSS survey indicates that there are differences in self-assessed health by gender, with women (17%) being slightly more likely than men (16.6%) to rate their health as being fair-poor. Amongst our participants the findings differed by year. In 2008, women (10%) were less likely than men (12%) to rate their health fair-poor. In 2009, there was quite a large increase in the overall numbers of participants in the fair-poor health category. Differences between men and women were smaller with men (16.1%) slightly less likely than women (17.2%) to say their health was fair-poor.

**Figure 3.5: Proportion of participants with self-assessed health rating of fair-poor by age, 2008 and 2009.**
Age can also account for differences in health, with people generally having poorer self-assessed health as they age. While this was certainly the case for our participants in 2008, those aged 60+ years had better self-assessed health than other age categories in 2009 (Figure 3.5). However, it should be noted that the numbers in the 60+ year age group were small which makes comparisons difficult.

**Mental Health**

As a measure of psychological wellbeing, participants completed the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ12) in 2008 and again in 2009. The GHQ12 is a mental health measure, with higher scores reflecting greater distress. Scores ranging from 0 to 15 reflect normal functioning, whilst scores ranging from 16 to 20 reflect evidence of distress, and scores above 20 are suggestive of severe psychological distress. In 2008, 15.3% of participants in this study showed evidence of distress with a further 4.9% having more severe distress. The extent of distress was slightly lower by 2009 with 11.2% of participants showing evidence of distress and 4.0% having more severe distress. These figures differed by region, gender and age.

**Figure 3.6: Evidence of distress – severe distress (GHQ12 score >15) by region, 2008 and 2009**

![Figure 3.6](image_url)

Figure 3.6 demonstrates regional differences for participants scoring >15 and therefore showing evidence of distress or severe distress. Participants in all of the regions except for LLRMC improved their levels of distress between 2008 and 2009 with those in the CEP and MN improving by more than 10 percentage points each.

In 2008, women were more likely than men to show evidence of distress or severe distress (21.4% women, 18.9% men), although the difference was small. By 2009, however, the proportion of women in this category had fallen to 13.9%, while for men the fall to 17.2% was much smaller. Of those women who withdrew from the project in 2009, only one had a GHQ12 score of >15 in 2008, compared to three of the men suggesting that attrition is unlikely to have skewed this result. This result may therefore demonstrate that women participating in this study are recovering psychologically from drought more quickly than men.

GHQ12 scores improved across all age groups over the 12 months. The proportion of participants aged 40-59 years scoring >15 fell from 19.2% to 12.4% between 2008 and 2009.
Younger participants (20-39 years) in this category fell from 16.7% to 12%, while those aged 60+ years fell from 30% to 27.8%. Mindful that there are differences in the size of the sample across age groups, our findings suggest that of all the participants showing evidence of distress – severe distress, it is those in the 60+ range that have both the highest rates of distress and the least recovery from stress over time.

These data demonstrate that from the participants’ perspective there is a difference between getting by and the absence of psychological distress. Many of the participants would have been excluded from an investigation into resilience on the basis of their GHQ12 score had we used a standard cut-off point for the presence of psychological distress. From a subjective viewpoint, however, participants felt that they were getting by despite their psychological distress. The process of resilience that they use to do this are discussed in chapters 4, 5 and 6.

We add another note of caution in the use of the GHQ12 as a measure of psychological distress in relation to drought. It was clear from the comments made by participants when completing the GHQ12 that there were problems in using it for this purpose. One problem was lack of the relevance of the four week time frame for considering responses to the questions: that is, questions are framed by ‘in the last four weeks have you...’ Participants would often comment that the last four weeks had been no worse than the previous six or twelve months, which had been stressful. Their responses therefore did not always reflect the level of psychological distress that they felt they were under. The second problem was that issues other than the drought impinged on their response. These varied from having adult children who had recently separated from their partners; having teenagers about to leave home and go to boarding school; having parents or children with health problems; and so on. These dilemmas with the use of quantitative measures of psychological distress add to our concern about their use as a measurement of wellbeing.

3.4 Financial Impact of Drought on Farm Families

Although most of our research focuses on individual participants, the questionnaire data also provided information about the farm family as a unit. This was important in relation to livelihood and financial viability of the farm. The majority (over 70%) of farm families had been operating the farm for more than 20 years, with 5% having either purchased or moved onto the farm within the past five years. Most farm families envisaged living on the farm until a time of their choice, although three were currently looking to sell or lease, with another six unsure how long they were likely to stay on farm. By 2009, one farm family had exited the farm and another was in the process of doing so. The levels of equity in the farm provide an indication of farm viability with 73% of farms having more than 60% equity. Of the 13% of farms with less than 40% equity, the majority were in the LLRMC and CEP.

In 2008, 70% of farm families said that their financial position had become worse or much worse due to the drought, with two farms in the USE indicating that their financial position had improved. The impact of the drought on farm output was to reduce it overall, with just over a fifth of farms in the LLRMC, MN and USE and nearly half of the farms in the CEP indicating that their output had been reduced to its lowest point or had been eliminated completely. In summary, the drought had limited the capacity of most farms to provide a sustainable livelihood.

Discretionary income (self-disclosed) is another indicator of the capacity of the business to support the household and the farm. In both 2008 and 2009, participants were asked the
extent to which their income was meeting needs on a five point scale (from not meeting needs to meeting all needs plus savings). Results are shown in Figure 3.7. Farms on the CEP have the least amount of discretionary income with the situation worsening over time. In the LLRMC the numbers with discretionary income increased over the 12 month period, but the numbers of farm families not able to meet their needs stayed the same. In the MN, the capacity of family income to meet needs increased overall. The situation in the USE was polemic, with more farm families not able to meet their needs, but only a small decline in the proportion with discretionary income.

**Figure 3.7: Capacity of family income to meet needs in each region in 2008 and 2009 (%)**

Recent research on the impact of drought on farm household income suggests that the experiences of participants in this research are similar to that of farm families in other regions across Australia.  

### 3.5 Getting By Over Time

To gauge the extent to which resilience could be sustained by farm families over time, a question in the second wave interviews asked about their capacity to get by over the past 12 months, with responses covering a 5 point scale from ‘increased a lot’ to ‘decreased a lot.’ As Table 3.4 shows, 47.2% of participants said that their capacity to get by during this period had increased, with 20% experiencing a decreased capacity to get by.

There were differences in region, gender and age. Participants in the LLRMC were less likely to have increased capacity than those in other regions. In contrast participants in the USE had markedly increased capacity compared to other regions. Within our sample, women had increased their capacity to get by more than men had, while older participants (60+) had a lower capacity to get by than those under 60 years.
Table 3.4: Capacity to get by over last 12 months, by region, gender, age (N=125)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Increased %</th>
<th>Same %</th>
<th>Decreased %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CEP</td>
<td>44.1</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LLRMC</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>23.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MN</td>
<td>43.4</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>19.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USE</td>
<td>59.4</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Increased %</th>
<th>Same %</th>
<th>Decreased %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>47.2</td>
<td>32.8</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Increased %</th>
<th>Same %</th>
<th>Decreased %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20-39</td>
<td>52.0</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-59</td>
<td>49.4</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60+</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>38.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total  | 47.2        | 32.8   | 20.0        |

In many ways this was a surprising finding as we anticipated that time would decrease the capacity to get by. Partly the response reflected a decrease in the severity of drought in parts of SA – including some parts of the USE and lower MN – and improvements in grain prices. It is also indicative of the strength of the participants in negotiating their (personal, social, physical and economic) environment to engage in the kinds of resilience processes that worked for them. We asked those participants who said their capacity to get by had increased, what they thought had contributed to this. Two main reasons were given: increased confidence in their personal coping capacity; and increased confidence in their business strategies. On a personal level, participants discussed finding useful strategies for dealing with stress and realising that having been through so much, their threshold was higher than they thought.

Knowing that my threshold, I suppose, is probably bigger than what I thought it was. Because when dad went and then [daughter] did her knee and the dog got run over I sort of jokingly said to my friends ‘well, that’s the end of this month, it can only get better’ and then the next thing happened and it didn’t get better and it didn’t get better again, like it just kept getting worse, but then I got through it. So what I thought was my threshold actually stretched out to be quite a lot bigger than what I thought it was so I suppose that I know that I can handle a lot more than what I thought I could, if that makes sense. [USE68, female, 49 years]

On a business level, participants discussed the ways in which their drought-related business strategies had worked out, and that they were now more familiar with the situation and had greater confidence in their business decision-making.

I guess because of a lot of the changes that we’ve made with the farm I can see things starting to head in the right direction so I’ve got justification for some of the previous decisions I’ve made and so I guess you feed on that a little bit so it gives you just a little bit more confidence to continue on sort of thing. [MN48, male, 38]
For those participants whose capacity to get by had decreased, this was primarily related to the ability to sustain their livelihood. Concerns were raised about whether they wanted to keep borrowing money, the capacity of the farm to support them (especially if sons were on-farm), the ability to sell the farm if they needed to and, for older farm families, whether they had enough equity/assets to retire.

“It just all starts getting hard after a while. Sooner or later you start wondering how much money do you want to blow farming, that’s the thing. Like I said to you earlier I’m young and I’m sure I’ll be able to pay back any monies that I borrow eventually but the mind boggles sometimes” [MN52, male, 28 years]

Approximately 40% of the farm business units in this research indicated that they would be reviewing their on-farm viability in the near future, two thirds of these within the next 12 months. Despite this, several participants stated that they would be okay, and had the capacity to get by no matter what.

“I’m confident about selling, that if I get out and sell I’m confident I’ll be able to do something else. It’s like if you’re going to do something else you need to close the door before you can do something else … there’s drought here and it’s depressing, it’s something I don’t need at this time in my life.” [CEP6, male, 64 years]

### 3.6 Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the participants as individuals and as farm families located in a particular region. The research examined differences in region, gender, age and ethnicity as factors that could have a bearing on the resilience of farm families during drought. Due to the lack of diversity in the sample, we were not able to differentiate responses on the basis of ethnicity. In this chapter the age, gender and regional profile of the participants were outlined. In the following chapters these differences will be discussed further where relevant.

The research was conducted across four regions in South Australia, each with different historical exposure to drought. The CEP had the most frequent history of drought and although farm families in the CEP had drought experience, they had been the most financially disadvantaged by the 2006-2008 drought. The difficulties were reflected in a slightly higher proportion of participants (compared to other regions) indicating that their capacity to get by had decreased, although the proportion that had increased their capacity to get by was still marginally higher than that of participants in the MN.

In the LLRMC the drought was exacerbated by the lack of water for irrigation. While dryland farmers had experienced drought in the LLRMC previously, it was relatively new to irrigators. There was quite a bit of diversity within the region and this is reflected in the polarisation in the capacity to meet needs. Over the 12 month research period, the numbers of farm families not meeting their needs stayed steady at around 20%, while the number with discretionary income more than doubled. Overall, however, the LLRMC had a lower proportion of participants who had increased their capacity to get by.

Farm families in the MN indicated that their capacity to meet their needs had improved, and, for over 40%, their capacity to get by more generally had increased. The MN also had intra-regional differences in their historical exposure to drought, depending on their location relative to Goyder’s Line.
The USE rarely encounters drought and for the farm families in this research, this was their first experience of it. Although the USE had a high proportion of farm families with discretionary income, the numbers not meeting their financial needs had increased five-fold in the 12 month period. Nevertheless, out of all the regions, the USE had the highest number of participants indicating that their capacity to get by had increased.

The sample consisted of approximately 10% more men than women and this stayed consistent across the two waves of interviews. Farming was seen to be *gendered* in the division of labour and the hours worked. All of the men in the research worked on farm, most for long hours, and only a few had taken off-farm work. In contrast farm women worked fewer hours on-farm, were more likely to have off-farm work and rarely considered themselves to be equal partners in the farm business. There were also gendered differences in health outcomes and capacity to get by. Over the 12 month period, for example, women’s health tended to fluctuate more than men’s. However, the data suggest that women recovered psychologically more quickly than men, and more women had increased their capacity to get by over the 12 month period.

Participants in the project ranged in age from 25 to 78 years. Farming is an ageing occupation and older participants (60+ years) had the highest rates of psychological distress and the least recovery over time compared to other age groups. Despite this, they demonstrated an improvement in their physical health. Older participants also found it more difficult to get by over time, with the proportion that had decreased their capacity to get by more than doubling the proportion for other age groups. In interpreting these results, however, the difference in the size of each age cohort needs to be taken into consideration (i.e. this was not a random, nor representative sample).
4. Resilience: Stance

Analysis of the data revealed that the process of resilience can only be understood by appreciating that people view the world from a particular stance, and that this stance influences how they actively engage in their lives to deal with their experience of drought. This stance positioned participants to engage with their environment in ways that enabled them to secure and use the resources and strategies necessary for them to get by.

Our understanding of the stance was developed from meta-coding the data. This type of analysis begins with the participants’ discussion of their experiences of being in a farm family during a drought. We then analyse this information by drawing on social theories to develop a conceptual framework. This helps to order, synthesize and evaluate the information to produce a more robust and detailed understanding of resilience. The meta-coding resulted in the development of a conceptual framework of resilience as a process in which three elements are critical:

- **Stance**: the position from which participants make decisions (including non-decisions) and take action.

- **Context**: the personal, social, natural, political and economic environment within which decisions are made and action taken.

- **Resilience processes**: the resources and strategies used to facilitate a positive outcome in dealing with adversity

These elements are discussed separately in this and the following two chapters.

Everybody has a stance. What we found was that the men and women in our research exhibited a particular stance. This stance had four main features relevant to the research: participants had an approach to farming as a business lifestyle, a positive construction of self, contingent optimism, and engaged in active decision making. While these features were common across the interviews, the stance was enacted in gendered ways. We therefore differentiate between the stance of farm men and farm women in our discussion.

4.1 Stance: Farm Men

In this project, individual farm men had a relatively similar stance to one another. Within the stance, slight variations between age groups were evident, particularly in the emphasis placed on various aspects of the stance.

**Farming as a business lifestyle**

The men participating in this research viewed farming as a business lifestyle. The distinction between farming as a business and farming as a lifestyle has been one of the more enduring in the farming literature. The difference between the two is that a business oriented farm is expected to make decisions that are utilitarian, while a lifestyle oriented farm will make decisions based on identity and family concerns. In recent years, Australian farmers have been encouraged by industry, education and government organisations to adopt a more managerial view of farming and there is now a general view that farmers are more likely to view the farm as a business rather than a lifestyle. However, this dichotomous approach to farming was not upheld in our research.
Certainly farm men placed a lot of emphasis on the farm business. It was undoubtedly their priority. This was qualified by the recognition that the business would not be profitable without the lifestyle component, in particular the tendency for farm men to work long hours for a low hourly rate (and often expect the same from other family members). The lifestyle element of farming was also important for sustaining their enthusiasm for the business. Farm men derived a great deal of job satisfaction and motivation from the lifestyle elements of the work: their relative autonomy in making day-to-day decisions, their sense of belonging to the physical and natural environment, their involvement in family life and the ways in which they constructed a positive sense of self from farming (see below). Lifestyle was seen as important, but it was a lifestyle that was firmly attached to farming as a business. In capturing this dual focus, we use the term farming as a business lifestyle.

**Positive construction of self**

Farm men had a positive sense of themselves as farmers. They derived this from a number of sources including:

- Their attachment to the land. This was discussed both in specific and generic ways. At a specific level, men might be attached to a particular farm while at a general level the attachment was more to land per se, indicating that, for them, this was a transferable attachment.

- The moral meaning they found from farming. Men viewed farming as a worthwhile activity that met an essential need: that of feeding people. In some cases men also added that they not only produced food, but they produced quality food. The trend toward production for bio-fuels raised an ethical dilemma for those who thought this aspect of self was particularly important.

- Their interaction with the natural environment. Working in the open air, working with animals, growing crops, and nurturing the land were all discussed as inherently satisfying.

- The sense of achievement associated with dealing with challenges and realising their potential. This usually related to farming, but could also relate to other facets of their life such as family or their role in the community.

- Recognising they were more than ‘just’ a farmer. Where men had multiple roles, they valued these as providing options and connecting them with the world beyond farming. These roles include being a parent, community leader, having a trade or profession (outside of farming), or significant off-farm interests.

**Contingent optimism**

Optimism has been long associated with farming, and is featured in most studies on the capacity of farm men to cope with stress. We also found that the farm men in this research were generally optimistic about farming and their future, even in relation to rainfall and the weather. However this optimism was contingent upon a realistic assessment of what was actually happening. For example, their optimism was strong when it was raining (or looked as though it was going to rain) and remained strong until there was concrete evidence (e.g. wilted crops, low yield) to suggest that it needed to be moderated. It took quite a bit to shake the optimism – optimism was their default position – but throughout the year optimism would wax and wane.
Active decision making

Farming requires constant decision-making, and these decisions can have large financial and material implications. Confidence and competence in decision making was a resource that farm men drew upon when dealing with the drought (see chapter 6). In relation to their stance, farm men positioned themselves as active decision makers within a world that was not entirely certain or knowable, and was almost always complex. Decision-making occurred through a process of:

- **Bounded rationality**: Rationality, the process of making decisions based on maximising gain or utility, is bounded when optimal choice is limited or restricted. This occurs when information is incomplete, such as when it is contradictory, partially provided, unavailable or unknown; or when the decision-maker acts with incomplete information, attaches approximate values to outcomes or explores a limited number of alternatives. Our analysis of the decision-making processes of farm men indicate that farm related decisions typically display one or more elements of being bounded. Farm men were not economic rationalists, instead they sought the most satisfactory outcome given the limitations of the information to hand.

This is not to say that men did not try to find the best information, or use good planning processes. It is just that even given this, much information relating to running a farm business is uncertain (e.g. weather, grain prices, yield) and therefore choices, including risk management strategies, are based on judgement, experience and intuition. As a result, decisions often involved compromise (such as applying fertiliser on a nutrient replacement rather than yield optimisation basis or returning to work early post-injury or illness); managing contradictions (for example, the information relating to climate change); and opportunism (for example, buying or leasing another property while otherwise implementing cost containment strategies). The process of bounded rationality was particularly evident in the decisions farm men made about selling grain - whether or not to forward sell, and when to ‘lock in’ their price. For older men, bounded rationality also influenced their decisions about the kinds of work they undertook on-farm whereby they selected those tasks they could do and compensated for their decreasing physical ability by using supports available to them, including other family members, experience, etc. (an approach called selective optimisation with compensation).

