
Rural issues - losing the farm

Summary

- In many cases, the farm has been in the family for generations, and losing it can feel like betraying one's ancestors while robbing one's children of their birthright.
 - Grief has many stages - you may not experience all of them, or you may experience the stages in a different order to other family members.
 - Farmers typically pride themselves on their self-sufficiency and independence, so asking for help can be hard to do.
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Losing the farm is a highly distressing and difficult experience for a family. The impact can be compared to losing a loved one. In many cases, the farm has been in the family for generations. Losing it can feel like betraying one's ancestors while robbing one's children of their birthright. Grief, guilt, despair and depression are common reactions.

It isn't always possible to turn to immediate family members for support - in some cases, the farm supports three generations (grandparents, parents and children) and its loss means the entire family is in turmoil. Overstretched families can benefit from professional support and advice on how to establish a new way of life. The transition may take some time.

Losing the farm – grief issues

Some of the grief issues families who lose their farm may face include:

- loss of identity, since farming is a way of life, not just a job
- feeling professionally lost, since most farmers couldn't imagine doing anything else for a living
- loss of the family home
- a sense of having betrayed previous generations, if the farm was in the family for a long time
- guilt over losing the only substantial inheritance for the children
- feelings of guilt, failure and inadequacy.

People experience grief in different ways

Grief has many stages - you may not experience them all, or you may experience the stages in a different order than described here. Your family members may grieve in different ways to you, so try to respect each other's feelings during this difficult time. Common feelings could include:

- **denial** – you can't believe that your worst fears have come true
 - **release** – physical expression of distress, including sobbing and intense feelings of sadness
 - **restlessness** – physical reactions including sleeping problems and changes to appetite
 - **isolation** – the need to pull back from other people and events, and spend time alone with your thoughts
 - **remorse** – going back over decisions you had made, feeling regret and wishing you could undo the past
 - **panic** – the inability to think clearly or perform everyday chores
 - **confusion** – you feel unable to make decisions or plan for the future
 - **anger** – you start looking for people, organisations or things to blame for your loss
 - **idealisation** – looking back with rose-coloured glasses and romanticising your life on the farm
 - **vulnerability** – certain things trigger painful memories and feelings; for example, the anniversary of leaving the farm could provoke tears
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- **acceptance** – the emotional realisation that things have changed
- **confidence** – the ability to look towards your new future with hope and optimism.

Problems facing farm families

Farm families who lose their farms may need a variety of types of help. These may include:

- information
- referral services
- social support
- emotional support
- financial counselling
- financial support
- education and training for new careers
- job hunting assistance
- house hunting assistance
- assistance for children relocated to new schools.

Seek professional help

Farmers typically pride themselves on their self-sufficiency and independence, so asking for help can be hard to do. In other cases, the family members may not be aware of the extensive range of organisations, both community and government, that are available to offer assistance. It might be a good idea when consulting with an organisation to ask if there are any other contacts they could suggest.

Where to get help

- **Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning** Customer Service Centre Tel. 136 186
- **CRANaplus Bush Support Services** 24-hour phone counselling service Tel. 1800 805 391
- **Lifeline** Tel. 13 11 14
- **Australian Women in Agriculture** Tel. 0418 883 250
- **Victorian Rural Women's Network**
- **Farmsafe Australia** Tel. (02) 6269 5622
- **National Debt Helpline** Tel. 1800 007 007 Monday to Friday, 9.30 am to 4.30 pm – a free financial counselling and debt advice phone service for Australians (includes interpreter services)

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