



WHAT'S WRONG WITH OUR FARMERS?

Jamie Raynolds
shares his thoughts
on the plight of
Australian
farmers

SO MANY FARMERS now, me included, are being forced to look for off-farm income — or marrying a school teacher [laughs]. To stay on the land you've got to be stubborn; you just grit your teeth more and more every day.

I doubt if it'll ever change. When it starts to come good the multinationals will come in with their greed and take it off us somehow; or government bureaucracies with their red tape — all that sort of stuff.

Remember when Gough Whitlam said in 1974, "You farmers have never had it so good". After that, the cattle crashed, along with everything else as a result of the Arab oil embargo.

I know that other sectors of society,

WOULD YOU PAY A BIT MORE FOR FREE-RANGE FARMERS?

manufacturing for example, are doing it tough too. But look a negative gearing. That's just middle- and upper-class welfare and yet farmers are called whingers when we ask for assistance due to catastrophic weather.

The countries we compete against — their farmers are all being subsidised. The wages farmers have to pay are also far in excess of what our competitors pay. There is this fundamental imbalance.

In fact we've been on the back foot ever since England joined the Common Market in 1964. The Australian farmers' terms of trade have been on a downward slope ever since that time.

In addition, the Australian population as a whole do not appreciate our primary producers the way European countries appreciate theirs. I think it has a bit to do with the starvation Europe went through in, and just after, the Second World War.

We're getting the same money for cattle now as we were 40 years ago. What was the price of fuel then? What does this mean? We're digging into our assets just to survive. So we're becoming less and less flexible and less able to do anything.

You know, we pay \$5 per head per transaction on our cattle to Meat and Livestock Australia. Their job is to get us the best price overseas and I don't know if it's worth it or not — but a beast can be transacted 5, 6 or 10 times before it's slaughtered.

At \$5 a pop. So we could be selling at \$140 a head, say, and it costs \$35 to sell each one.

So you think to yourself, "Should I go all organic, direct to market and so on...". You fill your head with all these ideas and what the so-called successful people are doing.

Back on our farm we are into holistic management, cell grazing and letting nature do as much as it can for us. Instead of fighting nature, as a lot of cockies still do, we're trying to go with nature.

Reducing the cost of farm inputs is one of the things we can do to lower the cost of production.

You hear farmers talking of what's bad, the rising cost of production, falling commodity prices and all that. But rarely do they let on how they are feeling inside. But I know there's a lot of depression out there.

The demons got into my head, I was having all these negative thoughts but I said to myself, "Right. I'd better do something about this". That's why I've come up to Braidwood to get focussed

on other things. Unfortunately though, some people do nothing about it. Farmers rely a great deal on relationships with family, friends and community organisations. The Lions club helps me out a lot.

Pete's down on the farm and he fronts the bank manager now. They're the ones who really rule the roost.

Down on the farm Pete and I are battling just to get our grass right. We've got 760 head of cattle; we did have sheep but with this weather pattern we have now, in my opinion you can't run sheep and cattle together any more.

It's just what the climate change people said 25 years ago: the extremes are becoming more acute — more and more pronounced. So as soon as the

dry times come the sheep eat the grass out from under the cattle — they can eat so much closer, right down to the roots. Absolutely unsustainable.

On top of all this, we have government policy against us. If the new government refuse to let the Chinese company Huawei tender for NBN work on a level playing field, the Chinese government will tell us to stick our meat where it fits best.

They've told Tony Abbott that. So it seems that when it comes to agriculture the government favours a free market. Not so with the car industry or the NBN or other trade-exposed industries mind, just for us farmers.

The Australian primary producer feels like a lower-class citizen. We really do, no risk, every one of us does.



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