- **Reflexivity**: Being reflexive means having the ability (and willingness) to question and review practices and decisions, with the goal of continual improvement. This involves being open to change, but the extent of this openness can vary. For example, a number of farm men in the project considered themselves to be conservative farmers which would usually indicate a resistance to change. However, these farmers were not necessarily resistant to change, but cautious about how they went about it (e.g. they might overestimate the costs and underestimate the returns of a particular course of action); or they might be resistant to some forms of change (e.g. chemical dependent cropping) but be remarkably open to others (e.g. biological farming). Other farmers viewed themselves as innovative and entrepreneurial: they might have developed their own markets, experimented with new commodities, or shifted to biological farming. Although there was a difference between conservative and innovative farm men in the extent to which they were open to change, they could still be seen...
as being reflexive – the goal of continual improvement through revising current practices and ways of thinking was evident across the spectrum. For the most part improvement was related to the farm business, but it could also be related to non-farm activities and decisions, including retirement or exit decisions.

- Healthy scepticism: Farm men displayed a ‘healthy’ scepticism (that is, it did not tend to succumb to cynicism) toward government, service-providers, policy, ‘official’ information and new ideas. This scepticism resulted in a cautious approach to change, and enabled farm men to be discerning of the hyperbole around particular issues (those mentioned include mental health and climate change), without negating either the need to know or the broader usefulness of action taken to address issues. For example, during the drought rural communities received a lot of information, attention and services relating to mental health. The hype around mental health was often mentioned (to the extent that some said they were ‘over’ the whole mental health thing), but in a way that recognised the value in having mental health services available even if they did not view them as personally relevant. There was a similar response to climate change. And, for those men involved in advocacy around the use of the Murray-Darling system, their healthy scepticism meant that they did not have high expectations of government even though they thought it important to be involved in the process of change.

4.2 Stance: Farm Women

Farm women displayed more diversity in their stance than farm men. This is not surprising given that for all of the farm men in this project, farming was both a personal and an occupational identity; while for farm women, these two bases of identity were more likely to be separate and may or may not be linked to farming. For farm women, the stance they adopted in order to negotiate with their environment for resources and strategies to produce positive mental health and livelihood outcomes, was not so focused on the farm business, and often extended beyond this to be more focused on family and community. Differences between farm women were influenced by their level of involvement in the farm business; their off-farm employment; and their care responsibilities for children, grandchildren, parents and other family. In discussing the stance of farm women, below, we maintain the four key themes identified in the men’s stance.

Where farm women were active in the farm business and viewed themselves as equal partners, their stance was similar to that of farm men but with more of an emphasis on their responsibilities as a parent and the implications of decisions on the farm family. In contrast, some farm women had constructed independent lives from the farm business: they had their own income and/or investments and controlled their time and level of contribution to the farm. This independence may or may not have been at their instigation – some farm women were not permitted a role on farm (for example, where brothers were in the farm partnership and had decided not to involve their spouses). Although having a separate role from the farm business, these women did have an important role in the farm family because they placed high priority on the needs of family when constructing their lives. The majority of the farm women in this project (over 70%) were located between the two ends of this spectrum. For all women, stance was a product of the negotiation between their own needs and that of farm, family and work with this negotiation taking place within the gendered social/power relationship of the farm family.
Farming as a business lifestyle

While farm women viewed farming as a business lifestyle, it had different implications depending on their level of involvement in the farm business. Other than those women who were actively involved in the farm business (where the business lifestyle was more jointly constructed), the business lifestyle of farming meant that farm women had to accept that farm men place priority on maintaining the business lifestyle in relation to resources (for example their time and where farm income was spent).

For farm women, farming shaped their social roles and influences their lives even if they did not have an active on-farm role. The business lifestyle of farming meant that farm women would:

- Be dependent on negotiations with their spouse – and sometimes their spouse’s family – about taking an on-farm role (unless the farm was inherited by the farm woman or they entered into farming as a joint venture)
- Negotiate their roles in relation to the needs of the farm:
  - as a business and source of income/livelihood, e.g. whether they could or wanted to be involved; whether they needed to earn off-farm income to provide for the family (and sometimes support the farm)
  - as a lifestyle, e.g. whether it gave them freedom to do what they wanted with their time, or to do things with children;
- Be more likely to prioritise their own paid work over that of working on-farm where the farm business did not provide them with security in livelihood. This security may be about securing income for the things they value, over the things that are valued by farm men (who tend to prioritise the farm business).

While the business lifestyle of farming could be viewed as placing constraints on the lives of farm women, it was also a source of satisfaction. Farm women viewed the farm business as providing the lifestyle that they enjoyed. In particular, the farm was viewed as being:

- a good place for raising children; allowing high levels of involvement in children’s lives and sense of continuity between generations (for those who had adult children come on-farm)
- a place to connect with the natural environment; particularly valued for getting them outdoors, and the quietness and sense of space

Positive construction of self

For the majority of farm women interviewed, their lives as farm women began when they partnered with a farmer. A few had farming backgrounds, and a couple had developed a farm business with their partner, but often being a farm woman was an identity that was developed in relation to the more established identity of their partner as farmer. Their construction of self was therefore more reflective and explicit than that of farm men. It was also more fluid as it tended to accommodate the changing needs of the farm business and the changing needs of family. Key events, such as having children, succession or
taking off-farm work could trigger a re-evaluation and reconstruction of their sense of self.

Farm women derived a positive sense of self from:

- Being involved in something personally meaningful that (often) went beyond the farm business. This included caring for family, being engaged in community activities or groups, or taking off-farm work.

- Having relative autonomy over aspects of their life that were important to them. For some women this was over their time or their personal space, others sought an income over which they had control. Relative autonomy would also provide women with a sphere of their lives over which they had primary responsibility. Mostly this sphere was family, but it was also discussed in relation to on-farm tasks (e.g. working with stock).

- Their connection with place – this was sometimes discussed in relation to a specific piece of land (i.e. the farm), but ‘place’ also incorporated home, community and the landscape more generally.

- Gaining a sense of achievement from something they (rather than the farm business per se) had personally contributed to and valued. This might be related to their contribution on-farm or to other paid work, but more often to their home (getting a room painted), and their community role (leadership, making a difference).

**Contingent optimism**

By the 2009 interviews, farm women were somewhat less optimistic than farm men about the year ahead. Although a slight majority of farm women said that they were optimistic, around 40% indicated that they were ‘hopeful’ rather than optimistic, while a small number of women said that they were pessimistic. This was despite farm women being more likely than men to have increased their capacity to get by (see section on resilience processes). The default position for farm women was to have a positive attitude toward the future but, in comparison to farm men, one that was less based on a deliberate assessment of the future and more on an emotional desire (hope) for a good outcome.

Although optimism for farm women was contingent on the weather and the outlook for input and output prices, this was not only because these influenced income but because they had an impact on family relationships. Other family issues and relationships were also more likely to influence the level of women’s optimism.

**Active decision making**

Previous research on farm women’s decision-making has focused on women’s capacity to influence farm business decisions and argue that the power relations of marriage and of farming constrain the extent to which women make a difference to decisions. Our research indicates that women’s involvement in farm business decisions was often restricted, but there were differences between the women we interviewed. For example, women who did not have any on-farm role were less likely to be involved in any farm-related decisions. In contrast, farm women who worked full-time in the farm business tended to view themselves as partners in decision-making and having influence over on-farm decisions. Farm women who said they had a ‘supportive’ on-farm role – that is, they
supported their spouse in his work – said they were consulted about decisions, with some having the power of veto over issues that they deemed important. Many farm women had actively decided what kinds of farm business decisions they wanted to be involved in, and most had other spheres of their lives in which they were active decision makers.

The particular elements of the stance which farm women took when engaging in decision-making are discussed below.

**Basing decisions on a self-in-relation:** Rather than view themselves as an isolated individual, farm women tended to organise and frame their decision-making in the context of important relationships. This included relationships with their spouse and with their children and was evident in the ways in which women made decisions about their roles and about the health, education and wellbeing of the family (especially children). Women also extended this self-in-relation when they mediated between members of farm families (especially father-son relationships).

Decisions within the farm family were often the result of negotiation, and these were not only based on bounded rationality (as discussed in relation to farm men), but also on the farm women’s relational skills.

**Latent source of power:** Farm women made decisions within gendered power relations that generally favoured men and (often as a consequence) the farm business. However, farm women are not without sources of power and although these are often latent, they provide women with a basis for negotiating a positive outcome from decisions. Sources of power include having an independent income, being the primary caregiver within the family (especially important for achieving outcomes they want for their children), being the book-keeper and therefore the source of knowledge about the financial state of the farm business, and being in a marriage (which if dissolved, could be costly to the farm business and affect their husband’s capacity to continue farming). This latent source of power provided a basis for farm women to be consulted on those decisions that they thought were important: there was often a threshold beyond which decision-making became ‘joint’.

**Insider/outsider perspective:** Farm women were more likely than farm men to have come into an established farm business; and they were also more likely to have work and other responsibilities that brought them into contact with the world off-farm. This provided farm women with an ‘outsider’ perspective which allowed them to take a different stance in relation to the ongoing viability of the farm business than men. They appeared to be more able, for example, to imagine a life beyond the farm whether that was a result of the impact of drought or as a result of retirement.

4.3 **Summary**

This chapter outlined the stance that farm men and women displayed in order to get by during drought. A stance is reflective of a person’s identity, social location, and social roles and is the position that is assumed when making decisions and non-decisions and taking action. We identified four elements of our participants’ stance that influenced their approach to getting by: a commitment to farming as a business lifestyle; having a positive sense of self; having contingent optimism; and engaging in active decision-making.

Differences within these elements of the stance between farm men and farm women were identified. The stance of farm men was strongly related to their primary role in the farm business. While the stance of farm women was more diverse, depending on their level of
involvement in the farm business, their family responsibilities and their off-farm roles it was evident that family relationships strongly influenced their decisions and actions. Farm women and farm men had different bases of power which influenced how they positioned themselves and positioned each other within the farm family.

Although a stance is relatively stable, it was apparent from the interviews that participants constructed and reconstructed it as circumstances changed. There were several ‘key events’ that could alter a stance, including: moving on-farm, taking off-farm work (or moving off-farm), intergenerational transitions, having children, and financial pressure. This fluidity in a stance means that it is likely that aspects of it can be learned and a stance can be shaped to enhance an individual’s capacity to successfully negotiate with their environment for resources and strategies that could help them get by during adversity.
5. Resilience: Context

From the interviews it was clear that the context within which farm families experienced drought shaped the ways in which they responded. Context provided them with opportunities to respond in particular ways, but also constraints on the options available to them. In analysing this data, parallels with the social determinants of health framework emerged. Resilience, as with health, is affected by social, economic, political, environmental and cultural determinants. In this section we identify those determinants that were specifically mentioned by the farm families who participated in this research as being relevant to the ways in which they engaged in resilience processes during the drought. In particular, we highlight the regional differences evident in our research.

In basing our understanding of context in the information gathered in this project we can only report on those aspects of the context that participants discussed in relation to drought. More detailed explanations of the context (in particular the industry, government and economic context) within which farm families conduct their lives is available in the Productivity Commission’s 2009 report on their inquiry into Government Drought Support and in various ABARE publications.

5.1 Spheres of Influence

The influence of the context differs depending on the immediacy to the lives of farm families. As a means of illustrating the relationship between aspects of the context, we distinguish between the different layers, or spheres, of influence. We identified three spheres of influence (Figure 5.1), with the individual located in the centre of the micro sphere of farm business and family. These are embedded in the meso level sphere of community, ecology/place (the natural and physical elements of the environment), and industry. In turn these are embedded in the macro sphere of government, economy and society. In the remainder of this chapter, we draw on the interviews with farm families and the consultations with service providers in each of the regions to highlight those aspects of the context that were particularly relevant during the drought.

Figure 5.1: Spheres of influence on the resilience of farm families
5.2 Micro Sphere

Within the farm family, individuals are located in the nexus between farm (as business and place) and family. As discussed in the previous chapter both the farm and the family were central to the ways in which participants developed their stance, a stance that was gendered, but not necessarily static. While the stance influenced the ways in which participants traversed the context in order to secure the required resilience processes, the context also influenced the construction of the stance and the ways in which it changed over the life-course.

While the relationship between farm and family can be (and often was) harmonious the drought appeared to exacerbate any tensions and therefore impact on the wellbeing of individuals. The key issues identified by participants in relation to the context of farm and family which influenced the ways they accessed resources and strategies were as follows.

**Farm**

The farm was discussed as both a place and a business, with each of these having different implications for participants.

As a place the farm was valued for its natural environment, peacefulness and as a ‘haven’ for participants. However, its location, in particular its distance from towns influenced the cost (in time and money) of accessing services and participants’ involvement in the community or off-farm work. These costs were proportionally higher in relation to income during the drought, and in some instances meant that participants reduced the number of visits to town and, as a consequence, their social contact.

As a business, a number of features were discussed as relevant to participants’ capacity to access finance. Some of these are considered in the following sections. Here, the most relevant aspect of this context was the financial health of the farm prior to and during the drought. Participants who had bought a property just prior to the drought and those who had lower equity levels in the farm found it more difficult to either negotiate for financial resources or feel confident that they could manage the acquired levels of debt.

**Family**

The family was mostly discussed as a source of strength, and was often given as a reason why farm families stayed on-farm rather than exiting. However, the family context depended on the stage in the life course and whether there were intergenerational issues relating to the farm business.

The family context was a particular source of strength when children were young or school-age and when a child (or children, usually male) had come back on-farm. Nevertheless, the responsibilities of raising, educating and maintaining the health of children shaped the strategies and resources that participants – especially women – utilised as a resilience process. The emphasis in many farm families (especially those under the age of 50 years) on making life better for the next generation, has meant that farm children received a broad range of opportunities and experiences, including support in post-school education, exposure to other lifestyles (e.g. city life) and encouragement to travel. Younger participants in this project were more likely to have had off-farm occupations and professions than other age groups.
When children decided to come back on-farm, often after a period of working elsewhere, issues surrounding intergenerational transfer were raised. At the very least it added another layer of financial commitment to the farm family, but it also raised issues regarding intra-family relationships, the feasibility of retirement and sometimes the capacity of the farm to support two families. In negotiating strategies for livelihood and wellbeing during the drought some of the farm families in this project were working through intergenerational issues, resulting in some children leaving the farm either because the farm could not support them or because they had decided not to pursue farming as an occupation. Others were actively engaged in succession planning, including farm expansion and transition processes that impacted on the overall livelihood and wellbeing of the farm family.

The distinction between farm and family was rarely clear cut. Competing priorities, including those relating to work-family balance, were often referred to in the interviews. As discussed in the previous chapter, women were more likely to have responsibility for family matters and men for farm business matters. Clashes between these areas of responsibility were frequently mentioned, with resolution often involving an ongoing process embedded in gender relations. The relationship between the farm and the family was therefore an important aspect of the micro-sphere.

### 5.3 Meso Sphere

The meso sphere was particularly important for understanding the regional milieu within which farm families lived. The project had a specific focus on regional differences and many of these are identified in this section. There are two broad explanations for the ways in which health and wellbeing varies between areas or locations. Compositional explanations relate to the characteristics of people who live in a particular location – for example, the relationship between low socio-economic status and poor health. Contextual explanations focus on the features of the areas themselves: the physical, environmental characteristics, housing, and levels of social capital. This section focuses on the contextual characteristics of the regions – the community and the environment. It also discusses ‘industry’ as part of the regional context which makes a difference to the ways in which farm families engage in resilience processes.

**Community**

Differences in community cultures, levels of rural decline (or progress), and engagement in community activities were evident across the regions. These influenced the ease with which people could access and utilise resources to manage their livelihood and secure their mental health and wellbeing.

**Social capital**: social capital has been an increasingly important concept in both social research and policy formulation. The core elements of social capital are social norms, networks and associated values; and there is evidence of a link between health and elements of social capital such as social connectedness, involvement in voluntary organisations, informal networks, and levels of trust, reciprocity and belonging. Social capital enables individuals to engage in processes conducive to achieving wellbeing through information sharing and social support.

Within the research there were some differences between regions in both the levels of engagement in community by farm families and the extent to which communities were able to engender social capital amongst its residents. From the service provider
consultations it was evident that the development of social capital within communities was viewed as important. In particular, they discussed the issues affecting their ability to facilitate community development (sometimes called community capacity building), both within the broader community and within professional communities.

Generally, farm families discussed the importance of their community involvements across the regions. However, social capital appeared to be slightly higher in the CEP than in the USE or MN. In the LLRMC, social capital was less evident with some farm families openly discussing the lack of trust between neighbours and low levels of social connectedness. Service providers in this region also noted these problems, and the high levels of fragmentation between and within communities in the region.

Several participants noted the ways in which communities had changed with different groups of people moving into an area in response to changes in an industry base or housing affordability; or moving out of an area as the number of farm families exited the farm. This was also viewed as having an impact on the level and kinds of services and businesses in a town, as well as on the types of social opportunities available to them. The fear of rural decline appeared to galvanize some communities to resist it, while others were more pessimistic about the possibility of withstanding what was sometimes perceived as ‘inevitable’.

Business, services and employment: farm families look to regional and rural towns to provide them with the resources required for living in rural areas: food, entertainment, business supplies, health, education etc. The prolonged drought was seen to have affected the viability of many businesses and concern was expressed about the impact this would have on the quality of life in rural areas, the opportunities for off-farm employment (especially for farm women) and the availability of labour for use on-farm.

Environment

The physical and natural environment influenced decisions about how to manage their current situation and the future of the farm business.

