



# Evaluation of the Western Australia Drought Pilot Programs

Department of Agriculture

A Marsden Jacob Report

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## Summary

The Western Australian Drought Pilot has helped improved the drought resilience of farmers who participated in the Farm Planning and Building Farm Businesses programs. The Stronger Rural Communities and Beyond Farming programs were also valuable and each contributed respectively to improved community connectedness and wellbeing for those involved.

A recent survey of participants found that the Farm Planning and Building Farm Businesses programs have, on the whole, resulted in a number of positive outcomes for farmers who responded to the survey. Survey respondents comprised 165 farmers which equates to 15% of original program participants. Many survey respondents felt their farm businesses are more prepared for drought, more resilient to drought and more viable due to the programs. Moreover, and possibly related to these outcomes, many reported improvements in individual and family wellbeing.

The programs focussed on empowering farmers to improve their whole farm strategic planning and to invest in on-farm action to build more drought resilience into their farm enterprises. Some eight years since the program, a remarkably high number of farmers continue to strategically plan. They also continue to value the new ideas provided in the small group learning environment. In a number of cases, this evaluation received direct contact from participants who wanted to emphasise the 'life changing' nature of the programs to them.

Nonetheless a sizeable number of farmers who responded to the survey felt the program did not materially improve their preparedness or resilience. This could be due a variety of personal and business factors and circumstances affecting their capacity to implement a farm plan, but also the possibility they were already well advanced, and the program provided only marginal opportunities for improvement.

While there are considerable private benefits and incentives for farmers to self-improve preparedness and resilience, there can be also be public benefits from reducing the associated social costs (including farm adjustment impacts on social capital). The future focus should be to design programs that address market failures (particularly gaps in information) to help farmers prepare for drought. However, they should not undermine incentives for farmers to self-prepare.

On the whole the shift in the Drought Pilot toward providing planning skills to build self-reliance has helped improve this balance and has demonstrated that outcomes can be long lasting – it is important these gains are not compromised in the design of future programs. The market failure case for the public provision of farm financial and management advice is weak<sup>1</sup>. However, the farm planning component of the Drought Pilot was neither of those. Instead it provided basic educational skills that would have otherwise been under provided if left to private decisions. These new skills created a launching pad for farmers to then make their own management choices and to further utilise the market for management and financial advice.

The design of farm grant programs is more problematic — by supporting basic input costs they can undermine private incentive to invest and prepare, and so discriminate against those that do. Where farm grants can have public benefits is by supporting farming outcomes that have predominantly public rather than private benefit – such as reducing environmental degradation, improving the sustainable use of natural resources such as soil and water. Care is also needed to decouple grant programs from planning programs to ensure grants do not drive the farm strategy.

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<sup>1</sup> See Freebairn J 2019, Drought Assistance Policy Options, Australian Farm Business Management Journal, Volume 16, Paper Number 2.

There are opportunities to improve the focus and delivery of these programs if similar initiatives were to be proposed in the future. It would be valuable to establish a dataset of participating and non-participating farmers and track indicators of drought resilience, preparedness and wellbeing.

The Beyond Farming mentoring program helped farmers thinking of transitioning from farming to learn about potential opportunities and improve their decision-making processes. This was also valuable but could be further refined to address information gaps and be more linked with other programs and deliverers of complementary or supplementary services.

The Strong Rural Communities program invested in a range of community resources to build social capital and improve connectedness within rural communities. These investments have had positive outcomes however the program would benefit from having clearer strategic objectives and integration into more standard community support focussed delivery vehicles, rather than being tied to a drought resilience program.



# 1. Background and the evaluation approach

This evaluation reviews four components within the Western Australian Drought Pilot program. The focus is on finding ways to improve: drought resilience; the effectiveness and efficiency of program delivery; and the effectiveness of program monitoring and ongoing evaluation.

## 1.1 Background to the Pilot

The Australian Government, in partnership with the Western Australian Government, commenced a pilot of drought reform measures across 67 local government areas in Western Australia (WA) in July 2010. These areas covered a broad range of farming and climatic conditions and included the Gasgoyne, Mid West, Wheatbelt, Great Southern and Goldfield-Esperance regions.

In May 2011, the program was extended to include the southwest region of Western Australian, adding an additional 62 local government areas to the pilot program. The range of pilot measures trialled by the government that are the focus of this evaluation are:

- **Farm planning:** The Farm Planning Workshops assisted farm businesses to develop or update a strategic plan to effectively enhance drought resilience. The Plan identified priority activities to help improve the management and preparedness of the farm business to respond to future challenges.
- **Building farm Businesses:** The Building Farm Business Program provided grants to eligible farm businesses in two components:
  - Business Adaptation Grants for eligible activities identified in the strategic plan that helped farm businesses prepare for the impacts of drought, reduced water availability and climate variability, and
  - Landcare Adaptation Grants for eligible activities identified in the strategic plan with a natural resource management focus and having a broader public benefit.
- **Stronger rural communities:** This suite of measures aimed to assist rural communities prepare for and manage agriculture related hardship to build social capital and community networks and encourage participation in social networks and community events.
- **Beyond farming:** Beyond Farming put current farmers in touch with former farmers to discuss opportunities outside of farming.

The Pilot overall was designed to inform the development of a new national drought policy, aiming to help prepare Australia's agricultural sector and communities for drought, climate change and other hardships.

## 1.2 Objective of this evaluation

This evaluation will assess the efficacy (efficiency and effectiveness) and enduring impacts of the selected measures in building drought resilience in agriculture and agriculture dependent communities.

Based on the evaluation, we:

- make recommendations on how the findings can inform the development of policies to effectively enhance drought resilience
- provide advice on the establishment of efficient and effective arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the performance of drought resilience programs over time, as well as benchmark against which improvements in drought resilience can be measured over time; and

- advise on the most effective mechanisms for the delivery and monitoring and ongoing evaluation of drought resilience programs.

## 1.3 Understanding resilience and social capital

The focus of the drought pilot included improving resilience and social capital.

### 1.3.1 Resilience

In this evaluation we adopt the following definition of resilience:

*The ability of a person, household or community to successfully adapt to adversity and to capitalise on opportunities.<sup>2</sup>*

Greater resilience enables those affected by adversity to be better off than they would have been otherwise. In the context of this evaluation, efforts to improve the resilience of farmers, households and farm businesses to drought are considered to be aimed at helping improve or limit the deterioration of outcomes for both personal/family/business wellbeing and farm performance than might otherwise be the case.

We explore a range of participant self-assessments of the impacts of the pilot programs on resilience both in terms of farm performance and wellbeing. These are discussed in following relevant sections.

### 1.3.2 Social capital

In this evaluation we also adopt the following definition of social capital:

*Social capital relates the social norms, networks and trust that facilitate cooperation within or between groups.<sup>3</sup>*

Among others, social capital improves societal outcomes by enhancing personal wellbeing and related follow on benefits. Increasing social capital has links to increasing drought resilience by improving cooperation among those connected by drought.

We explore a range of subjective assessments of the impacts of the pilot programs on personal wellbeing. These are discussed in the following relevant sections.

## 1.4 Approach and method

Our framework to assess and consider improvements to the Drought Pilot programs comprises two key components:

- **An analytical framework** – how we frame the problem, analyse information and form recommendations, and a
- **Data and consultation framework** – how we gather information to undertake the analysis. A well-designed consultation framework helps address matters and recommend lasting solutions.

Among others, we use the framework to:

- understand interests and views;
- test perspectives and suggestions and ground truth advice received;
- check on performance; benefits and costs; and effects on incentives and behaviours;
- identify interactions with other institutional settings;
- find opportunities for innovative solutions;
- understand the likely responses to and impact of options.

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<sup>2</sup> Schirmer J and Hannigan I 2017, Understanding the resilience of NSW farmers: findings from the 2105 Regional Wellbeing Survey. Report prepared for the NSW Department of Primary Industries, University of Canberra, Canberra.

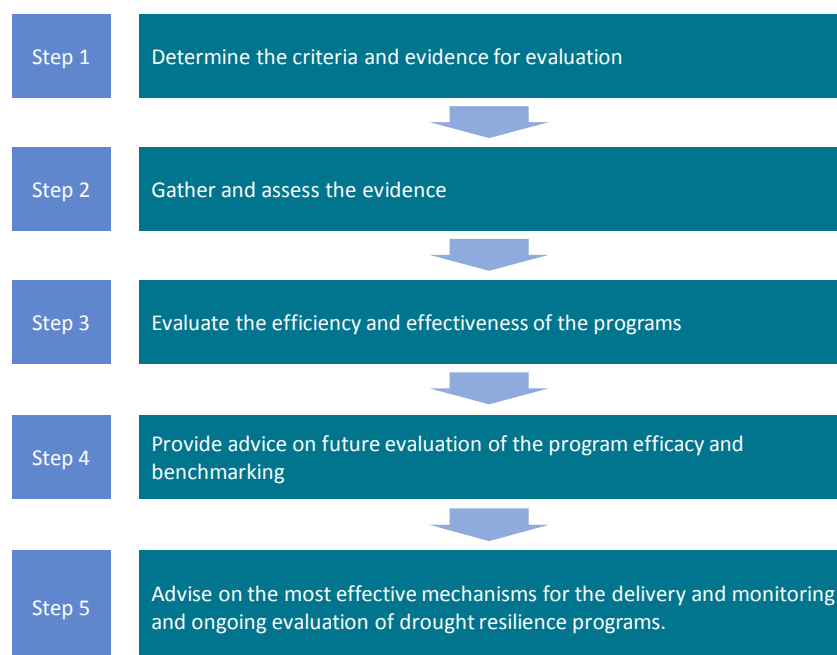
<sup>3</sup> Productivity Commission 2003, Social Capital: Reviewing its Concept and Policy Implications, Research Paper, Ausinfo, Canberra

In this report, we draw on an array of available documentation and supplement this by consulting with:

- Department of Agriculture: For guiding the review to ensure the scope of the work fits their needs and to draw on their insights and experience while undertaking the tasks;
- WA government agencies and supporting providers; and
- key external stakeholders including the Western Australian Department of Agriculture and Fisheries and the Western Australian Council of Social Services (WACOSS).

The key steps in our method for the project are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Key project steps



## 2. About the Pilot and previous evaluations

The Western Australian Drought Pilot introduced new approaches to drought programs and delivery. These included a greater focus on: whole farm planning to improve preparedness and improving resilience; developing farm skills and ownership to develop and implement their plans; innovative workshop-based learning environments; and a more integrated cross program approach.

This evaluation also draws on previous evaluations by the Drought Review Panel, the Western Australia Drought Pilot Working Group and Bluebottle Consulting<sup>4</sup>.

### 2.1 A new approach to drought response and program delivery

In July 2010, the Australian and Western Australian governments commenced a Pilot program to improve the focus and delivery of drought programs in southwest Western Australia.

The pilot consisted of seven programs:

- Farm Planning
- Building Farm Businesses
- Farm Family Support
- Farm Social Support
  - Rural Support Initiative
  - Online Counselling for Rural Young Australians
  - Rural and Regional Family Support Service
- Farm Exit Support
- Beyond Farming, and
- Stronger Rural Communities.

### 2.2 Program logic

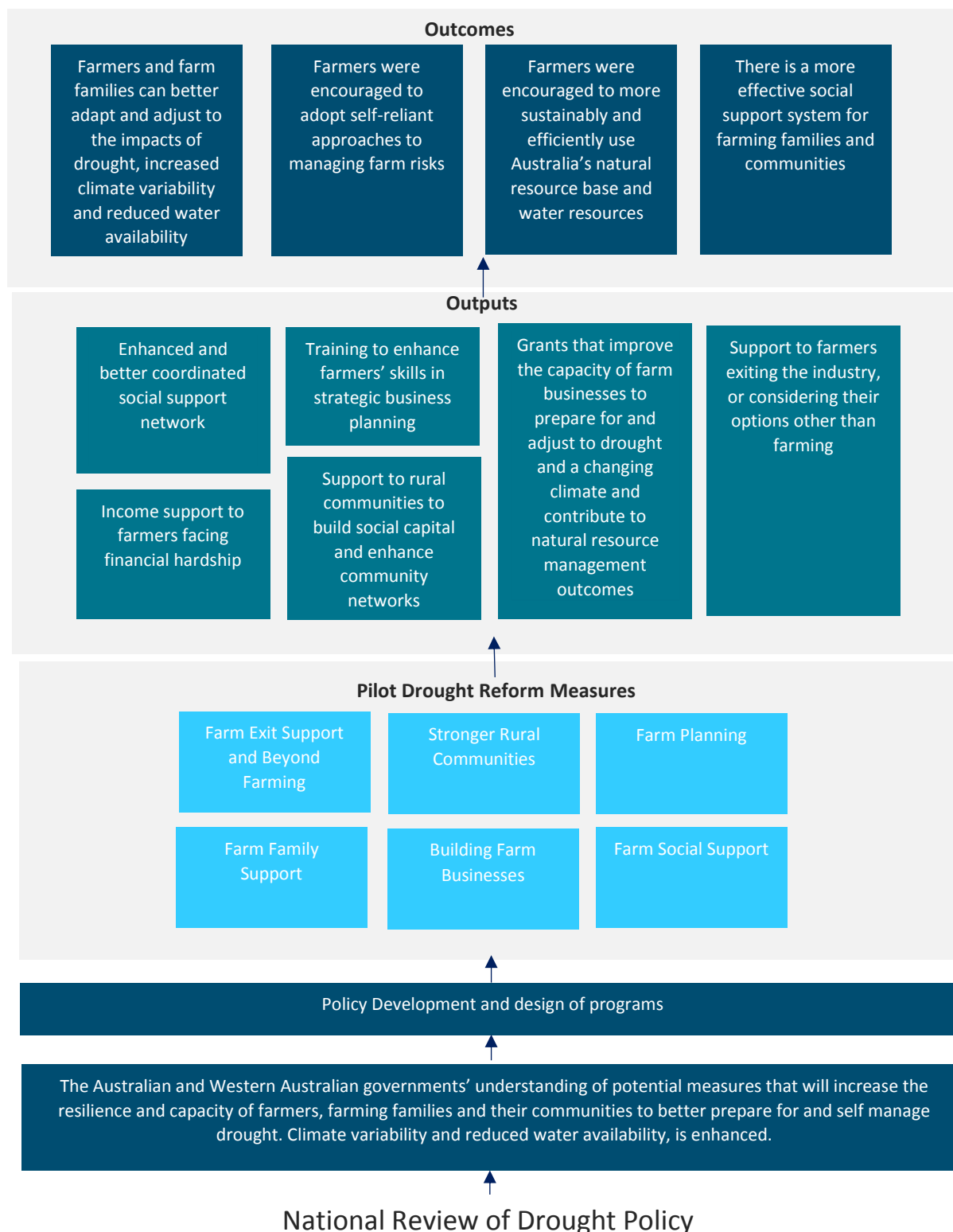
The broad program logic of the entire WA Drought Pilot is summarised in Figure 2. The aim of the Pilot was to:

- ensure farmers and their families were better equipped to adjust to the impacts of drought, increased climate variability and reduced water availability
- deliver a more effective social support system for farming families and communities
- encourage farmers to adopt a self-reliant approach to managing farm risks
- encourage farmers to use Australia's natural resource base and water resources more sustainably and efficiently.

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<sup>4</sup> Keogh, M., Granger, R. and Middleton, S. 2011, Drought Pilot Review Panel: a review of the pilot of drought reform measures in Western Australia, Canberra, September. Drought Review Panel Pilot of Drought Reform Measures Working Group 2013, Pilot of Drought Reform Measures in Western Australia, Final report. Bluebottle Consulting 2012, Independent Evaluation: Beyond Farming, Final Report, June.

Figure 2: WA Drought Pilot Program Logic



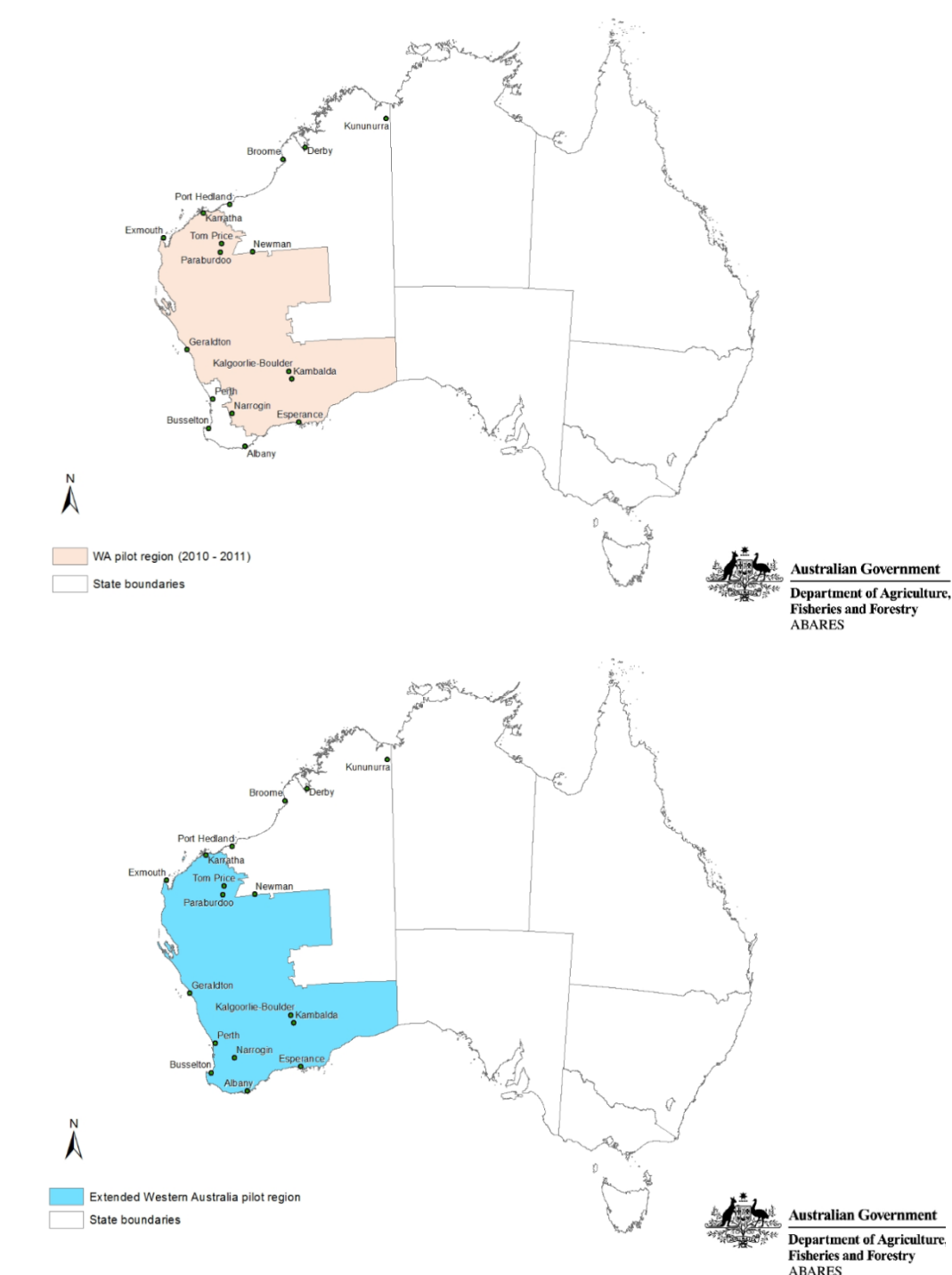
Source: Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry 2010, Pilot of Drought Reform Measures in Western Australia. Monitoring and Review Strategy, October.

### 2.2.1 Phased delivery

The Pilot was delivered in two phases:

- Phase 1: 1 July 2010 to 30 June 2011 for south west Western Australia excluding the far south west
- Phase 2: 1 July 2011 to 30 June 2012 with the geographical area of delivery expanded to include the entire south-west of Western Australia and the scope of delivered material expanded (See Figure 3).

Figure 3: Geographical scope of the Pilot



## 2.2.2 Underpinning philosophy

The pilot represented a significant shift in the focus and form of delivery of drought programs. Among others, this included:

- using workshops with a high ratio of facilitators to farmers to enable engagement and completion of tasks
- giving farmers ownership of their decision making and accountability
- providing farmers with the skills to enhance their own skills to plan and prepare for drought
- problem solving and compartmentalising farm business risks
- focussing on improving preparedness and capacity to manage the inevitability of drought
- being linked to other pilot and social programs (e.g. DHS Rural Service Officers, and Rural Social Workers, Rural Financial Counsellors and Beyond Farming) to connect up people and refer issues
- using cross participation of other program deliverers in some program sessions – (e.g. mentors attended farm planning sessions)
- being delivered by facilitators with a broad mix of skills.

## 2.3 Key features and outputs of the programs to be evaluated

This report reviews four programs of the Pilot:

- Farm Planning
- Building Farm Businesses
- Beyond Farming
- Stronger Rural Communities.

In this section we describe their key features.

### Farm Planning

Farm planning was a training program to enhance strategic farm planning and management skills and enable farm businesses to receive an independent assessment of their plan. The program objective was to enhance farmers' skills in business planning, with a particular focus on managing and preparing for drought and a changing climate.

Table 1: Farm Planning Program Logic<sup>5</sup>

| Activity   | Performance indicators  |
|--|---|
| <b>Outputs</b>   |   |
| Training courses   | All available training places filled  |
|  | Administered cost per farm business ≤ \$7500                                  |
|  | Broad representative coverage – by LGA, by farming activity                   |
| Farmers develop or update farm business strategic plans that set long term goals and identify priority actions | Course completion rates commensurate with similar courses                     |
|  | Most participants didn't previously plan or plan effectively                  |
| Participants have plan independently assessed  | All assessed plans would, if implemented, lead to a more viable farm business |

<sup>5</sup> Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry 2010, Pilot of Drought Reform Measures in Western Australia. Monitoring and Review Strategy, October.

| Activity   | Performance indicators  |
|--|---|
|  | Independent assessments completed within 10 days  |
| <b>Preliminary outcomes</b>  |   |
| Farmers place more value on farm business strategic planning                                 | All participants place more value on farm planning  |
| Farmer skills in strategic business planning improved  | All participants report that their strategic business planning skills have improved   |
| Farmers undertake activities to better manage and prepare for drought and a changing climate | All participants report that, after Farm Planning, they felt their business was better prepared for drought/climate variability |
|  | All participants intend to undertake some or all activities in their strategic plan   |
|  | All participants undertake some or all activities identified in their strategic plan  |
| <b>Long-term outcomes</b>  |   |
| Farmers better manage and prepare for drought and climate change                             | Not applicable  |

## Objectives and types of training

The objective of the program was to enhance farmers' skills in business, natural resource management and personal planning with a particular focus on managing drought and climate variability, and to increase the number of farm enterprises with comprehensive written strategic business plans.

Curtin University delivered five Farm Planning modules during Phase One of the pilot. The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries Western Australia (DAFWA) took over the delivery of Phase 2 and used nine service providers so as to provide a suitable mix of skills and experience. New course material was trialled on top of the Phase 1 content as learnings from Phase 1 were incorporated:

- financial planning
- natural resource management
- managing the impacts of a changing climate
- work/life balance
- succession planning.

These modules were usually delivered individually over 5 days or two-day blocks and the entire course within 5 weeks.

The strategic planning guidance covered economic social and environmental considerations:

- economic — e.g. risk management and financial planning
- social — e.g. personal and business goals
- environmental — e.g. managing the biophysical impacts of a changing climate on production.

## Uptake

A total of 1,156 farm plans were approved under the Pilot — 422 in phase 1 and 734 in phase 2. Only relatively small numbers were declined or withdrawn (Table 2). The programs were delivered in 36 groups in Phase 1 and 72 groups in Phase 2.



The program was available to approximately 43 per cent of Western Australia farm businesses in Phase 1 and 96 per cent in phase 2 — with participation representing a program uptake of 6 per cent uptake across each area in each phase.

**Table 2: Key Farm Planning program statistics**

| Category                  | Phase 1 | Phase 2 |
|---------------------------|---------|---------|
| <b>Applications</b>       |         |         |
| Total applications        | 456     | 756     |
| Approved                  | 422     | 734     |
| Declined                  | 3       | 9       |
| Withdrawn                 | 31      | 13      |
| <b>Farm composition</b>   |         |         |
| Broad acre                | 61%     | 37%     |
| Livestock                 | 29%     | 40%     |
| Horticulture              | 9.5%    | 11%     |
| Other                     | 0.4%    | 12%     |
| Number of training groups | 36      | 62      |

Source: DAFWA 2012

### 2.3.1 Building Farm Businesses

The Building Farm Businesses program provided grants to assist eligible farm enterprises to meet the cost of completing activities to prepare for and reduce the impacts of:

- drought
- reduced water availability, and
- increased climate variability on agricultural productivity and the farm enterprise.

**Table 3: Building Farm Businesses Program Logic<sup>6</sup>**

| <b>Building Farm Businesses</b>  |   |
|--|---|
| Program objective  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To assist eligible farm enterprises to adjust, improve risk management and improve their capacity to prepare for drought, reduced water availability and the impacts of a changing climate;</li> <li>2. To increase natural resource management efforts to improve on-farm resilience and reduce the environmental impact of agricultural activity in times of extreme climatic conditions, such as drought;</li> <li>3. To reduce human stress associated with drought and reduce reliance on in-drought assistance</li> </ol> |
| Outputs  | Performance Indicators  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Farm businesses take up BFB Grants</li> </ul> | Broad representative coverage – by LGA, by farming activity   |

<sup>6</sup> Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry 2010, Pilot of Drought Reform Measures in Western Australia. Monitoring and Review Strategy, October.

|  | Rejection rates based on assets test is commensurate with ECIRS rejection rates  |
|--|--|
| Preliminary Outcomes   | Performance Indicators   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Farmers undertake activities to better prepare for and manage the impacts of drought, reduced water availability and a changing climate and reduce the environmental impact of agricultural activity</li> </ul>   | <p>All grantees commence projects before 1 July 2011</p> <p>All grantees consider the funded activities will better equip them to prepare for and manage the impacts of drought, reduced water availability and a changing climate</p> |
| Long term outcomes   | Performance Indicators   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Farm enterprises adjust, improve risk management and improve their capacity to prepare for drought, reduced water availability and the impacts of a changing climate; increase natural resource management efforts to improve on-farm resilience and reduce the environmental impact of agricultural activity in times of extreme climatic conditions, such as drought; experience less stress associated with drought and are less reliant on in-drought assistance</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not applicable</li> </ul>   |

### Objective and types of grants

The objectives of the program were to:

- assist eligible farm enterprises to adjust their business, improve risk management and improve their capacity to prepare for drought, reduced water availability and the impacts of increased climate variability.
- increase natural resource management efforts to improve on-farm resilience and reduce the environmental impact of agricultural activity in times of extreme climatic conditions, such as drought.
- reduce human stress associated with drought and reduce reliance on in-drought assistance.

