

YOUNG FARMER BUSINESS PROGRAM FINAL EVALUATION

**Prepared for NSW Department of
Primary Industries**

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Clear Horizon

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Acronyms

DPI	Department of Primary Industries
YFBP	Young Farmer Business Program
YF&F	Young farmers and fishers

Executive Summary

The Young Farmer Business Program (YFBP) aimed to build the business resilience of young farmers and fishers (YF&F) across NSW to equip them for a future in the agricultural industry. Commencing in July 2017, the program was funded by the NSW Government and delivered by the NSW Department of Primary Industries.

The program developed and oversaw a range of activities and resources, including a suite of single-night events, externally subsidised courses, business coaching, and podcasts. These activities and resources were tailored to young farmers and fishers who already own a business and those who aspire to own a business in the future. Program activities were delivered by the program team, industry groups and specialist contractors. The program team also made considerable use of social media to engage young farmers and fishers.

Clear Horizon Consulting was contracted to provide evaluation support throughout the program, including this summative evaluation. Clear Horizon provided regular information and support to the program to review what was working and not working, adjust the program deliverables and make decisions at the periodic Advisory Committee meetings. This final evaluation has four key aims: to provide accountability about the program's effectiveness, assess the appropriateness of the program's design and implementation, capture the learnings about engaging young farmers and fishers in a customer-centred program, and inform the design of future programs.

The final evaluation looked at the entire program period, and adopted a mixed methods approach, including a desktop review of existing data, ongoing Slido surveys¹, interviews with subcontractors and the program team, and longitudinal case studies with participating young farmers and fishers.. This report details the evaluation findings and presents recommendations for improving the Program.

Key Findings

The Young Farmer Business Program successfully improved the resilience, business mindset, and networks for both young farmers and fishers who own and manage a business and those that aspire to in the future. The program provided a full suite of tailored offers that were appropriate for young farmers and fishers in different situations. The program team has accumulated experience and knowledge about young farmers and fishers, how to engage with them, and how to use evidence for strategic learning.

Impact and outcomes for on-farm young farmers and fishers

All YF&F who received coaching have **built resilience** in their own businesses. They are making informed decisions on a day-to-day basis, improving their business plans, demonstrating greater willingness to focus on the business, improved financial management and strategic thinking. These young farmers and fishers have taken significant steps towards improving the viability and profitability of their farming businesses. Coaching participants are **continuing to apply the skills** learned once the coaching program has finished.

Participating in the coaching program has contributed to all participants **increasing the profitability** of their businesses. In some cases, this increased profitability was significant, more than 100% higher than

¹ Slido is a survey and polling app used to engage participants in workshops and presentations and collect data. (<https://www.sli.do>)

before the program. Participating in the coaching program has also contributed to the **drought preparedness** of participants by encouraging actions which improve the long-term viability of their businesses.

After attending workshops run by the program, approximately 60% of young farmers who own a business **took actions to improve their business resilience**. In particular, they improved their business thinking and actioned direct advice provided. These outcomes were less significant for these farmers compared to the tailored advice provided by coaching but had a broader reach.

“After the Bank Ready workshop, I went to the bank and tried to get a loan. I was unsuccessful, but I kept trying. After the Business Ready [workshop] I tried again and got a small loan. Now I’ve got a paddock, and I’ve got the cows. I got the GST, ABN, and BAS all setup - I’ve never had them before.” – Young farmer

Impact and outcomes for aspiring young farmers and fishers

Involvement in the YFBP program has prompted approximately 32% of aspiring young farmers and fishers to move towards owning a business in the future. Actions taken include adopting a business mindset, having financial conversations, developing business plans, and increasing their savings targets. However, these YF&F are limited in their opportunities to apply business skills until they own a business.

Young farmers and fishers are demonstrating **improved mindsets** through a greater appreciation of the importance of business skills, enhanced motivation to focus on the business rather than the “paddock”, and greater positivity and self-belief.