Location: the location of a farm within a region and a region within a state influenced farm families’ decision-making in three ways. Firstly, location had a direct impact on the kind of farming possible. Being near the River Murray made irrigation possible, being in the CEP made broadacre farming possible and so on. Location influenced the opportunities and constraints due to soil types, access to water, and climate. Secondly, location was related to the distance that farm families had to consider when accessing resources and services or engaging in community and social activities: the greater the distance, the more that farm families needed to spend in time and money. Thirdly, location provided opportunities and constraints on farm families’ leisure activities and their capacity to ‘get away’ for short periods of time. Farm families discussed the benefits of having amenable physical and natural resources (the river, the outback, the beach) within a short drive so that they could unwind from some of the pressures of farming.

In addition to influencing decision-making, location also influenced the types and level of political activity, including the amount of time spent on such activities. In our research, this was most evident in the lobbying and advocacy roles undertaken in the LLRMC.

Climate variability and climate change: as discussed in chapter 3, each of the regions was subject to different levels and kinds of climate variability and this influenced their decision-making about the kinds of resources and strategies they employed during
periods of drought. All farm families considered drought and climate variability to be a normal part of farming. In contrast, few participants thought that the prolonged drought was related to climate change and, overall, decision-making had not been influenced by climate change scenarios or information. Nevertheless, about a quarter of the participants said that if climate change occurred they would adapt. The main issue for adapting to climate change was the uncertainty about what was happening and how it would impact on their region. The contradictions in climate change messages, its politicisation and suspected exaggeration were all discussed as problems for taking climate change seriously as a factor for on-farm decision-making.

Industry (agricultural)

Agricultural industries provide the context within which farm families operate their business lifestyles. At a regional level, the vitality of a particular agricultural industry impacts on farm families and provides opportunities (or constraints) for capacity building and optimising income.

Support, extension and services: agricultural support, extension and services are provided by a range of agencies (private and government) and can be either general (retail outlets) or highly specialised (agronomists). For the participants in this research, having these available in the local region assisted directly in optimising output and profits by reducing the costs associated with access and delivery. They also influenced on-farm decisions and management through the dissemination of information about research and development (and sometimes the opportunity to participate in research and development), and through facilitating the various communities of practice that participants were involved in. For example, the types of innovation and collaborative practices that farm families discussed were often regionally and commodity specific, with different kinds of agricultural support and communities of practice generating different outcomes.

Industry politics and change: participants mentioned various industry related issues that are captured under the heading of industry politics and change. Levels of confidence in the industry had a bearing on decision-making, and this confidence was affected by the macro context, but also on a regional basis. This was particularly evident in industries that were highly competitive (horticulture, viticulture) on an individual grower basis, where levels of trust and reciprocity were low and collaboration either within or between industries fraught with difficulty. In other areas, changes in an industry base (for example, from agriculture to viticulture or from agriculture to tree-lots) resulted in a shift in the relative power for industry groups to negotiate for services and resources for their region.

5.4 Macro Sphere

The influence of the macro sphere on how people negotiated their way to a positive outcome from drought was not always as direct as that in the other spheres, but it was nevertheless important. In particular, the macro sphere influenced the resilience of communities and agricultural industries through policy, service provision, the economy, and social change.

Government

Government, through policies and service provision, are an influential component of the context which farm families navigate in order to use the resources and strategies they
require for getting by during drought. The specific areas discussed by farm families are discussed below.

**Regulatory environment:** governments control and influence the regulatory environment within which farming takes place. Increasingly, the compliance cost of the regulatory environment is being borne by individual farm businesses with limited capacity to pass on these costs to the consumer. Areas such as occupational health and safety, taxation (e.g. BAS reporting), and employing farm workers were noted for the level of associated administration. For farm families, this means that a significant amount of time must be dedicated to the bureaucratic, administrative and training demands of regulation. This results in increased workloads, or constraints being placed on the time available for farm women (in particular) to engage in off-farm work. While employing extra labour may also be an option, this was difficult in some regions where labour was not available and particularly difficult during periods of financial stress.

One of government’s key regulatory functions that influenced the context of farm families in the USE and the LLRMC was that of water licensing. The uncertainty created through changes in the amount of water available, the cost of water and the capacity to ‘buy in’ across states had a big impact on the ways in which irrigators in our research used particular resources and strategies to get by. In addition, some members of farm families were spending a lot of time lobbying and advising government bodies and ministers, and contributing to the direction of water policy in SA.

**Superannuation:** although Australia has a compulsory superannuation system for employees, the management of superannuation for the self-employed (including farm families) is subject to different regulations. While many of the farm families, especially those over the age of 45 years, had provisions for superannuation, few of those approaching retirement felt financially secure about exiting the farm. Part of the problem was that their superannuation was often linked to assets that were converted to cash in order to keep the farm business viable through lean periods. Where these lean periods coincided with the transition toward retirement, extra pressure was placed on the farm family and influenced their on-farm and family decision-making.

**Drought support:** the government’s policy approach to the farm sector is to encourage self-reliance and preparedness for financial difficulties. Government assistance to farm families has therefore been limited (it is one of the lowest in the OECD), and has been available only in ‘exceptional circumstances’. In this project, farm families utilised EC funding where they could. Discussions about EC funding traversed many of the issues raised elsewhere and are not replicated here. Nevertheless, the ‘crisis’ model of assistance, the selectivity of eligibility and its failure to discriminate between good and poor farm practices all influenced how farm families made decisions about EC funding in the drought.

**Service provision:** governments typically control the types, level and location of services, either through direct provision or through funding non-government organisations. When considering their livelihood or mental health and wellbeing, farm families discussed the importance of having access to compulsory and post-compulsory education, health and community services. Providing services to rural areas is an ongoing difficulty for governments, and finding ways of providing equitable and accessible services has been the subject of many reports. For farm families, the need to access services incurs direct and indirect costs that influence the timing and levels of service use. Decisions about
which services might help them get by were influenced by service availability, its perceived suitability, the cost of service use and the mode of service delivery.

**Economy**

Aspects of the economy discussed by participants included the globalisation of agriculture and the ‘crash’ in the financial sector, as well as regional economies.

**Globalisation of agriculture:** farm families operate within a global industry that influences the prices of inputs and outputs. During the research period these prices had fluctuated markedly, both in the size and speed of fluctuations. This was especially so in grain markets, where changes to the marketing system had opened up futures trading (forward selling) which a number of farm families entered into, often on the advice of ‘experts’. Losses from this exacerbated the financial impact of the drought and increased the levels of risk associated with farming. Farm men, in particular, discussed farming as a risk or gamble and identified an increase in uncertainty associated with the globalisation of agriculture.

While the global nature of agriculture also provided opportunities for farm businesses to profit from price changes, this was moderated by the decreasing profit margins being experienced by the industry, which participants also viewed as an effect of the global market.

**Global financial crisis:** the global financial crisis was seen to have two effects on farm businesses. One is that the value of the Australian dollar dropped relative to that of major trading partners after achieving record highs earlier in the drought. The fluctuation in the dollar impacted on input prices and the demand for (and price of) grain and other commodities, making farm business planning difficult. The other impact was that the value of shares decreased which meant that those farm families wanting to cash in shares as a strategy for protecting their livelihood finished up with much less than they went into the drought with. In essence, the global financial crisis created an extra source of uncertainty associated with on-farm livelihood and off-farm investments.

**Regional / local economies:** the health of the regional economy was important for farm families because it provided them with opportunities for work and education beyond the farm and meant that services and infrastructure were likely to be maintained and even developed. Participants discussed the benefits that industries such as mining, tourism and viticulture had brought to their regional economy. These would often not be possible without active financial support (particularly in infrastructure) from governments. Although changes in industry base also meant changes in the ‘types’ of people coming into the region, this was usually seen in a positive light. This aspect of the macro sphere of influence highlights the inter-relationship between government, economic and social contextual factors.

**Society**

At the societal level, key contextual factors influencing drought-related outcomes included:

**Gender:** gender roles and gender relations are heavily influenced by social norms around constructions of masculinity and femininity and intimate relationships. These are not static, and changes in roles (e.g. women’s increased workforce participation, men’s increased family participation) and gender relations (e.g. no fault divorce, de facto
relationships) have an impact on the ways in which power is distributed and decisions are made within the farm family.

**Information technology:** the growing dependence on information technology to do business and communicate with family and friends has impacted on farm families in different ways. At one level it has decreased isolation by making communication easier and faster, and uncoupling community from local geographical space. Farm families can now easily communicate with others across the country and world. At another level, the use of IT for business has enabled an increase in the level of complexity of the farm business that would not have been physically possible prior to computers. While this may provide better information for planning it also adds to the administrative side of farming, most of which is done by farm women. This dependence on IT, however, was sometimes made difficult by access problems and the lack of infrastructure. Some older participants, who were not IT literate felt as though they were not able to keep up what was happening, especially in business, and were somewhat isolated from the broader farming community. This influenced decisions about retirement and succession planning.

**Attitudes toward farming / farmers:** there was a perception amongst participants that the broader (metropolitan) community – including media and government – had negative attitudes towards farming / farmers, and that these attitudes were misinformed and damaging. The impact of this on decision-making was that some participants felt defensive and wary about getting their needs heard and attended to. For some of those that did raise issues, they felt that it needed to be done in such a way that they would not be (further) perceived as negative, ‘whinging’ or not coping. Comments from participants suggested that the water restrictions placed on city residents had increased the level of empathy for farming/farmers during the drought, but that more could be done to change public attitudes.

### 5.5 Summary

This chapter outlined the elements of the context which farm men and women discussed as influencing their capacity to engage in the required resilience processes. We identified three layers, or spheres of influence, which directly or indirectly affected the wellbeing of farm families as they dealt with drought. The **micro** sphere of the farm and family was clearly important on a day to day basis as farm families worked through competing demands on their time and their financial, emotional and relational resources. The **meso** sphere comprised the region in which the farm family was located. Within the region, the environment, community and industry provided opportunities and constraints for engaging in resilience processes. Regional differences were evident amongst the four areas selected for this research and, in some areas, intra-regional differences were also noted. Differences were especially noticeable in levels of social capital in both communities and agricultural industries. The **macro** sphere of government, the economy and society were particularly influential on the livelihood of farm families, however, service provision and social norms and attitudes also influenced their mental health and wellbeing.

As depicted in Figure 5.1, the three spheres of influence were embedded in one another and therefore inherently linked. Changes in one sphere could trigger changes in another. For example, changes in the global financial sector influenced the profitability of regional industries and businesses, services and employment, which in turn affected the farm family’s ability to secure off-farm work or draw on investment income, while also impacting on their profit margin by raising the cost of inputs. The changes were not all
one way, with changes in the farm family – for example, decreased involvement in community activities – influencing levels of social capital and/or service provision, especially in smaller communities where the withdrawal of relatively few volunteers can make a big difference to the sustainability of community services. While at an individual level, such ‘bottom-up’ changes would have only a minor impact, when undertaken en-masse in response to widespread drought-related financial stress the impact on elements of the meso and macro spheres would also be significant.

This inter-relationship between the spheres of influence and their importance for the resilience of farm families, suggests that there is a need to engage in resilience thinking beyond the individual or the farm family. Resilience thinking is still in its early stages in Australia, but it may well be conducive to integrating a ‘health in all policies’ approach into and across each of the spheres of influence. Having a context which enables resilience amongst farm families would certainly be beneficial to their mental health and wellbeing.

Context was the second of the three elements of resilience identified in this project. In this chapter we described the spheres of influence that made up the context. How participants navigated through the different spheres of the context was influenced by their stance, which, as we discussed in chapter 4, was gendered. For example, family issues were dealt with differently by farm men and women because they approached them from this gendered stance which reflected their identity, social location and social roles. In negotiating with their context, farm men and women engaged in resilience processes – in acquiring the resources and strategies – required for them to get by during the drought.
6. Resilience: Processes

In this chapter the main resources and strategies – what we term the resilience processes – used by farm families in the domains of mental health and wellbeing and livelihood are discussed. These processes helped to protect farm families from the risks associated with farming during drought.

This section draws directly on the interviews with farm families to illustrate how each of the resources and strategies contributed to farm families being able to get by in terms of their mental health and wellbeing and their livelihood.

6.1 Mental Health and Wellbeing

Social interaction

Participants recognised the benefits of social interaction, although they used a wide range of strategies to achieve it. Many of the participants were engaged in sports or social clubs, or in formal committees and organisations (e.g. CFS), while others discussed the importance of friendship groups, and informal networks. Social interaction was both a strategy for sustaining wellbeing and a resource for times when they needed a boost.

We distinguished between three types of social interaction: communities of practice, where people with an interest in common (usually farming) would meet regularly; community and civic participation, where people would be involved in building social infrastructure, the provision of services and engaging in the political processes (e.g. advocacy); and friendship groups based on trust, reciprocity and a more intimate knowledge of each other. Many participants discussed engaging in all three types of social interaction.

Community of practice:

We have a little farm group at [town] and there’s about 15-20 blokes in the group, and wives that tag along a bit. So we meet with them once a month, and we were doing quite a bit of work there, we started doing drought-type strategies … and those days always finished up with a barbeque and plenty of beer. So that was always good. If someone was doing it tougher than the next bloke or whatever, he can, oh, well, you’re not the only one mate. … So being able to bounce off other people was always good. [USE69, male, 46 years]

Community and civic participation:

I’m secretary of the local gun club and president of the local SAFF and past president of the local tourism association. …It’s good as a bit of an escape, to get away from work for a while, and I think a lot of rural people like to give something back to their community. Rather than just take all the time, or just use the community as a base, we prefer to put something back into it. [MN53, male, 46 years]

Friends:

Well our friends, we’d have perhaps six good couples and their kids that we do quite a lot of things with. … So they’d be our friends that we have dinner and barbies and things in the paddock with. We’d all sort of look after each children when they were little when they were home … our very good mate across the road here, has just had leukaemia and she’s had a stem cell transplant and she’s sort of all right now. But she’s been very ill. And we had a roster
when she was sick, and one of us every day would be with her, doing her food, cleaning, making her walk, get out, shopping, do the washing, ironing. And we would just take it in turns whoever’s day it was to be there. [USE72, female, 52 years]

Mental disengagement from farm

Strategies for disengaging from the seeming relentlessness of the drought and the implications for the farm were viewed as important. Sometimes this was as simple as making sure you went to watch the local football game each Saturday, but having a weekend away or time off was also viewed as necessary to ‘get away from it all’.

It’s very important to have time off. I’ve always had like an annual holiday every year so that’s something we’ve always done. Like it won’t be anything flash, we’ll just go down the beach or something, but we’ve always got away for a couple of weeks. …Just to give you a break. Even though you stop home and you’re not doing anything you’re still thinking about things so just go away, go for a bit of a sail or windsurf or something does you good, a bit of fresh air. [MN42, male, 47 years]

Women were often responsible for ensuring that ‘time off’ happened.

I think it’s important for me to get [husband] off the farm, just to give him a bit of a break. [MN52, female, 29 years]

In addition to physically getting off farm, participants discussed the need to have something else to worry about besides the farm. Their community activities often provided this type of release:

I’m on the Council here … and I’ve been on a few boards, voluntary boards, Hospital Board and School Board at various times as well …You can actually get involved in different things. Farming is quite often, not the same thing, but dealing with similar situations year after year after year but with the Council … that gives me other things to interest me. [USE75, male, 53 years]

A surprising number of participants also had hobbies and interests other than farming, or cultivated non-farming friends as a means of providing a mental escape from the farm.

Personally I’ve got three old Holdens and that’s a hobby that I’ve got sitting over in the shed that I just don’t seem to get time to do things with. And a couple of them are very valuable so I would like to pursue my interest in them a lot more. And even last night, as late as last night I got a mate to buy something on Ebay for me for one of them. So I’ve got a bit of a bug with them. [CEP8, male, 53 years]

Oh fair bit of computer work, book work and stuff like that. I do, don’t go out much at all really, I don’t know I just play around with computers, rebuild computers a bit, got into amateur radio, that’s something I can do even when I’m working, particularly truck driving …Yeah talk to people all over the world, that’s been a real big plus. [LLRMC35, male, 50 years]

There are two or three bad things to do in a drought. You never go through a clearing sale, because everybody at the clearing sale is, “Oh it is terrible. It is getting worse.” And it is absolutely contagious that way of thinking and so we always say in the drought, you know, you should cultivate your city friends and go out to the theatre and see a few comedies and
things like that, just to get you out of it … you have got to keep perspective. [USE65, female, 55 years]

**Comparative advantage**

Participants, especially the men, used comparisons with others in a worse situation to present themselves in a positive light. These comparisons were often regional, with farm families in the CEP and upper portions of the MN being viewed by those in other regions as ‘doing it tough’. Occasionally there would be intra-regional comparisons between different areas, different crops or, for the LLRMC, between irrigators and non-irrigators.

> It’s not like those poor blokes that live in margin country. I mean, if we had to go 5 years without an income, you know, I’ve got mates on the west coast that try and put crops in and, you know, live on the smell of an oily rag. [USE69, male, 46 years]

Another source of comparative advantage was age, with older participants thinking they were better off than the younger generation, and vice-versa.

> It’s the young guys that I feel for the most, that have just come into farming and they’ve copped three bad years. Those are the guys that are full of energy and enthusiasm and they want to do stuff and it just keeps belting them and belting them and belting them; they’re the guys I feel for. [CEP19, male, 40 years]

**Significant other**

The farm family was a resource for its members to draw upon when support was needed. This was often especially the case between intimate partners.

> Well for quite a while he was withdrawn and quiet and I’d go you know ‘what’s wrong hun?’ ‘Oh nothing.’ Like that would be it and that went on for ages and ages. Then I just said look there is something wrong tell me what it is, and he said well the farm isn’t going well and this and that and the other and once he did actually get it out you could see that he started to get better. … But once we knew and once we talked about it, it all got better. Then I just started to do a bit more for him in little ways, just little things [USE 75, female, 51 years]

However, some participants drew support from other family members (e.g. brother, parent or child).

> I have to say that our son is also very good at saying don’t stress, you know it’s only money or it’s only this or it’s only that and makes you think of things differently. I’m not sure where that wiseness comes from, it should be the other way round, yeah he’s very good at calming us down and telling us to chill out and relax so that’s good [CEP17, female, 56 years]

It was not only beneficial to have family as a source of support, it was also important to provide the family with support. This gave participants purpose and influenced decision-making. Although some participants discussed their partner in this context, mostly this responsibility was to children.

