

# NEXT GENERATION AUSTRALIAN AGRICULTURAL DECISION-MAKERS

The next generation research provides an insight into the mindset of emerging Australian agricultural decision-makers through a focus on Millennial (1980–1995) and Generation Z (1995–2007) farm owners and managers (Next Gen). The study reveals that in comparison to Gen X (1965-1979) and Baby Boomer (1946-1964) (Current Gen) farm owners and managers, the Next Gen are highly educated, entrepreneurial, and operate with a distinctly paradoxical mindset of optimism and concern. The next generation are poised to fundamentally reshape the future of Australian agriculture now and into the future.

## The Research

The data for this study was collected as part of a large annual online survey of 7,358 Australians (Heartbeat of Australia study), conducted as a partnership between ACM, University of Canberra, and Australian Regional Insights, a specialist regional and agricultural market research agency.

## Who are the next generation?

The 2021 ABS census highlights that 27% of current farm owners and managers are under 44 years. Through focusing on Millennials (1980-1995) and Gen Z (1995 - 2007), we can consider what the future of Australian agriculture may look like as these groups begin to take up the reins.

More entrepreneurial than previous generations, this highly educated cohort are preparing their farms for the future.

They are running more diversified operations, with many also branching out into consultancy or supplier services. With a lower reliance on any one sector, they are perhaps better positioned to weather the volatility and change that is coming.

## What is their mindset?

Farmers commonly exhibit a concept known as the Farmer Paradox, an inconsistency whereby they are both very happy and also very unhappy at the same time.

*Agriculture is built on a willingness to hope without certainty. Farmers operate at the mercy of a thousand variables, nearly all of them beyond their reach. Nonetheless, they move with purpose, rising before the sun to milk cows or attend to crops ahead of the rain. With every act, they challenge Mother Nature "I remember last season. I understand the odds. I persist. I am hopeful."*

The next generation agri-decision maker feels the Farmer Paradox more strongly than the other generation. While they are highly satisfied with their lives and optimistic towards the future, they are also simultaneously more stressed, anxious and worried. Holding these two states concurrently presents an interesting conundrum, does one need to be a realistic optimist to be a modern farmer?



They are highly engaged with their communities and take action to be involved, including volunteering, attending local events and being a member of a local club or group. Through this deep connection, they are acutely aware of the challenges facing their communities, particularly around the opportunities for young people. As these emerging voices move into leadership roles, their active community positions place them front and center for advocacy. This is the generation uniquely prepared to fight for their futures, their communities, and to redefine the face of Australian agriculture.

### **What worries them?**

Their stronger community engagement similarly turns into a greater appreciation and concern for the issues within their communities. They are more concerned about community issues across the board, particularly property prices, interest rates, public health and crime.

Reflecting the greater emotional stresses felt by the next generation, they are also more worried about issues in their personal lives, particularly cost of living, mental health and debt.

### **How to connect with them?**

The next generation are hungry for knowledge and early adopters of new technologies to consume news. Therefore connecting with this audience requires a broader outlook than brands may currently be used to.

More highly educated than older generations, the next generation are hungry for knowledge, and show a deep interest in stories and information from their community. Knowledge is also viewed as social capital and power among this audience, with a strong desire to be seen by others as an informed person

### **The future of Australian agriculture.**

The next generation of Australian agri-decision makers represents a highly capable, diversified, and community-centered group. Their unique blend of high optimism and heightened stress, coupled with a propensity for quicker adoption of new information and greater operational diversification, indicates an industry transiting towards a more resilient and entrepreneurial future. Organisations looking to engage with this cohort must acknowledge their paradoxical mindset and their heightened concerns over systemic and economic issues, while appealing to their hunger for knowledge and fostering and supporting their active roles within their communities.



To learn more about this study, please contact  
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