Aspiring young farmers and fishers are **drawing on lessons learnt** at events focusing on one-off activities such as approaching a bank or selecting the right business structure.

Networking outcomes for all young farmers and fishers

Young farmers and fishers have **developed networks** through the program and around 36% are **continuing to draw upon them**. Young farmers and fishers who attend events are forming connections with new people and seeing others who they already know.

The program has helped young farmers to become more interested and confident about **discussing business and finance with other farmers**. While the networks themselves may change this practice has continued.

There were some cases of significant impact where young farmers and fishers’ **attitudes towards networking had transformed**; that is, they placed a significant value upon networks and were maximising the opportunities to actively expand and purposefully draw upon networks for their benefit.

Will these outcomes endure?

The outcomes around profitability and drought preparedness for coaching participants will endure. Young farmers and fishers have formed relationships which they draw upon years after engaging in the program and will continue to draw upon in the future. Furthermore, the actions taken as a result of the program will equip individuals to repeat these actions again in the future. Aspiring young farmers who are not in a situation to apply skills have learned new knowledge and skills which they will apply in the future.

Delivery effectiveness

The program delivered 124 single-night events, two conferences, coached 12 farming and fishing businesses, subsidised 21 external courses, and provided numerous online resources, including three seasons of the program's podcast. In total, over 5,000 young farmers and fishers attended an event, course, or conference.

The program met the needs of young farmers and fishers across NSW by consistently delivering face-to-face events across all Local Land Service regions and continued to provide online events during COVID.

The program was most successful at meeting the needs of **beginners in learning about business** – young farmers and fishers who traditionally focus on the field rather than the office. The program has successfully adapted to feedback by building upon these events for beginners with new events and courses that meet the needs of young farmers and fishers who were more advanced in business.

The program had limited success in meeting the needs of **fishers and small-scale farmers** due to the limited capacity of the program team. The program team focused upon designing and delivering events targeted towards the largest groups, such as cattle, sheep and croppingfarmers. Events and courses tailored to fishers and small-scale farmers were offered in the final six months of the program and no evaluation data was available at the time of writing this report.

The program had limited success in meeting the needs of a significant group of young farmers (33%) who **work on a family farm**. Succession planning is important for this group, and there were few events dedicated to this topic apart from one podcast series and online resources dedicated to succession. At this stage, there is no evidence of improved succession outcomes.

Most farmers and fishers who engaged with the program were in the target age demographic and did not own or manage their own farm or boat.

Processes and implementation

The YFBP team has successfully drawn upon evidence to inform the ongoing design and delivery of the program. This has been supported by a **strong focus upon outcomes and evaluation**, and clear strategic learning processes that allow for the team to draw upon evaluation evidence to inform strategic decisions about the program moving forward. This use of evidence is in line with **best practice strategic learning** and provides an example of how to implement a customer-centred program.

Prior to March 2020 the program was **largely implemented as intended**, with 100 workshops delivered. The program has delivered a full breadth of activities in line with the original intent of the program.

Implementation was **significantly affected by COVID-19** as the program could no longer run face-to-face workshops. However, the program adapted to this challenge by successfully introducing online workshops and thereby reaching a significant number of young farmers remotely. Interviews with participants suggest that outcomes from online workshops were similar to those from face-to-face workshops, with the exception of outcomes relating to networking and belonging.

Program delivery was **efficient due to outsourcing specific activities and events** to independent subcontractors. Most of these subcontractors were industry associations or volunteer-run organisations that must be efficient to remain viable. Other subcontractors offer specialised coaching services which could not be delivered by the program team. However, the program team experienced the process for engaging new subcontractors challenging due to the requirements of government procurement

processes. There were also a small number of inefficiencies when multiple subcontractors were required to collaborate on individual tasks or projects, and the externally subsidised courses were expensive.