> It’s hard, as I said I’ve had enough personally, I’m staying here as I said because we share the machinery, my son has stuck his neck out and he’s bought land and you know, we share the machinery … and you know, I can’t really quit because his future hangs on me
making sure I’m here and the machinery’s here to do his work as well. [CEP7, male, 51 years]

A few people relied on non-family members to be their confidante. Sometimes - more often for women - this was a reciprocal arrangement, as with close friends. At other times, it was someone from their broader network who provided this level of emotional support.

I had another guy who’s not a person I’m close too, but he came through the Port Lincoln bush fires and he was aware of the situation and he dragged me off to the Yorke Peninsula Field Days. Even though I didn’t really want to go, I had nothing to go for. Anyway he talked me into going with him and I enjoyed the trip and had a good chat to him about his experiences with the bush fires and that sort of thing. So I think that helped me. [CEP8, male, 53 years]

Managing physical health

Physical health was a resource that enabled participants to sustain the level of work required of them and their overall sense of wellbeing throughout the drought. Results from the in-depth interviews suggested that participants were proactively managing their health (generally) and specific health problems. This was followed up in the second wave interviews with specific health related questions. Around 74% of respondents had regular check ups (annually or more often) with a health professional - the majority with GPs. Another 23% went on a needs basis. Only 3% said they never went to a GP due to access issues or difficulties with the local GP.

A small group of participants were managing chronic illnesses, but the main health issues discussed were managing day to day problems. Back/neck and limb/joint problems, accidents, migraines, and increased blood pressure were the main health issues discussed. Participants who worked on-farm were more likely to seek medical help if their health prevented them from working, if they were female or, if male, the problem concerned their spouse. Rehabilitation from injury (farm or sport related) or accidents was often a mix of self-care and health service use (GP, physiotherapy, chiropractor etc). Farm men were likely to return to work earlier than recommended, and would substitute self-care for formal care strategies if the problem occurred during peak working periods.

I broke my neck I think it was in March… actually I was pretty naughty because I still went out and drove the tractor with the hay load on … I went down and had x-rays every so many weeks to make sure it wasn’t moving [MN55, male, 27 years]

Women were especially active in monitoring and encouraging the health of the whole family, particularly through diet, exercise and making appointments.

Interviewer: How do you keep yourself physically healthy enough to work?
*Eat pretty right and go for walks with the missus and every weekend I play bowls just to get away from the place and, yeah, try to keep positive.*

Interviewer: Do you have regular check-ups?
*Yeah I have an annual check-up.* [LLRM28, male, 50 years]

In addition to formal health care, the majority of people had self-care strategies including diet and exercise.

*I’ve had a lot of back problems but I’ve come through seeding exceptionally well this year…. I suppose I do tend to stop now, every two hours and do spend five or 10 minutes*
just outside stretching a bit, which I think has helped. I just bought myself a bike for inside
the house because I can pedal a bit while I’m watching TV. I’m getting different treatment
at the moment; I’m getting Bowen therapy and that seems to be working exceptionally
well. I am taking – I was advised a couple of years ago and I tend to feel that fish oil and
glucosamine are making a difference; I’ve been doing that for 12 months now, or 18
months. The combination of a number of things is obviously helping a bit. [LLRMC25,
male, 55 years]

Service provision was raised as a problem by several participants in the LLRMC, where
participants were less likely to go to a GP for a check-up, although alternative therapies
were used. Across all regions, participants with chronic health conditions tended to visit
specialists in Adelaide or other major regional centres, often requiring significant time
away from home, sometimes for the whole family. For a few participants time and
distance constrained them getting even minor health problems seen to:

It’s a matter of that you’ve got to have money to get all these things done and not only
money, there’s the time involved. Our doctor is 100 miles away and it’s a major effort to
even just go to the doctor to have a look. [CEP1, male, 78 years]

Managing psychological distress

Approximately half of the participants in the in-depth interviews said that the drought
had impacted on their mental health (although some said the drought merely exacerbated
underlying problems). There was a surprising openness in discussing mental health
problems, although where there was reticence it came mainly from men. Questions about
mental health were asked in the follow-up interviews, particularly in relation to their
mental health literacy, and the actions they would take to deal with suspected mental
health problems.

Most participants distinguished between stress and depression, which were seen as an
acceptable response to drought and financial hardship, and other forms of mental illness.
The stigma associated with stress and depression previously reported within farming
communities was not strong amongst the participants, but it was still evident. People
were generally accepting of the need to maintain mental health and were aware of the
symptoms of decreasing mental health and the availability of services.

There was a hierarchy of approaches when concerns about their own mental health arose:

- Self-manage: research symptoms, take time out to rejuvenate, exercise
- Discuss problem with others: usually with a significant other or anonymous
telephone counselling (e.g. beyondblue); attend a community information session
on mental health (or men’s health)
- Seek professional help: GPs and community-based counsellors were the main
health professionals.
- Mental health advocacy: discuss their problems with others as a means of
normalising depression

Although women were more likely to be the ones that monitored and managed mental
health in the family, concerns were expressed about the need for someone to do this for
them. One farm woman was so concerned about this that she wrote to us after the first interview and said:

*Women are very good at hiding their worry generally because they don't want to add to their husband’s worries but it doesn’t mean they aren’t suffering. Women do things like cry in the shower so that the husband and children don’t know. Last year at Lucindale we had some govt guru come and speak about farmers coping with stress. It was all about how the women could support the men and no mention of the fact that women may be suffering. Who is there for the women? This woman’s theory was that women talk to each other which is true but only to a certain extent. Women don’t even admit to each other how badly they are suffering. They will talk about their worries for their husband, that they are worried about the children and maybe that they don’t sleep at night. The real extent of their suffering will probably never be talked about because they are supposed to be the strong one. If they let go who will hold the family together, who will care for the children? [USE77, female, 46 years]*

Several participants had a history of depression or were currently on medication for depression. These people were had strategies to manage their mental health (sometimes with the help of their family) and maintain their involvement in the farm, family and community.

*I was in hospital last year so that was just a mini one, but 1997 was my big breakdown, I spent six weeks in hospital, it wasn’t very nice so. I've just been trying to get better and stronger and do the things I wanted to do now so yeah, I’m getting there now. Interviewer: And the period you were sick last year, was that brought on by something specific or to do with the farm? Not really, things just seemed to get on top of me. I guess it was a bit stressful when I was starting to take over books and things yeah and I seem to get over reactive with things and I just let things, but yeah. I got help and yeah so it’s all good now. … So now I’m getting back on track, so just coping with five children and working [full-time on-farm] [LLRMC31, female, 38 years]*

Help providing behaviour was generally well informed. Less than 10% of participants said they would not know what to do if a friend or family was displaying psychological distress. Types of intervention differed depending on their closeness to the person with a suspected problem. If they had a close relationship (e.g. family, friend) participants were likely to talk directly to the person about their concerns and be proactive in providing help; whereas for more distant relationships, participants were likely to speak to someone close to the person with problems, or speak directly to health services about their concern for someone else.

*If it was a family member I would talk to them about it and ask them if they thought they needed to get help and try and encourage that. If they didn’t think it was necessary I’d probably go and see our local GP and try and work through it together. [CEP17, female, 56 years]*

Men were likely to keep in contact with someone with a suspected problem, but not necessarily raise the issue directly with them, due to the sensitivity of doing so. However, several men also shared their experience of depression with others as a strategy to overcome resistance to mental health messages.

*They had a men’s night in the local town and that was good, quite a few went to that and that was over three nights, one night a week. I went to that and another bloke in the district*
has gone the same way as me [farm exit], along with a few others, and yeah I rang him and he was having a bit of difficulty with it so I went over and organised a heap of blokes and we helped line his stuff up for his clearance sale, which there’s no way he would have been able to do, so yeah just keeping an eye out for others as well as my own. I’m sort of more aware of it probably now as to when I last spoke with you. [CEP3, male, 50 years]

For some farm families, suicide was a real threat. One farm woman (whose husband did not participate in the research) was worried when her husband admitted having suicidal thoughts. She has taken on a large part of the farm workload, as well as monitoring and managing her own and her husband’s mental health:

I didn’t actually realise it was that bad, like he was of suicidal thoughts, and getting to that stage and I didn’t realise he had taken that next level. I knew he was bad and I was trying to get him help and had made him appointments and was encouraging him and saying that I’d go with or if he didn’t want me to go with him that’s fine, and it wasn’t until we were at a rural – a mental health nurse together that he openly … did share how he was really feeling. … then the thoughts of ‘crap, am I going to find him somewhere?’ or ‘how’s this going to happen?’ and trying to prevent it before it gets to a point of despair. It is quite challenging because you don’t know exactly what they’re thinking and living with somebody with depression is also in itself quite a task and they don’t really know how you’re feeling either, so far as how you’re dealing with their illness. [USE66, female, 32 years]

For others, the threat could be for people outside of the family:

One mate, that a couple of us actually had a couple of long chats over the back fence about, he confided to a mate of mine, he said one night F-this and F-that, and if there’s a big enough tree, go and do it. And so my mate rang me and yeah, we just kept ringing him. Never ever said you know, listen, you’re not going to kill yourself are you? But just subtly, I don’t know, tried to monitor him and humour him. [USE69, male 46 years]

Despite having strategies for providing help to others, a small number of participants found that it did not always go well. Some participants had tried to help someone and it had gone badly either because they had misread the situation or the other person did not acknowledge the problem. Others had used information services to get assistance, but found them unhelpful: when making inquiries in the third person, they were not believed, with services thinking it was them that had the problem.

**Spirituality (life-meaning)**

Several participants discussed aspects of their life that provided them with meaning and a sense of wellbeing which they drew upon when they felt down. Religion, family relationships, gardening, or the environment in which they lived all contributed to their sense of connection with life beyond themselves. Maintaining this became especially important during difficult periods.

We [husband and I] are a close partnership and we are a praying partnership, in good times or bad and we just trust God with what we are going through and you learn from it and even within that – I mean I guess it struck me last year, I thought well you have just got to be grateful no matter what. … I am not playing it down, at different times we got distressed and we did get down at various times and stressed and things like that, so I am not saying that we haven’t done that but
within that there was still that hope of thinking that we were going to be okay whatever happens. [MN51, female, 34 years]

6.2 Livelihood

Drought preparedness

Drought preparedness was a strategy informed by expectations about how often a drought would occur in their region and previous experiences of drought. Farm families were knowledgeable about the history of drought on their property: they had some idea (usually based on rainfall records) about how often it was likely to occur and how bad it was likely to be. They adapted their farm business to these expectations. Dryland farms in the CEP, MN and LLRMC were more likely to have drought preparedness strategies, with farm families in the USE being the least prepared.

So yeah, I’ve probably been one of the guys from the word go that’s said hey, it’s low rainfall country, we don’t know when we’re going to get a drought, put something aside for when it’s not so good, in the way of hay, … We also have bulk grain storage facilities, which weren’t around 20, 30, 40 years ago… too many people live from hand to mouth, they don’t put anything aside for when it’s not so good. [LLRMC29, male, 48 years]

Older participants drew on their prior experience of drought as a basis for optimism and as a resource for thinking about useful strategies.

During the drought there was a lot of pressure on my wife and myself because we are the only ones that run the farm, but because of our age and our experience over the years we knew that it would turn around eventually so it was just a matter of digging your heels in and pulling the belt in and just keep going. [USE71, male, 62 years]

Cost containment

Cost containment was a strategy used to minimise expenditure when finances were tight. Nearly all farm families used this strategy. It included prioritising needs above wants, and reducing expectations regarding quality and quantity of purchases.

We pretty much have to know where every dollar is going, we have to be very, very careful in spending and not spend any money on anything that’s reckless or want to be-s, only on what you absolutely need that’s all you can buy. [CEP9, male, 29 years]

Often called ‘tightening the belt’, cost containment occurred in both the household and the farm business. Although there was evidence of joint decision making about spending priorities, women spoke mostly about the strategies used within the household, while men mainly discussed strategies relating to the farm business.

We stopped [daughter] going to childcare … just for the fact that we had another bad year and that $36 or $37 a day … and I thought I really can’t afford that at the moment, so we stopped. [MN54, female, 34 years]

That’s right, you be careful, don’t go buying, never buy new machinery, don’t buy anything brand new, because you pay top dollar for just that tiny paint and someone else hasn’t sat in that seat … It’s just incredible what money you can save if you don’t do, how you spend your money, you’ve got to be careful. [LLRMC30, male, 42 years]
There appeared to be a cohort difference in perceived ability to adopt a cost-containment strategy, with older cohorts believing they were better placed to live austerely.

**Diversified income source**

Farm family income increasingly comes from multiple sources. We identified six diversification strategies used by farm families to decrease the financial impact of drought.

1. **Multiple commodities**: a common strategy was to derive income from more than one commodity. Whether this was growing different kinds of crops (grain, legumes), having mixed farming ventures (combining livestock and cropping), or a mixture of both, this was viewed as an income ‘safety net’.

   They [farm business] diversified about, I don’t know, 10 or 15 years ago, when it used to have just sheep really, but then they got a lot more into cattle … and a few pigs. Not as many as what the other bigger boys around us have got by any means, but they just, they’re just there as a bit of a side-line income as well. And then we’ve just got all the triticale, wheat, barley and all of that sort of stuff as well. So it’s a real mixture these days just to try to keep on top of everything. [LLRM28, female, 46 years]

2. **Multiple properties**: a small, but significant number of farm families had properties located in different areas, providing them with some measure of protection against extreme climate variation in any one region.

   We have got our eggs in a few baskets. Like we have land behind [town] which is very high rainfall and then we have got our place at home which is middle rainfall and then we have got our [other property] which is more station country like mum and dad’s and so we are still able to have sheep. If we were just all farmers, like cropping, those people would have to be in trouble because they’ve got no other income. [MN58, female, 27 years]

3. **Government benefits**: the main source of government assistance was the Exceptional Circumstance payments, both the income support and the interest rate subsidies. For those who were eligible, these were seen as welcome relief from the financial pressure.

   If it wasn’t for a lot of those funding grants that we’ve been able to access, things would’ve been very, very difficult, yeah. We’ve been able to get an interest rate subsidy for two years which has been an immense amount of pressure off and we’ve had fortnightly Centrelink payments which have been able to just help us, so financially the support has been excellent. [MN42, female, 39 years]

   [Son]’s on a small wage at the moment, minimal from us and he’s on drought support from Centrelink because we can’t, well … we’re not paying him enough for him to live, put it that way, but with the extra he’s getting from the drought support he’s getting through. [CEP2, female, 49 years]

   The recovery grants were also widely used, with the business planning aspect to them viewed as a useful process for thinking about the future of their farm business.

   [We] got a grant for a business recovery grant. We’ve done a business plan which is covered by that grant, which is a, I have to say, I was a little bit sceptical about it at the start, but has turned out to be a really great thing to have, to have someone else have a look at our business.
and, perhaps, point out a few areas where we might be lacking, and a few areas where we might be going ok, so it’s supportive as well. [CEP20, male, 42 years]

4. Investment income: the main forms of investment income were shares and investment properties. Farm families with these types of investments were more likely to be over 40 years of age, with shares and investment properties viewed as part of their retirement planning. Women with independent income were more likely to have investment properties than shares.

Well there’s those three houses, I run a share portfolio which I run off the internet, and a self managed super fund. [USE61, male, 54 years]

We have a half share in a building development in [regional centre] that we went into about 5-6 years ago. We had two good seasons and we, it’s in our super fund so yeah hopefully that’s our, yeah what we can have later in life. [CEP12, female, 47 years]

5. Liquid assets: many farm families drew on their off-farm assets to supplement their income during the drought. Farm Management Deposits were an important liquid asset for some, particularly in the MN and USE. Shares were also seen as a liquid asset. For older participants shares were likely to have been earmarked for superannuation, and while their sale was financially useful it raised issues regarding long-term financial security.

We haven’t got any superannuation, we had to sell all our shares last year to put a crop in and that was always our backstop is the fact that we had so many shares to sell [CEP15, female, 55 years]

We had to put money into Farming Management Deposit the year before….Yeah, that helped us through … So when it is a good year we put money aside and then we draw it out. [USE62, male 70 years]

6. Pluriactive farm family: the most common form of pluriactivity was for farm women to take off-farm work. This was viewed as an important source of household income, although it may also supplement the farm business during the drought. Approximately 40% of the women in the research were engaged in off-farm work. Several others worked in non-agricultural on-farm businesses, mostly tourism.

I’m a registered nurse, but because I’ve followed my husband I haven’t really gone up the ladder at all, I’ve just stayed as a Level 1 RN … by me working it means that we can actually go on holidays and we can have a reasonable standard of living, maybe not as high as what some people expect but we’re quite happy. [MN46, female, 53 years]

I work off-farm so I work a 9-day fortnight. … Yes, we’d certainly struggle if I didn’t, and the first year [2002] being so bad, we bought a lot of hay in. I basically worked to buy the hay. Like, that’s how it ended up. [LLRMC21, female, 46 years]

Although few farm men had off-farm work, they did get involved in the tourism businesses. Others worked as contractors and truck drivers.

Yeah we’re into tourism, we’ve got our own tourist shack and four wheel drive tours and every other bloody thing … But if you think there’s money in tourism, there’s not really. It’s a good side line and good beer money, that’s it [MN41, male, 52 years]
Hay baling, I was doing that. I’m sort of trying to give it all up because I’ve got plenty of work on the farm … sort of a bit contract work, anything from truck driving to harvest work or tractor driving, anything like that. [LLRMC29, male, 48 years]

Transferable human capital

Having transferable skills and abilities was a resource upon which participants drew to get off-farm employment if they wanted or needed it. For women, this was a resource that was utilised more directly in their engagement in local labour markets. For men, it was more indirect, but provided them (and their family) with confidence that – if worst came to worst – they could get work.

We don’t have children so I would like to work but it seems that out here work is not that easy to get. …. I have found most of the jobs that I’ve applied for have already been taken before they were even advertised but they have to advertise these jobs. [I: What kind of work are you looking for?] Well receptionist work, I’ve worked in pharmacy before I came over here… silo work and working at the bakery at night, I did that for a year and a half.