In order to be eligible for a grant the farm business had to:

- complete the Farm Planning program *and*
- receive an independent panel assessment that their proposed plan would result in a viable farm business.

Two types of grant could be allocated:

- Farm Business Adaptation Grants – focussed on eligible activities that prepared for farm businesses for drought, reduced water availability and the impacts of increased climate variability
- Landcare Adaptation Grants — focussed on eligible natural resource management activities (aligned with state and national NRM priorities) to help farm businesses prepare for drought, reduced water availability and the impacts of increased climate variability.

Grants of different sizes were issued during the different program phases:

- Phase One — a minimum \$40,000 to a maximum of \$60,000 for Farm Business Adaptation and \$20,000 for Landcare Adaptation paid in instalments over four years
- Phase Two — up to \$30,000 for either a Farm Business Adaptation grant and/or Landcare Adaptation grant paid in two instalments.

### Level of uptake

A total of 802 farm plans were approved under the Pilot — 127 in phase 1 and 675 in phase 2. Only relatively small numbers were declined and withdrawn (Table 4).

A relatively equal number of Farm Business and Landcare grants were provided in Phase 1, whereas in Phase 2 the vast majority were Farm Business Grants. Most recipients were cropping farms in Phase 1 while in Phase 2 there was a relatively even mix of cropping and livestock farms that made up the large majority of the grants issued.

**Table 4: Key Building Farm Business statistics**

|                    | Phase 1      | Phase 2     |
|--------------------|--------------|-------------|
| Total applications | 137          | 733         |
| Approved           | 127          | 675         |
| Approved grants    | 3            | 9           |
| Farm Business      | 127          | 674         |
| Landcare           | 125          | 51          |
| Declined           | 6            | 55          |
| Withdrawn          | 4            | 3           |
| Farm composition   |              |             |
| Cropping           | 68 per cent  | 40 per cent |
| Livestock          | 31 per cent  | 37 per cent |
| Horticulture       | 1 per cent   | 14 per cent |
| Other              | 0.1 per cent | 10 per cent |

Source: DAFWA 2012

### 2.3.2 Stronger Rural Communities

The Stronger Rural Communities program aimed to increase the capacity of rural communities experiencing significant hardship to build social capital, develop new and existing community networks and increase community resilience to the impacts of agricultural downturns.

**Table 5: Stronger Rural Communities Program Logic<sup>7</sup>**

| Stronger Rural Communities |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| Program objective          | Increase the capacity of rural communities experiencing significant hardship to build social capital, develop new and existing community networks and increase community resilience to the impacts of agricultural downturns |
| Outputs                    | Performance indicators   |

<sup>7</sup> Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry 2010, Pilot of Drought Reform Measures in Western Australia. Monitoring and Review Strategy, October.

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Grants provided to community groups and LGA's</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All available funds expended by 30 June 2010</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Preliminary outcomes</b>   | <b>Performance indicators</b>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Projects undertaken to build social capital and community networks and/or encourage participation in social networks and community activities</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All grant recipients consider that the project has helped build the social capital of the community and increased its resilience to significant hardships cause by agricultural downturns</li> </ul> |
|   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All grant recipients report new or enhanced community networks facilities/events or increase in use of existing networks</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Long-term outcomes</b>   | <b>Performance indicators</b>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rural communities have strong social capital and community networks and are more resilient to the impacts of agricultural downturn</li> </ul>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not applicable</li> </ul>  |

There were four broad types of projects funded under the Stronger Rural Communities component of the Pilot:

- Sports club renewal and or consolidation
- Community centre or use facility construction
- Event resourcing, and
- Hall refurbishment or upgrade.

All were provided to relatively small, isolated communities within a general radial arc of the outer wheat belt. In some cases, the project supported was stand-alone but in a number of cases it was linked to other community projects and initiatives.

Of the eight projects under the Strong Rural Communities program, six were interviewed for this evaluation (Table 6).

**Table 6: Projects funded under the Stronger Rural Communities program**

| Shire/Association                       | Project   | Value     | Interviewed |
|---|---|-----------|-------------|
| Shire of Mukinbudin                     | Upgrade Mukinbudin Sporting Complex   | \$82,005  |             |
| Shire of Dowerin                        | Part fund the relocation of four local sporting clubs into one central location | \$150,000 | Yes         |
| Beacon Progress Association             | Build a premise in Beacon for community activities                              | \$206,914 | Yes         |
| Lake Grace Development Association      | Fund the 'Living Communities' program – to increase community resilience        | \$72,040  | Yes         |
| Shire of Narembeen                      | Upgrade Narembeen Community Shed  | \$96,000  | Yes         |
| Shire of Perenjori                      | Renovate Perenjori Sports Club  | \$227,950 |             |
| Canna Progress Association Incorporated | Upgrade Canna Hall  | \$50,000  | Yes         |

|  |                       |                  |     |
|--|-----------------------|------------------|-----|
| Lake Varley Branch of the Country Women's Association of Western Australia | Refurbish Varley Hall | \$11,579         | Yes |
| <b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</b>   |                       | <b>\$896,488</b> |     |

Source: Department of Agriculture and Marsden Jacob

A summary of the focus of the investments by each recipient is provided in Table 7 – this is drawn from DAWR program data.

**Table 7: Summary of the Stronger Rural Communities projects**

| Project   | Details  |
|---|--|
| Upgrade Mukinbudin Sporting Complex   | The grant funded refurbishment of the function room at the Mukinbudin Sporting Complex. This increased the use and accessibility of the facility to sporting and other community groups. A number of functions have been held at the Complex that would not have otherwise been held there. The events facilitated by the function room encourage social interaction and engagement, helping to build community resilience by allowing people suffering hardships to stay connected to each other and the community. |
| Part fund the relocation of four local sporting clubs into one central location | The Dowerin Community Function centre has created a centralised shared sports facility. The grant contributed to the fit-out of the function facility and children's playground. Co-location of sporting clubs at the facility increased social interaction between participants and the facility is used for social events.   |
| Build a premises in Beacon for community activities                             | The grant part funded the construction of a Community Centre in Beacon. The Centre has enabled the co-location of a number of community service organisations, community bank, Telecentre and community co-op. The centre has approximately 40-50 users per week enabling social connection and provision of services that would not otherwise be provided in the town.  |
| Fund the 'Living Communities' program – to increase community resilience        | The grant funded a stock-take of social capital in Lake Grace and identified an opportunity for the establishment of a business expo and Christmas night market. The market is a regular annual even that bring people from across the shire together.   |
| Upgrade Narembeen Community Shed  | The grant funded repairs and refurbishment of the Community Shed including better roofing, plumbing, electrics and access for the disabled. The shed attracts both town and farm-based retirees who pursue a range of hobbies (such as restoration of old farm equipment) and use the shed as a venue to socialise. Future activities planned for the shed include health workshops and woodwork and metalwork instruction for school students.  |
| Renovate Perenjori Sports Club  | The grant funded renovations to the Perenjori Sports Club. This increased its availability to different activities and people. The upgrade of the facility enabled the certification of a food preparation area. This has meant that dinners and catered community functions could be held at the venue – increasing its use to a wider range of groups.   |
| Upgrade Canna Hall  | The grant funded the upgrade of kitchen facilities and external amenities. This has meant more events and functions can be held at the venue. It has also enabled tourists to use the facilities   |

| Project               | Details  |
|-----------------------|--|
| Refurbish Varley Hall | The grant funded the upgrade of kitchen facilities and meeting room area. This has meant more events and functions can be held at the venue. |

### 2.3.3 Beyond farming

The key objective of Beyond Farming was to encourage structural adjustment within the agriculture sector by assisting farmers in determining whether they should be exiting the industry. This was to be done by providing opportunities for current farmers (mentees) to speak with former farmers (mentors) about exit experiences, opportunities and options.

**Table 8: Beyond Farming Program Logic<sup>8</sup>**

| Beyond farming   |  |
|--|--|
| Project objective  | To encourage structural adjustment within the agriculture sector by assist farmers in determining whether they should be exiting the industry. This will be done by providing opportunities for current farmers to speak with former farmers about exit experiences, opportunities and options |
| Outputs  | Performance indicators   |
| • Sufficient current farmers   | • 25 or more participate   |
| • Program delivered within expected cost   | • Cost per current farmer ≤ \$3,500  |
| • Satisfied mentors  | • All mentors satisfied with their involvement in program  |
| • Satisfied current farmers  | • Program met expectations of most current farmers   |
|  | • Most current farmers satisfied with service  |
| Preliminary Outcomes   | Performance indicators   |
| • Farmers can better determine whether they should exit farming  | • Most participating current farmers report that they are better informed about exit experiences, opportunities and options  |
| •  | • Most participating current farmers report that assistance helps decision-making about whether or not to exit the industry  |
| Long-term outcomes   | Performance indicators   |
| • Non-financial barriers to structural adjustment via farmers exiting the industry and farm consolidation are overcome | • Not applicable   |

Beyond Farming also aimed to:

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<sup>8</sup> Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry 2010, Pilot of Drought Reform Measures in Western Australia. Monitoring and Review Strategy, October.

- promote the consideration of the opportunities and options available after ceasing farming as a part of normal farm and succession planning activities. It was to complement and be promoted through other measures in the pilot, including Farm Planning and Farm Family Support
- enable former farmers and current farmers to discuss opportunities and options available after selling up or retiring from farming; and
- enable currently active, though drought affected farmers to benefit from the considerable skills and knowledge of former farmers.

The Western Australian Council of Social Services (WACOSS) led the implementation of the Beyond Farming program, including:

- the training of mentors
- fielding initial contact from current farmers
- matching current farmers with mentors, liaison with mentors and mentees
- the communication and promotion of the program and working in conjunction with service providers and key stakeholders.

An initial pool of 20 mentors in 2010 was supplemented with another 7 in 2012 as the pilot was expanded into the South West.

Mentors were people who had ceased farming and had experience in post farming careers not related to farming. They were drawn from a diverse range of post farming backgrounds, interests and business experiences including:

- mining
- long distance trucking
- hardware business
- small vehicle repairs
- weed control
- financial investment
- vintage car restoration
- long distance bike rides
- natural disaster relief
- real estate
- playground equipment
- Landcare
- further education
- literature and arts.

Farmers were able to connect find out about the program through a variety of promotional and information channels including:

- newspaper and radio advertising and features
- referrals through other pilot programs
- field days and community events
- program hotline
- program website.

As a result of the links between the pilot programs, Beyond Farming mentors also presented at other pilot program initiatives. The program also participated in the Australian Government Mobile Van, Men's Shed's and other events; and worked closely with other service providers such as Centrelink, and key stakeholders at Department of Agriculture information sessions and at DAFWA presentations.

After an initial contact between an interested farmer (or farming family) and the program – these were then 'matched' with an appropriate mentor. Available program data and Bluebottle Consulting evaluation provided to this review indicate that the awareness and interest in Beyond Farming grew slowly over the life of the program and that the WACOSS program officer and mentors' active roles assisted in raising the profile of the program among the target group and key service providers. Field days and rural events resulted in 103 informal contacts for the program.

Over the life of the pilot, there were 27 mentor matches with 22 farming families/farmers (mentees). Approximately one match per month was made over the life of the pilot. Mentees were generally matched with two mentors before they then made contact with one or both of them. Most had face to face contact or via phone calls.

Farmers made initial contact with the program for a variety of reasons including:

- health issues
- financial reasons
- interested in what's available
- succession planning
- planning on leaving the farm
- relationship issues/family conflict
- bad season
- leasing a farm.

The scope of mentor contact and engagement with individual mentees varied considerably ranging from:

- one or two phone calls
- a series of conversations over several months and in one case
- ongoing contact of 18 months.

## 2.4 Insights from previous reviews

In this section we summarise a number of the key insights from previous evaluations in relation to the evaluation questions relative to this evaluation.

Three key evaluations are relevant:

- The Drought Pilot Review Panel evaluation completed at the end of Phase 1 of the Pilot
- Pilot of Drought Reform Measures Working Group evaluation completed in 2013 after the completion of the Pilot
- Bluebottle Consulting completed a Beyond Farming evaluation in June 2012.<sup>9</sup>

### 2.4.1 Farm Planning

The Drought Pilot Review Panel concluded the following:

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<sup>9</sup> Keogh, M., Granger, R. and Middleton, S. 2011, Drought Pilot Review Panel: a review of the pilot of drought reform measures in Western Australia, Canberra, September. Drought Review Panel Pilot of Drought Reform Measures Working Group 2013, Pilot of Drought Reform Measures in Western Australia, Final report. Bluebottle Consulting 2012, Independent Evaluation: Beyond Farming, Final Report, June.



- participants and other stakeholders had indicated that participation was enhancing business, natural resource management and personal planning skills and it had increased the number of farm businesses with comprehensive written strategic plans
- strategic farm planning could lead to enhanced farm productivity
- broader public benefits could be expected and provided rationales for government to be involved in provision because
  - farmers who become better long-term risk managers will become more self-reliant, and
  - the whole-of-farm business approach beyond focussing narrowly on farm financial or production planning could result in improved natural resource management outcomes.
- participants were in the initial stages of implementing their plans (some were also still being developed) and therefore more time was needed to assess the effectiveness of the program.

The Pilot of Drought Reform Measures Working Group concluded the following from exit surveys of program participants:

- participants felt they had improved drought preparedness — from 24 to 59 per cent in Phase One and from 62 to 91 per cent in Phase Two
- participants had improved confidence in the future viability of their farm business — from 64 per cent to 85 per cent in Phase One and 77 to 93 per cent in Phase Two
- a very high percentage of farmers had completed a tangible strategic business plan for farm businesses by its members
- participants were up-skilled through the course of the workshops by being supported in developing and completing a strategic business plan that they could use effectively in their farm business to assist in future profitability, resilience and risk management.<sup>10</sup>

#### 2.4.2 Building Farm Businesses

Drought Pilot Review Panel concluded the following:

- the grants provided a strong motivation to participate in the Farm Planning program and thereby created a tension between developing a plan to be eligible for the grant or one that best met the long-term strategic needs of the farm businesses
- grants funded a range of eligible activities - some which included normal farm input and operating costs that were inconsistent with some of the higher-level program objectives and guidelines. While those activities may lead to efficiency and short-term productivity gains, the Panel was unclear of their longer-term merit and their effect on improving preparedness for the future impacts of drought, climate variability and reduced water availability.

The Pilot of Drought Reform Measures Working Group concluded the following regarding Building Farm Business Grants:

- while grant-funded activities were likely to deliver efficiency gains and short-term productivity benefits, activities, they were less likely to deliver long-term improvements in preparedness for future impacts of drought
- the focus of Landcare grants shifted from predominantly improving soil quality activities in Phase One, to establishing native species to re-vegetate degraded land in Phase Two.
- grants were financially demanding on government despite a high percentage of applicants providing co-contributions to the projects that indicated 'buy-in'

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<sup>10</sup> Pilot of Drought Reform Measures Working Group 2013. Pilot of Drought Reform Measures in Western Australia, Final report

- many of the grants were used to meet typical farm input and operating costs making it difficult to measure improvements in drought preparedness.

### 2.4.3 Stronger Rural Communities

The Drought Pilot Review Panel did not undertake a detailed assessment of the program. It queried the appropriateness of the programs inclusion in the Drought Pilot and concluded it would be better conducted under existing jurisdiction regional development programs.

### 2.4.4 Beyond Farming

The initial pilot of the Beyond Farming program was evaluated in 2012 by *Bluebottle Consulting*. Bluebottle Consulting were given a list of 20 mentees to potentially consult. Their evaluation drew on a half day workshop with 7 Mentors and 2 mentees, phone interviews with 11 mentors and 8 mentees and an interview with the WACOSS program lead.

There was no formal feedback loop as part of the program. Therefore, it was difficult for mentors during the evaluation to assess what happened post the program and how their engagement might have been of assistance. This remains an issue for program design and evaluation, as the program was about support and helping to enable decision-making, but not about shaping the decision per se. In some cases, the mentor assistance might be to widen the scope of opportunities to be considered by the mentee or provide feedback on their own experience of change, which may or may not be influential in the adjustment choice that is made by the mentee in the end.

The Bluebottle Consulting evaluation found that:

- the program met the aims of enabling former farmers and current farmers to discuss opportunities and options available prior to and/or after selling up or retiring from farming, and of enabling others to benefit from the considerable skills and knowledge of former farmers
- that the program 'fitted' as part of farm planning and succession planning and that farmers need to be reached before they are in crisis, when conversation and decision-making is more complex and difficult
- mentors were the major asset of the program, offering useful skills and knowledge, have all made successful transitions to a life beyond farming and are useful 'sounding boards' allowing current farmers to discuss their circumstances freely without fear of judgement
- mentors and mentees could clearly see the benefit in the continuation of the program and were concerned about funding of the program after the pilot, and
- the farmers participating in the program were planning on exiting the farm for a variety of reasons.

The Bluebottle evaluation also observed:

- there were low numbers of farmer participating in the program extension funded by the Western Australian Government
- two years was not a long time to implement and embed a new social behaviour program
- it was difficult to identify what the barriers to entry actually were – e.g., is it the stage of transition where a current farmer may be at that holds them back, or is it 'farmers pride'?
- that the program impact was difficult to quantify as it seemed to be a small part of a larger and more complex process of transition. The program may be better integrated into farm planning and farm succession planning programs or a broader 'farm transitions' program
- the sample size of the evaluation activity was small and as such it was difficult to extrapolate changes in awareness, viewpoint and behaviour as a result of participation of the program.

## 3. Approach to data collection and analysis

Email and telephone-based surveys of Farm Planning and Building Farm Businesses participants were constructed and undertaken. Approximately 15 per cent of program participants responded. The surveys build on earlier program exit surveys completed near the end of Drought Pilot.

The survey designs are detailed and focussed on identifying and describing the impacts of the programs on drought resilience. Detailed data from participants in the Stronger Rural Communities and Beyond Farming programs was not available nor were participants available for surveying. However, program representatives in the case of Stronger Rural Communities were identified and interviewed. A post Drought Pilot evaluation of Beyond Farming was analysed and supplemented by interviewing key program officers who were responsible for delivery and oversight of the program.

### 3.1 Farm Planning and Building Farm Businesses

Marden Jacob undertook two surveys during the evaluation. The first survey (Farm Planning or FP survey) focused on participants who completed the Farm Planning Program, but who didn't proceed on to the Building Farm Business (BFB) Program. The second survey (FPBFB survey) was focused on participants in the Farm Planning Program who then went on to the BFB Program.

Both surveys were undertaken via a combination of SurveyMonkey and direct phone contact:

- The FP survey was sent to a total of 117 recipients using email addresses sourced from the 2011/12 surveys, noting that 17 were to email addresses that were 'undeliverable'. Of the remaining emails that were delivered, we received a total of 24 responses. We also undertook 20 phone surveys which took total responses to 44. Including the undeliverable emails, this equates to a response rate of 38 per cent.
- The FPBFB survey was sent to a total of 482 recipients (of which 81 were undeliverable) and had 121 responses (including 20 phone surveys), indicating a response rate of 25%.

The higher response rate for the first survey was due to 20 people being surveyed by phone in each survey.

The two surveys were sent only to participants that met specific criteria, i.e. they had completed an exit survey in 2011/12 (and also a building farm business completion survey in 2011/12 for the FPBFB survey); there was an email address for the participant (or phone number in the case of the phone survey); and there was information available on their current location. The exit surveys were undertaken by program participants at the end of the pilot programs. This matching enabled us to create a panel dataset that provides useful insights into the impact of the program on participants using survey responses from 2011/12 and 2019.

#### 3.1.1 Survey design

For the data to be most useful, some survey questions were consistent between surveys so that the impact of the program and participant circumstances could be compared over time. For these questions, the wording was based on questions from the Department of Agriculture and Food, Western Australia's previous surveys with slight adjustments to simplify the question. Some additional information and definitions were included.

Additionally, several questions not included in the 2011/12 exit or BFB completion surveys were included in the 2019 surveys. These questions explored the impact and effectiveness of the program on participants, including preparedness and resilience.

The survey excluded some questions for those farmers who were no longer farming since these would not be relevant for them.

A full summary of the final questions that were asked in the 2019 Marsden Jacob surveys are attached in Appendix 1.

### 3.1.2 Development of panel and new data sets

Of the two surveys undertaken, 32 survey respondents from the 2019 FP survey were able to be matched with responses from the 2011/12 survey, while 95 were able to be matched for the FPBFB survey. The total panel number does not equate to the total number of responses under both surveys since that not all respondents provided us with an email address. Both the results of all survey respondents and the panel data set are reported in our survey analysis.

### 3.1.3 Survey response rates

Key survey response numbers for the surveys are summarised in Table 9. Around 15 per cent of total program participants were surveyed (165 of 1,125). A panel data set of 127 responses was constructed (32 for the FP Survey and 95 for the FPBFB survey).

**Table 9: Survey response statistics**

| Number of participants and survey respondents           | Farming Planning | Farm Planning and Building Farm Businesses | Total |
|---|------------------|--|-------|
|   | FP               | FPBFB                                      |       |
| Total participants in 2011/12 program                   | 345              | 780  | 1,125 |
| 2011/12 Exit survey                                     |                  |  | 940   |
| 2011/12 Building farm business completion survey        |                  |  | 780   |
| 2019 MJA survey - All                                   | 44               | 121  | 165   |
| 2019 MJA survey - Panel                                 | 32               | 95   | 127   |
| 2019 MJA survey - All (% of total program participants) | 13%              | 16%  | 15%   |

*Note: Number of participants in 2011/12 for FP and FPBFB is based on using the number that completed the 2011/12 BFB survey for FPBFB (780) and then the FP is the residual of 1,125 minus 780. Note that the 1,125 is slightly less than the figure of 1,156 in Table 2 and comes from a different data source.*

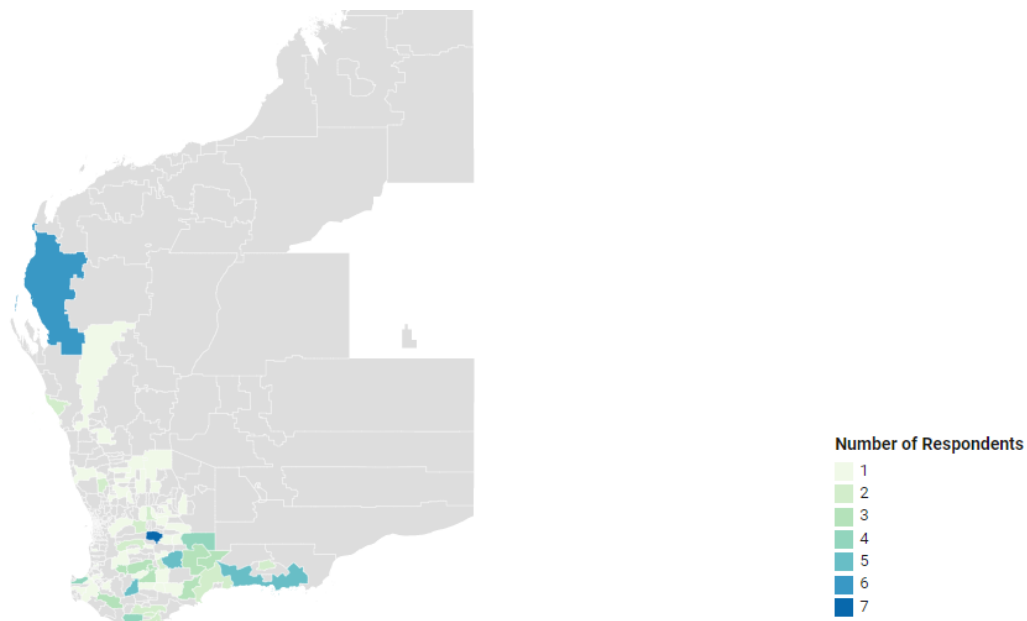
Over the two phases (Table 10), grain growing, sheep and beef cattle farming accounted for the overwhelming number of farmers participating in the survey.

Table 10: Farm business composition of respondents

| Farming business type                      | Panel         |  |             | All        |
|--|---------------|--|-------------|------------|
|  | Farm planning | Farm planning and building farm businesses | Total       | Total      |
|  | FP            | FPBFB                                      | Total panel |            |
| Grain growing                              | 25            | 66   | 91          | 113        |
| Sheep farming                              | 23            | 63   | 86          | 104        |
| Beef cattle farming                        | 6             | 28   | 34          | 43         |
| Dairy cattle farming                       | 1             | 4  | 5           | 9          |
| Pig farming                                | 2             | 0  | 2           | 2          |
| Deer farming                               | 0             | 0  | 0           | 0          |
| Vegetable growing                          | 0             | 12   | 12          | 12         |
| Grape growing                              | 0             | 1  | 1           | 1          |
| Apple and pear growing                     | 0             | 0  | 0           | 0          |
| <b>Total number of activities in total</b> | <b>57</b>     | <b>174</b>                                 | <b>231</b>  | <b>284</b> |
| <b>Total number of businesses</b>          | <b>32</b>     | <b>95</b>                                  | <b>127</b>  | <b>165</b> |

Survey respondents were relatively evenly spread across the pilot region (Figure 4) with high numbers in the Gascoyne and more southerly region of the state near Esperance and Lake Grace.