The program **contributed to the capacity of subcontracted organisations** by engaging them to deliver established events such as *Bank Ready* and *Startup Stories*. Through delivering these events, subcontractors have expanded their networks and learnt more about opportunities available for their members, gained internal stability, and incorporated the feedback from young farmers and fishers to inform their internal decision-making and policy development. This improved capacity will further benefit young farmers and fishers in the future because these subcontractors – including NSW Young Farmers and Future Farmers Network – have organisational missions aligned to supporting young people in agriculture.

Conclusion

The program has achieved its mandate to build the drought preparedness of young farmers by improving their business skills knowledge, and networks. This has contributed to young farmers and fishers taking steps to improve the viability and profitability of their businesses. Drought preparedness (or business planning for fishers) underpins all these steps – from approaching banks, developing business plans, and managing the business day-to-day, young farmers are preparing their business to remain viable in a drought-affected future.

The program catered for the different situations of young farmers and fishers. Coaching was most appropriate for the minority of young farmers who own and manage their own business. This coaching resulted in the most outstanding outcomes from the program. The single-night events and resources were directed towards the majority (81%) of aspiring young farmers that attended events but do not own their own business, and the outcomes for this group were focused on steps towards owning a business in the future.

There is strong evidence that the individual coaching program should continue with all participants benefitting from this tailored approach. Furthermore, continued demand from young farmers suggests the single-night workshops are still relevant. The program has developed important intellectual property – such as networks and knowledge of how to engage with young farmers – which can be leveraged for a future program.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were developed from the findings above and discussed with the program advisory committee.

- **Continue the program:** The program has delivered on its mandate to improve drought preparedness, the relevance of which has been demonstrated by the recent drought. There is strong demand from young farmers and fishers for more events, and the existing networks and knowledge mean the program team is well-positioned to continue efficiently.

There are four sub-recommendations related to continuing the program:

- **Maintain the individual coaching program:** A coaching program tailored around young farmers in similar farming situations (owning or leasing a small farm, hoping to grow in the future) will be more fit-for-purpose than coaching programs open to farmers of all ages. In addition, young farmers will be more willing to share and participate with others like them rather than older and more experienced farmers on larger operations.

- **Develop an offer to support succession.** Support to navigate the dynamics of succession is the largest gap in the program offerings and outcomes related to succession were limited. Succession planning is a complex process relevant to a significant number of young farmers which involves more than business skills – it also requires an understanding of family dynamics and the different ways succession can occur. The program team has built the relationships, networks and understanding of young farmers to be in a position to develop an offer for a problem of this complexity.
- **Stop or reconsider subsidising external courses:** Externally subsidised courses are a significant cost for the program. However, the long-term benefits from designing and delivering a course– such as the ability to replicate the course in the future for a lower cost or networking and learning about young farmers and fishers through their engagement with the program – accumulate to external providers rather than the program team.
- **Consider how to further improve attitudes towards networking:** The program provides substantial space for young farmers and fishers to network, and most develop connections. There is an opportunity to maximise the value of this network by encouraging participants to follow the example of those few that significantly expand and purposefully draw upon these connections to a major extent.
- **Consider how the learnings about engagement can be incorporated into other programs:** The program team has tested and refined many methods for engaging with young farmers. These methods and learnings could be incorporated into other areas of the department in line with the goal to deliver customer-centric programs.
- **Consider how the evaluation and learning processes can be replicated in other programs:** The program has successfully integrated evaluation into ongoing design and delivery of the program, which provides a case study in strategic learning and implementing an outcomes-focused, customer-centred program.

A new NSW DPI program has been developed under the Australian Government's Future Drought Fund, which has similarities to the coaching under this program. The evaluation team has highlighted some considerations for the new program:

- Develop a recruitment campaign.
- Consider how group sessions will work for participants in different farming situations.
- Consider how to deliver coaching to farmers who are not tech-savvy or connected to internet.

1 Introduction

1.1 About this report

This report presents the final evaluation for the Young Farmer Business Program (the program), which was delivered by NSW Department of Primary Industries (NSW DPI). The purpose of this evaluation is to provide accountability about the program's effectiveness, assess the appropriateness of the program's design and implementation, capture the learnings about engaging young farmers and fishers in a customer-centred program, and inform the design of future programs

The evaluation was undertaken in line with the Young Farmer Business Program Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, which was developed collaboratively with the DPI team and submitted in September 2018.