[2009 interview] In August I got a job at a local – it’s tuna, oysters and seafood. I’m an oyster shucker but I do tours so I kind of work with tourist information and so forth and I love it. So it was the best thing that could happen to me. [CEP9, female, 29 years]

[Husband] will find a job somewhere, he’s already had a couple of offers of jobs last year and this year as a mechanic; one was at [town], at a tractor dealership, because they know he’s a fully trained mechanic [CEP18, female, 47 years]

Some participants recognised the need to develop their skills and qualifications to get the kind of work they were seeking.

Last year I decided I would go to Adelaide and study at the Real Estate Institute and did my Certificate IV which enables you to be a salesperson and then I just went straight on and did the Diploma which was a week a month for five months. So I want to just finish that, just waiting to get all my registrations and that back and hopefully get a job. [CEP12, female, 47 years]

By the 2009 interview, the above participant was enjoying working in real estate. As is evident from these quotes, while having transferable human capital was viewed as a resource, it was one that depended on opportunities being available in their region. A few participants, however, worked away from home in large regional centres or the city and commuted home on weekends. Some men had considered working in the mines, but did not want the ‘away from home’ lifestyle. Also, the capacity to utilise this resource was seen to decrease with age:

I wasn’t too fussed about that [selling up] because opportunities arise. You make a couple of phone calls and all of a sudden opportunities turn up. It’s surprising sort of what happens. I wasn’t too fussed about it anyway. I thought I’m young enough so I can jump into anything. [USE64, male, 51]

Older participants were less likely to have formal qualifications than those in younger cohorts, which may limit the marketability of their skills in other occupations.
Confidence and competence as business managers

Having confidence and competence as business managers was an important resource for those farm families wanting to stay on-farm. It was particularly relevant to members of farm families actively involved in farm decisions – all of the men and a minority of the women. Confidence and competence was seen to develop through experience, learning (formal and informal) and sharing knowledge. The development of this resource through experience was discussed by participants as being able to make decisions based on their ‘gut’; many also had a ‘philosophy’ which guided their decision making.

Because some farming is a bit of a, while it can be a science it is also a bit of an art. It’s a bit of an instinct thing. Like, you get a rain, do we fire the tractors up now, no, look this was only a bit of a false start, we’ll hold back. You know, all those different things. It’s a bit of a gut instinct. And I guess, whether you’re right or wrong, you’ve got to go with your decisions [CEP11, male, 38 years]

I adopt the philosophy that if you don’t do it right this year it costs you next year. [MN45, male, 60 years]

Staying informed about new technologies, changes in their industry and their financial position was discussed. Several farm families engaged consultants (agronomists, livestock consultants) and financial advisers, while accountants and bank managers were widely called upon to inform decisions. It was common for at least one member of the farm family to have formal qualifications (usually TAFE) in farm business management, and the majority of farm families used information technology for research and farm management. Field days, the radio and farming newspapers were also key sources of information.

We now work in conjunction with the agronomist and have regular meetings throughout the season and it’s not so much the agronomist coming and sort of saying okay we can grow this and you can do this and this, it’s now a case of well I’ve found out about this variety and I’d like to really trial this way and it’s, I guess we’re expressing a lot of our needs and our goals about where we want to go a lot more than perhaps has happened in the past. [MN43, female, 39]

Another approach to maintaining confidence and competence was to belong to communities of practice where they would learn about the more technical aspects of farm management and share their knowledge with others. These could be formal groups or informal networks of support and, for younger farmers, mentors.

We need to get out and see other people and that’s what I enjoy about our dairy group. We all get together as a community and quite often and have discussion about different aspects. … it gives you that drive to maybe go oh, I hadn’t thought about doing this. You picked it up from this other person. I’ll go home and try it that way. [MN59, male, 61 years]

6.3 Interactions Between Processes

The resilience processes discussed above were utilised in different ways by participants. One of the key interactions was at the broad level between the two domains. The capacity to get by in the livelihood domain influenced mental health and wellbeing: financial stress was clearly related to psychological distress, particularly for men (and women who worked on-farm). The reverse was also true, though it was discussed less frequently.
Participants who had sought help for psychological distress realised the impact of their distress on their capacity to work and ability to make good financial decisions. For women the problem was more that psychological distress influenced their capacity to manage their multiple on and off farm responsibilities (including family), and vice versa.

At the level of resilience processes there were three interactions: cumulative, overlapping and reciprocal. The cumulative effect was most apparent, with a small number of participants using all of the above strategies and resources to successfully get by during the drought. More often, participants would adopt strategies and resources as they needed, using them either concurrently or consecutively. Several of the resilience processes overlapped and could influence each other. Within the mental health and wellbeing domain, for example, managing physical health could overlap with the strategies used to manage mental health – exercise was used for both. Within the livelihood domain, strategies used to sustain their confidence and competence as farm managers could overlap with strategies for drought preparedness and cost containment.

Sometimes the interactions were reciprocal, they influenced each other. Having a diversified income source (e.g. being pluriactive) could depend upon the kinds of transferable human capital that a participant could draw upon; or social interaction could help develop confidence and competence as business managers - and vice versa. Similar patterns could also be found between domains.

The patterns of interactions between resilience processes highlight the complexity of participants’ experiences in getting by during the drought. The extent to which these interactions were necessary (beyond cumulating processes), and the direction of interactions require different kinds of measures than those used in this project. Having identified which factors are resilience processes, and how participants used them, further work is needed to develop these into measures and indicators that can be mapped and tracked over time.

6.4 Summary

This chapter outlined the key resilience processes – the resources and strategies – utilised by farm families to help them get by during the drought. In the mental health and wellbeing domain, processes associated with the development and maintenance of social capital and significant relationships were identified as being important, as was the ability to disengage from the farm business and place their situation in perspective. Most participants had strategies for managing their physical and mental health, with the majority having regular check-ups with a primary health care provider. In the livelihood domain, participants used a range of resilience processes to increase (or sustain) their income and decrease (or minimise) their expenses. Their preparedness for drought was also important as was their confidence as business managers. The availability of options, particularly in relation to work, also provided farm families with a sense of security and a ‘fallback’ position when they were under financial pressure.

The two domains were not mutually exclusive, and processes used in one also helped participants to get by in the other. In addition, interactions between the processes included being cumulative, overlapping and reciprocal. This highlights the complex and chaotic (rather than causal) nature of resilience processes.

While the resilience processes were central to understanding resilience within farm families, identifying the resources and strategies utilised was not, in itself, sufficient. Understanding resilience requires acknowledging the stance, context and processes
associated with participants’ capacity to get by. To recap, participants within farm families had a stance which positioned them in particular ways to make decisions and take action when engaging with the context within which they experience drought. It is in negotiating with the elements in the three spheres of influence that they are able to access and utilise the types of resilience processes that enable them to have a positive outcome when facing adversity: to be able to get by during drought.
7. Understanding Resilience as a Process

This chapter is the first of two ‘final’ chapters of the report. In this chapter we return to the research questions as a means of drawing together the findings of our interviews with farm families. The discussion highlights what it means to understand resilience as a process, rather than personal trait or an outcome. This approach to resilience research is relatively new and using it generated challenges, but also new knowledge about how people can have positive outcomes despite experiencing adversity. The first section of the chapter outlines the research questions. This is followed by sections on resilience and farm families (Qs.1, 2 & 3), and enhancing resilience (Q.4).

In the next chapter we focus on the applied implications of the project for policy and service provision.

7.1 Modifying the Research Questions

The original research project was conceptualised in a way that created tensions for the development of research based on a constructivist understanding of ‘resilience as a process’. As the project developed the wording of the research questions was modified to reflect:

- Our focus on competence and strengths (i.e. salutogenic qualities), rather than maladjustment and health deficits
- Our understanding of resilience as complex not causal. We sought to understand these complexities, rather than map or measure the causal relationships between factors and outcome.
- The exploratory, inductive qualities of the research which provided opportunities to seek out new ways of thinking about resilience and widen our perspective on what it means to health and wellbeing.
- The qualitative research methodology which provided data on the experience of getting by, but not on ‘measuring’ the impact.

Our engagement with the literature on resilience, farm families, drought and mental health resulted in the modification of the first two research questions. Question 3 was also modified to remove ethnicity as a variable due to the lack of diversity in the sample. Question 4 remained the same. Table 7.1 illustrates the changes.

Table 7.1: Comparison of original and modified research questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original Questions</th>
<th>Modified Questions</th>
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<tr>
<td>Q.1 What personal, social and contextual factors enable farm families in drought-affected areas of South Australia to overcome or resist psychological distress?</td>
<td>What personal, social and contextual factors enable farm families in drought-affected areas of South Australia to get by?</td>
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</tbody>
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Q.2 How do these factors differ across age, gender, *ethnicity* and region?

Q.3 What impact do personal, social and contextual factors have on the experience of *psychological distress* in farm families operating in drought-affected areas of SA?

Q.4 What do these findings suggest for existing understandings of resilience, and how resilience may be enhanced across the farm population?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Limitations of the research</th>
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<tr>
<td>Qualitative research aims for transferable, rather than generalisable results, and the standards upon which it is judged are based on rigour, transparency and reflection. Throughout this project, the research team has consistently evaluated our research processes and practices to ensure that we achieve the best outcome possible. However, all research has limitations. For this project the limitations relate to the potential for transferability of the findings. In particular, we argue that care needs to be taken when considering strategies for transferring the findings to other populations, contexts or types of adversity because:</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Contextual specificity is central to the research approach. Transferring the results will require recognising the impact of context on resilience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The sample was purposively selected according to a specific outcome (getting by) and in relation to a specific population (farm families) so that we could focus explicitly on what enabled them to have a positive outcome in the face of adversity. It was not representative of farm families, nor randomly selected so no reliable, valid comparisons between groups (e.g. those with resilience processes and those without) could be made.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The sample only included people who were ‘getting by’ and focused on how this was achieved. This strengths-based approach was explicit in the research design. An alternative would have been to have a comparison group (i.e. farm families who did not see themselves as getting by) which could have helped to compare which characteristics enabled some people, but not others, to negotiate with their environment to access the resources and strategies required to get by.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Future research could address these issues. The strength of our research is that it has produced the preliminary knowledge required to take this approach to mental health and wellbeing to the next stage.
7.2 Resilience and Farm Families

Q.1 What personal, social and contextual factors enable farm families in drought-affected areas of South Australia to get by?

Resilience was found to be comprised of three elements: stance, context and processes. Within each element a range of factors were identified.

Stance

The stance was the position from which farm men and farm women made decisions and took action in relation to their livelihood and mental health and wellbeing. The stance was gendered and this contributed to differences in outcomes between men and women. Although primarily a personal factor affecting resilience, the stance was constructed within a broader context. Factors relating to the stance included:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stance</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Farming as a business lifestyle</td>
<td>• Farming as a business lifestyle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Positive construction of self</td>
<td>• Positive construction of self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Attachment to land</td>
<td>o Involved in meaningful role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Moral meaning in work/farming</td>
<td>o Relative autonomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Interaction with natural environment</td>
<td>o Connection with place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Sense of achievement</td>
<td>o Sense of achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o More than ‘just’ a farmer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Contingent optimism (default)</td>
<td>• Contingent optimism (hope)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Active decision making</td>
<td>• Active decision making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Bounded rationality</td>
<td>o Self-in-relation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Reflexivity</td>
<td>o Latent sources of power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Healthy scepticism</td>
<td>o Insider/outsider perspective</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Context

The context was the personal, social, natural (ecological), political and economic environment within which farm families experienced drought and made decisions. The factors relating to the context identified in the research reflect the views of the farm families as being important to their decision-making processes. They are unlikely to cover the full spectrum of contextual factors associated with being in a farm family.

The context was conceptualised as consisting of three spheres of influence, each of which provided opportunities and constraints on the options available to farm families. The micro sphere of the farm and family was gendered and influenced by age. The meso sphere of the community, industry and environment reflected regional differences. The macro sphere of government, economy and society impacted on farm families differently in relation to age, region and gender. Factors relating to the context included:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Micro Sphere</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Farm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Source of strength</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Intergenerational opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Farm-Family interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meso Sphere</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Social capital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Business, services, employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Climate variability / change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Support, extension and services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Industry politics and change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Macro Sphere</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Regulatory environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Superannuation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Drought support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Service provision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Globalisation of agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Global financial crisis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Regional / local economies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Information technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Attitudes towards farming / farmers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Processes

The processes were the personal, social and contextual resources and strategies that farm families utilised to get by. In essence, these processes alleviated some of the risks associated with the drought. The processes have been differentiated according to whether they were used to protect livelihood or mental health and wellbeing, however, they were inter-related and this is discussed further in responding to Q.3. Factors associated with the processes were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Processes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mental Health and Wellbeing</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Social interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Communities of practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Community and civic participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mental disengagement from farm business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Comparative advantage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Significant other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Managing physical health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Regular check-ups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Self-care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Managing psychological distress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Self-care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Help-seeking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Help-providing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Spirituality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Livelihood</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Drought preparedness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Cost containment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Farm business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Household</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Diversified income source</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Multiple commodities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Multiple properties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Government benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Investment income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Liquid assets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Pluriactivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Transferable human capital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Confidence/competence as business managers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Staying informed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Communities of practice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q.2 How do these factors differ across age, gender and region?

Age

Age was the most difficult demographic characteristic to capture differences between. Although we made some effort to recruit participants across the age spectrum, there were differences in the sizes of the age cohorts which made comparisons difficult – and this needs to be acknowledged when translating these findings into policy or other contexts. In addition, other issues seemed to mediate between age and getting by. For example, older farm families who had a child come onto the farm had different considerations, and had used different processes (e.g. farm expansion and diversification) than those who did not (who were looking to sell or lease). Younger farm families with a trade or other profession to fall back on felt as though they had more options than those who had come straight into farming from school. All age groups felt as though they had an advantage in the drought – younger participants because they were not jaded by experience and could capitalise on opportunities; older participants because they had experience they could draw upon and were no longer needing to establish themselves or worry about expansion.

There was evidence that older participants (over 60 years) were finding it the most difficult to get by: they were more likely to have decreased their capacity to get by over time, were the most psychologically distressed by the drought and had slower recovery rates than other age groups. Despite this, older participants were the only age group to improve their general health rating.

Farming is an ageing occupation and issues such as intergenerational transition, retirement planning and considering the possibility of a career change had particular age-related challenges which farm families did not always feel well resourced to deal with.

Gender

The gendering of resilience was evident in the stance. Farm men had a relatively consistent stance across the sample, and although aspects of this stance were evident amongst women who were equal partners in the farm business, women’s stance tended to be more focused on familial relationships. Stance is influenced by social roles and social location and therefore the combination of roles that women undertook influenced their stance.

In differentiating between the farm and the family in the micro-sphere, the context within which farm families experienced drought was also gendered. Women were often key mediators in farm family relationships, particularly intergenerational transitions. Men were more focused on the farm business and would often work long hours (sometimes due to the lack of available / affordable labour). The gendering of the farm family was also apparent in the macro-sphere where social norms about gender influenced government policy, often making the contribution of women to farm family income and wellbeing all but invisible.

As a consequence, the ways in which farm men and farm women accessed and utilised resources and strategies that helped to alleviate the impact of drought, often differed. For example, women were much more likely to take off-farm work, contain costs within the household and monitor their spouse’s and children’s health and wellbeing; while men were more likely to cut costs associated with the farm business and enhance their competence/confidence as business managers. Both men and women were actively
engaged in different kinds of social interaction and sought to mentally disengage from the farm.

We also noted gendered differences in health outcomes and capacity to get by over time. The data indicated that women recovered from psychological distress more quickly than men, and more women that men had increased their capacity to get by over the 12 month data collection period.

**Region**

Regional differences were evident in the discussion of the context, especially in the mesosphere of community, industry and environment. The regional context influenced the opportunities and constraints upon participants in their decision making and actions.

The sample was selected on differences in the history of drought (and hence preparedness) in particular regions, and at a general level this influenced the extent of financial disadvantage and psychological distress brought about by drought. However, there were some intra-regional differences, suggesting that the boundaries around regions are constructed on criteria that were not relevant to understanding resilience.

We also noted regional differences in levels of social capital (i.e. trust, reciprocity, sense of community, opportunities for participation) and the ways in which service providers were addressing these. Communities appeared to be more robust with higher levels of social capital where the community was relatively homogenous, active leadership was being displayed and community capacity building came from a mix of bottom-up and top-down initiatives. Communities that were fragmented due to competing industries, ethnic and religious diversity, inter-town/community tensions found it more difficult to generate optimism, a collective sense of direction and interest in initiatives.

**Q.3 How do personal, social and contextual factors impact on the experience of getting by for farm families operating in drought-affected areas of SA?**

When brought together the three elements of resilience enable members of farm families to achieve the positive outcome of ‘getting by’ in the domains of livelihood and mental health and wellbeing. The elements are linked at the upper level as well as in the interactions between factors across and within the elements.

At the upper level, we found that members of farm families exhibited a stance which informed the way that they negotiated with their context to utilise particular resilience processes. This is illustrated by the black arrows in Figure 7.1.

This was not a one way relationship. It was evident from the research that there was a more complex relationship between the elements. The stance is also constructed within the context of each of the spheres of influence. The context therefore enables or constrains the development and maintenance of the stance. For example, variation in the climate can influence the levels of optimism within the stance and may, if severe enough, see it disappear altogether.

At the same time, the processes utilised by farm families are shaped by the context, but they also contributed to different aspects of the context. For example, the level of social capital with a community provides the context within which members of farm families
can and do achieve the types of social interaction and mental disengagement from the farm business required for their mental health and wellbeing. However, their participation in the community helps to build social capital.

**Figure 7.1: Relationship between the resilience elements**

![Diagram of resilience elements]

Finally, in getting by, farm men and women reinforce their stance, for example by enhancing their positive construction of self; and contribute to a more enabling (rather than constraining) context, for example in being more likely to participate in communities of practice or in being able to better negotiate farm-family interactions (see the grey arrows in Figure 7.1).

Interactions between factors within elements were also identified. Within the processes, interactions between factors were seen to be cumulative, overlapping or reciprocal. Within the context, there was a relationship between factors within each sphere of influence as well as there being a relationship between each sphere of influence. Within the stance, the factors were mutually reinforcing.