Figure 4: Location of all survey responses



### 3.1.4 Survey margin of error

When all survey participants are included (165), the survey statistical margin of error is approximately 8 per cent at a 95 per cent confidence interval. For the panel survey respondents, the margin of error is approximately 17 per cent for the FP survey (32 respondents) and approximately 10 per cent for the FPBFB survey (95 respondents). When the two panel surveys are combined (127 respondents), the margin of error is approximately 9 per cent. A margin of error describes how many percentage points that the 2019 survey results differ from the result that would be achieved if all program participants were surveyed.

Table 11: Survey margin of error

| Survey segment   | Survey size | Approximate margin of error |
|--|-------------|-----------------------------|
| Completed Farm Planning only – FP (panel data only)                            | 32          | 17%                         |
| Completed Farm Planning and Building Farm Businesses – FPBFB (panel data only) | 95          | 10%                         |
| Combined FP and FPBFB – panel data only  | 127         | 9%                          |
| All survey respondents (both panel and non-panel) – All (panel and non-panel)  | 165         | 8%                          |

### 3.1.5 Potential survey bias

Both FBP and FPBFB surveys each contain 20 phone surveys which were based on a random sample with some stratification based on geographic region. However, the remaining survey participants were based on farmers responding to an email link and self-selecting to participate in the survey. It is possible that those that participated in the email surveys are more likely to have derived benefit from the pilot program than those that did not participate. Therefore, while the phone survey mitigates potential survey bias risk to some extent, the total sample of survey respondents may not necessarily be representative of all program participants.

## 3.2 Stronger Rural Communities

Marsden Jacob reviewed available program data provided by the Department of Agriculture. This included a spreadsheet completed during the program by key program contacts, detailing the amount of the grant and the description of the works and expected outcomes. The Department advised Marsden Jacob that no further program information or data had been retained.

Marsden Jacob attempted to locate and interview each nominated project lead. In most cases, the project lead was no longer with the recipient institution. However, an alternative project representative was nominated by the institution or located by Marsden Jacob. Marsden Jacob also undertook desktop research to identify media and other reporting relevant to outcomes. This included researching the websites and social media of the recipient institutions. In some cases, the investment outcomes were or are still being described and promoted.

Marsden Jacob interviewed representatives of five of the eight projects. A list of the questions used to guide the semi structured interviews is provided in Appendix 2.

The focus of the interview questions was about how the investments affected social capital outcomes and the implications of those outcomes for community and individual drought resilience. The connection between the investments and social capital and resilience are relatively straight forward but can also be more subtle.

In short, the investments provided upgrades in facilities or the emergence of opportunities to enable the building of social capital, including:

- creating or improving the quality of venues and means for individuals, groups and communities to meet in a more regular or structured way

- Increased opportunities and quality of engagement provided for individuals, groups and communities through new or more enduring avenues for them to remain connected with one another
- increased connection to help build resilience and help contribute to positive mental health outcomes.

More subtle outcomes can also occur from follow on impacts, for example:

- more events and connection opportunities can have wider flow-on benefits in small communities and towns – such as tourism and craft-based small businesses
- the investments can provide an economy of scale for groups to come together and combine resources
- cross membership connections can build group resilience.

### 3.3 Beyond farming

Marsden Jacob reviewed available Beyond Farming program material provided by the Departments. This included the *Bluebottle Consulting* evaluation. Marsden Jacob also consulted WACOSS to access program data. Detailed participant data was confidential and not retained by WACOSS beyond the end of the delivery of the program.

As a result, Marsden Jacob was unable to undertake surveys or interviews of Mentors or Mentees. Instead this review draws on the Bluebottle Consulting evaluation completed after the Drought Review Panel report.

To supplement this data, Marsden Jacob also reviewed available program information after the Drought Pilot when the program was operated by WACOSS and funded by the Western Australian Department of Agriculture.

As part of this review Marsden Jacob interviewed the Program Director at WACOSS who was in place during the program period and the key Program officer lead within the department at the time.

Marsden Jacob undertook semi-structured interviews to supplement the Bluebottle evaluation. This included:

- What their role was?
- How the program changed after the Pilot?
- How the program affected drought resilience and community resilience outcomes?
- What worked well?
- What did not work so well?
- Whether some of the limitations identified under the Pilot were addressed and what some of the impediments and issues were with this?
- How a future program could be designed and effectively and efficiently structured?
- Should the program be better linked to other service providers and referral agencies?
- The skills required to match mentors and mentees
- Whether the scope of the program should be broadened or focussed just on exit?
- How a future program might be monitored and evaluated?
- Some of the challenges of effectively monitoring and evaluating outcomes in relation to wellbeing.

### 3.4 Considering effectiveness and efficiency

In later sections of this report, the alignment of the programs to the concepts of effectiveness and efficiency of improving drought resilience is considered. A traffic light system is used:

- Green — full aligns
- Amber — partially aligns
- Red — does not align.

*Effectiveness* is defined to mean whether the program achieved the specified objective and outcomes whereas *Efficiency* is defined to mean whether in doing so there was likely to be a net gain in societal economic welfare because there would be an overall improvement in the allocation and use of economic resources.



## 4. Panel data insights

Comparing responses of farmers between 2011/12 and 2019 to a number of key survey questions suggests that the Drought Pilot has had positive and lasting effects on farm business resilience.

Farmers indicated they were more prepared for drought than they were previously. They continue to have very similar levels of confidence in the viability of their farm business in 2019 as compared to when they completed the Farm Planning program in 2011/12. The data also indicate a much wider and more even involvement across a range of activities that can help contribute to building resilience.

### 4.1 Introduction

The construction of a Panel data set enables the impact of the program on farm resilience to be examined by comparing responses by farmers to similar questions at 2012 and 2019.

Four groupings of farmers are compared between 2012 and 2019. Those who:

- completed Farm Planning only – FP (panel data only)
- completed Farm Planning and Building Farm Businesses – FPBFB (panel data only)
- combined FP and FPBFB – panel data only, and
- all survey respondents (both panel and non-panel) – All (panel and non-panel).

### 4.2 Key impacts on panel farmers

Panel data for the following responses from farmers are assessed:

- change in drought preparedness
- key benefit of the Farm Planning program
- confidence in the viability of the farm business, and
- prepared a strategy plan.

These impacts were chosen to be examined as questions on these topics formed part of the 2012 survey and, therefore, were also able to be asked of farmers in the 2019 survey.

#### 4.2.1 Change in preparedness

Using combined FP and FPBFB panel data, of the farmers who said in 2011/12 they were prepared for drought, 33 farmers stated in the 2019 survey that they were prepared to about the same level, while 74 said they were better prepared now than previously (Table 12). None said they were 'worse prepared' than previously. This result is similar across both the FP and FPBFB panel data sets (Table 13 and Table 14).

Table 12: Change in preparedness 2011/12 to 2019 – combined FP and FPBFB (panel data only)

|   |                | Preparedness at 2011/12 |                                  |          |
|---|----------------|-------------------------|----------------------------------|----------|
|   |                | Not prepared            | Neither prepared or not prepared | Prepared |
| Preparedness at 2019 compared to before 2011/12 | Worse          | 0                       | 0                                | 0        |
|   | About the same | 1                       | 0                                | 33       |
|   | Better         | 1                       | 2                                | 74       |

Note: number of survey respondents that answered this question in both 2011/12 and 2019 surveys = 111.

Table 13: Change in preparedness 2011/12 to 2019 – Farm Planning only (FP panel data only)

|   |                | Preparedness at 2011/12 |                                  |          |
|---|----------------|-------------------------|----------------------------------|----------|
|   |                | Not prepared            | Neither prepared or not prepared | Prepared |
| Preparedness at 2019 compared to before 2011/12 | Worse          | 0                       | 0                                | 0        |
|   | About the same | 0                       | 0                                | 8        |
|   | Better         | 1                       | 0                                | 17       |

Note: number of survey respondents that answered this question in both 2011/12 and 2019 surveys = 26.

Table 14: Change in preparedness 2011/12 to 2019 – Farm Planning and Building Farm Businesses (FPBFB panel data only)

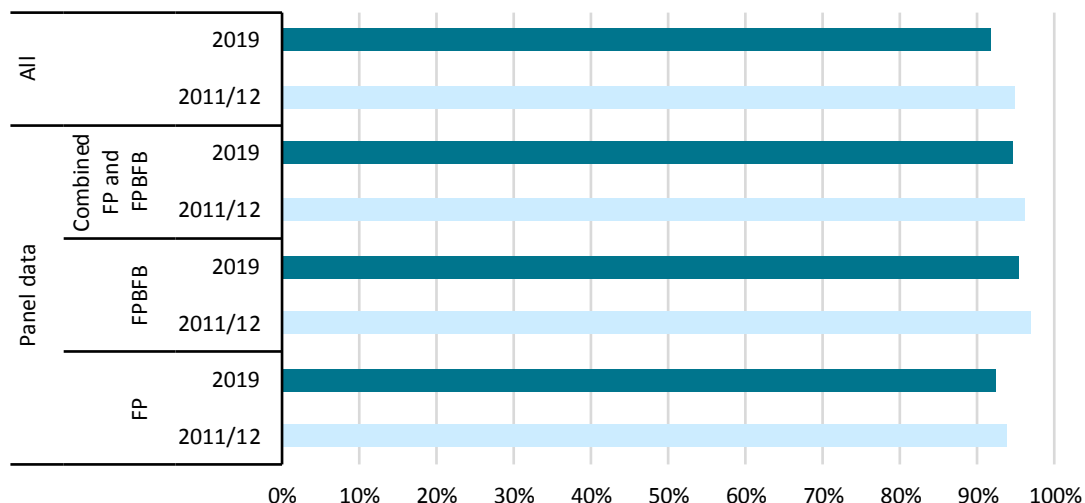
|   |                | Preparedness at 2011/12 |                                  |          |
|---|----------------|-------------------------|----------------------------------|----------|
|   |                | Not prepared            | Neither prepared or not prepared | Prepared |
| Preparedness at 2019 compared to before 2011/12 | Worse          | 0                       | 0                                | 0        |
|   | About the same | 1                       | 0                                | 25       |
|   | Better         | 0                       | 2                                | 57       |

Note: number of survey respondents that answered this question in both 2011/12 and 2019 surveys = 85.

#### 4.2.2 Confidence in the viability of the farm business

The confidence of farmers in the future viability of their farm business is relatively high and stable (Figure 5)—between 92 and 97 per cent of farmers across the different survey groupings were confident both in 2011/12 and 2019. There has been a slight decline of between 1 and 3 percentage points of farmers that are confident since 2011/12.

Figure 5: Confidence in the viability of the farm business



Note: number of survey respondents that answered this question in both 2011/12 and 2019 surveys = 26 (FP), 85 (FPBFB), 111 (combined FP and FPBFB) and 144 (All).

#### 4.2.3 Main benefit of program

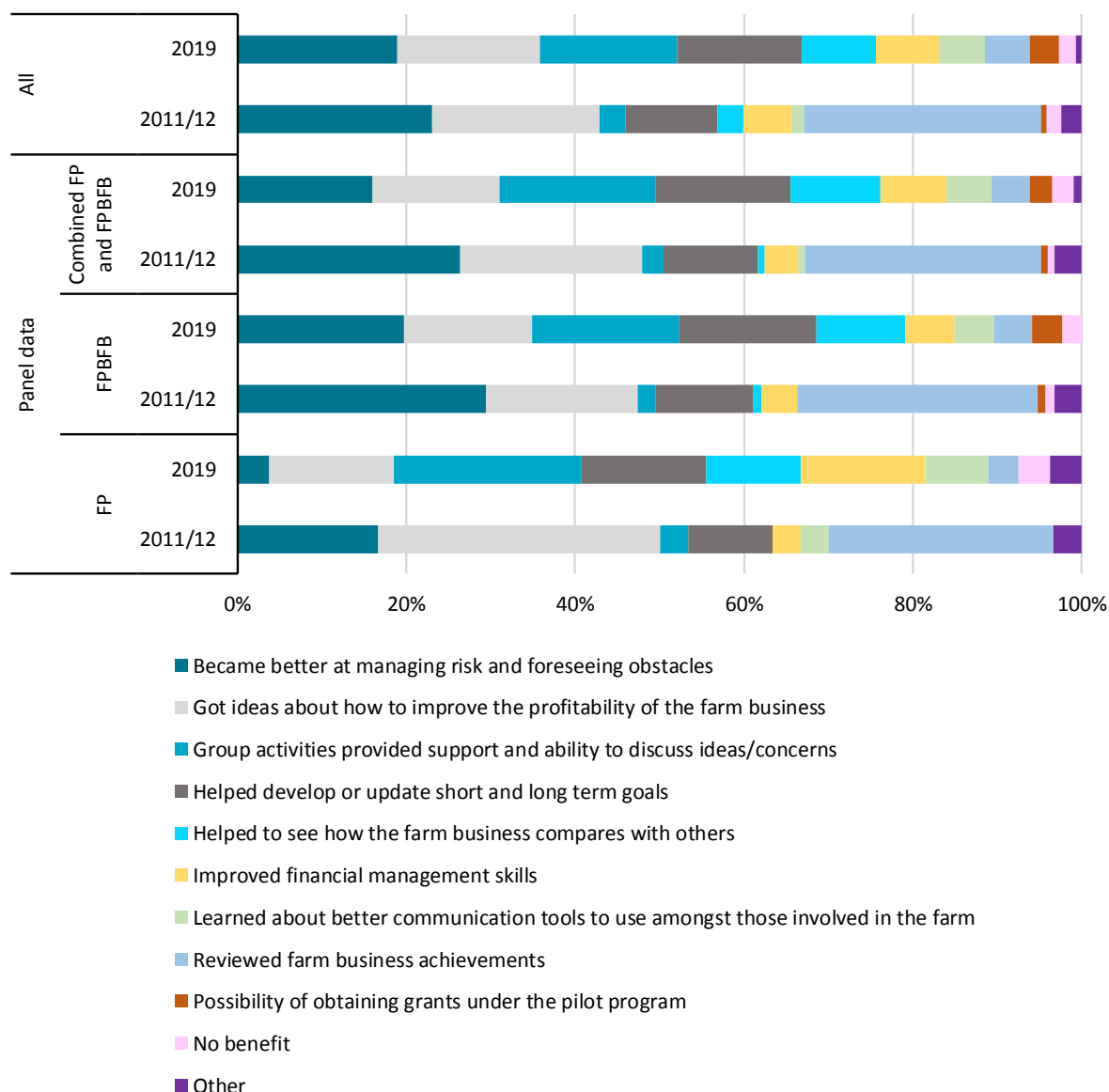
The main benefit of the program as compared across time and for different survey groupings is shown in Figure 6.

The largest increase from 2011/12 to 2019 was in the 'Group activities provided support and ability to discuss ideas/concerns' category across all survey groupings. Other benefits of note were 'helped develop or update short and long-term goals' and 'helped to see how the farm business compares with others'.

The largest decline was in the 'Reviewed farm business achievements' category across all survey groupings.

Another major insight is the more even distribution across a wider number of program outcomes in 2019 than in 2011/12. In 2011/12 farmers placed more benefit on a smaller number of outcomes.

Figure 6: What was the main benefit of the farm planning program?

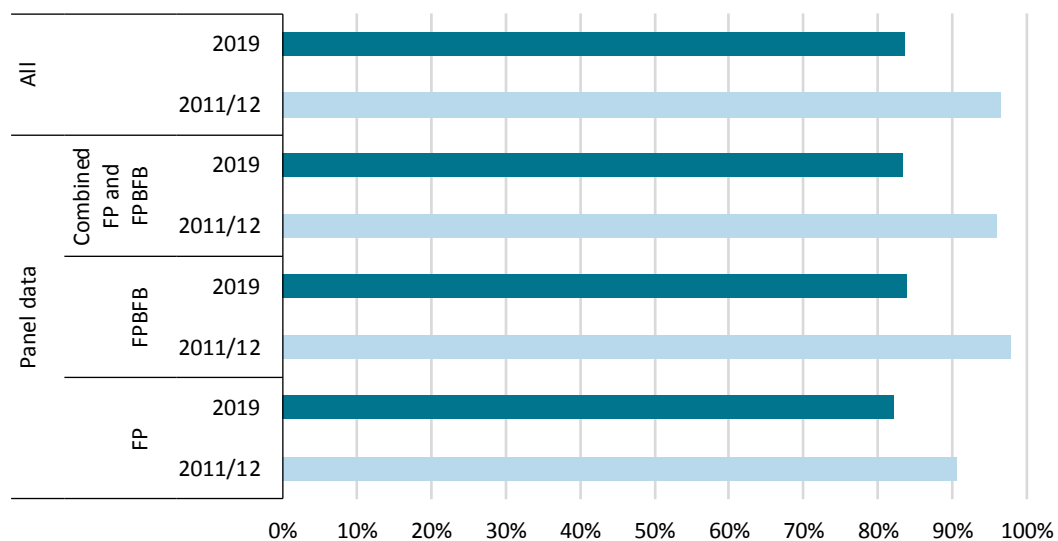


Note: number of survey respondents that answered this question in both 2011/12 and 2019 surveys = 27 (FP), 86 (FPBFB), 113 (combined FP and FPBFB) and 148 (All).

#### 4.2.4 Strategic planning

A high proportion of farmers continue to have a strategic plan, as shown in both the 2011/12 and 2019 survey results across the different survey groupings (Figure 7). However, the proportion with a strategic plan has declined since the 2011/12 survey.

Figure 7: Does the farmer have a strategic plan?



Note: number of survey respondents that answered this question in both 2011/12 and 2019 surveys = 28 (FP), 87 (FPBFB), 115 (combined FP and FPBFB) and 153 (All).

## 5. All farmer responses (2019 survey)

Survey responses suggest the Drought Pilot has had positive outcomes for indicators of farm resilience and wellbeing. A very large majority plan for and believe their farm business is more resilient to drought, and their wellbeing has improved as a result of participating in the Drought Pilot.

Most farmers believe they have been in drought for no more than 2 to 3 years since the programs were completed. A very large majority of farmers annually plan for drought and most believe the Drought Pilot programs have helped them to implement the plans effectively. Most also believe the program improved their personal and their family's wellbeing.

The survey suggests that the program has led to better outcomes in terms of the five impacts: business planning; risk management; confidence in decision making; better able to cope with climate change; and using financial ratios and benchmarking. Additionally, the survey suggests that most farmers that had better outcomes for these five impacts also had increased wellbeing and resilience as a result of the program. The survey also suggests that having a strategic business plan and referring to it led to more farmers with improved wellbeing and resilience outcomes as a result of the program.

Interestingly, there is some evidence that the program has had a positive impact on farmers that have had a relatively higher number of drought years since 2011/12. Moreover, the survey results suggest that proportionately more farmers experienced improvements in wellbeing as a result of the program if they had 2 or more years of drought since 2011 compared to 0 to 1 years of drought.

The survey also suggests that farmers involved in grain production had a higher proportion of 2 or more drought years compared to those with those farmers not involved in grain growing. However, the impact of the program on wellbeing and resilience appears to be only marginally different for those involved in grain growing and those that are not.

Most farmers surveyed believe the programs have helped them keep farming and, in some cases, helped delay the decision to exit. However, the survey does not indicate whether this is the right or wrong decision for the farmer given their personal circumstances.

### 5.1 Introduction

In this section, three survey groupings are used:

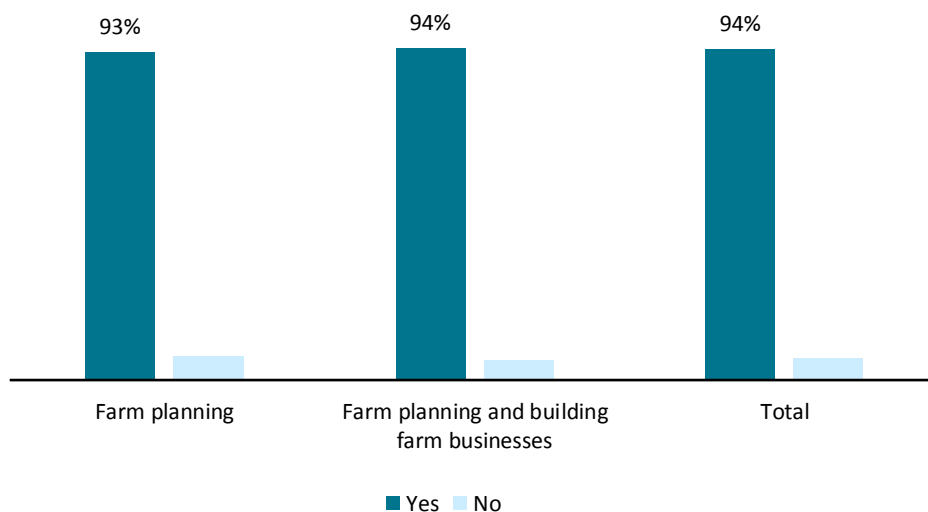
- completed the 2019 Farm Planning survey. These farmers participated in the Farm Planning program but did not receive a grant as part of the Building Farm Business program
- completed the 2019 Farm Planning and Building Farm Businesses survey. These farmers participated in the Farm Planning program and did receive a grant as part of the Building Farm Business program
- combined results from both 2019 surveys ('Total').

All of the results in this section are from the 2019 surveys and include both panel and non-panel survey respondents.

### 5.2 Farming status

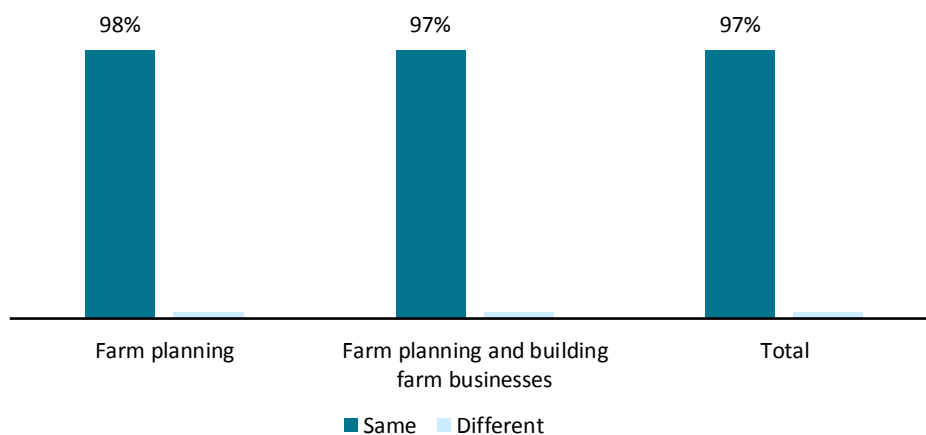
Almost all farmers that were surveyed are still in farming (Figure 8) and, for those that are still farming, almost all are in the same location (Figure 9).

Figure 8: Since you participated in the Farm Planning/Building Farm Businesses pilot program are you or your family business still farming?



Note: number of survey respondents that answered this question = 44 (Farm planning) and 121 (Farm Planning and Building Farm Businesses).

Figure 9: Are you farming at the same or a different location as when you participated in the pilot program?

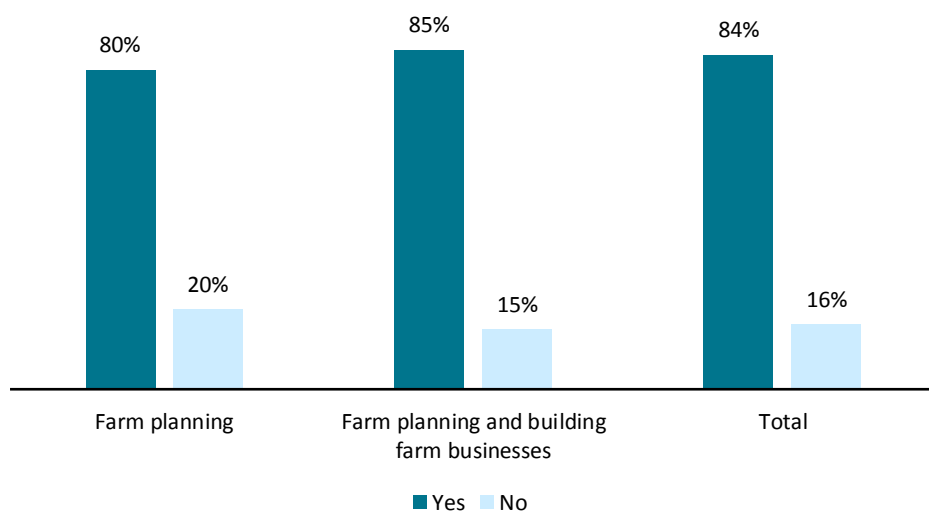


Note: number of survey respondents that answered this question = 41 (Farm planning) and 114 (Farm Planning and Building Farm Businesses).

### 5.3 Strategic Planning

Approximately 85 per cent of farmers that completed the Farm Planning/Building Farm Business programs have a farm business plan (Figure 10). This is slightly higher than those that only participated in the Farm Planning program.