The report is structured as follows:

1. Introduction
2. Findings
3. Conclusion
4. Recommendations
5. Appendices

1.2 The Young Farmer Business Program

The Young Farmer Business Program was a \$6 million investment by the NSW Government to enhance the business resilience of young farmers and fishers in NSW, delivered through the NSW DPI. The broader goals of the program were to improve the drought preparedness of the agriculture industry so they are less reliant on subsidies during future adversity. The program commenced in July 2017 and ran until June 2021.

The program was designed in response to from two surveys conducted in 2016 and 2017. These surveys identified that some of the biggest barriers for young people pursuing a farming or fishing career were: confidence in making business decisions (self-efficacy); a sense of connection to networks that support them on their business journey; and business skills and knowledge.

The program developed and delivered a suite of offers to young farmers and fishers across NSW. These offers were:

- **Single-night events:** workshops such as *Bank Ready*, *Business Ready*, *Startup Stories*, and *Bank Savvy*, delivered to a group of 20 or more local young farmers in a familiar community location.
- **Coaching program:** a small group of farming or fishing businesses were allocated weekly coaching sessions for 10-12 months, packaged with workshops and farm visits. Coaching was exclusively for young farmers or fishers who owned and managed their business.

- **Externally subsidised courses:** the program subsidised between 50% - 90% of the registration costs for existing courses that were in line with the goals of the program.
- **Conference:** two statewide young farmer conferences were held, including guest speakers and farm tours.
- **Resources and podcasts:** a number of resources and podcasts were developed and made available through the program website.

A theory of change was developed in September 2018 to show how the program activities contribute towards its broader goals. The theory of change (Appendix 1) illustrates two clear pathways:

- **Business resilience pathway:** if young farmers and fishers improve their individual capacity then they will display the mindset, decisions and actions which will lead them to developing a sound business in agriculture (business resilience). The program contributes towards business resilience by building the individual capacity of young farmers and fishers in three areas: their business skills and knowledge, awareness of the resources available to them, and self-belief.
- **Connection and networks pathway:** if young farmers and fishers develop their networks then they will improve their sense of connection with other young farmers and fishers, feel less isolated, and become more aware of the opportunities available to them. As a result they will draw upon networks for guidance and support when making business decisions and during crises. The program contributes towards these networks by facilitating regular face-to-face events where young farmers and fishers can network and connect.

1.3 Approach to the evaluation

The following section describes the scope of the evaluation project, outlining the purpose, key evaluation questions (KEQs) and methodology, including limitations.

Purpose

The purpose of this final evaluation was to:

- provide **accountability** to funders and key stakeholders regarding YFBP's performance and effectiveness
- **assess** the appropriateness and efficiency of the overall implementation of the program
- Capture the **learnings** about young farmers and fishers and implementing a **customer-centred** program
- **test** the pathways of change and effectiveness, viability, and sustainability of the delivery model
- **inform** the design of future programs.

Key evaluation questions

The key evaluation questions for this final report draw upon the questions outlined in the Monitoring & Evaluation Framework developed in September 2018. This report aims to address all five questions below, and these questions were used to guide the collection and analysis of data.

1. How effective was the program in achieving its intended outcomes?

2. What was the impact of the program on young farmers and fishers?
3. Are the outcomes likely to endure beyond the program?
4. How well did we implement the program?
5. How appropriate is the program model?

Data collection and analysis

The evaluation used a theory-driven approach to develop evidence-based findings against the KEQs. The approach was underpinned by mixed methods, capturing qualitative and quantitative data to triangulate evidence and strengthen the rigour behind the findings.

Data was collected through a desktop review, ongoing surveys, and semi-structured interviews. Table 1 shows a summary of data collected from each stakeholder group for this evaluation.