Although patterns of interactions were identified, the sample was not large enough to map these in detail. It does indicate that resilience is a complex process that cannot be totally explained by only identifying the factors relating to the resources and strategies used. There is also a need to identify factors relating to the stance and context, and to understand the interactions within and between these three elements.

### 7.3 Enhancing Resilience

**Q.4a – What do these findings suggest for existing understandings of resilience?**

There are many ways of understanding resilience and this project has focused on how resilience is understood within a health paradigm. We have taken a sociological approach in which we conceptualise resilience as a process.

This differentiates us from other approaches, for example, we do not perceive resilience to be a trait of individuals nor do we speak of resilient people; we do not operationalise resilience as an outcome; we do not view resilience as the absence of psychological distress, as measured by indicators such as the K10, SP12 or similar instruments; and we do not view the process of resilience as inherently causal.
Instead we understand resilience to be a salutogenic approach to mental health and wellbeing which involves a process of individuals negotiating within a context to access the resources required to attain positive adaptation to adverse events.

Having undertaken the research it is clear that this requires more than identifying protective or vulnerability factors. To understand resilience for particular contexts it is necessary to:

1. Identify how people engage in the process of resilience and understanding the components of the process
2. Map the components of the process for interactions
3. Develop measures to reflect the ways in which resilience is operationalised

Our study provides a comprehensive discussion of 1 and started to identify aspects of 2, although this would require a larger sample and different research tools in order to capture the complexity of resilience as a process. In British research undertaken by the Foresight Programme, a complex systems approach to wellbeing is being advocated to mental capital and wellbeing, and this would appear to be relevant to our understanding of resilience. The third step would require measures at multiple points within the system. Such measures would not focus specifically on the individual, but recognise the importance of having, for example, a sustainable community, a capacity for adaptation within the (natural) environment and a resilient industry. This way of understanding resilience is more closely aligned with that being advocated through the ‘resilience thinking’ approach.

Q.4b What do these findings suggest for enhancing resilience amongst farm families?

Enhancing resilience amongst farm families would require addressing issues associated with all three components of resilience: stance, context and processes. Addressing only resilience processes will not be enough to replicate or develop positive outcomes to the broader farm population. It is also necessary to create a resilience-oriented context for farm families and generate the development of a stance that is conducive to achieving positive outcomes.

Achieving this goal will require a multi-faceted approach, in which small changes over several areas will have an impact, even though changes within a single area may be difficult to measure.

The following suggestions for enhancing resilience are derived from the interviews with participants:

- Enhancing the stance may require:
  
  o Implementing an approach to farming as a business lifestyle which values both business management and farm identities. An approach that only focuses on business management will neither encourage farm families to stay in farming nor encourage young people to enter into farming. Conversely an approach that focuses only on lifestyle will be unlikely to create the conditions for a viable farm business.
Offering supportive family and life-course relevant programs (e.g. intergenerational transfer, rural/farm counselling, post-natal and early childhood support, retirement planning, income support – including Youth allowance/Austudy, family payments) to assist with the relational aspects of farm families.

Capacity building in relevant farm business skills (decision-making, planning, diversification, marketing, risk management, technology), both on individual and community of practice basis to assist in active decision making.

Validating the work of farm women in contributing to household income, and providing opportunities (education, employment) that enable them to find work in rural areas.

Enhancing the context would require:

- Regional development (communities with employment opportunities, health, education and community services, sporting and social groups), includes a focus on cooperation and development of trust, leadership development, future oriented (i.e. long and short term planning), change management.
- Sustainable and (relatively) predictable industry base.
- Integrating the farm production approach (research and development, extension) with one that looks at the personal and social aspects of adaptation.
- An approach to policy and economic decisions that:
  - Recognises the value/role of farm families in food production and in sustaining rural life (includes tourism and other industries etc);
  - Recognises the power inequity between individual farm business units and the national / multi-national nature (and often monopolistic or duopolistic nature) of agri-business (suppliers and consumers). Farm businesses have little power to negotiate prices on either their inputs or outputs. There is no ‘level playing field’ in global agriculture;
  - Recognises the role of farm women in sustaining agricultural enterprises through their off-farm and on-farm roles;
  - Recognises the impact of policy/economic broader changes on agriculture and farm families;
  - Implements regulatory requirements in ways that are sensitive to the demands of farming and capacities of farm families;

Enhancing the processes would require:

- Implementing measures to develop the stance and the context in ways suggested above to provide farm families with more opportunities and
options for making decisions about which resources and strategies would be most useful in their particular circumstances.

- Facilitating the development of social capital and community capacity building to enable social interaction and opportunities for mental disengagement from farm, and for maintaining communities of practice through periods of adversity

- Finding ways of utilising the skills and experiences of farm men and women in other areas of employment; and promoting off-farm income opportunities in rural areas

- Encouraging drought preparedness strategies across all regions (for example, this could be similar to the approach taken to the development of bushfire preparedness strategies)

- Developing positive approaches to mental health and physical health literacy and self-care, which recognise that most farm families will get by in drought conditions

- Providing accessible health and community services in rural areas

### 7.4 Further Research

This research has opened up new questions and areas of study that might well be conducive to further investigation.

*Firstly*, it would be interesting to extend the work that has been conducted on farm families experiencing drought. Work in this area could involve undertaking a detailed mapping of the interactions between and within the three elements of resilience. This type of analysis could well lead to the development of measures or indices of wellbeing based on resilience rather than the absence of psychological distress.

A central finding of our research was the relationship between social and personal resilience. More work is required to fully understand what community / social / regional resilience might look like, how it intersects with the personal resilience of farm families, and how it can be enhanced to leverage resilience within farm families.

Extending the current study could also explore the limits to resilience. What triggers a decline in resilience? Are there cycles of resilience (and non-resilience) and, if so, how are these activated and managed?

One of the unanticipated findings from conducting the interviews with farm families was the impact of drought on retirement and considerations of moving off-farm. Continuing a longitudinal study of farm families with participants over the age of 50 years, possibly over a 10-15 year period would contribute to resilience research in several ways. It would add to our understanding of how resilience might change with age; it would allow us to examine how older farm men and women adapt their working practices and processes to protect their livelihood; it would build on knowledge about the transitions between farm and non-farm occupations and lifestyles (about which little is known); and, an a practical
note, would provide farm men and farm women with evidence about the factors associated with a successful transition.

Secondly, our approach to resilience research could be transferred to other contexts and, in some cases, the conceptual analysis may also be transferable. This would be particularly so with occupations where there is a strong relationship between occupational and personal identity, such as the self-employed, the defence force, people engaged in care work. However, the approach to resilience could be more widely applied in order to examine the commonalities between stance, context and processes for different occupational groups.

The approach could also be extended to other rural industries and rural employment that might have similar contexts to the farm families in our research. The wine industry, horticulture industries, fishing and aquaculture industries and those involving intensive animal husbandry would be interesting to examine for the similarities and differences between farm families. It could, also extend to people employed or working in farm reliant industries in rural areas: the retail sector, value-added industries and rural service industries.

Thirdly, further research could examine the relationship between our approach to resilience and other concepts. Most simply, our approach to resilience could inform debates around ‘resilience thinking’, health in all policies, and ideas about wellbeing more generally. However, the UK government is thinking much more strategically about concepts aimed at a creating a salutogenic, strengths based and systemic approach to health. Although not dealing specifically with the concept of resilience, the Foresight Mental Capital and Wellbeing Project, released in 2008, is an example of how to develop and implement a complex systems approach to mental capital across the life-course. The programme of research undertaken by Foresight was extensive, but generating a systemic change toward mental health and wellbeing may well require this level of commitment.
8. Applying Resilience Research

In this final chapter of this report we examine the applied implications of the project for policy and service provision. This research was funded as part of the Strategic Health Research Program (SA Health) and, as such, is expected to have practical application. In particular, it is anticipated that the research undertaken has the potential to address health and other targets in the SASP and will inform policy and service delivery approaches to mental health across the SA population. It was anticipated that resilience research could hold the keys to better preventive policies.

Ensuring that the research has an impact beyond academic circles is also important to the research team and to the participants in the research. We have an interest in ensuring that the research is applied in ways that benefit farm families (and others) through achieving positive social, economic, environmental and/or cultural outcomes. We anticipate there being two types of outcomes: a) new or improved services or processes, and b) changes to policy. However, we are researchers, not experts in policy, nor are we involved in service delivery or interventions. We have therefore chosen to address the strategic implications of our research by facilitating and reporting on discussions from two forums:

- Consultations with service providers across the four regions
- Workshop with selected government and non-government agencies

Within these forums we sought to understand how our research relates to service delivery, as well as to the policy implications for the SASP, ‘health in all policies’ and resilience thinking. This chapter provides an overview of the findings from the forums.

8.1 Service Provider Consultations

The service provider consultations were undertaken just prior to the second wave interviews with farm families. Insights from the consultations informed the development of the second interview schedule. The consultations focused on three questions:

- Whether the interim findings (from first wave interviews) resonated with their experience of working with farm families
- Identifying the key issues in providing services to farm families
- Whether they could apply a resilience framework to their area of service provision

The responses to these questions highlighted regional differences within the research. In particular, differences were evident in social capital, community change or decline, approaches to farm exit, and community cultures. Some of the issues raised in the consultations have been incorporated into Chapter 5 on Resilience: Context.

Research versus Practice

It was apparent from the consultations that service providers were primarily concerned with a different client group than the farm families participating in this project. Although the farm families in this research would have used some of these services (e.g. banking, financial counselling, health, agricultural-related services), the group of farm families that the service providers found most problematic were those who were NOT getting by.
Nevertheless, the discussion generated around this question confirmed our sample as consisting of farm families who were getting by; and helped to identify some of the differences between farm families who were and were not getting by.

**Service provider concerns re farm families using their services**

- **Difficulties in decision making**
  - financial stress clouding judgements
  - resistance to innovation and adaptation
  - decreasing options (e.g. re off-farm work, leasing/selling property)
- **Farming viewed as a lifestyle, rather than business**
- **Relationship breakdowns**
  - marital
  - intergenerational
- **Problems with exit strategies**
  - retirement for farm families - no superannuation
  - selling properties difficult – not always rational decision
    - raises intra-familial conflict
  - succession planning deferred/halted
    - can’t afford to retire
    - sons working for no income (not sustainable)
  - increasing use of lawyers to intervene in conflict
- **Lack of off-farm income**
  - options decreasing for off-farm work with tighter labour market
  - share prices / dividends etc decreased
  - investment properties sold
- **Increasing isolation:**
  - withdrawing from support networks (e.g. agricultural groups etc) as things get tougher
  - many are ‘over’ the drought and mental health issues and have ‘switched off’ to messages from service providers
  - think that working harder (and longer) on farm will solve problems

Service providers indicated that _time_ was of the essence and there was an overwhelming ‘sense of gloom’ whereby farm families were getting to the ‘pointy end’ when major decisions would need to be made (or made for them). If the drought did not end, service providers discussed the consequences in terms of increased farm exits and higher levels of psychological distress. Even if it did end, however, service providers thought that there would be ongoing difficulties due to:

- Farm women leaving the relationship – or giving men an ultimatum – as they seek to have their needs within the farm family met.
• Banks wanting to recoup money after supporting farm families through several years of drought
• Sons wanting reimbursement for income forgone
• Farmers wanting/needing to replenish and repair on-farm equipment, but with limited resources to do so.

The problem of time was not so apparent in our sample of farm families, for whom nearly half had increased their capacity to get by over time, while a third had stayed the same (see Table 3.4).

**Issues in service provision**

Service providers raised numerous issues about the ways in which services to farm families were provided during the drought. These include:

• Complexity of issues arising from drought
• Not always able to provide the kinds of support required
  o Limited capacity to continue to provide support
  o Need to find innovative ways of delivering services to farm families
• Service providers who live in the community have difficulties in getting away from their work
• Getting correct and timely information out to farm families
• Inter-agency coordination required
  o Some services are under-resourced
  o Sense of all or nothing in some areas
• Dealing with scepticism re ‘drought industry’
• Funding models mean operating on a ‘deficit’ approach

Some service providers identified aspects of their work that they thought were positive:

• Had been a shift from self-referral to case management to integrated management of clients
• Capacity building and community development was taking place, but regional differences in process and success were notable
• Innovation in delivery was being trialled, e.g. going out to farms rather than people coming to them.

There were also suggestions for resolving some of the issues, including a telephone hotline for farm families (similar to the small business hotline); training for non-health service providers who are often on the front line in dealing with farm families’ psychological distress; and linking receipt of government benefits to programs/training that would help decision-making re farm management. Service providers recognised that the effect of the drought went beyond farm families to other rural businesses and were concerned about the impact of the drought in generating conditions for ongoing rural decline.
Applying a resilience framework

The consultations highlighted three areas in which services could contribute to the resilience of farm families: by improving service provision, attending to community resilience and creating opportunities through regional and industry development. These suggestions influence the resilience context, but also lay the groundwork for farm families to access resilience processes to help them get by.

Improving service provision

One of the key factors restricting the capacity of service providers to apply a resilience framework in their services was the emphasis on the deficit model of health and wellbeing taken by funding bodies. It seemed that where service providers did take a strengths based approach, such as in community development / capacity building, they did so because they had a personal or professional commitment to it. This made it dependent on individuals within a job, rather than being structurally or organisationally mandated. Despite these problems, there was widespread support for a strengths based approach to service delivery.

Ideas for improving service provision included:

- Client-centred or demand driven services, included having clearer pathways into services
- Service coordination and integration, including improved information flows, to ensure that services are effective and efficient
- Continuity in service provision (not crisis driven) as a preventive measure. Base level continuous services were seen as reducing the need for acute services that tend to operate on a deficit model and have disadvantages re timing, workforce capacity, and building trust with clients.
- Innovative services and modes of delivery are especially required for isolated areas and for being relevant to particular cohort of clients
- Capacity building (among service providers) to facilitate shift to strengths-based, demand driven services

Community resilience

Service providers in every consultation identified the importance of community (included geographical and occupational communities) and social capital for supporting farm families through adverse climatic conditions. Some saw their role as specifically focused on developing community capacity, building social infrastructure and generating collective optimism. While all regions had recognised the importance of this, they had taken different routes to achieving it and had done so with varying levels of success.

Wudinna, for example, has been pro-active in generating community wellbeing through their support of innovative projects, focus on leadership development and providing opportunities for community members to utilise their skills, be involved and stay optimistic. Other regions had more difficulty doing this. Sometimes this was due to difficulties of working with diverse and highly competitive communities. This appeared to be the case in the Riverland where communities were said to be fragmented and service provision difficult despite efforts of some service providers to generate community resilience. In the Murraylands, the domination of the area by a large regional centre meant that there were advantages in having services available, and some innovations were
discussed. However, the rate of change has affected the social fabric of the community, altering its needs and priorities and making it difficult for established community members to maintain a sense of cohesion and belonging. Throughout the LLRMC, the tourism industry has also declined due to water restrictions, thereby constraining the amount of non-farm income flowing into the area. This was particularly important for those towns dependent on tourism as a secondary industry.

In the MN, generating community resilience focused on interagency coordination and the provision of effective services to the community. Service providers acknowledged that this was due to a particular individual who had the connections, personality and commitment to achieve the required outcome. Communities in the upper MN were viewed to be more vulnerable to decline due to changes brought about by climate variation because of their small size and lack of structural power within the region (i.e. in advocating for services).

Evidence of differences within regions, suggests that while community resilience is important, regions may well be an artificial construct based on political or other criteria. Generating community resilience is unlikely to be effective through region-wide programs unless there is inbuilt flexibility to address the strengths and weaknesses of specific communities. The challenges of doing this are discussed in a recent document produced by the Australian Social Inclusion Board, ‘Building inclusive and resilient communities’ and in the academic literature on social and community resilience.63

Creating opportunities

Although creating opportunities is related to community resilience, it was also discussed separately within the consultations, in particular opportunities relating to employment and climate change. These types of opportunities opened up the possibilities for sustaining a livelihood in rural areas, and were viewed as instilling confidence in the potential for rural living.

Employment opportunities were linked to ideas about regional development and the work of regional development boards, including the capacity of a region to attract new industries. Mining, tourism, diversification in the types of agricultural based industries (e.g. tree lots, wine industry, intensive livestock industry), agricultural value-adding and marketing were generating employment opportunities in different areas. Service providers suggested that there were often difficulties in creating employment opportunities, including attracting industries that offered sustainable employment and managing the community changes that resulted from an influx of new industries.

Climate variation and, more generally, climate change was viewed as creating opportunities for farm families and rural communities that had yet to be realised or even addressed. Service providers indicated that more information is required about these opportunities and how farm families can capitalise on them. In one region, service providers discussed their role in promoting these opportunities by role-modelling the kinds of change that are possible. For example, Wudinna was undertaking preliminary investigations into becoming self-sustaining in terms of water and power.

8.2 Workshop with Policy Makers

The workshop with policy practitioners was undertaken toward the end of the project. The purpose of the workshop was to see whether our resilience research on farm families
experiencing drought could hold the keys to better preventive policies and approaches. The workshop aimed to:

- Identify areas in which research has policy relevance
- Discuss implications of research for policy
- Identify the priorities for policy emerging from the research

**Key policy areas**

The key policy areas that were identified were:

- Health
  - Mental health
  - Country / rural health
- Families and communities
- Regional development
- Agriculture and climate change

**Common threads**

Discussions about the implications of research for policy were then carried out for each policy area.

Some themes extended across more than one policy area. These include:

- Continuity (at a base level) of services with less reliance on crisis driven responses
- Community capacity building, including leadership
- Gendered approach to policy-making, ensuring that rural women’s needs are met as well as those of rural men
- A systemic view of policy and service provision, involving integration across policy areas
- Valuing the contribution of farm families to the community, to agricultural and non-agricultural (e.g. tourism, mining) industries and to attaining SASP targets

**Priorities**

The following priorities for each policy area were identified by workshop participants.