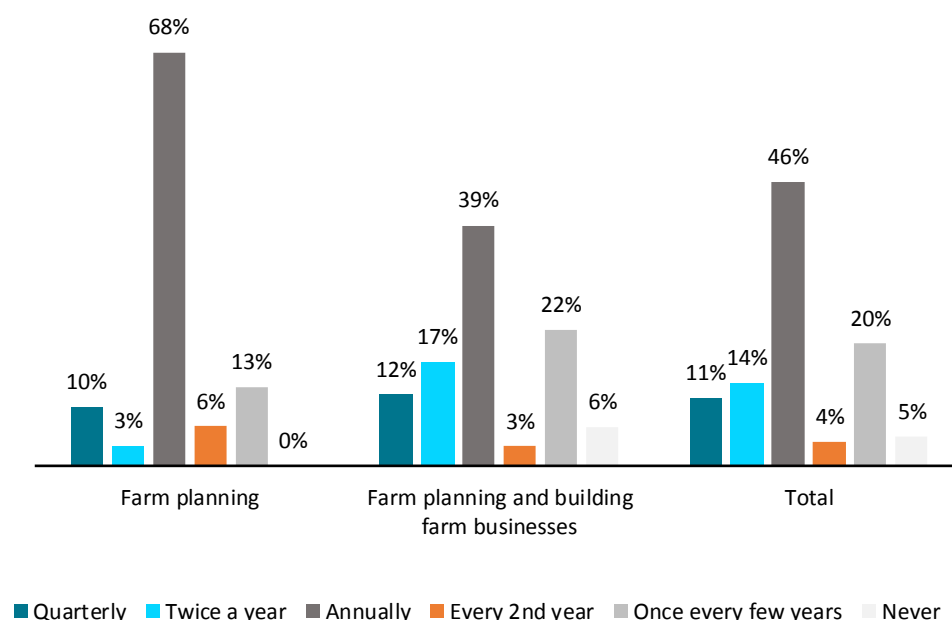
Figure 10: Do you have a strategic farm business plan?



Note: number of survey respondents that answered this question = 40 (Farm planning) and 113 (Farm Planning and Building Farm Businesses).

Just under half of those farmers refer to their plan annually (Figure 11) and a further twenty five percent refer to it more frequently than that. The farmers that completed the Farm Planning program are more likely to refer to their plan annually than those that also completed the Building Farm Businesses program, who appear to be more likely to refer to their plan more frequently than annually, although somewhat less frequently overall.

Figure 11: How often is your farm business plan referred to?

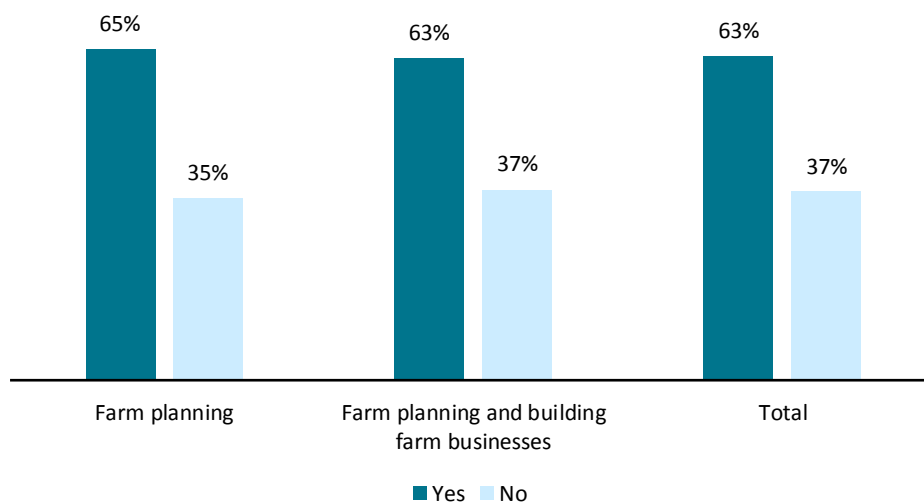


Note: number of survey respondents that answered this question = 31 (Farm planning) and 94 (Farm Planning and Building Farm Businesses).



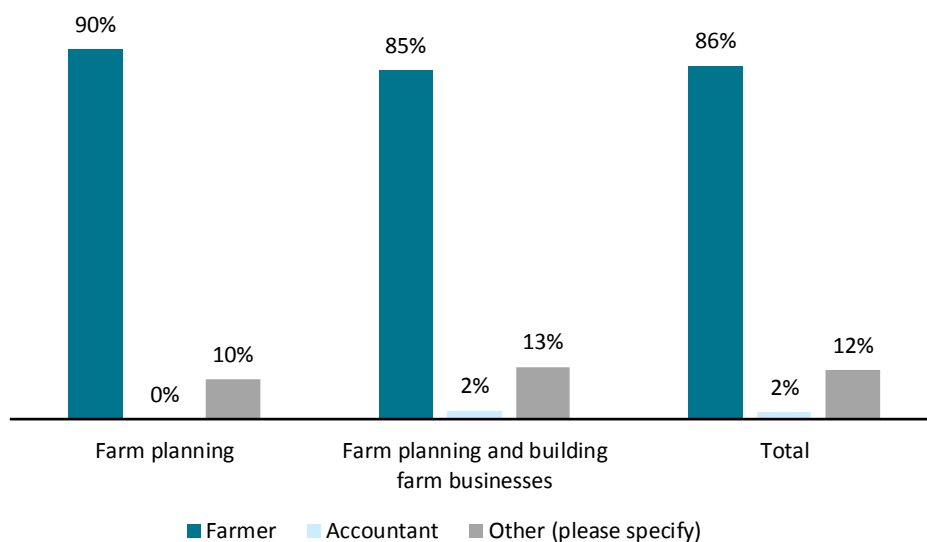
Most farmers (approaching two thirds) have updated their plan since 2011 (Figure 12), with this result being very similar across survey groupings. Additionally, in the large majority of cases the farmer is the deliverer and reviewer of the plan (Figure 13).

Figure 12: Have you updated it since 2011?



Note: number of survey respondents that answered this question = 31 (Farm planning) and 94 (Farm Planning and Building Farm Businesses).

Figure 13: Who is the main deliverer and reviewer of the plan?



Note: number of survey respondents that answered this question = 31 (Farm planning) and 94 (Farm Planning and Building Farm Businesses).

## 5.4 Continuing to farm

This section examines the impact that the program had on the decision to continue farming or to delay the decision to cease farming.

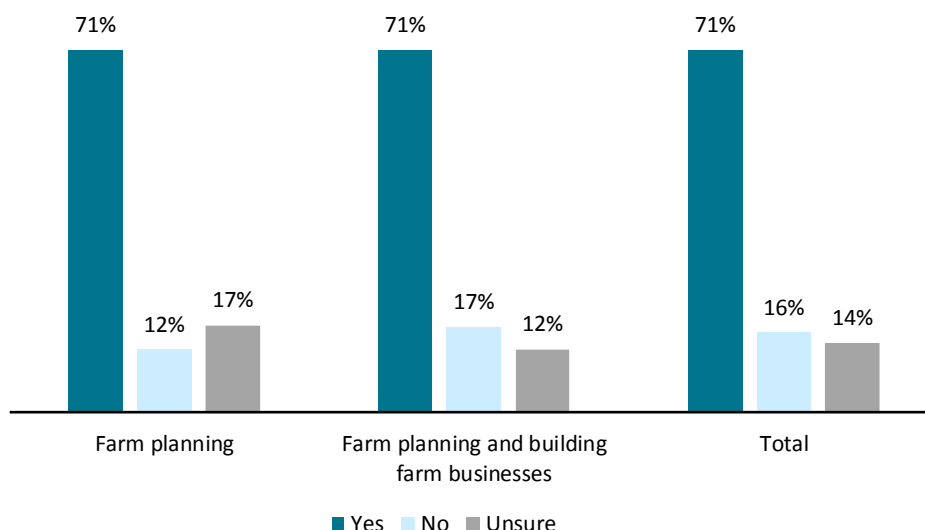
However, this analysis should be treated with some caution. Of the farmers who responded to the survey, 94 percent were still farming and of those 97 percent were still farming in the same location as when they participated in the program. These indicators have potential sample bias because:

- farmers more interested in remaining in farming may have participated in the program
- phone and email contact details are likely to have changed for those that exited their farms and there was no way of locating those who may have changed their contact details since the 2011/12 survey for the 2019 survey.

#### 5.4.1 Decision to exit or continue farming

The overwhelming majority of farmers (71 percent) believed the Farm Planning/Building Farm Business programs enabled them to continue farming (Figure 14).

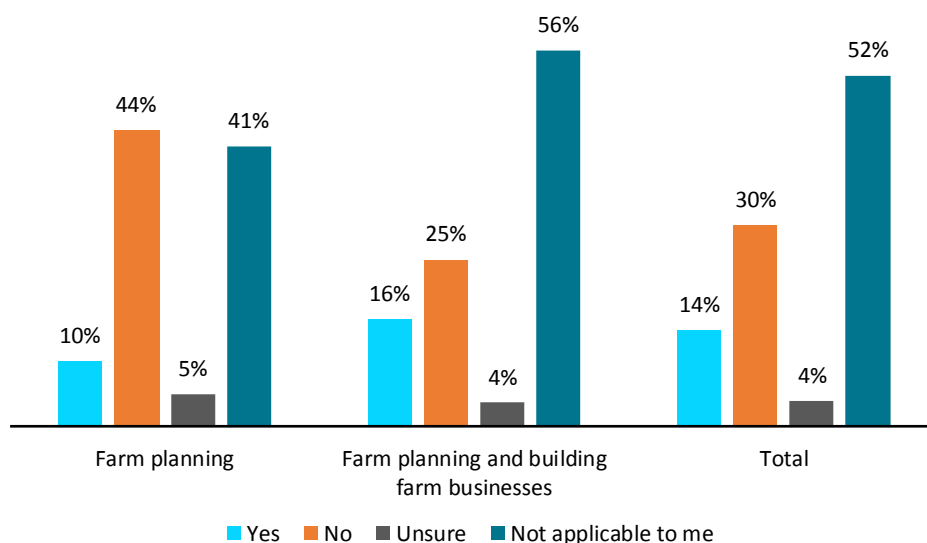
**Figure 14: Do you think participating in the Farm Planning/Building Farm Businesses program has helped or enabled you to continue farming?**



*Note: number of survey respondents that answered this question = 41 (Farm planning) and 113 (Farm Planning and Building Farm Businesses).*

The program also had a small but important effect on delaying farmers' decisions to exit farming (Figure 15). In total, 14 per cent of farmers said the program had enabled them to delay their decision to exit. While the survey shows that the program has influenced decisions to exit or remain in farming, the survey does not indicate whether this is the right or wrong decision for the farmer given their personal circumstances.

Figure 15: Did participation in the Farm Planning/Building Farm Businesses help to delay your decision to cease farming?

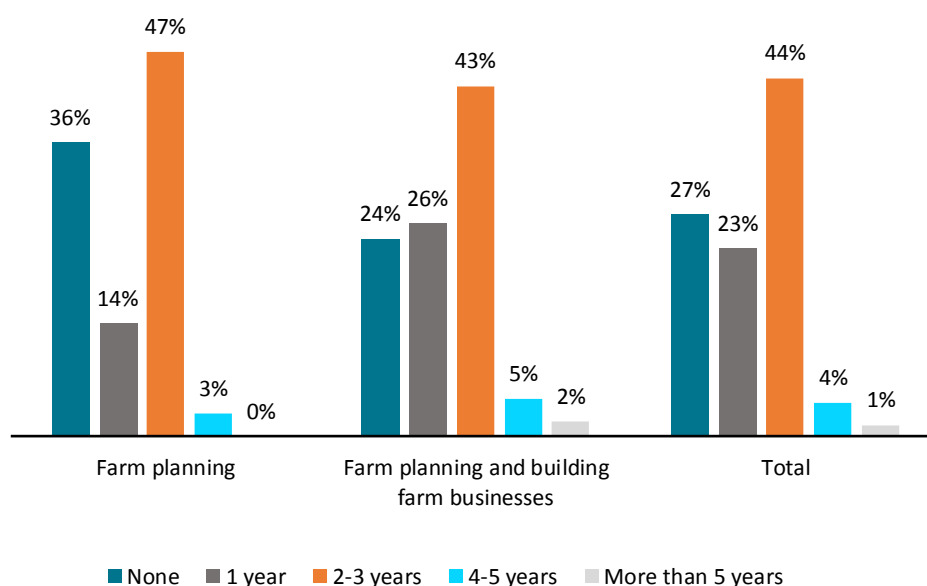


Note: number of survey respondents that answered this question = 41 (Farm planning) and 113 (Farm Planning and Building Farm Businesses).

## 5.5 Drought wellbeing and resilience

Around half of survey respondents believe they have been in drought for 2 to 3 years since 2011/12 (Figure 16). A similar number believe this figure is less than this. When considered overall, the majority (over 70%) of farmers feel they have been in drought for between 1 and 5 (or more) years since 2011. Only around one quarter say they have not been in drought since 2011.

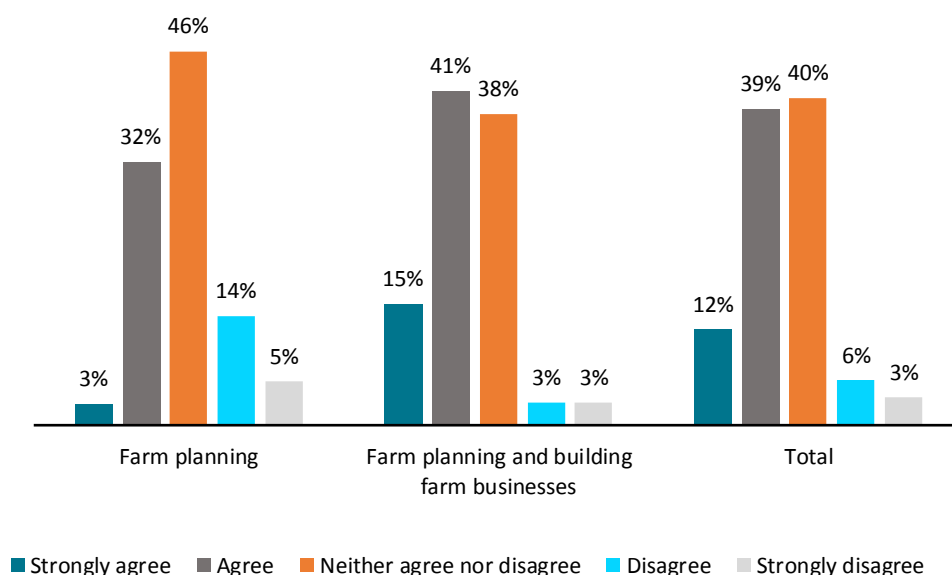
Figure 16: Years of drought since 2011



Note: number of survey respondents that answered this question = 36 (Farm planning) and 107 (Farm Planning and Building Farm Businesses).

Notwithstanding that most farmers have experienced drought conditions since 2011/12, most farmers believe their own and their family's wellbeing has improved as a result of participating in the Pilot (Figure 17). However, a large number (over 40 percent) neither agreed nor disagreed that their wellbeing had improved.

Figure 17: As a result of participating in the Pilot my and my family's wellbeing has improved



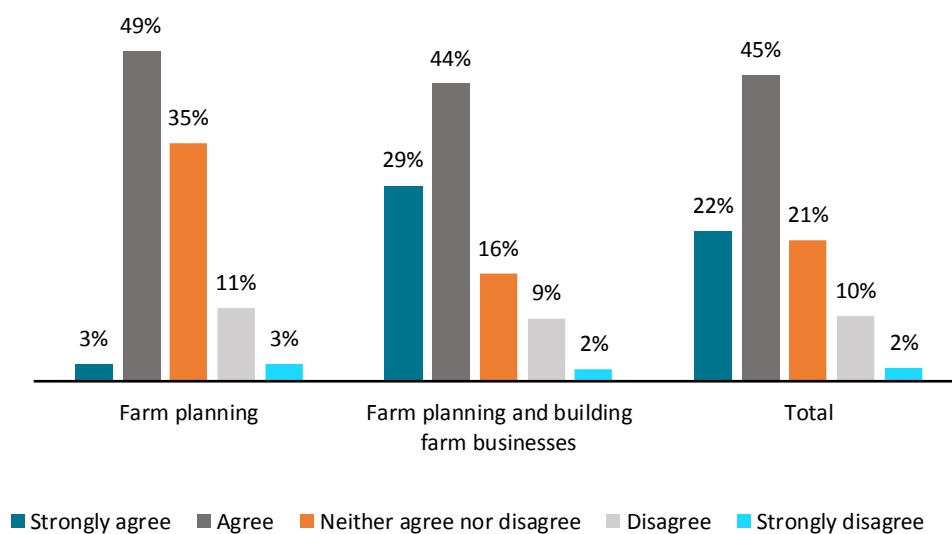
Note: number of survey respondents that answered this question = 37 (Farm planning) and 107 (Farm Planning and Building Farm Businesses).

A large majority (67 per cent) of farmers believed the resilience of their farm business had improved as result of the Drought Pilot. Only a small percentage did not believe so (Figure 18).

Additionally, the survey shows that this positive impact on resilience is reflected in various ways with well over half of farmers:

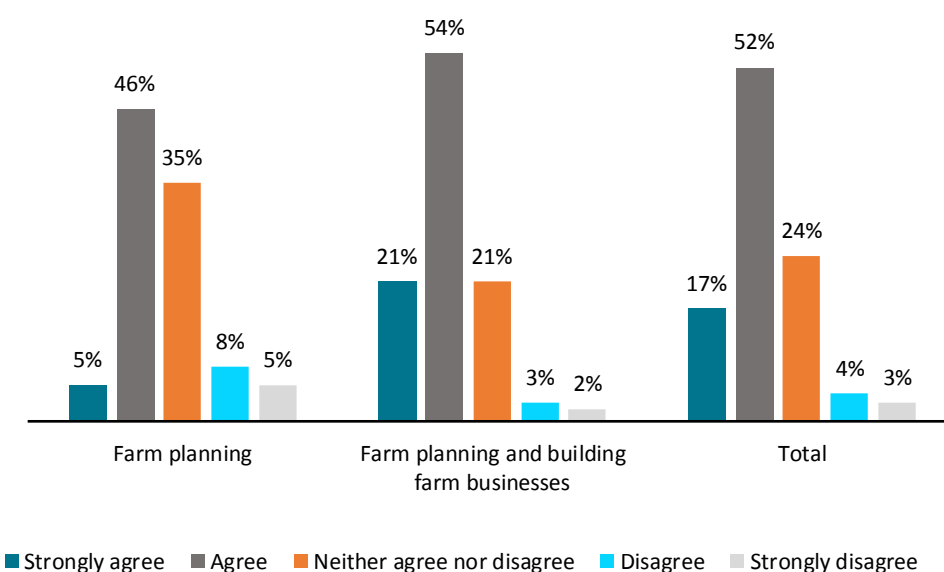
- better able to plan their business (Figure 19)
- better able to manage farm risks (Figure 20)
- more confident in making decisions (Figure 21)
- better able to cope with ups and downs of climate and rainfall (Figure 22)
- better able to use financial ratios and benchmarking (Figure 23).

Figure 18: Participating in the pilot has improved the resilience of my farm business?



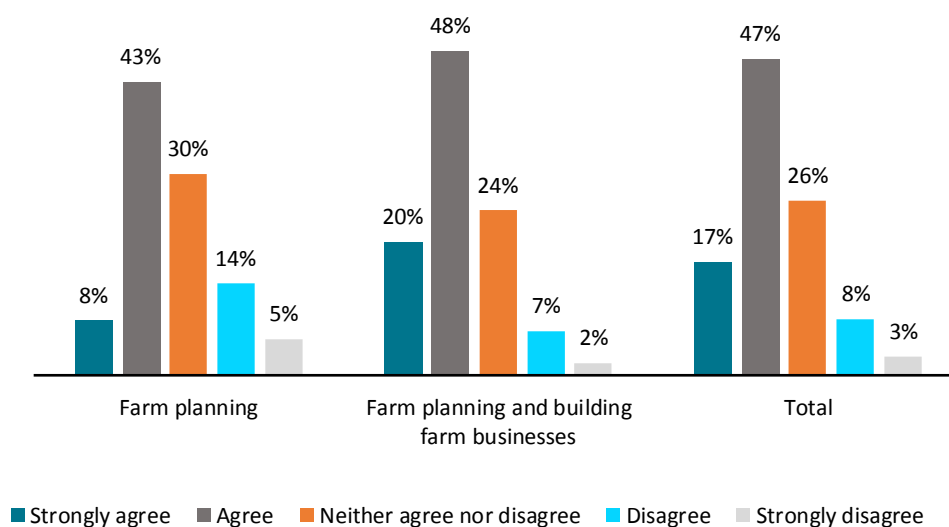
Note: number of survey respondents that answered this question = 37 (Farm planning) and 107 (Farm Planning and Building Farm Businesses).

Figure 19: We are better able to plan our farm business



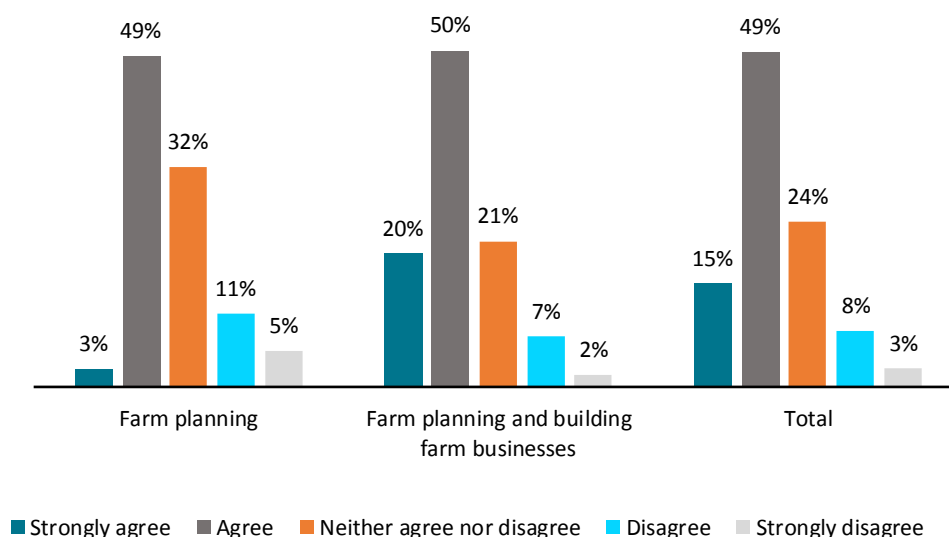
Note: number of survey respondents that answered this question = 37 (Farm planning) and 107 (Farm Planning and Building Farm Businesses).

Figure 20: We are better able to manage farm risks



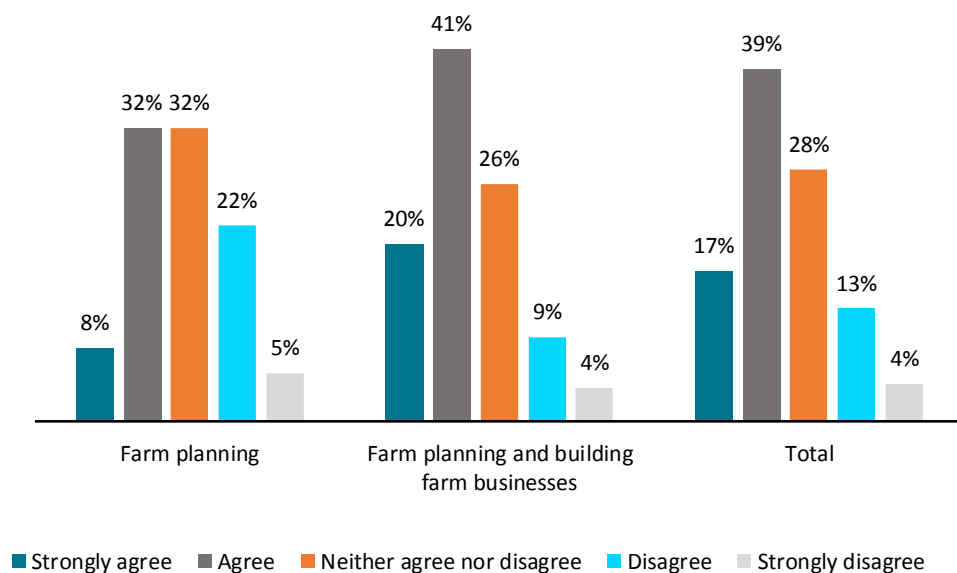
Note: number of survey respondents that answered this question = 37 (Farm planning) and 107 (Farm Planning and Building Farm Businesses).

Figure 21: We are more confident in making decisions



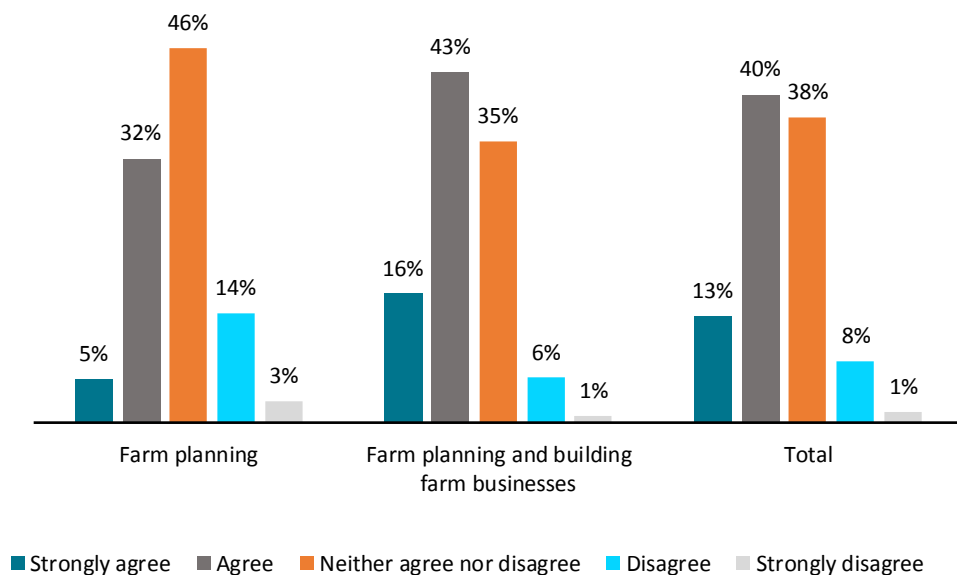
Note: number of survey respondents that answered this question = 37 (Farm planning) and 107 (Farm Planning and Building Farm Businesses).

Figure 22: Our farm business copes better with the ups and downs of climate and rainfall



Note: number of survey respondents that answered this question = 37 (Farm planning) and 107 (Farm Planning and Building Farm Businesses).