Table 1 Data sources for final evaluation

Data collection method	Stakeholder group	Sample collected
Desktop review	Program documents	2
Slido surveys	All young farmers and fishers who attended single-night events, externally subsidised courses, or the conference	>4,000 respondents
Post event phone survey	Up to 10 participants from each single-night event, externally subsidised course, coaching program, or the conference	>150 respondents
Longitudinal case studies	A representative group of young farmers and fishers, spread across a mix of LLS regions, industries, and farming situations	13 participants
Key informant interviews	Program team	5
	Subcontractors	5
Findings meeting	Advisory Committee	Notes from the meeting were used to support the interpretation of data.

The data collected from the desktop review, surveys and interviews was analysed separately using the following approaches. **Qualitative data** was analysed using cluster analysis, clustering comments that are similar, to give an indication of how many individuals had similar opinions about a topic. Individual comments that were considered significant were also captured. **Quantitative data** from surveys were analysed using descriptive statistics. All evidence was synthesised against the KEQs and a **findings meeting** was held with the program Advisory Committee to collaboratively review the evidence, begin the formulation of key findings and recommendations in a collaborative way and inform the evaluation report. A results pack was used to synthesise the evidence against each KEQ.

Case studies

A total of nine case studies were developed in addition to the report, found in a separate attachment. These case studies illustrate the context and lives of young farmers, how they engaged with the program, and the impacts of them from this involvement. The case studies are referred to through the report.

Case studies highlight the following outcomes:

1. Improved planning and networks
2. Improved financial literacy
3. Set and shared goals as a couple
4. Improved understanding of different options and avenues for farming
5. Improved connections and networks
6. Improved drought preparedness
7. Approached a bank for the first time
8. Secured funds from a bank
9. Delivered events to other young farmers

Limitations of approach

While every effort was made to ensure a rigorous evaluation within the budget available, we note the following limitations with the methodology:

- **Representation:** post event phone interviews were conducted with young farmers and fishers who left their name and contact details at the end of each workshop, and Slido data was collected by those who chose to participate. While this provides a good indication of a range of views, it may not represent the views of all stakeholders.
- **Reliance on self-reporting:** interviews and surveys relied upon young farmers and fishers to self-report changes to their knowledge, decisions, and attitudes after engaging with the program. Interviewers managed this limitation by asking for specific examples of changes cited where possible.

2 Findings

Section 2 presents the findings from this evaluation and a summary of the evidence supporting the findings. Findings relating to the outcomes achieved by the program are presented first. These are followed by findings about program processes and how the program was implemented, including lessons learnt.

SUMMARY FINDING

The Young Farmer Business Program successfully improved the resilience, business mindset, and networks for both young farmers and fishers who own and manage a business and those that aspire to in the future. The program provided a full suite of tailored offers that were appropriate for young farmers and fishers in different situations. The program team has accumulated experience and knowledge about young farmers and fishers, how to engage with them, and how to use evidence for strategic learning.

2.1 Outcomes, impact and legacy

Presented below are outcomes achieved by the YFBP from the highly focused coaching program, and those from broadly targeted activities including the single night events and the conference.

Impact and outcomes from coaching program

KEY FINDING

All YF&F who received coaching have **built resilience** in their own businesses. They are making informed decisions on a day-to-day basis, improving their business plans, demonstrating greater willingness to focus on the business, improved financial management and strategic thinking. These young farmers (and fishers?) have taken significant steps towards improving the viability and profitability of their farming businesses.

Participating in the coaching program has contributed to all participants increasing the profitability of their businesses. In some cases, this increased profitability was significant, worth tens of thousands of dollars per year. Participating in the coaching program has also contributed to the drought preparedness of participants by encouraging actions which improve the long-term viability of their businesses.

Coaching participants are continuing to apply the skills learned once the coaching program has finished.