**Health**

1. Partnerships for policy development across departments:

- Stepping up social inclusion board involvement in rural issues
- GP models of shared care prefer continuum of care
- Policy needs to be recurrent rather than crisis driven
- Build foundation around healthy communities and healthy lifestyles, then build up
- Must be sustainable and context sensitive
2. Policy needs to be linked with local action
   - Implementation for different communities of interest (recognise gender and age differences)
   - Address the barriers to implementation resources, deliverables, recruitment and training.

3. Rural policy needs a focus on early childhood and youth to keep them engaged in rural communities

4. Create policy to build virtual networks in health service delivery

**Families and Communities**

1. Services need to be maintained over the long term
   - Identifying minimum level
   - Provide continuum of care
   - Funding needs to link into something, not be one-off

2. Develop community capacity to convert needs and goodwill into effective services
   - Create and sustain networks
   - Define what is unique to a particular community
   - Identify key people for leadership; develop leadership skills and transition processes
   - Understand the critical mass of people required for viable communities (threshold of self-efficiency)
   - Maintain personnel enthusiasm and identify benchmarks for service provision (i.e. in community health)

**Regional Development**

1. Identify base level of services to be in communities to build on when needed

2. Communities to be organised and networks connected to government. This builds trust.

3. Implement change management processes within communities, including ensuring leadership continuity to help communities to change.

4. Issue of diversity versus homogeneity in communities influences capacity to change

5. Identify creativity and opportunities that will facilitate adaptation. For example, Andrew Fearne (Thinker in Residence) advocates adding value to farm products through supply chain thinking.

**Agriculture and Climate Change**

1. Take a longer term view of service provision
2. Translate big issues (climate change) to practical real time thinking.

3. Embed services / supports in communities.

4. Enable farm business managers to maintain a sense of control in decision making

5. Share models between regions

6. Promote communities of practices

Feedback from participants

The workshop received positive feedback from participants, both on the feedback sheet and in post-workshop correspondence. At a broad level there was recognition that the research provided an ‘excellent snapshot of today’s agriculture’ and ‘validated / adds value to the thinking that we [in government] already have’. However, in extending their thinking further, participants said that the most useful aspects of the research challenged them to consider:

- The intersection between mental health, economic wellbeing and community strength
- The diversity of response and how this fits with a strategic approach to addressing issues
- Bringing the social context / regional variation into examination of needs / program delivery
- Exploring ways of engaging mental health services in wider community development activity / programs
- Promoting the view that agriculture has a future, farming families … know how to get by

For others, our understanding of resilience was viewed as useful for:

- Building a knowledge base around resilience
- Framing thinking about the future
- Thinking about how resilience can be supported in the community
- Translation into other policy areas

8.3 Summary

This project was funded on the basis that resilience research might well hold the keys to better preventive policies and services. The strengths-based, process focused approach used in our research opened up opportunities for shifting the discussion about mental health and wellbeing that acknowledges the personal, social and environmental contexts within which farm families achieve wellbeing even when facing adversity.

On this basis, the mental health and wellbeing of farm families is relevant to targets within the South Australian State Plan that go beyond measures of psychological
wellbeing (Target 2.7). In all consultations about policy and service provision it was suggested that enhancing resilience requires a systemic – or health in all policies – approach that focuses on health maintenance rather than illness prevention or treatment. Health maintenance requires a life-course perspective that recognises the social contexts – the family, business (industry) and community – within which people negotiate for the appropriate resources to achieve wellbeing. This presents challenges to the current ways of thinking about mental health, wellbeing and resilience.
Endnotes


9 Bryant, L. 1999. ‘The detraditionalization of occupational identities in farming in South Australia.’ *Sociologia Ruralis* 39: 236-261

10 Productivity Commission, 2009

11 Clark et al, 2000, p.1


13 Clark et al, 2000, p. 4

14 ABARE, 2007a, 20
ABARE. 2007b. *Australian Commodities, March Quarter. Cat. No. 07.1*, Canberra p.176

ABARE, 2007a, 20

Gunasekera, D., Tulloh, C., Ford, M. and Heyhoe, E. 2008. ‘Climate Change: Opportunities and Challenges in Australian Agriculture,’ in proceedings of Faculty of Agriculture, Food & Natural Resources Annual Symposium, University of Sydney. p. 5


Judd, F., Cooper, A.-M., Fraser, C. and Davis, J. 2006a. ‘Rural suicide - people or place effects?’ *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* 40: 208-216.


34 Ungar, M. 2004, p. 359

35 Articles consequently appeared in the Stock Journal, Flinders News, West Coast Sentinel, Murray Pioneer, Border Watch, Drought E Newsletter and other regional papers. Interviews were also conducted on ABC radio and WIN TV.


37 Goyder’s line is the rainfall boundary above which land is thought to be unsuitable for agriculture.


39 Alston, M. 2006, p. 158


43 South Australia Department of Health. 2008. South Australia: Our Health and Health Services, Adelaide

44 SA Dept Health, 2008

45 SA Dept Health, 2008


Keleher, H. and McDougall, C. 2009. p. 44


Foresight Mental Capital and Wellbeing Project, 2008.


References


ABARE. 2007b. *Australian Commodities, March Quarter*. Cat. No. 07.1, Canberra.


Judd, F., Cooper, A.-M., Fraser, C. and Davis, J. 2006a. ‘Rural suicide - people or place effects?’ *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* 40: 208-216.


Appendix A: Project Management

A1. Research Team

Debra King (Chief Investigator), Senior Research Fellow, National Institute of Labour Studies, Flinders University

Colin MacDougall (Associate Investigator), Associate Professor of Public Health & Southgate Institute for Health, Society and Equity, School of Medicine, Flinders University and Honorary Principal Fellow, The McCaughey Centre, Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences, University of Melbourne

Jennene Greenhill (Associate Investigator), Director, Flinders University Rural Clinic School

Anna Lane (Research Assistant), National Institute of Labour Studies, Flinders University

The research team was supported by:

Llainey Smith and Megan Moskos (Research Assistants) National Institute of Labour Studies, Flinders University

A2. Project Management Group

Adrian Booth, Chief Project Officer, Health Promotion Branch, Statewide Service Strategy, SA Health

Deane Crabb, Policy Manager, SA Farmers’ Federation

Jean Griffiths, Head, School of Arts and Social Sciences, Southern Cross University

Lib Hylton-Keele, Program Leader, Rural Communities, PIRSA

Alan Morris, Director, Drought Response, Country Health SA

Frank Vanclay, Professorial Research Fellow, Rural Social Research Group, University of Tasmania

The PMG differed significantly from that originally named due to personnel changes in different organisations, availability of named members, and suggestions made by SA Health.
A2.1 PMG Terms of Reference

To collaborate with the research team and provide advice to ensure the success of the project in meeting its deadlines and outcomes. This includes working with the research team to:

- Design the research tools and methodology
- Develop and support a strategy to promote the project to farmers and their families
- Provide feedback on the draft and final reports
- Develop a dissemination strategy to relevant industry and policy stakeholders
- Translate research findings into strategic policy areas, including the planning of a focused policy workshop
- Identify and develop research projects suitable for applying for a Linkage grant
Appendix B: Research Instruments and Processes

B1. Mind Map – First Wave Interviews

Can you give me an example? What happened then? – Details / Events

EXPERIENCE OF FARMING

- Drought
- Climate Variation / Climate Change
  - Long / short term
    - Global / local
    - Cause / effect
  - Structural
    - Where does money come from
    - Work conditions
    - Work to life balance

- Work / Livelihood
  - Physical / Mental
  - Emotional
  - Social network
  - Service use

- Health / Wellbeing

Now; In the past; In the future; In relation to other farmers

What did you mean by …? – Interpretation

How did that feel? – Emotions

What was that like? What did you think about that happening? – Opinions
B2. Questionnaire – First Wave Interviews

Thank you for participating in this research and taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

The questions in this booklet will give us information about:

• your farm
• your health
• you (your age, education, etc)

This will help us to compare your situation to that of other farmers.

Please read each question carefully. Remember, we just want to know about your own personal situation or opinions.

To answer the questions, either:
• Mark one of the boxes, eg. ☒ OR
• Write your answer in the space provided

### About Your Farm

1. What is the total farm area operated (include land leased or share-farmed)?
   - Less than 500 ha
   - Between 500 and 1,000 ha
   - Between 1,000 and 2,000 ha
   - Between 2,000 and 5,000 ha
   - Between 5,000 and 10,000 ha
   - More than 10,000 ha

2. How long have you been operating this farm?
   - Less than 5 years
   - 5 – 10 yrs
   - 10 – 20 yrs
   - More than 20 yrs

3. For how many generations (including yours) has this farm been in your family (or your partners)?
   - 1 (you bought / leased the farm)
   - 2 (parents bought / leased the farm)
   - 3 (grandparents bought / leased the farm)
   - 4 or more generations

4. How many people (including yourself) worked on the farm last week:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3-5</th>
<th>6-10</th>
<th>11+</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full-time (35+ hours)</td>
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<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Part-time (regular hours)</td>
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<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Casual / Seasonal</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<td>☐</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

5. On average, how many hours do you spend working on the farm each week?
   - Less than 20 hours
   - 20 - 40 hours
   - 40 - 50 hours
   - 50 - 60 hours
   - More than 60 hours

6. Is your farm first and foremost a:
Business ☐
Lifestyle choice ☐
Equally a business and a lifestyle choice ☐

7. What is the business structure of the farm:
   Sole trader ☐
   Partnership ☐
   Family company ☐
   Trust ☐
   Don’t know ☐

8(a). What is the approximate market value of your farm/business (include land, stock and plant)?
   Less than $1,000,000 ☐
   Between $1,000,000 and $2,500,000 ☐
   Between $2,500,000 and $5,000,000 ☐
   Between $5,000,000 and $7,500,000 ☐
   Between $7,500,000 and $10,000,000 ☐
   More than $10,000,000 ☐

8(b). Approximately what is your equity in the farm (i.e. the percentage of its value you do not owe money on)?
   Less than 20% ☐
   Between 20% and 40% ☐
   Between 40% and 60% ☐
   Between 60% and 80% ☐
   More than 80% ☐

9. Approximately what proportion of your income is derived from OFF farm activities (e.g. off-farm work, investments)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0-20%</th>
<th>20-40%</th>
<th>40-60%</th>
<th>60-80%</th>
<th>80-100%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In a good year</td>
<td></td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In an average year</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This year</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

10. At the moment is your family’s income:
   Not enough to buy necessities ☐
   Enough to meet necessities only ☐
   Enough for only some of the things you want ☐
   Enough for about everything you want ☐
   Enough for everything you want plus some for saving ☐

11. Overall, has the family’s financial position over this drought:
   Become much worse ☐
   Become worse ☐
   Stayed about the same ☐
   Improved ☐
   Improved considerably ☐

12. How long do you want to stay on the farm?
   Indefinitely ☐
   Until retirement ☐
   Until the children have grown up ☐
   For a short time while I look for something else ☐
   Only until I can sell up ☐
   Don’t know ☐

13. How long do you expect to stay on the farm?
   Indefinitely ☐
Until retirement
Until the children have grown up
For a short time while I look for something else
Only until I can sell up
Don’t know

14. How would you describe the overall effect of this drought on your farm’s output?
   - Eliminated it completely
   - Reduced it to its lowest point
   - Reduced it substantially
   - Reduced it to below average
   - Had little effect
   - Had no effect

15. What would be the effect of another year of drought on your farm (i.e. within the next 5 years)?
   - Would not recover
   - Serious but would recover
   - Minor
   - No impact
   - Don’t know

---

### About Your Health

16(a). In general, would you say your health is:
   - Excellent
   - Very good
   - Good
   - Fair
   - Poor

16(b). How is your health compared with others your age?
   - Better
   - Same
   - Worse

16(c). How is your health compared to two years ago?
   - Better
   - Same
   - Worse

17. Please consider the last four weeks and answer the following questions by selecting one of the four answer options (please circle one answer per question).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have you….</th>
<th>Better than usual</th>
<th>Same as usual</th>
<th>Less than usual</th>
<th>Much less than usual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Been able to concentrate on what you’re doing</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>No more than usual</td>
<td>Rather more than usual</td>
<td>Much more than usual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost much sleep over worry</td>
<td>More so than usual</td>
<td>Same as usual</td>
<td>Less than usual</td>
<td>Much less than usual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt you were playing a useful part in things</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>No more than usual</td>
<td>Rather more than usual</td>
<td>Much more than usual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt capable of making decisions about things</td>
<td>More so than usual</td>
<td>Same as usual</td>
<td>Less than usual</td>
<td>Much less than usual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt constantly under strain</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>No more than usual</td>
<td>Rather more than usual</td>
<td>Much more than usual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt you couldn’t overcome your</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>No more than usual</td>
<td>Rather more than usual</td>
<td>Much more than usual</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
difficulties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>More so than usual</th>
<th>Same as usual</th>
<th>Less so than usual</th>
<th>Much less than usual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Been able to enjoy your normal day-to-day activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Been able to face up to your problems</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Been feeling unhappy and depressed</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>No more than usual</td>
<td>Rather more than usual</td>
<td>Much more than usual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Been losing confidence in yourself</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>No more than usual</td>
<td>Rather more than usual</td>
<td>Much more than usual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Been thinking of yourself as a worthless person</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>No more than usual</td>
<td>Rather more than usual</td>
<td>Much more than usual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Been feeling reasonably happy, all things considered</td>
<td>More so than usual</td>
<td>About the same as usual</td>
<td>Less so than usual</td>
<td>Much less than usual</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

About You

18. How old will you be on December 31 of this year? ____ years.

19. Are you male or female?
   - Male [ ]
   - Female [ ]

20. What is your country of birth? ____________________________

21. Including yourself, how many people aged 18 and over live in this household?
   ____________________ people.

22. How many children under 18 years do you have? ______ children

23(a). Do you want any of your children to continue in farming (including those already in farming)?
   - YES [ ]
   - NO [ ]
   - Not Applicable [ ]

23(b). Do you expect any of your children to continue in farming (including those already in farming)?
   - YES [ ]
   - NO [ ]
   - Not Applicable [ ]

24. Are you …
   - Married / living with a partner [ ]
   - Separated / divorced [ ]
   - Widowed [ ]
   - Never married [ ]

25. Which best describes the highest educational qualification you have obtained
   - Primary school [ ]
   - Secondary school, below year 12 [ ]
   - Completed secondary school (yr 12) [ ]
   - Trade / apprenticeship [ ]
   - Certificate / diploma [ ]
   - Bachelor degree or higher [ ]

26. If you have a post-school qualification, please give details (eg Diploma in Farm Management or Certificate III in Aged Care)
Thank you for completing this questionnaire. We would like to get back to you to let you know how things are going with the research. If you would like to receive this information, please provide the following details:

Name: ________________________________________________________________

Address: ______________________________________________________________

Email Address: __________________________________________________________

Phone Number: __________________________________________________________

Fax Number: ____________________________________________________________

We would also like to speak with you again in about 12 months time to see how things are going. Is this okay with you? YES □ NO □
B3. Second wave interviews – men and women

Questions for farm men

Last time we spoke you said you seemed optimistic / pessimistic (see summary) about the 2008 season. Did the season pan out as expected?
- What was the highlight of the last year?
- What was the low point of the last year?

Are you feeling optimistic / pessimistic about the next 12 months? Why?
- What would you like to achieve in the next 12 months?

The following questions are based on information that we received from the interviews with farmers last year. We are trying to build our understanding of particular factors and resources that help farmers to get by during the drought.

Can you give me an example of a difficult decision that you had to make recently?
- How did you make the decision (probe for process, people)
- What was the outcome of the decision (expected / unexpected)

From the last lot of interviews with farmers we were given the impression that one of the problems with farming is the level of uncertainty associated with it.
- Can you give me an example of how you deal with this?
- Do you think this type / level of uncertainty is a problem for your income? Your health? In what ways?

What community / social / farm-related organisations do you belong to?
- How involved are you in them? e.g. Any leadership roles
- Has this changed in the last 12 months?
- In what ways is your involvement in these organisations important?

At the moment is your family’s income:
- Not enough to buy necessities
- Enough to meet necessities only
- Enough for only some of the things you want
- Enough for about everything you want
- Enough for everything you want plus some for saving

[What are your options if your farm income does not improve over the next couple of years?
- If taking off-farm work, what would you do
- If selling the farm, what would you do
- If sticking it out, what changes would be required]

On reflection, do you think your age affected the way in which you managed the farm business during the drought? In what way?
- For farmers over 50 – probe for impact on retirement plans
- For farmers under 35 – probe for impact on ambitions
- For all/others – probe for impact on investment strategies (ie future use of Farm Managed Deposits; shares; investment properties; farm expansion)
In general, would you say your health is:

- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

How is your health compared to this time last year?

- Better
- Same
- Worse

What do you do to keep yourself physically healthy enough to work?

- probe for regular check ups
- probe for self-management regimes
- probe for assistance from spouse / friends

Have you had any problems with your physical health over the past 12 months? If yes, how did you take care of yourself during that time?

How often have you been able to take time off from the farm over the past 12 months?

- probe for holidays (how long); days off (regular / irregular)
- Is this more or less than usual?
- How important is it to you to take time off from your work?
- Would you like to take more time off?
  - If yes, how much more and what would you like to do?

If you were concerned about your own or your friend’s / family’s mental health, what would you do? Probes…

- Where would you go for advice?
- If concern is for others, how would you tackle the issue with them?
- At what stage would you seek / recommend medical assistance? Where would you go for this assistance?

**GHQ12**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have you…</th>
<th>Better than usual</th>
<th>Same as usual</th>
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<td>Been able to concentrate on what you’re doing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lost much sleep over worry</td>
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<tr>
<td>Felt you were playing a useful part in things</td>
<td>More so than usual</td>
<td>Same as usual</td>
<td>Less useful than usual</td>
<td>Much less useful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt capable of making decisions about things</td>
<td>More so than usual</td>
<td>Same as usual</td>
<td>Less so than usual</td>
<td>Much less than usual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt constantly under strain</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>No more than usual</td>
<td>Rather more than usual</td>
<td>Much more than usual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>No more than usual</td>
<td>Rather more than usual</td>
<td>Much more than usual</td>
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<td>Been feeling unhappy and depressed</td>
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<td>Been losing confidence in yourself</td>
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<td>Been thinking of yourself as a</td>
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<td>worthless person</td>
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<td>Been feeling reasonably happy, all</td>
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<td>things considered</td>
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Compared to last year, would you say that your overall capacity to get by has:

- Increased a lot □ [why?]
- Increased slightly □ [why?]
- Stayed the same □
- Decreased slightly □
- Decreased a lot □

[How long do you think you will be able to keep on getting by in this way?]