Figure 23: We are better able to use financial ratios and benchmarking



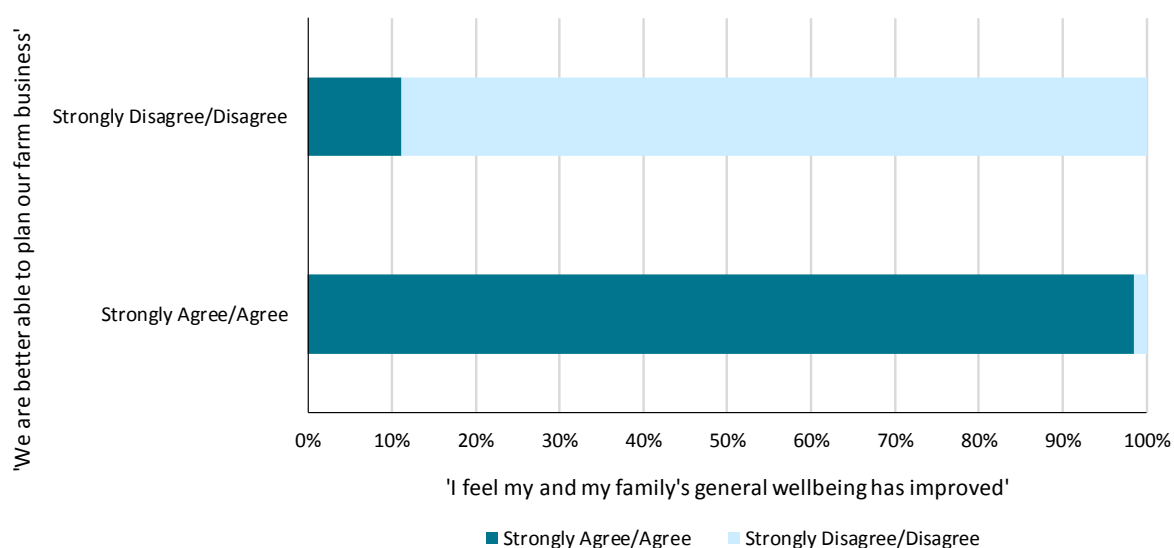
Note: number of survey respondents that answered this question = 37 (Farm planning) and 107 (Farm Planning and Building Farm Businesses).

## 5.6 Factors associated with the impact on wellbeing and resilience

In section 5.5, the survey responses from farmers indicated that the program has led to better outcomes in terms of the five impacts: business planning; risk management; confidence in decision making; better able to cope with climate change; and using financial ratios and benchmarking.

The survey results further suggest that each of these impacts appears to be contributing to improved resilience and wellbeing. This is illustrated in Figure 24, Figure 25, Figure 26, Figure 27, Figure 28, Figure 29, Figure 30, Figure 31, Figure 32 and Figure 33 which show that those farmers that strongly agree or agree that they had better outcomes for each of these five impacts also strongly agree or agree that their participation in the program has increased their wellbeing and resilience.

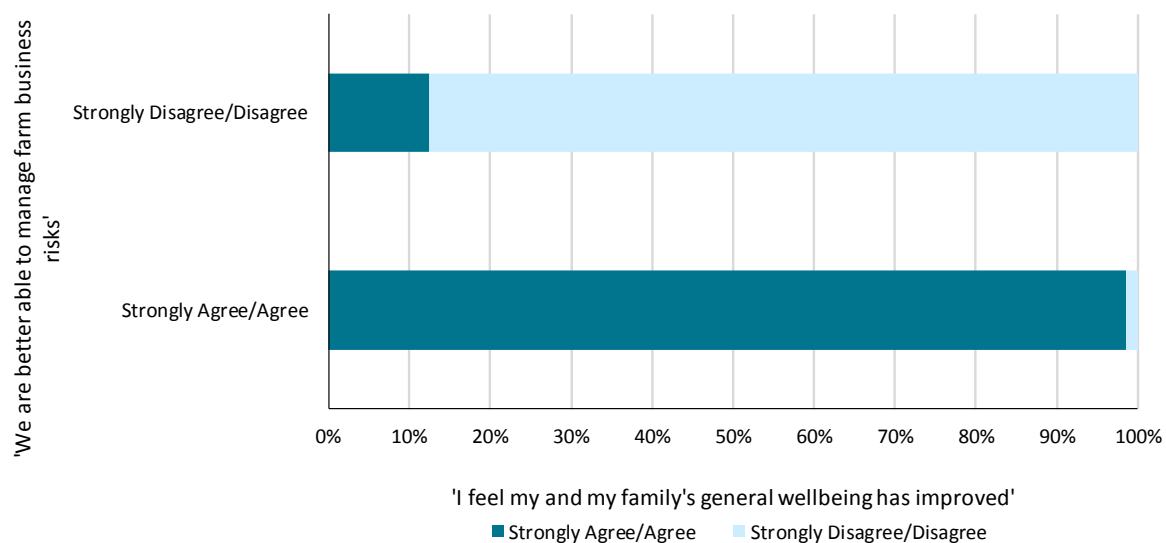
Figure 24: Relationship between impact on farm business planning and wellbeing



*Note: number of survey respondents that answered this question = 77 (Total Farm Planning and Building Farm Businesses and excludes those who answered 'Neither agree nor disagree').*

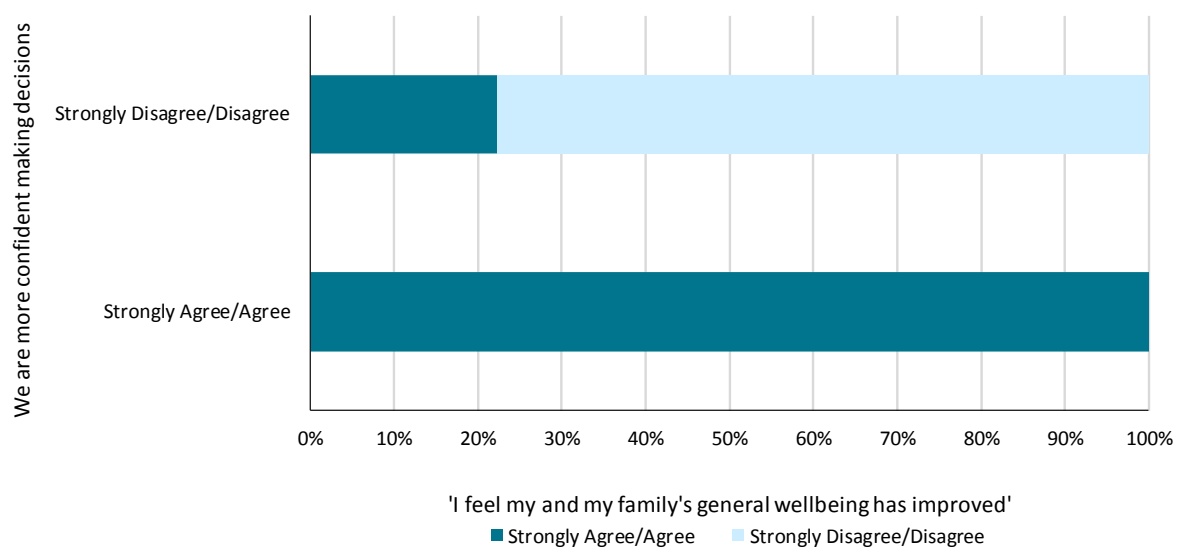


Figure 25: Relationship between impact on risk management and wellbeing



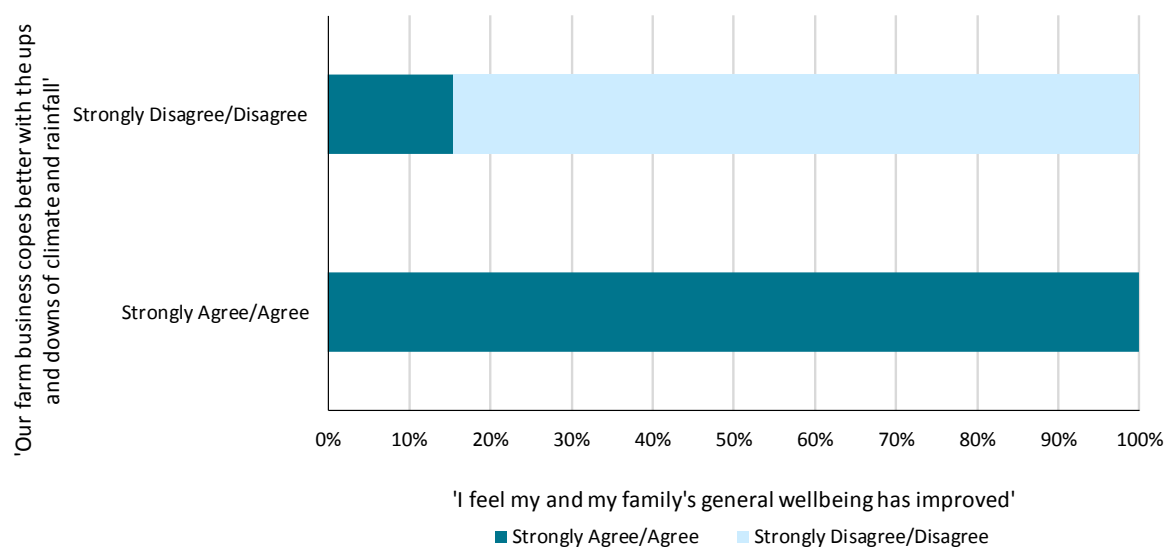
Note: number of survey respondents that answered this question = 74 (Total Farm Planning and Building Farm Businesses and excludes those who answered 'Neither agree nor disagree').

Figure 26: Relationship between impact on confidence in decision making and wellbeing



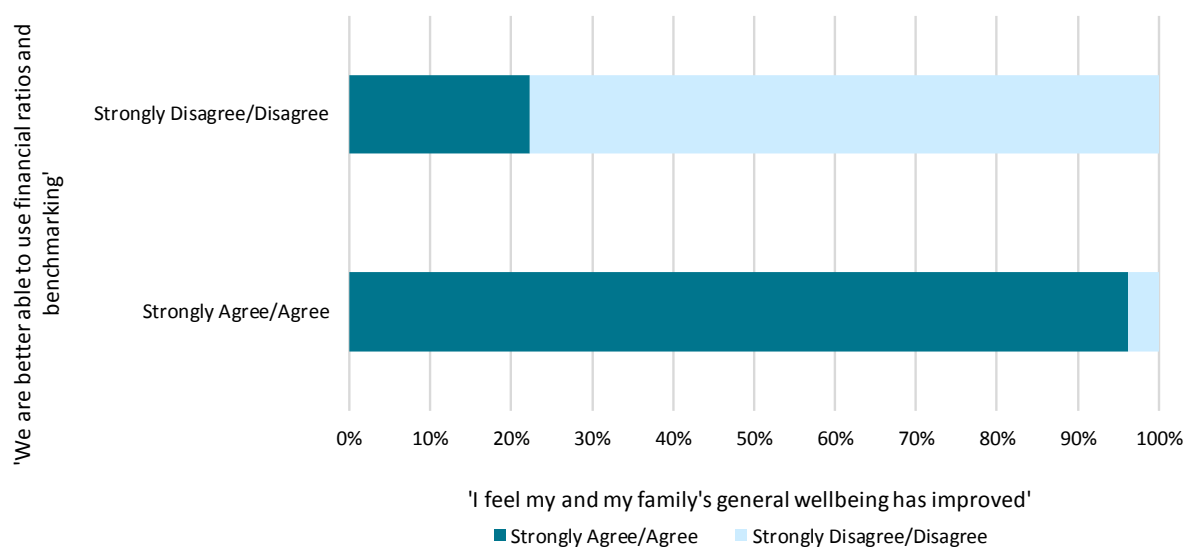
Note: number of survey respondents that answered this question = 74 (Total Farm Planning and Building Farm Businesses and excludes those who answered 'Neither agree nor disagree').

Figure 27: Relationship between impact on being better able to cope with climate change and wellbeing



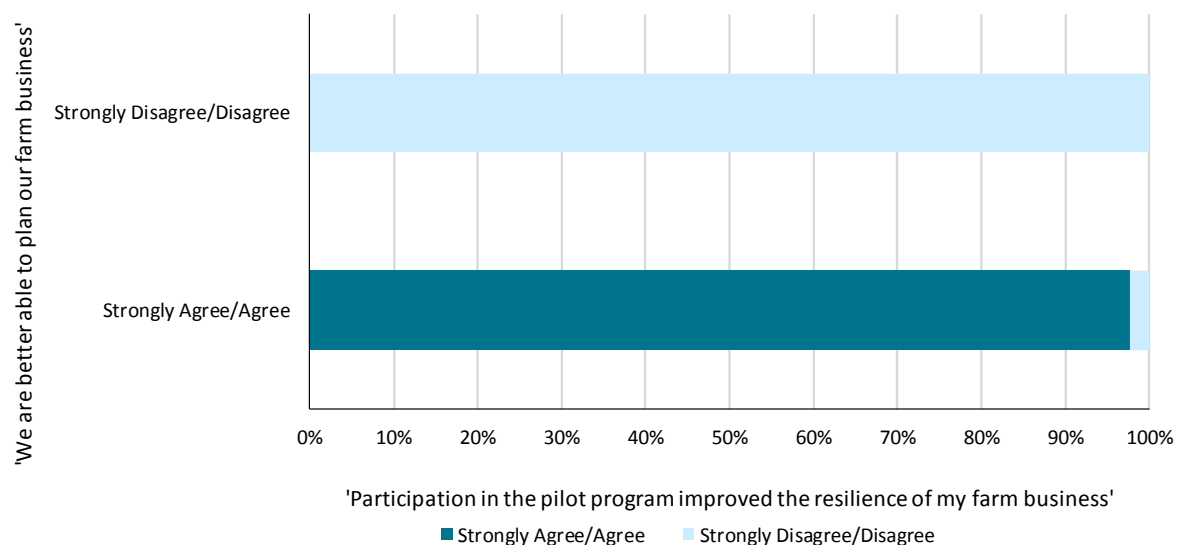
Note: number of survey respondents that answered this question = 74 (Total Farm Planning and Building Farm Businesses and excludes those who answered 'Neither agree nor disagree').

Figure 28: Relationship between impact on being better able to use financial ratios/benchmarking and wellbeing



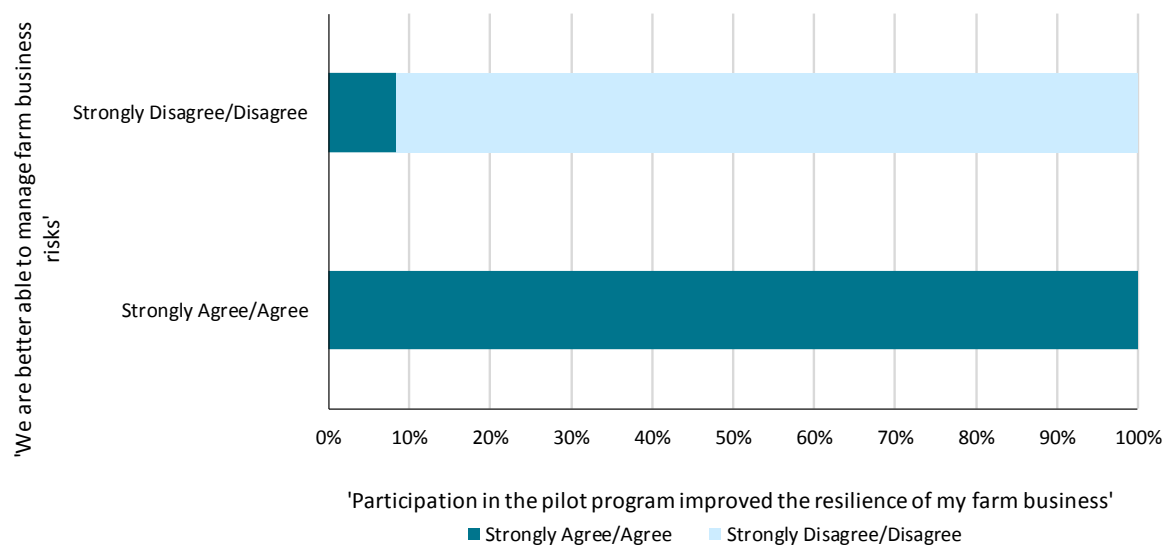
Note: number of survey respondents that answered this question = 61 (Total Farm Planning and Building Farm Businesses and excludes those who answered 'Neither agree nor disagree').

Figure 29: Relationship between impact on farm business planning and resilience



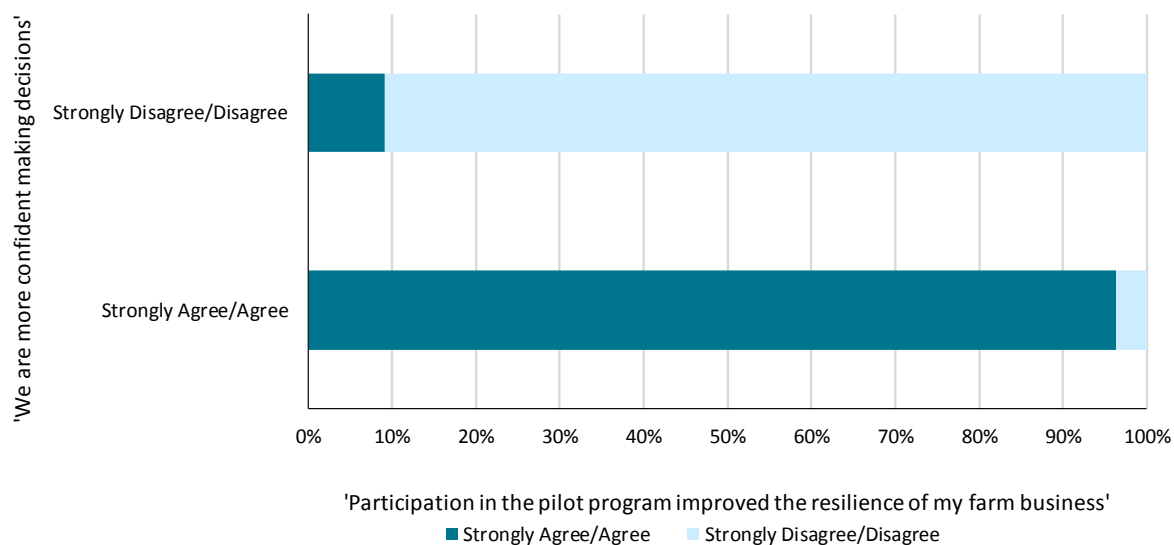
Note: number of survey respondents that answered this question = 97 (Total Farm Planning and Building Farm Businesses and excludes those who answered 'Neither agree nor disagree').

Figure 30: Relationship between impact on risk management and resilience



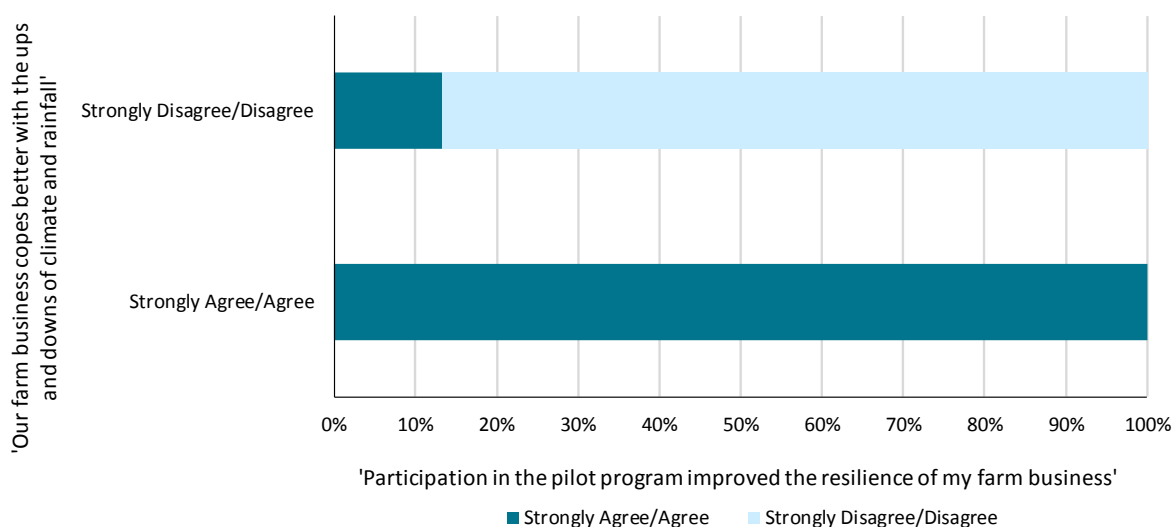
Note: number of survey respondents that answered this question = 92 (Total Farm Planning and Building Farm Businesses and excludes those who answered 'Neither agree nor disagree').

Figure 31: Relationship between impact on confidence in decision making and resilience



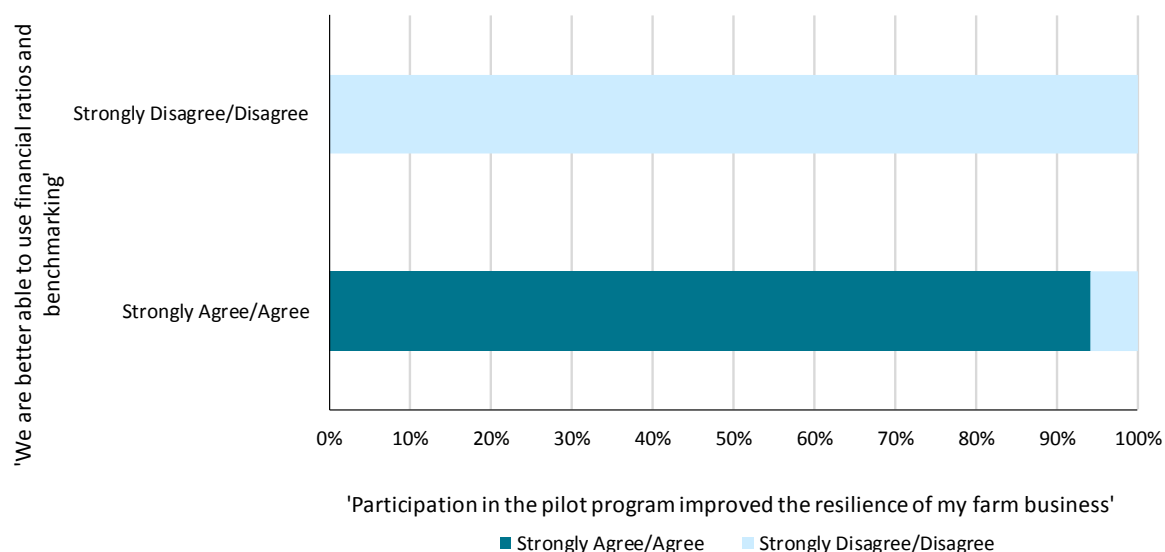
Note: number of survey respondents that answered this question = 92 (Total Farm Planning and Building Farm Businesses and excludes those who answered 'Neither agree nor disagree').

Figure 32: Relationship between impact on being better able to cope with climate change and resilience



Note: number of survey respondents that answered this question = 86 (Total Farm Planning and Building Farm Businesses and excludes those who answered 'Neither agree nor disagree').

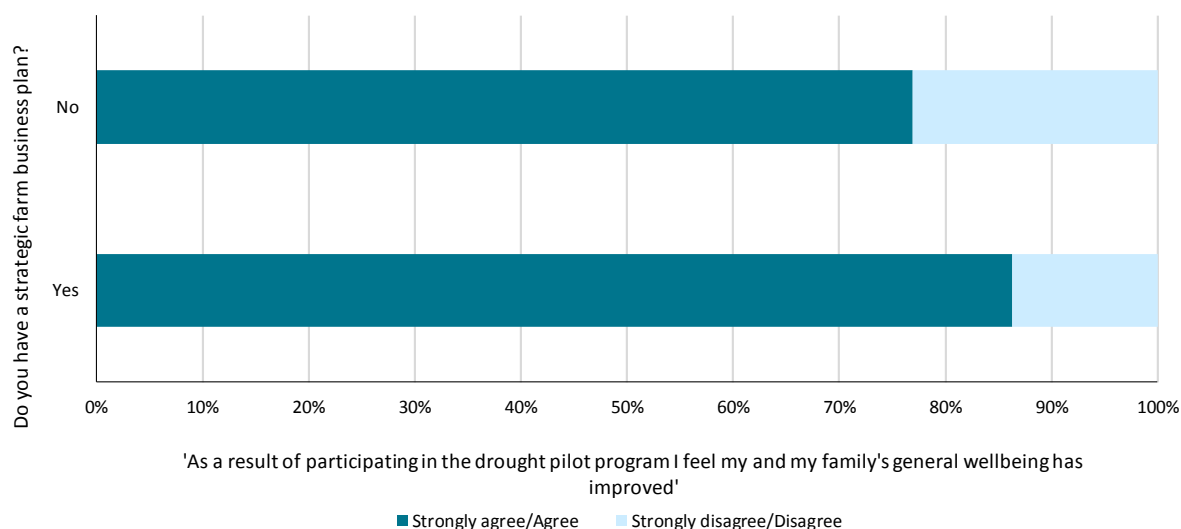
Figure 33: Relationship between impact on being better able to use financial ratios/benchmarking and resilience



Note: number of survey respondents that answered this question = 86 (Total Farm Planning and Building Farm Businesses and excludes those who answered 'Neither agree nor disagree').