A small group of established young farmers and fishers (12) received weekly coaching for 10-12 months. All young farmers and fishers who received coaching have **improved the profitability** of their businesses. One participant said their **profit was 110% higher** in the years after coaching compared to beforehand. This participant said this was brought about by the coaching, which had improved their

planning and helped them grow their networks to draw upon for advice and support. The coaching encouraged them to make investments and day-to-day decisions which started to pay off in the years after the program. This participant fully expected to maintain this higher level of profit in the future.

Three other participants highlighted the value of the coaching which enabled them to make **individual business decisions leading to improved profitability** of their farming business. In all cases the coach pushed for the decision, and these young farmers could repeat or maintain these decisions to benefit in future years.

- One participant was persuaded by the coach to agree on a selling price six months in advance (which they had never done before); and supported their marketing efforts through new methods and value adding. This allowed the participant to sell 100% of their production for the first time ever, and they received high prices on their sales.
- The coach told another participant that their interest rate was too high, that they should negotiate with the bank for a lower rate and helped them prepare the relevant documentation. This young farmer convinced their bank to reduce their mortgage interest rate by almost 0.5%, which saves them over \$30,000 pa.
- The coach urged one young farmer to start harvesting earlier in the season, which has allowed them to grow \$60,000 in silage (300 bales and transport costs) more than they would have normally, at no extra cost.

Other coaching participants **continued to operate their farm during the recent drought**. The recent drought was the longest and most severe in many decades, which presented enormous challenges for all farmers to continue operating their businesses. Two participants indicated that without the coaching, they would have been unable to maintain viable businesses, and it was likely they would have quit farming. With the drought ceasing in 2020 these young farmers can continue growing their businesses.

All coaching participants **prepared for drought by improving the profitability** of their businesses. Businesses that were more profitable were in a better position to withstand the challenges faced during drought, as they had fewer expenses which enabled them to save funds during non-drought years. Six coaching participants interviewed explained that improving their business will help them withstand the negative impacts of future crises.

“It all comes down to running a sound business. You just need to have a sound business that holds up during rough times. We are trying to make the business financially stable.” – Young farmer

Coaching participants had also taken explicit steps to improve their **drought preparedness**. Two young farmers increased their preparedness for future droughts by buying large silos, conserving feed from the current season, and monitoring hay prices in anticipation of buying additional feed when prices were low. These young farmers will be able to maintain stock levels for a longer period during future droughts without relying on subsidies for fodder or transport. Both farmers said that they would have lacked the confidence to make such big decisions without the coaching program, and both identified improved drought preparedness as the most significant benefit of their involvement in the program.

“In drought we were playing \$2.20 per head per week, [having] the silo will cut us back to \$0.40 per week during dry times. We spent \$300k on the silos. We can also use them to buy feed when it’s cheap and on-sell it.” – Young farmer

Coaching participants have **improved motivation to set and achieve business goals**. Three coaching program participants highlighted the impact of goal setting and the role the coach played in holding them accountable for achieving their goals. These young farmers and fishers asserted that accountability was a key factor for success in the coaching program. They described how the coaching program model (periodic online meetings) enabled accountability and pushed the participants to apply the knowledge and skills they learned.

“Goal setting is really important. It sounds so simple, but he busts your ass to achieve them - accountability.” – Young farmer

Coaching participants are demonstrating **informed decision-making and financial literacy** on a day-to-day basis and learning to ‘work smarter not harder’. Three coaching program participants identified the exercise of costing their business as valuable for their operations. While the initial tracking of everything was a chore, all three spoke about the information that was created as a result, how they understood it and could make decisions based on this information.

“[The coach] made us cost everything: how much it cost to get out of the harbour, every bucket of feed, every trap. When he started, I thought ‘what is this?’, but now it is so useful, you can make informed decisions about everything you do... Before the program if we wanted more money, we fished more. Now we know the value of that time in Excel.” – Young farmer

Case study 1 illustrates the significance of **improved planning** and informed decision-making, and how this leads to improved profitability.