- How will you know if you were having a problem getting by?]

Finally, what is the one thing that you would like to see changed so that you could more easily get by if there was another severe drought?
Questions for farm women

Last time we spoke you said you seemed optimistic / pessimistic (see summary) about 2008. Did the year pan out as expected?
   • What was the highlight of the last year?
   • What was the low point of the last year?

Are you feeling optimistic / pessimistic about the next 12 months? Why?
   • What would you like to achieve in the next 12 months?

The following questions are based on information that we received from the interviews with farmers last year. We are trying to build our understanding of particular factors and resources that help farm families to get by during the drought.

From our interviews with farm women we found that women have a variety of roles in farm families. What do you see as being your role?
   • On farm
   • Off farm

Is this what you want to be doing? If not, what would you prefer to be doing?
   • What will affect whether or not you will get to do this?

Has your role changed in the last 12 months? If yes, why did it change?

It seemed from the interviews that farm families have different ways of making decisions – from all sitting down together and discussing options, to those who make relatively independent decisions.

How do you choose what you do and don’t do on farm?

Can you give me an example of a difficult decision that you had to make recently?
   • How did you make the decision (probe for process, people)
   • What was the outcome of the decision (expected / unexpected)

What community / social / farm-related organisations do you belong to?
   • How involved are you in them? e.g. Any leadership roles
   • Has this changed in the last 12 months?
   • In what ways is your involvement in these organisations important?

How do you juggle your paid / farm work and your other activities and responsibilities (eg family, community)?
   • What gets priority?
   • How do you work out your priorities?

How often have you been able to take time off from the farm over the past 12 months
   • probe for holidays (how long); days off (regular / irregular)
   • Is this more or less than usual?
   • How important is it to you to take time off from your work?
   • Would you like to take more time off?
      ○ If yes, how much more and what would you like to do?
At the moment is your family’s income:
- Not enough to buy necessities
- Enough to meet necessities only
- Enough for only some of the things you want
- Enough for about everything you want
- Enough for everything you want plus some for saving

In general, would you say your health is:
- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

How is your health compared to this time last year?
- Better
- Same
- Worse

What do you do to keep yourself physically healthy enough to work?
- probe for regular check ups
- probe for self-management regimes
- probe for assistance from spouse / friends

Have you had any problems with your physical health over the past 12 months? If yes, how did you take care of yourself during that time?

If you were concerned about your own or your friend’s / family’s mental health, what would you do? Probes…
- Where would you go for advice?
- If concern is for others, how would you tackle the issue with them?
- At what stage would you seek / recommend medical assistance? Where would you go for this assistance?

GHQ12

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<tr>
<th>Have you....</th>
<th>Better than usual</th>
<th>Same as usual</th>
<th>Less than usual</th>
<th>Much less than usual</th>
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<tr>
<td>Been able to concentrate on what you're doing</td>
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<td>Lost much sleep over worry</td>
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<td>Felt you were playing a useful part in things</td>
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<td>Felt capable of making decisions about things</td>
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<td>Felt constantly under strain</td>
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<td>Felt you couldn’t overcome your difficulties</td>
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<td>Been able to enjoy your normal day-to-day activities</td>
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<td>More so than usual</td>
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<td>Been able to face up to your problems</td>
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<tr>
<td>Been feeling unhappy and depressed</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>No more than usual</td>
<td>Rather more than usual</td>
<td>Much more than usual</td>
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<tr>
<td>Been losing confidence in yourself</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>No more than usual</td>
<td>Rather more than usual</td>
<td>Much more than usual</td>
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<tr>
<td>Been thinking of yourself as a worthless person</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>No more than usual</td>
<td>Rather more than usual</td>
<td>Much more than usual</td>
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<tr>
<td>Been feeling reasonably happy, all things considered</td>
<td>More so than usual</td>
<td>About the same as usual</td>
<td>Less so than usual</td>
<td>Much less than usual</td>
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</table>

Compared to last year, would you say that your overall capacity to get by has:
- Increased a lot
- Increased slightly
- Stayed the same
- Decreased slightly
- Decreased a lot

[How long do you think you will be able to keep on getting by in this way?]
- How will you know if you were having a problem getting by?]

Finally, what is the *one* thing that you would like to see changed so that you could more easily get by if there was another severe drought?
B4. Consultations - agenda

Welcome (15 minutes)

Welcome
  - Housekeeping
  - Overview of agenda and protocols (including consent)

Introductions
  - Name, organisation
  - In relation to your work, what is the (one) key concern for you in helping farmers to survive the drought

Key findings: providing your feedback on results (30 minutes)

Presentation: Key findings (5 minutes – highlighting key points from paper sent to participants)

Questions
  - Does the picture of how farm families are getting by in your area surprise you?
  - From your work and interactions with farm families what other resources or factors do you think have helped them to get by?
    - In relation to farming – work and livelihood
    - In relation to health – physical and mental
    - In relation to men and women
  - How do you think farm families here compare to farm families in other districts in SA (ie what are their differences / similarities)?

Thinking outside the square: responding to the research (30 minutes)

Presentation: Putting research into practice (3-5 minutes – why this is important for us)

Questions
  - How might you use the results of this research in your own work or interactions with farm families
  - What do you think needs to change in order for our findings to be useful
    - Dissemination strategies
    - Policy responses
    - Local responses
B5. Policy Workshop Agenda

10.30 Welcome and introductions
10.45 Overview of findings and purpose of workshop
   ▪ Findings
   ▪ Policy implications
     ○ SASP
     ○ Health in all policies
11.00 Discussion
11.15 Policy mapping
   ▪ Policy areas
     ○ Regional development
     ○ Country / mental health
     ○ Climate variation/dryness
     ○ Rural community services
11.45 ▪ Strategic policy (map to SASP)
     ○ Psychological wellbeing
     ○ Regional population levels
     ○ Workforce development
     ○ Economic disadvantage
12.15 Summary and Close

Workshop Participants

Invited Guests:

- Celmow-Meyer, Michelle Country Health SA Coordinator Rural Community Counsellors, Drought Response
- Cock, Greg Sustainable Systems, PIRSA Program Manager, Drought Response and NRM
- Davis, Gerry Sustainable Systems, PIRSA Program Manager, Water Policy
- Dunsford, Adair Women in Agriculture and Business SA State President
- Ernszt, Ron SA Health Coordinator Strategic Projects, Statewide Service Strategy
- Galley, Phillip SA Health Manager, Acute and Community Services, Mental Health Unit
- Horwood, Wayne Mental Health Coalition SA Policy Officer - Section Liaison
- Lamont, Helen Sustainable Systems, PIRSA Director
- Martin, Warren Country Health SA Rural Community Counsellor
- Melino, Mike SA Health Executive Director
- Neal, John SAFF Chair, Rural Communities Engagement Reference Group
Petty, Heather  SA Health  Principal Project Officer (Strategic Research)
Plowman, Don  PIRSA  Deputy Chief Executive
Stewart, Amanda  SA Health  Communications Advisor,
Winefield, Matt  Department of Premier and Cabinet  Principle Policy Officer

**Project Management:**

Battersby, Selena  SA Health  Project Manager
Booth, Adrian  SA Health  Chief Project Officer, Health Promotion Branch, Statewide Service Strategy
Crabb, Deane  SAFF  Policy Manager
Hylton Keele, Lib  Sustainable Systems, PIRSA  Program Leader, Rural Communities
Morris, Alan  Country Health SA  Director, Drought Response

**Research Team**

Greenhill, Jennene  Flinders Rural Clinical School
King, Debra  NILS, Flinders
Lane, Anna  NILS, Flinders
MacDougall, Colin  Dept of Public Health, Flinders
Smith, Llainey  NILS, Flinders
Appendix C: Research Outputs

C1. Feedback to farm families

In December 2008 we provided feedback to farm families in each region. Below is an example of what we sent:

Getting by: farmers facing climate variation on the
Central Eyre Peninsula

Over the past few months we have been analysing the information you gave us when we interviewed you earlier this year about how you were getting by during the drought. We still have more to do, but thought we would take this opportunity to provide you with a very brief overview of our findings so far.

The drought in your region

We interviewed 39 people in the CEP, covering 20 farm families. The information in this and the next section is based on these interviews. Most farmers we interviewed told us that drought usually occurred in the region one in every three years. This regularity meant farmers on the CEP are accustomed to operating in drought conditions. Yet, the 2006/2007 drought differed from previous droughts to the extent that many claimed it to be to be the worst ever experienced.

“…its so dry. I’ve never seen the country so dry. Its just shocking.”

Early rains in 2007, following from drought in 2006, raised expectations of a good year. Grain prices were also good. These conditions meant that farmers appeared willing to take more risks in the marketing of their grain and entered into forward selling agreements. The lack of follow up rain meant that many farmers could not fulfil their contracts. The financial implications of this meant that, for these farmers, the impact of the drought was exacerbated.

“…what the biggest problem was last year was that, well there were two factors, there was failure of production, plus they locked the price in”. 

However, for those who did have grain to sell, the high prices softened the financial impact of the drought. It was obvious that this drought differed to others because of the changing nature of farming, especially the increasing cost of inputs such as fertilizer, chemicals, and fuel. By 2008 farmers had to plant crops after two years of drought and unprecedented cost conditions.

“Its getting harder because the actual cost to put a crop in is getting higher and higher. So there’s a higher risk factor every time you put a crop it…in the last 12 months, I reckon our costs have probably gone up 50%. Well fertiliser is the best example. Last year we paid $600 tonne for fertiliser, this year its about $1250 a tonne. So its you’re going to put on the same amount of fertiliser its going to cost you twice as much money.”
**How you said you were affected**

The output on all farms interviewed was affected with 45% of farmers interviewed describing the overall affect of this drought on their farm’s output as “reduced it to its lowest point”; 35% said it was “reduced substantially”.

The major impact of the drought on farm families was on income. Three quarters of the farmers we interviewed told us that the family’s financial position over this drought had become worse or much worse, with 40% of farm families having only enough income to cover necessities. A further 5% did not even have enough income for necessities.

“…this last couple [of years] has really been hard and I don’t mind saying the last 12 months have been the worst 12 months of my life I think. Just because of the financial pressure.”

Changes in workload were dependent on the type of farm and the affordability of labour. Livestock required more attention, but with little or no crops, the harvest time workload was greatly reduced.

“well some of it decreases actually because we didn’t spray anything, the crop wasn’t worth spraying so that was probably six weeks work was taken out for one person. And the harvest workload is significantly reduced because you're handling for less grain; so there’s far less trips to the silo. Stock wise there’s a bit more work because you’ve got to actively manage your stock a lot closer, just monitoring and shifting feed.”

All farmers reported experiencing stress over the past couple of years. Stress manifested itself in many ways, including worry, sleep disturbances, anxiety, loss of concentration, irritability, isolating self from others, using alcohol to relax and depression.

“you talk to some people and a lot of people are down in the dumps, they really are. Just bought land or just struck at the wrong time really. I think there’s a lot of people that are doing it tough”

Despite this, almost all farmers and their spouses were optimistic about the future.

“its hard to answer the question ‘how can you be so confident’ you just have to be, if you’re not confident why be here”

**Towards understanding what helped you get by**

The main purpose of doing this research is to develop a better understanding of what it is that helps farm families ‘get by’ during periods of extreme adversity (such as drought). We are particularly interested in the relationship between work and health, so this is what our interviews focused on. In this section, we bring the interviews with all 148 people (80 farm families) together and begin to identify some of the things that you said were important for ‘getting by’. We will be developing these ideas further over the next few months.

**Pre-existing viability of business**

Farms that had good profit margins in the years prior to the drought found it easier to manage through periods of lower income. The viability of a business was influenced by:

- pre-drought debt levels and capacity to make repayments
• the use of farm management deposits (FMD) as a means of equalising income over a period of time
• prior crop yields and stock levels which influenced the capacity to have stores of grain and feed on hand through the drought
• whether the business was in an expansion, consolidation or wind-down phase

Income security
Farm families are very creative when it comes to conserving income and cutting costs. In ensuring a regular income, some families used EC payments, some drew on their FMDs, while others relied on off-farm investments and savings to help cover the costs of living and of maintaining the business. In cutting costs the emphasis was on maintaining minimum functions on farm and in the household.

Managing risk and decision-making
In addition to the drought, changes in agriculture have increased levels of uncertainty and many farmers spoke about the risks associated with farming – some comparing it to gambling. Decision-making in this kind of environment was assisted by having confidence in their industry and capacity to make decisions. This was helped by:
• reading widely and doing research on issues affecting their business
• finding and using ‘experts’ (agronomist, farm consultant, accountant, bank manager) who could be trusted to give good advice
• listening to what other farmers were doing
Some farmers were being proactive in managing risk and were changing their farming methods, developing alternative markets for their products or moving toward a different mix of on and off-farm income sources.

More than a farmer
Often the farmers who were optimistic about their future were those who felt they had options in moving forward. These options might be related to the way they farmed, but they were also about knowing they had the skills or qualifications to find off-farm work or diversify their income. The ability to see themselves as more than a farmer was important to many people who valued their roles as community leaders, parents, or other kinds of workers (teachers, welders, nurses, mechanics etc). For some, their hobbies also provided this outlet with farmers having interests in a range of areas.

Opportunities to disengage
One thing that nearly everyone we spoke with recognised was the importance of ‘time-out’ from the farm – both physically getting off the property and mentally having something else to think about. Although holidays and weekends away were not always possible during the drought, people valued the ability to take time off and go to sporting events, spend time with children and family, be involved in the community or church, or have friends over for a barbecue. Many people made a point of maintaining contact with the ‘outside’ world with farm and non-farm friends, and relatives.

Health
Higher workloads and the stress and worry about finances and the future put considerable pressure on people’s health and sense of wellbeing. While not all of the health problems that farm families discussed were drought related, the drought certainly seemed to exacerbate issues. Generally people’s physical health was good, although age dependent. There were relatively high levels of awareness about health, with many people having regular, annual check-ups with their local general practitioner. However, there appeared to be a tendency to self manage health problems with exercise and diet unless it became an
absolute priority. For major health problems (broken bones etc) farmers tended to return to work early, mainly due to the shortage and cost of employing replacement labour.

There were also relatively good levels of awareness about mental health problems. Pre-existing mental health problems were often exacerbated by the drought, but these were generally being well managed. There was evidence that, in some communities, farmers looked out for each other and were proactive in keeping in contact with anyone they thought might be having problems. Farmers rarely offered ‘mental health’ advice to one another, but in maintaining contact with others they came to realise that they weren’t the only one in this situation (and that others may be doing it even harder than them) and that others had been through it before, and this was seen to be helpful. Beyond the informal networks, many farm families had been to information sessions about depression and stress and could readily identify the symptoms and impact on their wellbeing and ability to manage the business and make decisions. Several people had sought help from mental health services, including beyondblue, their GPs and specialists which they found useful.

Farm women
Women’s lives on farm were very diverse. Some were full partners and shared the workload, many had a supportive role doing the bookwork and ‘helping’ out, some viewed their primary role as mother, several worked off-farm and contributed to household income, while a few had very separate lives from their husband. Family life was important and most women had primary responsibility for ensuring that the educational, health and social needs of the family were met. For some women, this meant that their own needs were not always a priority either to themselves or others in the family. A number of women ensured that they had strategies for ‘self-care’ including exercise, time-out for themselves, maintaining contact with their own friends, or having interests off-farm.

*What is going to happen next?*

Over the next couple of months we will undertake a more detailed analysis of the information you gave us in 2008 to uncover differences and similarities across region, gender, age and farm types.

Early in 2009 we will begin a process of consultation with organizations on how this research can be used to improve services. This will involve contacting you via phone around March and April to discuss your views.

If you would like to provide us with feedback on this summary please don’t hesitate of contact us.

Contact: Dr Debra King,
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PO Box 2100, Adelaide SA 5001
Email: deb_king@flinders.edu.au
Phone: 08 8201 3164
C2. List of presentations

Debra King, Overview of preliminary wave 1 findings, SAFF Meeting, 10 October 2008.

Debra King, NILS Seminar, 14 July 2008.


Debra King, Feedback on consultations with service providers, SAFF Meeting, 8 May 2009.

Debra King, Resilience in Farm Women, Young Farm Women, Kingscote, 12 June 2009.


Debra King, Clarendon Agricultural Bureau, 15 July 2009

Debra King, Resilience and Farm Families in South Australia, The Australian Sociological Association conference, ANU, Canberra, December 1-4, 2009

Colin MacDougall, What does a “process of getting by” approach to resilience mean for interventions and policies to support farmers in times of drought?, Mental Health Research Day, Flagstaff Hill, 8 October 2009.

Colin MacDougall, Farmers and climate change: a South Australian study of resilience and change; Climate Change Conference, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia, 8-10 July 2010


C3. Journal article


C4. Media reports

Farm families in research spotlight, Stock Journal, 27 December 2007, p.9

How do farmers survive drought?, Murray Pioneer, 8 January 2008, p.15

Debra King, Climate change impact on farms under the microscope, ABC Australia News (Radio), 17 January 2008

Climate change impact on farms under the microscope, ABC Western Queensland (Longreach) National Rural News, 17 January 2008
Finding out how SA farmers cope with tough times, Flinders University News, 23 January 2008

Finding out how SA farmers cope with tough times, South Australian Policy Online, 25 January 2008

Study into farm life, Flinders News, 30 January 2008, p.16

Finding out how farmers cope, West Coast Sentinel, 31 January 2008, p.12

Study to find out how SA farmers cope, SA Drought E-News, 31 January 2008

Researchers call for farmers to share drought experiences, Border Watch, 8 February 2008, p.18

Jennene Greenhill, WIN TV, 11 February 2008

Debra King, ABC Riverland (Radio), 19 November 2008