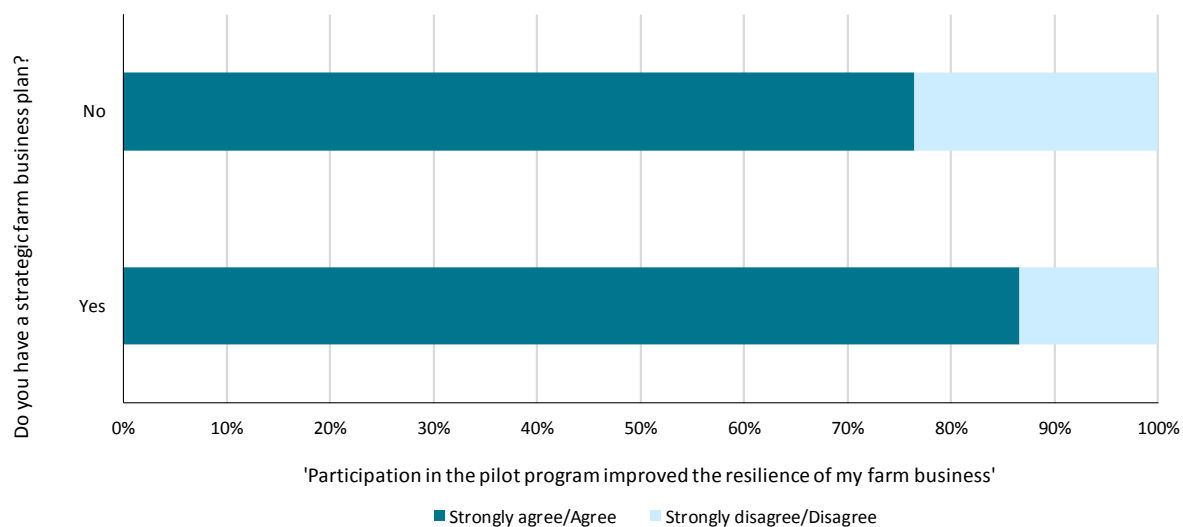
The survey also provides insights into the impact that having a strategic business plan and referring to it has had on responses for wellbeing and resilience. The survey results suggest that slightly more farmers experienced improvements in wellbeing and resilience as a result of the program if they had a strategic business plan (Figure 34 and Figure 35). The survey also suggests that more farmers experienced wellbeing and resilience improvements as a result of the program if they are referring to the plan – even if it is less frequent than annually (Figure 36 and Figure 37).

Figure 34: Relationship between having a strategic business plan and wellbeing



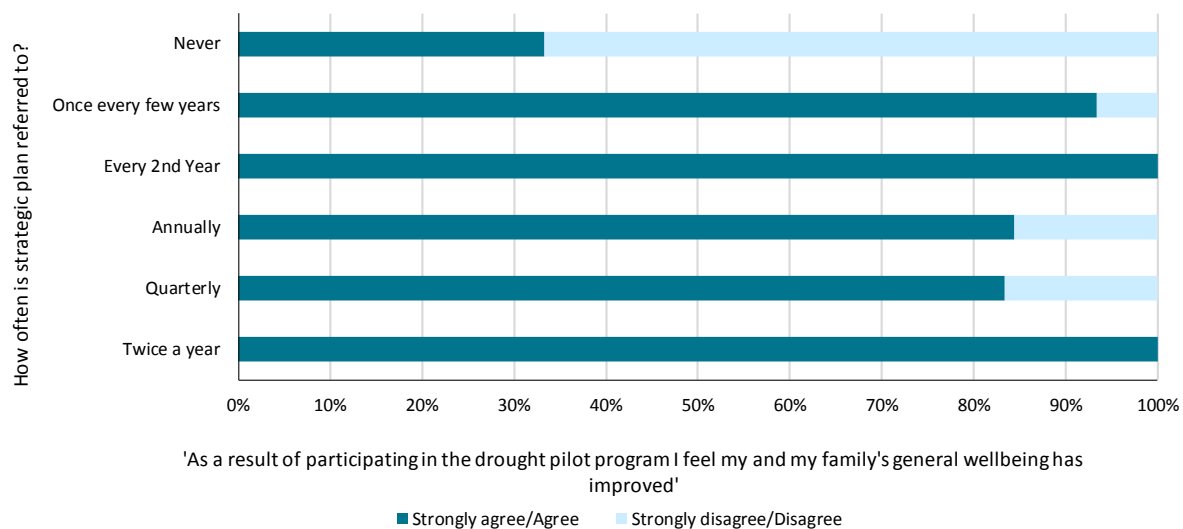
Note: number of survey respondents that answered this question = 86 across both the FP and FPBFB surveys.

Figure 35: Relationship between having a strategic business plan and resilience



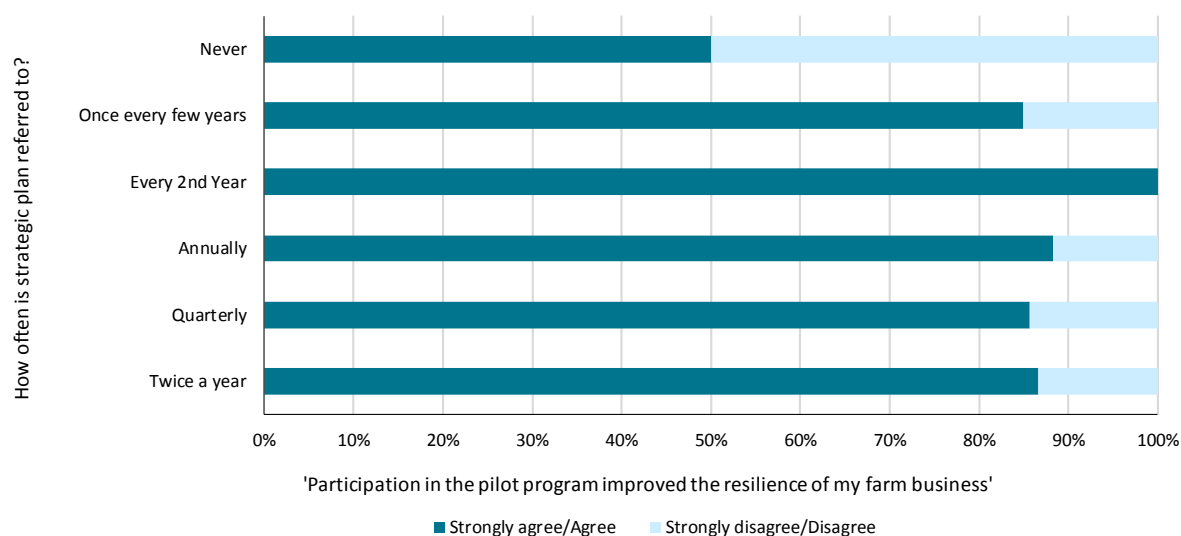
Note: number of survey respondents that answered this question = 114 across both the FP and FPBFB surveys.

Figure 36: Relationship between frequency of referring to a strategic business plan and wellbeing



Note: number of survey respondents that answered this question = 73 across both the FP and FPBFB surveys.

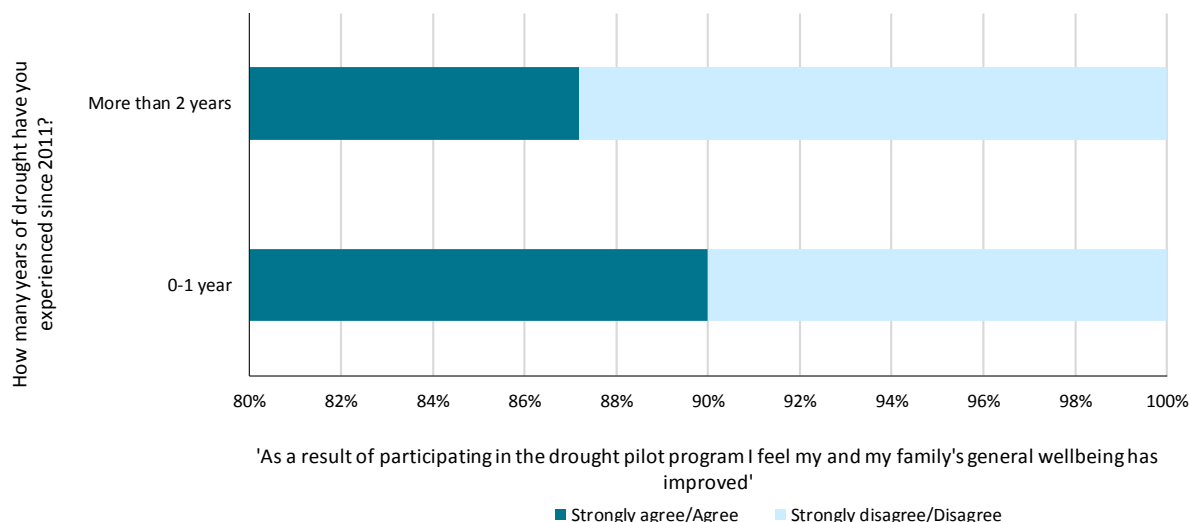
Figure 37: Relationship between frequency of referring to a strategic business plan and resilience



Note: number of survey respondents that answered this question = 97 across both the FP and FPBFB surveys.

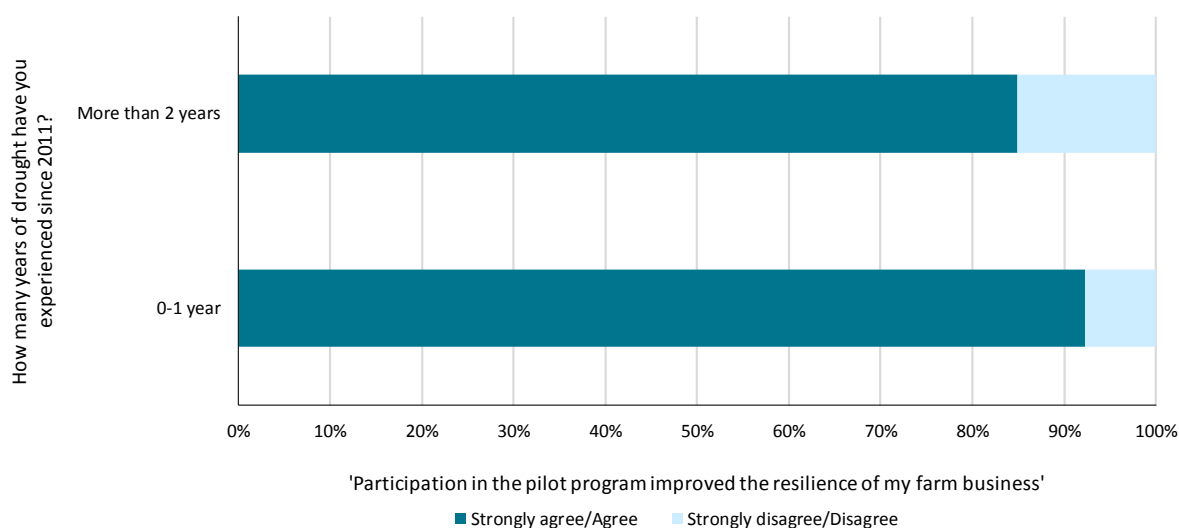
Additionally, the survey provides some insights into the impact that the occurrence of drought has had on responses for wellbeing and resilience. The survey results suggest that proportionately more farmers experienced improvements in wellbeing as a result of the program if they had 2 or more years of drought since 2011 compared to 0 to 1 years of drought (Figure 38). There is much less difference when considering improvements in resilience (Figure 39).

Figure 38: Relationship between drought occurrence and impact of program on wellbeing



Note: number of survey respondents that answered this question = 59 (Total Farm Planning and Building Farm Businesses and excludes those who answered 'Neither agree nor disagree').

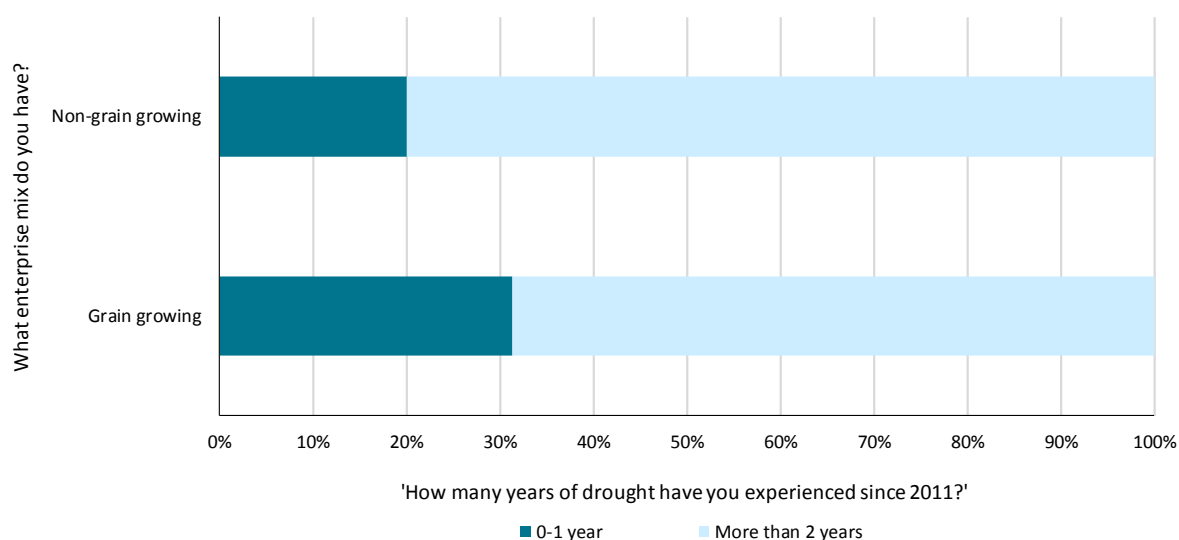
Figure 39: Relationship between drought occurrence and impact of program on resilience



Note: number of survey respondents that answered this question = 100 (Total Farm Planning and Building Farm Businesses and excludes those who answered 'Neither agree nor disagree').

Additionally, the survey provides insights into the impact on wellbeing and resilience based on the farm enterprise mix. Survey respondents that have some involvement in grain growing indicated that they have had a higher proportion of 2 or more drought years compared to those with those farmers not involved in grain growing (Figure 40). However, the impact of the program on wellbeing and resilience appears to be only marginally different for those involved in grain growing and those that are not (Figure 41 and Figure 42).

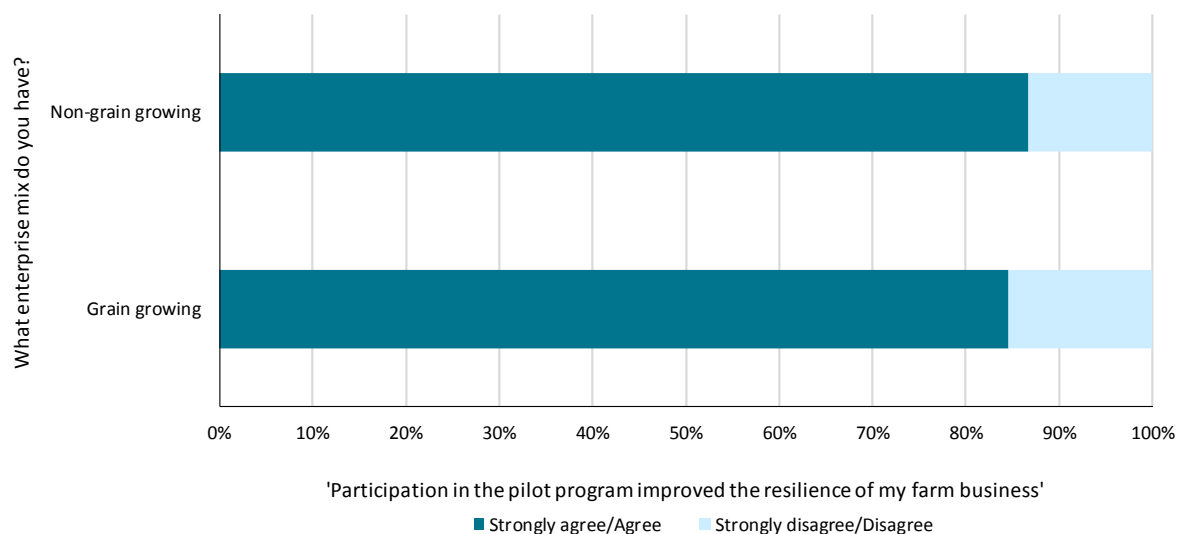
Figure 40: Relationship between drought occurrence and enterprise mix



Note: number of survey respondents that answered this question = 77 (Total Farm Planning and Building Farm Businesses).

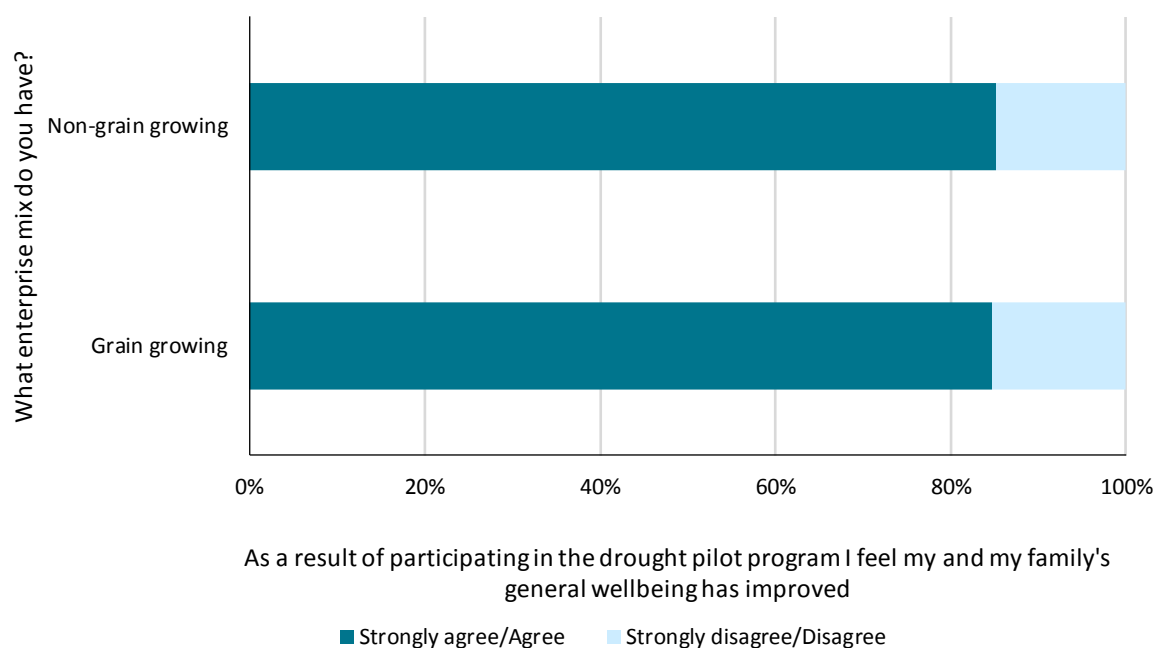


Figure 41: Relationship between resilience and enterprise mix



Note: number of survey respondents that answered this question = 114 (Total Farm Planning and Building Farm Businesses).

Figure 42: Relationship between wellbeing outcome and enterprise mix

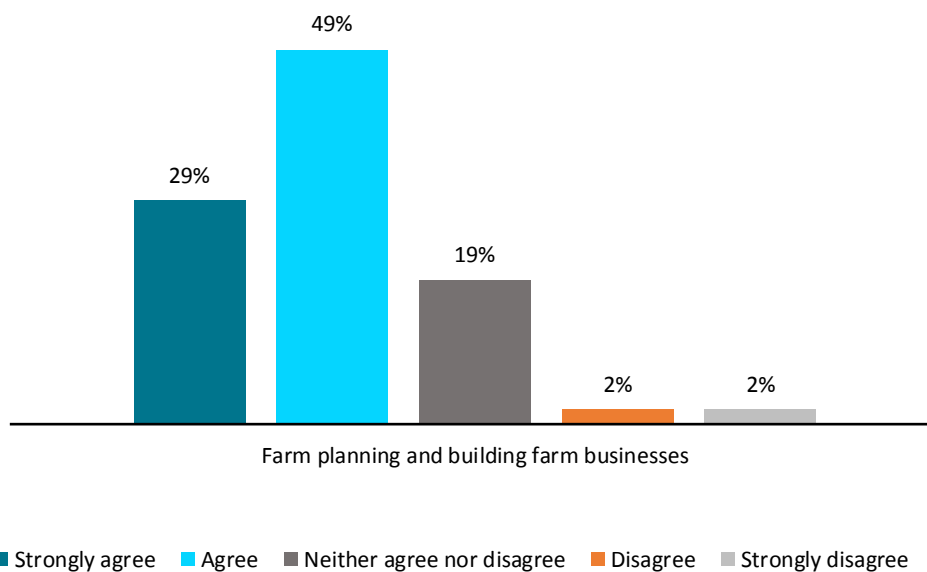


Note: number of survey respondents that answered this question = 86 (Total Farm Planning and Building Farm Businesses).

## 5.7 Effectiveness of Building Farm Business grants

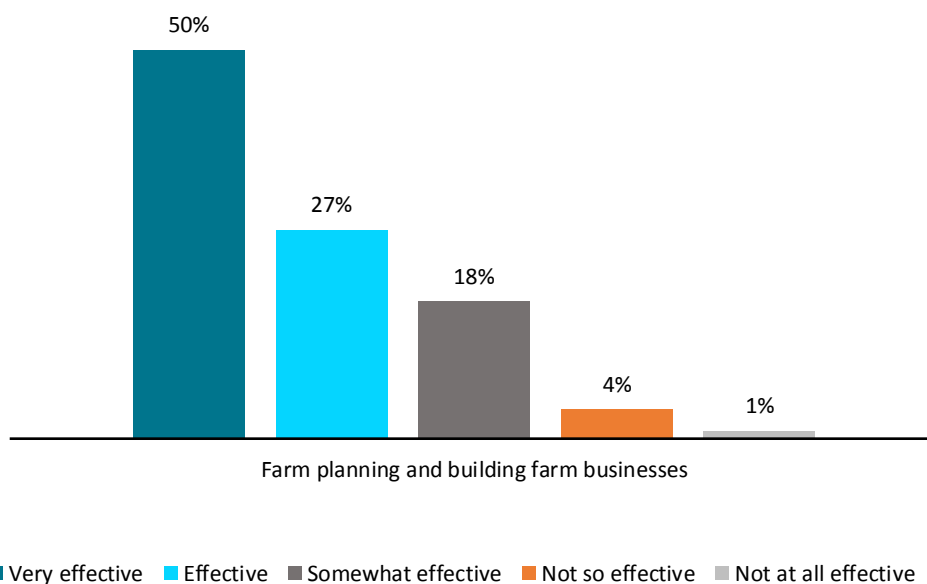
A large majority of farmers believed the Building Farm Business grant improved the profitability of their farm business and was effective in achieving the planned outcome (Figure 43 and Figure 44).

Figure 43: The grant contributed to my farm being more profitable?



Note: number of survey respondents that answered this question = 107 (Farm Planning and Building Farm Businesses).

Figure 44: Was the grant and your contribution effective in achieving the outcome planned?

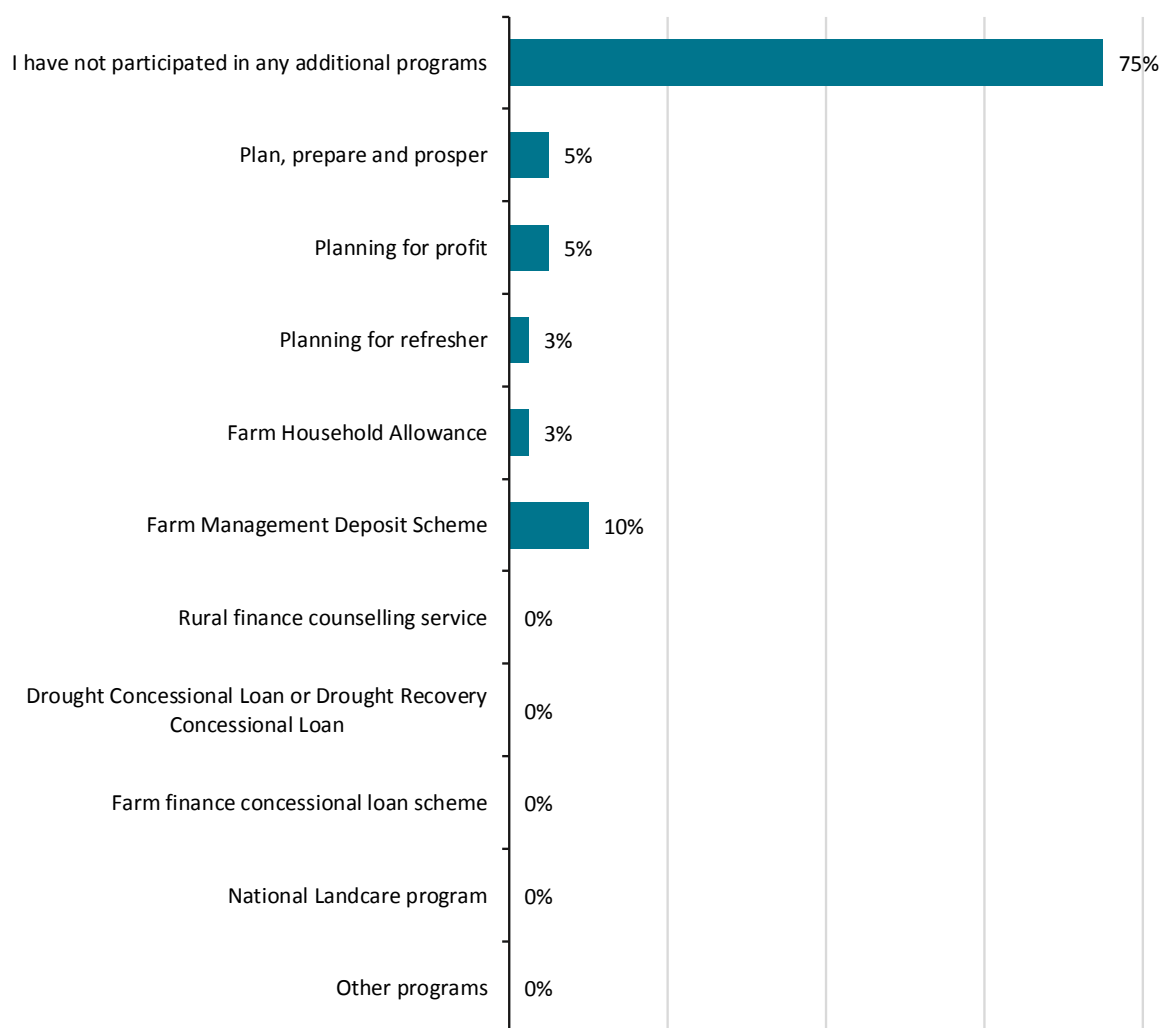


Note: number of survey respondents that answered this question = 107 (Farm Planning and Building Farm Businesses).