Case study 1 – Networking and planning

The most significant changes from the program for me have been the networking and improved planning. These two go hand in hand. Before the coaching there was no networking, we talked to the boys at the Coop and that was it. We mainly went out and fished without planning, and any planning we did was always very indecisive, because you didn’t want to invest money into traps in case it didn’t work. Now we have much more confidence, we know what to do if things go wrong, and we talk to other fishers and the fishermen’s association regularly. The program pushed us to expand our networks and get organised, without the program we would have been doing the same thing we always did. In the future our business will be so much better off. These two things were the most significant changes for me because they have the biggest impact on the bottom line, these are the main two things that increase our productivity and sales. Everything else stems from those two things, everything.

Coaching participants have **adopted a business mindset** in their operations and are spending more time each week on managing the business than they had done prior to starting the coaching. Six coaching program participants indicated that they were spending more time ‘in the office’ working on the business, and they saw themselves as young business people.

“We work on the business instead of in the business. We are better planners now, we are better business people now. We used to just have a business, now we’re actual business people.” – Young farmer

Coaching participants are also **feeling valued by the industry**. Four coaching participants demonstrated a positive mindset when thinking about the future. One program team member commented that this positivity was in stark contrast to most of the industry, especially during the drought.

“We are much more positive. There is a lot of negativity in this industry, so positivity is important” (Case study participant)

Outcomes and impact from single-night events, externally subsidised courses and the conference

The program delivered 119 single-night events and two statewide conferences, subsidised seven external courses, and provided numerous online resources, including three seasons of a young farmers podcast. In total, over 4,000 young farmers and fishers attended an event, course, or conference.

Outcomes for on-farm young farmers

KEY FINDING

Involvement in the YFBP program has prompted almost one third of aspiring young farmers and fishers **to move towards owning a business in the future**. Actions taken include adopting a business mindset, having financial conversations, developing business plans, and increasing their savings targets. However, these YF&F are limited in their opportunities to apply business skills until they own a business.

Young farmers and fishers are demonstrating **improved mindsets** through a greater appreciation of the importance of business skills, enhanced motivation to focus on the business rather than the “paddock”, and greater positivity and self-belief.

Most on-farm young farmers and fishers that attended events have taken action as a result. The findings indicate that 60% of on-farm young farmers took action directly following events. The most common actions were to demonstrate a business mindset, have more conversations about finances and business management, action the direct advice from workshop facilitators, develop and improve their business plans, and pick up minor tips and tricks. The following section expands upon each of these outcomes in detail.

On-farm young farmers have **demonstrated a business mindset** as a result of events. Almost half (47%) of on-farm young farmers who attended events explained how they had taken more of a business mindset, such as looking at how to improve profitability, what they could get from their accountants, and reviewing their budgets.

“The main thing that has changed since the workshop would be thinking more about what I’m actually doing on a day to day basis and on a strategic level. I’m not just working for the sake of working, but for a benefit.” – Young farmer

Events also contributed to on-farm farmers having **more conversations about finances and business management**. 17% of on-farm young farmers and fishers reported having conversations with their partners, accountants, or others in the business about their finances and business management following events. For many young farmers this represented a significant change, as they had traditionally minimised the time spent talking about the business.

"[What I learnt from attending the event] helped me start conversations with my partner. He is good at the hands-on stuff, leaves the paperwork with me. It helped me have conversations with him. One conversation was about getting employees on board with your brand - your employees have to share your vision. Another was about the finances." – Young farmer

Young farmers also **actioned the direct advice** they receive from facilitators in the workshops. 13% of young farmers reported taking up the calls to action from the workshops. These were normally related to changing their business structure (*Business Ready*) or preparing documents to approach a bank (*Bank Ready*).

"We actioned some of the advice that the accountant gave in the [Business Ready] workshop. We have re-structured the setup of our business due to the seminar. The biggest thing was securing your business through minimising financial exposure and this program has definitely assisted in this." – Young farmer

Young farmers also **developed or improved their business plans** following events. 12% of on-farm young farmers and fishers indicated they had implemented business planning as a result of the knowledge they gained during events. The primary motivation to develop these plans varied: some young farmers were motivated to think more about their business, others wanted the documentation to satisfy external needs.