## 5.8 Additional programs and their impact

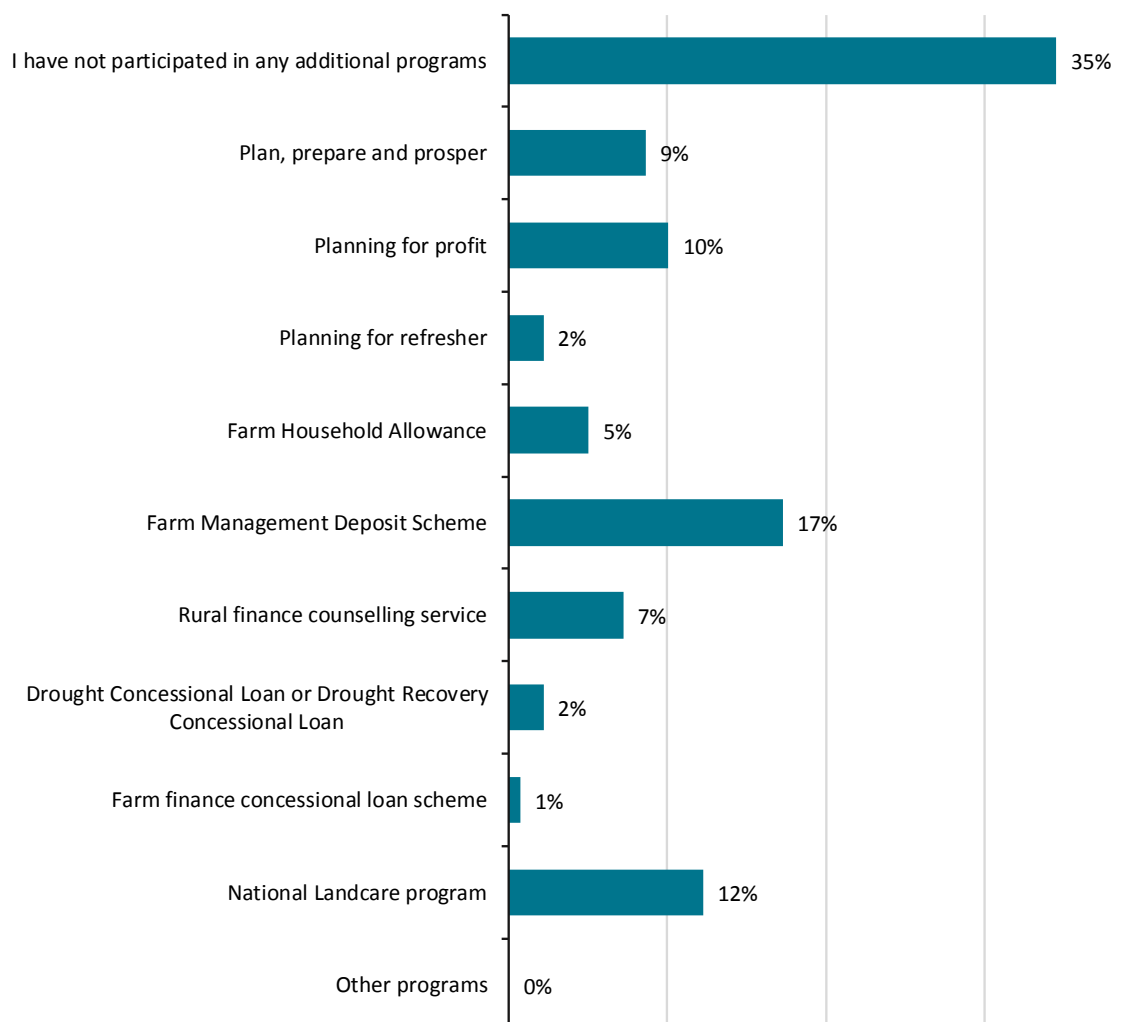
Most of those that only completed the Farm Planning program have not participated in additional programs since 2011 (Figure 45). In contrast, more than half of those that also received a grant have participated in additional programs (Figure 46).

Figure 45: Have you participated in any of these programs since 2011? (Farm Planning)



*Note: a survey participant was able to provide more than one response. The number of survey respondents that answered this question = 38.*

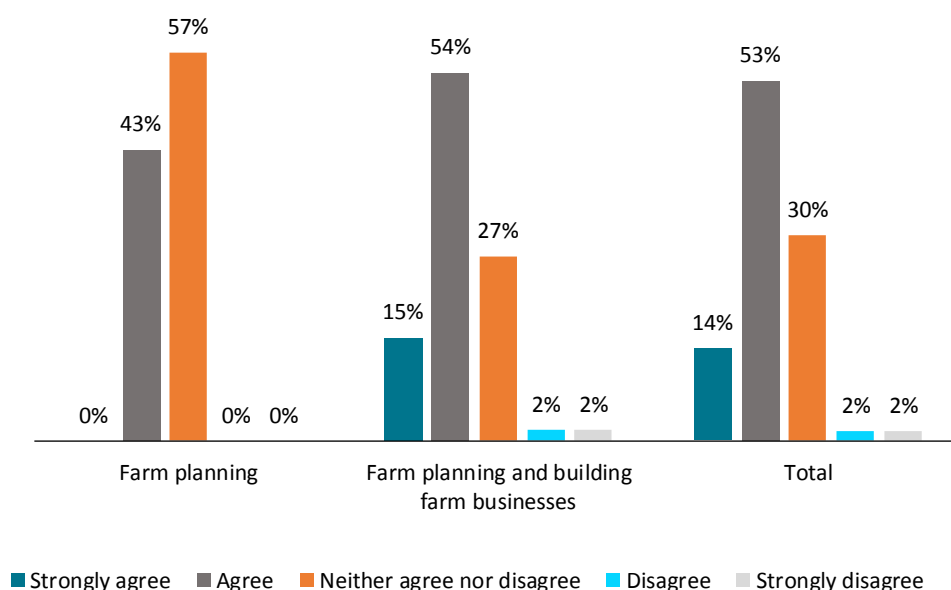
Figure 46: Have you participated in any of these programs since 2011? (Farm Planning and Building Farm Businesses)



Note: a survey participant was able to provide more than one response. Note: a survey participant was able to provide more than one response. The number of survey respondents that answered this question = 107.

A large majority of the Farm Planning/Building Farm Businesses program participants believe that participation in additional programs following the initial Farm Planning/Building Farm Businesses program has enabled them to more effectively implement their farm plan and grants (Figure 47).

Figure 47: As a result of participating in additional programs following the initial Farm Planning/Building Farm Businesses program, I have implemented my pilot plans and grants more effectively



Note: number of survey respondents that answered this question = 7 (Farm planning) and 59 (Farm Planning and Building Farm Businesses).

## 5.9 Open ended responses

**In the surveys, farmers were also invited to respond to the open-ended question ‘How do you think participating in the program most affected your resilience?’**

There was a wide diversity of responses. First, overwhelming those that responded were very positive about the impacts on their resilience. Indeed, Marsden Jacob were also contacted by a small number of farmers who wanted to relay those views personally given the profound impact of the program on them.

The positive responses were further grouped into like categories. These response groupings and some example responses are shown in Table 15.

Reflecting Figure 6, there was a relatively wide mix of perceived ways the program had positively impacted on resilience. This reinforces the unique nature of each farm business circumstance and the merit in providing a broad mix of skill underpinned by strategic farm planning to problem solve toward drought resilience.

There were a relatively small number of responses that were negative, and these tended to focus on program delivery and design.

Table 15: How do you think participating in the program most affected your resilience?

| Response grouping | Sample of comments  |
|-------------------|---|
| <b>Positive</b>   |   |
| Planning          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>‘Effective strategic planning enabled improved profitability, better financial performance but also identified areas that needed attention in our business and personal lives’</li> <li>‘Improved decision making &amp; long term planning’</li> <li>‘The importance of having the long and short-term plans have paid off’</li> </ul> |

| Response grouping        | Sample of comments  |
|--------------------------|---|
| Goals                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Better ability to ensure tasks goals and strategies are employed for better performance manageability'</li> <li>• 'Had goals to work towards over 5 years. Capitalise on the good years, limit losses in the bad.'</li> <li>• 'Improved farm management by setting goals and prioritizing actions. This would have happened but not as quickly and efficiently.'</li> </ul> |
| Preparedness             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Better prepared for drought conditions' '</li> <li>• 'Stronger focus on risk management - financial, seasonal, production, and proactive, early decision making'</li> <li>• 'We have improved storage of fodder and have learned that pasture is quite hard to establish.'</li> </ul>   |
| Knowledge and skills     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Being mindful of variable seasons and their potential impact on the business'</li> <li>• 'The education, advice and knowledge from presenters has been priceless'</li> <li>• 'Provided our business with extra management skills'</li> <li>• 'Gave a better insight/understanding to managing poor seasons'</li> </ul>  |
| Confidence               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Completing the pilot program gave us confidence in decision making'</li> <li>• 'All round improvement in my confidence levels, to tackle more difficult situations and become more flexible'</li> <li>• 'Gave us confidence in our planning'</li> </ul>   |
| Farming practices        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Changed practice with grain storage'</li> <li>• 'Changing farming practices such as getting accurate guidance to precision farming like soil management'</li> <li>• 'Sharpened up farming practices'</li> </ul>   |
| Infrastructure           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Better infrastructure has helped ensure faster, more streamline work practices'</li> <li>• 'Enabled us to make necessary capital outlays to prepare for greater resiliency'</li> <li>• 'Identified and built infrastructure on farm to store and distribute water and feed'</li> </ul>  |
| Financial                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Improved the business viability'</li> <li>• 'It helped me deal with the banks a lot better'</li> <li>• 'The financial module was the most beneficial'</li> <li>• 'Gave me a better understanding of how to analyse our profitability and help reduce cost to improve profit'</li> </ul>   |
| Social                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Really good social outlet when it was very stressful and dry'</li> <li>• 'The social connections and camaraderie experienced within the group'</li> </ul>   |
| Other                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'All combined together has helped my farming business.'</li> <li>• 'If it wasn't for the Drought Pilot program I would not still be farming. It turned this business around.'</li> <li>• 'It forced us to put our plans onto paper which is very effective'</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Not sure or mixed</b> |   |

| Response grouping        | Sample of comments  |
|--------------------------|---|
| General comments         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Financial performance is affected by outside forces that I cannot affect'</li> <li>• 'I don't know if the actual program helped but we are more experienced than we were then'</li> <li>• 'It is still very tough relying on the weather and such huge fluctuations in the markets, one bad timed decision or lack thereof can have massive implications'</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Negative feedback</b> |   |
| General comments         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'The program was condescending and was presented by people, to the best of their ability but had not walked a mile in our shoes'</li> <li>• 'It didn't. To be frank about it we already had all the measures in place that the pilot program was targeting'</li> <li>• 'It didn't make much difference'</li> <li>• 'No changes in my farming practices'</li> <li>• 'I don't think it did, suggest those involved with setting up such schemes get on the ground and talk to farmers so you truly understand impacts from droughts flood frost etc.'</li> <li>• 'What it taught me I already knew'</li> <li>• 'The information given by most of the presenters was in some cases downright misleading and useless'</li> </ul> |

Source: 2019 Marsden Jacob survey

**In the surveys, farmers were also invited to respond to the open-ended question 'What was the best part of the Farm Planning or Building Farm Businesses program?' Some common responses included:**

- All aspects of program
- Learning about strategic planning/farm planning
- Engaging with other farming families
- Financial budgeting and planning
- Benchmarking and understanding ratios
- Getting ideas from others
- Learning about risk management
- Building confidence
- Reviewing current business
- Discussing climate change issues
- Planning for profit workshops
- Financial grant (for those that participated in Building Farm Businesses)

## 5.10 Insights

The Panel results provide indicators of resilience and show strong evidence of increased resilience among farmers that responded to the 2011/12 survey and 2019 survey.

Some general observations are that farmers who participated in the Pilot:

- overwhelmingly are still farming – although this may include some sample bias since farmers that are more interested in remaining farming might have participated in the survey. Phone and email contact details are likely to have changed for those that exited their farms – it was not possible to survey those who may have changed their contact details since the 2012 survey
- are very likely to still have a Farm Plan – potentially indicating this is an important continuing outcome of the farm Planning program
- overwhelming felt the program had enabled them to continue farming
- are better prepared now for drought than they were in 2011/12 following their completion of the program, with many having experienced drought conditions since 2011/12
- remain overwhelmingly confident in the viability of their farm
- value more highly today the program benefit of ‘group activities providing support and ideas’, and
- now see value in a wider range of program outcomes than they did in 2012.

## 5.11 Efficiency and effectiveness of Farm Planning

Overall, the Farm Planning program was effective in improving drought resilience (Table 16). Most farmers felt they were better prepared and more resilient to drought. Nonetheless there was still a sizeable number of farmers who felt the program did not materially improve their preparedness or resilience. This could be for a variety of reason such as variability of goals, family and business circumstances, choice, skills and capacity and so forth. For others it is possible that they were already well advanced, and the program provided only marginal opportunities for improvement.

The program addressed important information gaps and impediments, and these can have had positive spill-overs for the community. If this type of program is to be provided again it should be under the banner of business preparedness prior to drought. There may be opportunities within drought to focus on fine tuning strategic responses but not in ways that undermine self-reliance.

Herein lies one of the challenges for balancing trade-offs in schemes designed to improve farm performance outcomes. There are considerable private benefits and incentives for farmers to self-improve preparedness and resilience. But there are also public benefits by reducing the associated social costs (including those on social capital) of farm adjustment due to gaps in the market for information and knowledge.

A number of past authors have pointed to the relative weak market failure cases for the public provision of farm financial and management advice.<sup>11</sup> The farm planning component appears to have been neither of those but rather can be viewed in the same eyes as the benefits of improved education and hence the reason for its public provision. The farm planning program provided basic educational skills that provided a launching pad for farmers to then make their own management choices and to further utilise the market for management and financial advice.

The future focus should be to design programs that address market failures (particularly gaps in information) to help farmers prepare for drought. However, they should not undermine incentives for farmers to self-prepare. On the whole the shift in the WA Drought Pilot toward providing planning skills to build self-reliance has helped improve this balance and has demonstrated that outcomes can be long lasting – it is important these gains are not compromised in the design of future programs.

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<sup>11</sup> See Freebairn J 2019, Drought Assistance Policy Options, Australian Farm Business Management Journal, Volume 16, Paper Number 2.



Table 16: Effectiveness and efficiency of the Farm Planning program

| Criteria   | Assessment | Observations  | Recommendations   |
|--|------------|---|---|
| <b>Effectiveness</b>   |            |   |   |
| Did the program achieve the outcomes expected  |            | <p>The program achieved the objectives that were specified. The grants were expended on the activities specified.</p> <p>The program contributed to community resilience within drought by enabling farmers to establish whole farm strategic plans. These plans have been maintained and help farmers be better prepared and more viable than would otherwise be the case.</p> | Clear and transparent program logics be established, and program design align with best practice public policy design   |
| <b>Efficiency</b>  |            |   |   |
| What impact did the program have on efficient outcomes for the community (including downstream impacts)? |            | <p>The program addresses gaps in farmers skills and knowledge to better strategically plan and manage risks.</p> <p>These can have positive spill-overs for the community in terms of preparedness and self-reliance.</p>   | <p>The program focusses on information gaps and market failures to uptake of good business practice.</p> <p>Where these programs are provided, they should be as part of cycle of ongoing farm business preparedness and response to changing weather season. They should avoid undermining inherent incentives to be self-reliant.</p> |

## 5.12 Efficiency and effectiveness of Building Farm Businesses

The Building Farm Businesses program was effective, but its efficiency was less clear (Table 17).

In terms of the design of drought grants, it is important that these are sufficiently decoupled from the design of farm drought plans. This is because it is important the grant does not unduly influence focus and content of the farm plan and the response to drought. A farm subsidy should not drive longer term strategic farm decision making.

The practice of independent assessment of grant against viability and resilience criteria is sound. Ideally these grants, if provided, should be carefully timed within the business cycle and cognisant of weather and climate variability cycles. To truly aid preparedness for drought, they should be made available before the onset of drought rather than as a 'in-drought' response.

The design of grant programs is more problematic as they essentially provide subsidies for farm activities. Where they support basic input costs, they can undermine private incentive to invest and prepare, and so discriminate against those that do. Where farm grants can have public benefits is where they support farming outcomes that have predominantly public rather than private benefit – such as reducing environmental degradation, improving the sustainable use of natural resources such as soil and water. Care is needed in the

design criteria to avoid subsidies for general farming inputs or infrastructure that encourages more riskier farm management practices in the face of a drying cycle.

**Table 17: Effectiveness and efficiency of the Building Farm Businesses program**

| Criteria   | Assessment | Observations   | Recommendations  |
|--|------------|--|--|
| <b>Effectiveness</b>   |            |  |  |
| Did the program achieve the outcomes expected  |            | <p>The program achieved the objectives that were specified. The grants were expended on the activities specified.</p> <p>On the whole, farmers believed the grants had a positive effect on resilience and farm viability.</p> <p>Nonetheless, there is also some evidence to suggest the grants did not achieve the outcomes expected by some farmers – some possible reasons were flagged in section 5.11.</p>   | <p>Clear and transparent program logics be established, and program design align with best practice public policy design</p> <p>Grants, if provided, should focus on investments in preparedness and encouraging self-reliance. Viability of the investment is a necessary but not sufficient condition</p>      |
| <b>Efficiency</b>  |            |  |  |
| What impact did the program have on efficient outcomes for the community (including downstream impacts)? |            | <p>The program helped improve farmer resilience and preparedness but there are limitations to this in terms of efficient outcomes.</p> <p>This does not mean that the grant is efficient. If it crowded out private incentives to do so or if it simply covered standard business expenses, then the grant would be inefficient. It is unclear from the evidence if this occurred. But prima facie, the design of the grants and their implementation suggest this maybe a risk.</p> | <p>Where grants are provided, they should be targeted at gaps in investment which have positive spill-overs for the community which would not otherwise occur. They should not be focussed where they create predominantly private benefits or risk crowding out incentives to undertake private investment.</p> |

### 5.13 Monitoring and evaluation

There are opportunities to improve monitoring and evaluation approaches for future programs with similar objectives, including:

- set out a clear and transparent program logic framework for each program
- ensure the program design features align with best practice public policy design principles in relation to efficiency and effectiveness
- develop ex-ante program intermediate and outcome indicators of farm business drought resilience
- establish a panel dataset of participating and non-participant farmers to map and track changes in key outcome indicators over time

- understand the impact of the program on incentives and behaviours to improve self-reliance and preparedness of those in and not in the program
- understand how farm performance and wellbeing indicators compare across both groups
- understand and track the influence of seasonal and commodity influences on outcomes
- develop a mix of farm performance, preparedness and resilience indicators and personal and household wellbeing
- update the panel data set through the sequences of the full business and climate cycle, and
- periodically review the pattern of on farm investment focussed on improving farm preparedness and resilience and understand in if there are gaps or deficiencies in the investment cycle.

## 6. Stronger Rural Communities

The Stronger Rural Communities program primarily resulted in upgraded community facilities. This increased the use of the facilities and generally also the scope and quality of community connection that came from increased use by a wider spectrum of the community.

This appears to have helped improve community resilience for those in drought, and also more generally. Communities within the drought pilot were eligible for funding for individual community projects. They focussed primarily on building social capital through the upgrade or development of new infrastructure where community members could meet and participate in activities and/or use the services of local community groups.

The outcomes of the grants have been useful beyond the framing of drought resilience. Delivery programs, however, should be carefully designed to ensure they are set at an appropriate scale and scope, are strategically targeted and are aligned to other programs and policies that support community institutions and groups. Given that the needs and outcomes are highly localised, it is important such programs be delivered at an appropriate level of subsidiarity. It needs to be recognised that there is a range of similar community assistance programs offered by other jurisdictions, irrespective of drought. As such, the rationale for this program to be delivered as part of a national drought resilience program is not compelling.

### 6.1 Feedback on the programs

To evaluate each funded project and their outcomes in relation to drought resilience, this evaluation attempted to interview a representative from each recipient grant institution. Given the length of time since the completion of the pilot projects, overwhelmingly the original project officer was no longer with the recipient institution, which required the identification of another individual with sufficient knowledge of the outcomes. Five representatives from the group of funded projects were interviewed.

The semi-structured interview questions used these conversations are provided in Appendix 2 and responses are summarised below. To respect confidentiality, no attribution or identification of individual responses is made.

#### 6.1.1 Questions and insights from feedback

| Questions   | Insights from feedback  |
|---|---|
| How many years of drought have occurred in your area?   | <p>There were mixed views on the period of drought since the program commenced. The concept of drought was generally considered at a localised rather shire or regional scale.</p> <p>Some areas felt the following seasons had been relative good while most felt drought was experienced every second to third year. The responses depended on their localised experience and type of participation they have in the farming community.</p> |
| What were the outcomes of the investment? What changed? | <p>Increased use of the facility or services offered by the community group.</p> <p>Increased community connectedness.</p> <p>Increased access to information and services.</p> <p>Indirect support for those suffering stress and anxiety.</p> <p>Depending on community group focus – increased access to skills and networks.</p>  |

| Questions   | Insights from feedback   |
|---|--|
| Approximately how many people were/are reached through these outcomes?  | This was difficult to quantify and varied considerably across the investments. For example, Community Halls – often monthly functions and use by tourists during wildflower season, so hard to quantify. Community centres – in the order of 30 to 40 per week.  |
| What would have happened without the Stronger Rural Communities grant?  | In all cases, the feedback was the investment would not have occurred and the outcomes would not have been achieved.   |
| How have the outcomes affected the wellbeing of the community?  | On the whole, greater community connection with indirect outcomes, to enabling support for those suffering or at risk of mental health concerns. This did vary considerably given the type and scope of investments.   |
| Were they short lived or have they been ongoing? Why?   | In all cases of infrastructure upgrade, the expected outcomes have been ongoing. This is because it has extended the useful life of the infrastructure or expanded the scope of its use by individuals and groups.<br><br>In several cases, the investment increased the use of the facilities or created new uses.  |
| How do you think the investment has helped improve the resilience of the community to drought?  | The general feedback was the investments enabled new or greater use of facilities. Thereby, bringing people together.<br><br>Community Hall upgrades appeared have had limited impact in expanding local use. In most cases, the impact was improved quality of use and some minor changes in the level of use by locals. However, there was some evidence of increased tourism via free camping being available for use during wildflower season with consequent benefits for local businesses.<br><br>In some cases, such as the Community Centre and Men's Shed, where there was a structured framework for use and underpinning institutions, the effect on use was more significant and broader-based across the community – often bringing together town and farming communities and individuals. This increased community connection, which helped them to cope both when in drought and more generally. The major outcome, suggested in most cases, was improved mental health. In the case of community centres, where they housed digital communication platforms such as internet availability, this enabled users to access training programs they otherwise would not have been able to. This positively impacted new skill development and enabled off-farm employment opportunities to be realised. |
| What are some examples of the changes in individual wellbeing of drought affected landholders who have been involved in the investment? | The feedback often illustrated outcomes by highlighting individual examples. The major theme was that greater use of the programs led to greater community engagement and participation in events and the provision of local services. These outcomes appeared strongest when the investment was linked to more structured use by community organisations. Men's Sheds, sports clubs and community centres pointed to several individual cases where engagement in these organisations have helped address personal mental wellbeing and helped with relieving stress and anxiety of those in on-farm and town-based service businesses affected by drought. This is because they helped address these pressures indirectly and provided a network for those experiencing isolation.   |
| Have there been any other spin offs that have enhanced greater  | In many cases, the investment has enabled spin offs, both planned and unplanned. In most cases, new users of facilities resulted, with the trickle-down economic outcomes for local business and other users being noted. For example, the creation of one community centre enabled local community members who would have not otherwise have been able to access online   |

| Questions  | Insights from feedback  |
|--|---|
| community and individual resilience?   | services or training programs to do so. In another case, opportunities were created for new community events to bring people together who might not have otherwise been reached.  |
| How could this type of support program be improved, or better targeted to address community networks and capacity? | The views were mixed. Some felt the scheme was relatively simple and straightforward, while others felt the scheme could be simplified and streamlined. On reflection, a number highlighted the usefulness of clear and tight criteria to ensure investments are well targeted and are delivered where need is greatest, and the outcomes will be long lasting. |
| What else do you think can build community drought resilience?   | A couple of interviewees pointed to a need for associated programs and groups associated with the use of the facilities to require ongoing support. There were calls for more training and support opportunities to attract and secure grants and the provision of resources to fund what are otherwise volunteer-based services.                               |

## 6.2 Efficiency and effectiveness

The Stronger Rural Communities program was considered effective but only moderately efficient at achieving its objectives and improving community resilience to drought.

The investments addressed gaps in local infrastructure and have enabled greater connectivity – both in terms of quantity and quality of the community gathering opportunities. These are sound outcomes to be achieved, although are outside of the scope of drought resilience. Increased opportunities for communities to come together are important regardless of drought and can create better outcomes for communities that increase their resilience when drought occurs.

There is not a strong rationale for the program to be a drought program per se. There are more efficient delivery vehicles with other jurisdictions and regional development programs. There is a need to carefully clarify objectives, selection criteria and governance to ensure the investment are well targeted and best meet long-term needs.

**Table 18 Effectiveness and efficiency of the Community Assistance Grants program**

| Criteria                                      | Assessment | Observations  | Recommendations  |
|---|------------|---|--|
| <b>Effectiveness</b>                          |            |   |  |
| Did the program achieve the outcomes expected |            | <p>The program achieved the objectives that were specified. The grants were expended on the activities specified.</p> <p>The program contributed to community resilience within drought by creating or enhancing spaces or events where individual and the community to come together and share experiences and support one another. Project leads reported this had positive outcomes for individual mental health and wellbeing.</p> <p>These outcomes appear more effective where the infrastructure houses organised community groups and</p> | <p>Strategic investment priorities be established to guide the program implementation</p> <p>Investments be prioritised where there is joint demand and a collaborative approach to use and community connection</p> |

| Criteria   | Assessment | Observations  | Recommendations  |
|--|------------|---|--|
|  |            | increases joined up responses by those groups.  |  |
| <b>Efficiency</b>  |            |   |  |
| What impact did the program have on efficient outcomes for the community (including downstream impacts)? |            | <p>The program addresses gaps in community infrastructure to build connectedness.</p> <p>However, there is not a strong rationale for the program to be operated as a drought resilience program. There are better delivery vehicles through other jurisdictions.</p> | The program be delivered within jurisdictional local and regional economic and community development programs. |

### 6.3 Assessment

The Strong Rural Communities program was as a useful component of the WA Drought Pilot.

The scope of the program was modest and affected eight relatively small and localised communities:

- The program had, in general, very positive outcomes for the communities involved.
- Most felt they had not experienced extended periods of drought since the investment. A small number felt drought occurred every two to three years since the investments were made.
- The most common outcomes were increases in the quantity and quality of community connectivity. The new or refurbished facilities resulted in more use and new participation or increased level of enjoyment by community members.
- A result the program contributed to increasing social capital in those communities. Most noted that this has had positive and ongoing benefits to community wellbeing, such as improved mental health, enhanced sense of connection and opportunities to share experiences. All these are valuable benefits in communities affected by drought and help build community resilience to drought.
- It enabled relatively small investments (that would have otherwise not occurred or been delayed by several years) in community infrastructure at a scale and scope generally commensurate with their use and community reach.
- Providing the program more broadly in a national drought program would require careful design to ensure it is effectively and efficiently targeted to need.

The key question for drought program design is whether this type of program should be housed as a drought initiative *per se* or badged and delivered under various regional and rural development initiatives offered by other governments as more generalised community support.

There is a need for careful program design and alignment with other like programs and initiatives so that they are integrated, strategically targeted and deliver the maximum outcomes for the dollars invested.

The investments were at very localised scales. This means they need to be carefully designed and delivered at an appropriate scale. These types of programs are usually best implemented at a state or local level. However, they should but bounded by broader-scale strategic prioritisation criteria.

The programs would be strengthened by being aligned with, and designed with, other community group programs and priorities in mind. A number of those interviewed observed that it would be useful to support these investments with frameworks and tools to help consolidate local community groups where they face size and capacity issues.

There are significant risks to the broad scale delivery of a community grants program in that the investments could be applied inefficiently and ineffectively. Among others, there are risks that a poorly designed program could:

- result in 'gold plating' – undertake investments to a scale and scope not commensurate with need
- 'crowd out' other sources of funding
- result in 'sunk investment' where the infrastructure becomes under-utilised, or later becomes redundant due to the scope of community adjustment.

As a result, a program such as this needs to have:

- very clear objectives and governance arrangements
- tightly defined criteria
- transparent application and award processes
- close linkages to other like programs
- a focus on communities and institutions that have sufficiently competent governance arrangements and capacity to maintain infrastructure and services on an ongoing basis
- a focus on infrastructure that draws together and integrates potential users under robust service-level use and funding agreements, and
- support by programs that enable governance and funding reforms to draw together users into sustainable organisational and use arrangements.

We do not recommend the Strong Rural Communities be implemented in future as a drought resilience program. Instead the program could be provided at a jurisdictional level to enable alignment other community and regional development programs.

Investments in infrastructure and activities to build social capital are best made within normal community business cycles and not within a drought phase *per se*. In doing so there are opportunities for these types of investments to help underpin community resilience before drought pressures emerge and thereby enable them to be better placed in a drought phase.

Looking forward, a drought program that considers the inclusion or alignment with a component like Stronger Rural Communities should:

- be guided by a clear and transparent program logic with defined outputs and outcomes
- be guided by a set of strategic priorities and investment prioritisation principles
- have measurable indicators of community social capital and wellbeing. These include output measures such as level of use, scope of use and reach of community activities, and scope of engagement and connection. Indicators of community wellbeing could also be monitored including indicators of social connectedness, community safety and mental wellbeing such as those collected by the Canberra University Health Research Institute Regional Wellbeing Survey, and
- be implemented at an appropriate level of subsidiarity and aligned with jurisdictional programs to prevent overlap.



## 7. Beyond Farming

The Beyond Farming program was a mentoring program that helped farmers who were considering exiting farming. The program was a useful complement to programs focussing on resilience in farm businesses that planned to continue farming. Uptake of the pilot program was modest, though some pilot and post-pilot reforms point to opportunities to improve the application of a similar program in the future.

The Drought Review in 2008 found that gaps in information on alternative careers outside of farming for those affected by drought was a barrier to exit. Beyond farming sought to address this issue by using mentors (past farmers with experience in post farming careers) to provide insights about their experience of ceasing farming and ideas and options for a post farming life.

Consequently, the program was not about building resilience to drought *per se* but aimed to provide decision support for those considering exiting farming. The program had links to resilience through the lens of adjustment and information and awareness of options – i.e. helping farmers cope with the process of adjustment. This alone can lessen the costs to the individual and the community of the process of farm exit.

This also had positive wellbeing outcomes for individuals involved — addressing information gaps by increasing awareness of positive post farm careers options helped alleviate anxiety and stress associated with exit decisions.

### 7.1 Changes in the program after the pilot

The program continued in 2013 and 2014 with funding from the WA Department of Agriculture and Food.

In 2014, the title changed to 'Farming and Beyond'. Part of the feedback in the *Bluebottle Consulting* report was that the Beyond Farming branding may have been holding back some farmers from participating in the program. WACOSS the deliverer of the program in 2014 also observed in its Annual report that Beyond Farming represented negative connotations for farmers who, while under financial pressure, were not yet ready to consider a life after farming and were therefore less likely to engage with the program. WACOSS also found that on changing the title of the program to 'Farming and Beyond' (FAB), that farmers and their families are more open to engaging with the program.<sup>12</sup>

The other major change was a focus on developing collaborative partnerships and relationships with *in situ* farming and rural support services (with positive public profiles and synergies) within focus communities. This established a reciprocal process of referrals within the farming/rural support and industry networks.

WACOSS reported that this resulted in good support delivery outcomes, through both events and individual one to one mentoring support — mentors had contact with 182 people at these events and one to one mentoring for 26 participants.

The Farming and Beyond program ceased in February 2015 when WACOSS was unable to secure further funding.

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<sup>12</sup>WACOSS Annual Report 2014 <https://wacoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/2013-14-WACOSS-Annual-Report.pdf>

## 7.2 Insights and issues

In 2017, in a submission to the Agriculture Competitiveness White Paper, WACOSS observed that The Federal Government's Drought Pilot conducted in WA in 2010 did, to some extent, acknowledge the complexity of the psycho-socio-cultural elements associated with the impacts of drought on farming families with the implementation of the Beyond Farming pilot program:

*During the course of the Beyond Farming pilot it was found that these issues and perceptions needed to be overcome before farmers and their families could begin to contemplate a future whether it included involvement in the agriculture industry in a different form or exiting farming and agriculture altogether. Despite the expected objectives of Beyond Farming being limited given its nature as a pilot program; at the conclusion of the Drought Pilot, the program nevertheless was deemed to have addressed a gap in the farming psycho-social support networks assistance delivery to farming families.<sup>13</sup>*

In the same 2017 Submission, WACOSS also said it believed the program will have long lasting effects on Wheatbelt communities due to the skilled, trained volunteer mentors now imbedded in these communities together with the farming families they supported through challenging times. Our consultations with WACOSS indicate there has been no formal system of promotion and referral for embedded mentors by most community groups.<sup>14</sup>

As part of this evaluation, Marsden Jacob held an interview with the post WA Drought Pilot program lead at WACOSS. The program continued after the pilot, though with more emphasis on connecting to community networks for referrals and defining broader outcome success measures, for example, indicators of preventing serious poor mental health-related outcomes. Perspectives gathered from the Program Lead were that the program continued to be valuable, though the scope of the desired outcomes was beyond what a mentor program could deliver in the form it was.

Challenges identified were:

- the program focussed on engagement around experiences post farming and outcomes that are related to positive mental health, while not being sole drivers of mental health
- the program was not nested within a broader mental health framework that could provide training support and referral, and
- there was no framework to objectively measure participant wellbeing before and after participation.

As part of this evaluation, Marsden Jacob also held an interview with the Western Australian Department of Agriculture and Water program lead who raised similar matters, emphasising the need for:

- a clearly defined program logic and measurable outcome-based performance indicators;
- connect support and referral with like services; and
- trained mentors and professionals skilled in linking mentors and mentees.

Marsden Jacob's assessment is that the Beyond Farming Pilot Program was a useful complementary program that met its relatively modest, but broadly defined aims. Feedback from a small number of mentees to *Bluebottle* suggested benefits to mentees included:

- feeling less isolated and felt more supported;
- an opportunity to have a non-judging sounding board for discussing situation and option; and
- an increased awareness of opportunities outside of farming.

Mentors were generally more positive about the program outcomes though they had no structured means of receiving feedback.

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<sup>13</sup> SUBMISSION: Improving psychological and social resilience of farming families and communities Agricultural Competitiveness Issues Paper

<sup>14</sup> WACOSS 2015 Annual Report

WACOSS stated that representatives from organisations and groups such as Regional Men's Health, Rural Community Support Services and the Rural Financial Counselling Service as well as facilitators, developers and researchers involved in the Farm Business Resilience pilot program, attested to the intrinsic value of the Beyond Farming program being present in the Drought Pilot. Equally supportive were the peak industry organisations of WA Farmers and the Pastoralists and Graziers Association of WA in addition to several shire councils in the south eastern, eastern and north eastern Wheatbelt regions of WA.<sup>15</sup>

The Bluebottle evaluation observed that two years was a limited time for the program to mature and be fully tested – but we note it continued for another 2 years and rates of uptake were not different. Review of program documents and discussions with program leads indicate the program faced a number of challenges including:

- it had a branding that implied a decision to exit when the program was about neutral decision-support, highlighting options and ideas and promotion of positive exit stories, rather than guiding the actual decision
- it was not equipped to support complex pressures on exit decision making such as legal and marital influences.
- establishing sufficiently rich relationships in a short window to sense or assess whether the mentoring is being effective. There was no framework for 360-degree feedback to the mentor.
- the positioning of mentoring support in other processes of farm adjustment was unclear
- not sufficiently linked to other Pilot Modules – particularly Planning
- not sufficiently embedded in existing community networks and processes where informal mentoring can naturally occur and where there are informal networks that enable a connection to the program. This helps address the farm 'pride' impediment to reaching out to a structured 'external' program. External support mechanisms were not embedded within existing community support institutions and structures. As such, it had to rely on farm 'events' as a primary mechanism for program recruitment
- the uniqueness of individual circumstances and the challenges in establishing a meaningful connection and comparative experience between mentors and mentees
- no clear communications strategy and there were resultant gaps in program awareness
- potential capacity constraints given the program was led by one WACOSS program officer across whole of WA.

Another consideration is that the program operated in an emerging digital environment and there would be opportunities in future to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of delivery through an integrated digital strategy across programs.

A foundational question is the role of mentoring more broadly in the process of decision-making within ongoing natural adjustment processes, and the pursuit of building resilience other than at the binary point in the decision process. Arguably, there is room for mentoring across the spectrum of adjustment decision making.

Mentoring could be usefully integrated into the Planning program components to support decision-making at that point (such as new farm decision-making, retirement, succession, farm expansion, etc) and also as a support mechanism where exit decisions are under consideration or activation. This would require a broad scope/range of mentors and experiences and a filtering and transferal mechanism for their best allocation. The challenge is link or embed these with farm business programs and community networks in an effective and efficient manner.

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<sup>15</sup> SUBMISSION: Improving psychological and social resilience of farming families and communities Agricultural Competitiveness Issues Paper

### 7.3 Efficiency and effectiveness

The Beyond Farming program was moderately effective and efficient at achieving its objectives.

The program was targeted at exiting farmers and this can have links to drought resilience though this does not appear to have been an explicit outcome focus. There are opportunities to better target, deliver and monitor a mentor program to improve its efficiency and effectiveness.

**Table 19 Effectiveness and efficiency of the Beyond Farming program**

| Criteria   | Assessment | Observations  | Recommendations   |
|--|------------|---|---|
| <b>Effectiveness</b>   |            |   |   |
| Did the program achieve the outcomes expected  |            | <p>The program achieved the broad objectives that were specified. Given the objectives were broadly defined, they were therefore relatively easy to achieve.</p> <p>However, the uptake of the program was low and below the levels desired. There were variety of reasons for this including gaps in the communications strategy, gaps in links to other referral and community groups and positioning and perception issues with the program.</p> <p>There are opportunities to improve the clarity of the objectives and better target the program at different types of farmers and household adjustment decision making.</p> <p>There are opportunities to improve program evaluation and objective measure outcomes experienced by program participants</p> | <p>The program be better linked to lead referral and community agencies</p> <p>A comprehensive communications plan be established and implemented. Links to community and referral groups be strengthened. The name be changed to better reflect the focus of the program and reduce negative connotations</p> <p>The program be broadened to include a wider set of information gaps in adjustment decision making.</p> <p>The program develop and use objective measures of resilience and wellbeing and include a regular cycle of 360 degree feedback</p> |
| <b>Efficiency</b>  |            |   |   |
| What impact did the program have on efficient outcomes for the community (including downstream impacts)? |            | <p>The program improve efficiency by addressing gaps in information for farmers considering exit. The program can be useful and efficient way to access direct first-hand experience and ask questions that are relatively unique to individual circumstances.</p>  | <p>There are opportunities to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>improve the system of matching mentors and mentees</li> <li>improve the scope of mentors to address information</li> </ul>  |

- link the program more effectively to other referral services

## 7.4 Assessment and recommendations

The Beyond Farming program was a valuable component of the WA Drought Pilot Program. The program:

- primarily contributed to improved individual wellbeing – by providing support and information on post careers options the program helped reduce stress and anxiety for those considering exit but not having the information or knowledge on what to do post farming and helped increase confidence in making an exit decision.
- indirectly contributed to drought resilience — by enabling farmers to make more informed choices about future farming and post farming plans, farmers were better able to cope with the process of adjustment to drought.

A carefully targeted mentor-based program would be desirable in future drought programs. Mentoring can be an important new or complementary means of helping people address information gaps and clarify objectives in the family and business decision-making for within and beyond the farming experience.

Programs of this type targeted at resilience and drought could be improved by:

- open to all business operators affected by drought adjustment
- targeted as an intervention both prior to and during drought, business and personal distress
- structured to meet clear and defined objectives and have a range of measurable outcome indicators of practice change
- defined by a clear and transparent program logic
- structured to incorporate an appropriately skilled professional to match mentors with mentees
- structured to house mentors with a diverse set of farming and non-farming experiences
- well connected to other program components as a referral and support mechanism
- segmented and appropriately resourced to target different types of drought adjustment needs
- more formally organised and delivered to meet best practice mentor program design; and
- appropriately connected other referral bodies specialised in financial counselling, mental health, marriage counselling, business coaching and legal advice services such that a virtuous cycle of referrals to and from can be made quickly, efficiently and effectively.

Going forward a future drought program that includes a Beyond Farming monitoring and evaluation component should have

- a clear and transparent program logic
- a strategic focus on addressing information gaps in farmers and household adjustment decision making
- a more formal mentor evaluation framework and includes a 360 degree review loop to enable Mentors to understand the usefulness or otherwise of their approach and advice
- a continuous cycle of 360 review and feedback through the life of the program and a subset of individual cases
- a set of indicators of individual wellbeing that can be objectively measured before and after program participation. Objective indicators of wellbeing should align with OECD wellbeing framework<sup>16</sup> and include

<sup>16</sup> OECD 2017, How is Life? 2017: Measuring Wellbeing, OECD Paris. [https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/economics/how-s-life-2017\\_how\\_life-2017-en#page27](https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/economics/how-s-life-2017_how_life-2017-en#page27)

indicators of current wellbeing, inequalities in current wellbeing, access to resources for future wellbeing, subjective wellbeing and community connection, and

- a set of indicators of referrals to and from the program.

Potential indicators of wellbeing should be designed to align with the program logic.

## Appendix 1 Online and telephone survey



The screenshot shows a survey introduction screen with a brown background. At the top left is the Australian Government crest. To its right, the text reads "Australian Government" and "Department of Agriculture and Water Resources". The title "Western Australia Drought Pilot Program Survey" is centered in white. Below the title, a paragraph explains the survey's purpose: to understand the longer-term outcomes of drought pilot programs from 2010 to 2014. Another paragraph states that participation is voluntary. A third paragraph assures confidentiality. At the bottom left is a dark grey button with the text "OK" in white.

 Australian Government  
Department of Agriculture  
and Water Resources

### Western Australia Drought Pilot Program Survey

The survey aims to gain a better understanding of the longer term outcomes of drought pilot programs delivered by the Australian Government and the Western Australian Government from 2010 to 2014. The results will assist with program development aimed at building drought resilience.

Participation in this survey is completely voluntary.

Please be assured that the information you provide will be kept confidential and will not be released to third parties.

OK

**1. What is your email address?**

(Although you have provided your email in the past, we are asking for your email to enable us to match your response to your past surveys. However it is not compulsory to provide it).

**2. What enterprise mix do you (or did you) have on your property? (Select all that apply)**

Grain growing  
Sheep farming  
Beef cattle farming  
Dairy cattle farming  
Pig farming  
Deer farming  
Vegetable growing  
Grape growing  
Apple and pear growing  
Stone fruit growing  
Other

**3. Since you participated in the Farm Planning/Building Farm Businesses pilot program are you or your family business still farming?**

Yes (continue to question 4)  
No (continue to question 24)

**4. Are you farming at the same or a different location as when you participated in the pilot program?**

Same  
Different

5. Do you think participating in the Farm Planning/Building Farm Businesses program has helped or enabled you to continue farming?

Yes  
No  
Unsure

6. Did participation in the Farm Planning/Building Farm Businesses help to delay your decision to cease farming?

Yes  
No  
Unsure  
Not applicable to me

7. Do you have a strategic farm business plan?

Yes (continue to question 8)  
No (continue to question 11)

8. Have you updated it since 2011?

Yes (continue to question 9)  
No (continue to question 12)

9. Who is the main deliverer and reviewer of the plan?

Farmer  
Accountant  
Other (please specify)

10. How often is it referred to?

Quarterly  
Twice a year  
Annually  
Every 2nd Year  
Once every few years  
Never

11. What was the main benefit of the Farm Planning program? (Pick one)

Became better at managing risk and foreseeing obstacles  
Got ideas about how to improve the profitability of the farm business  
Group activities provided support and ability to discuss ideas/concerns  
Helped develop or update short and long term goals  
Helped to see how the farm business compares with others  
Improved financial management skills  
Learned about better communication tools to use amongst those involved in the farm  
Reviewed farm business achievements  
Possibility of obtaining grants under the pilot program  
No benefit  
Other (Please specify)

12. Was the grant and your co-contribution effective in achieving the outcome you had planned?

Very effective  
Effective  
Somewhat effective  
Not so effective  
Not at all effective

13. To what extent do you agree with the following statement:

'The grant contributed to my farm being more profitable'



Strongly agree  
Agree  
Neither agree nor disagree  
Disagree  
Strongly disagree

14. To what extent do you agree with the following statement:

'Participation in the pilot program improved the resilience of my farm business'

*By resilience we mean your ability to cope with financial, environmental, and wellbeing pressures whilst maintaining business viability and 'bounce back' as quickly as possible from downturns and shocks.*

Strongly agree  
Agree  
Neither agree nor disagree  
Disagree  
Strongly disagree

15. Rate the following statements as a result of the pilot program

Strongly agree  
Agree  
Neither agree nor disagree  
Disagree  
Strongly disagree

We are better able to plan our farm business  
We are better able to manage farm business risks  
We are more confident making decisions  
Our farm business copes better with the ups and downs of climate and rainfall  
We are better able to use financial ratios and benchmarking

16. To what extent do you agree with the following statement

'As a result of participating in the drought pilot program I feel my and my family's general wellbeing has improved'

Strongly agree  
Agree  
Neither agree nor disagree  
Disagree  
Strongly disagree

17. How confident are you about the future viability of your business?

Extremely confident  
Very confident  
Somewhat confident  
Not so confident  
Not at all confident

18. Compared to before you participated in the pilot program or prior to 2011, how well prepared is your business now to deal with drought/climate variability?

Better  
About the same  
Worse

19. How do you think participating in the program most affected your resilience?

*(This may include your planning skills, changed farming practices, financial performance, social connections, or any other factors)*

Open-ended question

20. Have you participated in any of these programs since 2011? (Tick all that apply)

I have not participated in any programs (if yes, skip to question 22)

Plan, prepare and prosper (if yes, skip to question 21)  
Planning for profit (if yes, skip to question 21)  
Planning for refresher (if yes, skip to question 21)  
Farm household allowance (if yes, skip to question 21)  
Farm management deposit scheme (if yes, skip to question 21)  
Rural finance counselling service (if yes, skip to question 21)  
Drought concessional loan or Drought recovery concessional loan (if yes, skip to question 21)  
Farm finance concessional loan scheme (if yes, skip to question 21)  
National Landcare program (if yes, skip to question 21)  
Other programs relating to drought (Please specify) (if yes, skip to question 21)

21. How many years of drought do you feel you have experienced since 2011?

None  
1 year  
2-3 years  
4-5 years  
More than 5 years

22. What was the best part of the Farm Planning or Building Farm Businesses program? (*please state which program if possible*)

Open-ended question

21. To what extent do you agree with the following statement? 'As a result of participating in additional training following the Farm planning/Building farm businesses program, I have implemented my pilot plans and grants more effectively'

Strongly agree  
Agree  
Neither agree nor disagree  
Disagree  
Strongly disagree

**Following questions are for farmers who are NOT currently farming**

24. Did participation in the Farm Planning/Building Farm Businesses help to delay your decision to cease farming?

Yes  
No  
Unsure  
Not applicable to me

25. What was the main benefit of the Farm Planning program? (Pick one)

Became better at managing risk and foreseeing obstacles  
Got ideas about how to improve the profitability of the farm business

Group activities provided support and ability to discuss ideas/concerns  
Helped develop or update short and long term goals  
Helped to see how the farm business compares with others  
Improved financial management skills  
Learned about better communication tools to use amongst those involved in the farm  
Reviewed farm business achievements  
Possibility of obtaining grants under the pilot program  
No benefit  
Other (Please specify)

26. Was the grant you received and your co-contribution effective in achieving the outcome you had planned?

Very effective  
Effective  
Somewhat effective  
Not so effective  
Not at all effective

27. To what extent do you agree with the following statement:

'The grant contributed to my farm being more profitable'

Strongly agree  
Agree  
Neither agree nor disagree  
Disagree  
Strongly disagree

28. To what extent do you agree with the following statement:

'Participation in the pilot program improved the resilience of my farm business'

*By resilience we mean your ability to cope with financial, environmental, and wellbeing pressures whilst maintaining business viability and 'bounce back' as quickly as possible from downturns and shocks.*

Strongly agree  
Agree  
Neither agree nor disagree  
Disagree  
Strongly disagree

29. To what extent do you agree with the following statement

'As a result of participating in the drought pilot program I feel my and my family's general wellbeing has improved'

Strongly agree  
Agree  
Neither agree nor disagree  
Disagree  
Strongly disagree

30. What was the best part of the Farm Planning or Building Farm Businesses program? (*please state which program if possible*)

Open-ended question

31. Have you participated in any of these programs since 2011? (Tick all that apply)

I have not participated in any programs (if yes, skip to question 22)  
Plan, prepare and prosper (if yes, skip to question 21)  
Planning for profit (if yes, skip to question 21)  
Planning for refresher (if yes, skip to question 21)  
Farm household allowance (if yes, skip to question 21)  
Farm management deposit scheme (if yes, skip to question 21)  
Rural finance counselling service (if yes, skip to question 21)

Drought concessional loan or Drought recovery concessional loan (if yes, skip to question 21)

Farm finance concessional loan scheme (if yes, skip to question 21)

National Landcare program (if yes, skip to question 21)

Other programs relating to drought (Please specify) (if yes, skip to question 21)

32. How many years of drought do you feel you have experienced since 2011?

None

1 year

2-3 years

4-5 years

More than 5 years

## Appendix 2 Semi structured interview

***We introduce the questions with a short discussion about the Drought Pilot Evaluation and the purpose of this semi structured interview.***

### **Stronger Rural Communities Grant – Interview Questions**

*Confirm spreadsheet details of what the grant was used for*

How were you involved in the delivery of the grant?

Was the grant fully implemented? When was that?

How many years of drought have occurred in your area (the area receiving the grant), since 2011?

What were the outcomes of the investment? What changed? Can you give some examples?

Approximately how many people were/are reached through these outcomes?

What would have happened without the Stronger Rural Communities grant?

How have the outcomes affected the wellbeing of the community?

Were they short lived or have they been ongoing? Why?

Are the outcomes still occurring? What types of events (depending on nature of the investment) have been held since the investment? –

How do you think the investment has helped improve the resilience of the community to drought (its ability to cope with the ups and downs of farm under a variable climate and rainfall)? examples please if you have them.

How have the outcomes impacted on those within the community affected by drought? How?

What are some examples of the changes in individual wellbeing of drought affect landholders that have been involved in the investment?

Have there been any other spin offs that have enabled greater community and individual resilience?

How could this type of support program be improved, or better targeted to address community networks and capacity?

What else do you think can build community drought resilience? (*possible prompts e.g. network creation, leadership, information sharing*)