"We created a document that is business ready for the banks and investors and general people to show what we're doing. The document would be a business overview / plan, everything the business is doing, and exit strategies. We used the [handouts from the event] because it stepped it out and made it much easier to create." – Young farmer

Young farmers also **picked up tips and tricks** from events which they implemented themselves. These small changes did not result in substantial changes to their practices, but often helped improve efficiency or make use of better systems for managing their business. Approximately 5% of on-farm young farmers interviewed could recall small changes they had picked up from the workshops.

"We picked up a couple of tips like MYOB, Xero and cash management plans.... We signed up to Xero, that's what's come out of it." – Young farmer

40% of on-farm young farmers **did not do anything different** after the workshop. The two major reasons cited were that the workshop content was relevant to their past circumstances, and they did not learn anything new (13%), or they were unable to implement actions due to the drought (13%). The remainder of on-farm attendees (14%) indicated that while they had learned something at the workshop, they had not changed their behaviour at this stage.

KEY FINDING

Aspiring young farmers and fishers are drawing on lessons learnt at events, focusing on one-off activities such as approaching a bank or selecting the right business structure.

Many (32%) aspiring young farmers and fishers who did not own a farm took action following events. While these actions were aligned to the actions of on-farm young farmers discussed above, they were distinct due to the different farming situation of this group. The most common actions discussed below are demonstrating an improved mindset, having financial conversations, planning for the future, and increasing their savings rates.

Aspiring young farmers are **demonstrating an improved business mindset**. 24% of aspiring young farmers had demonstrated actions in line with a business mindset following the workshops. For aspiring young farmers on a family farm this involves taking a greater interest in the business, and for off-farm young farmers this involved staying open to more opportunities.

“I am not taking care of my family finances, but I guess you could say we are taking that leap. I am more interested now in taking on the books. Recently I have been focusing on where we can work together, how my schedule and income is supporting the farm.” – Young farmer

The program has contributed towards aspiring young farmers having **financial conversations**. 15% of aspiring young farmers reported either having additional conversations about the finance or business, or that they were more financially literate in conversations with banks and accountants. Case study 2 shows an example of a young farmer improving their financial literacy and applying it in their off-farm job.

Case study 2: Improved financial literacy

The most significant change from the program for me has been improved financial literacy. It has helped me in my work, and I am approaching the valuation of property differently to what I did before. While this hasn't been something specifically taught by the program, it has come as a result of the events and my general interest in financial literacy. This is the most significant change for me because its bigger than any single thing I have implemented, such as the bank loan or budget.

Young farmers were also more willing to talk about the topics such as business and finance with other young farmers. Interviewees explained that, while they knew other young people in similar farming situations, the events resulted in them talking about topics such as finance with them, and expect to continue to do so in the future.

“Yeah I did know a lot of people in the room but it did open up conversations about business opportunities, it wasn't just like talking socially like we normally would.” – Young farmer

A small number of aspiring young farmers set goals and **developed plans for the future** following the workshops. 9% of young farmers and fishers reported setting goals after the workshop – this was mainly after a *Business Ready* event, which had sessions explicitly on goal setting.

“I have set goals. I am taking a new course at university; I’ll only be at uni for three years. After that I plan to be on a property up in NSW somewhere... I want to gain more experience in the corporate industry, so I know what I’m doing.” – Young Farmer

Sharing goals was as significant for some as setting them. Case study 3 shows how the program contributed to a couple sharing goals with each other, and how this led to improved confidence.

Case study 3 – Set and shared goals as a couple

The most significant change from the program for me was talking about our goals with my partner and putting the SMART things around it. Before the event we both had goals and ideas, but they were separate in our heads, and not communicated or jointly discussed. Now they are very shared, to the point we feel comfortable talking about our goals to other people, we are very much on the same page. Now they are very clear goals, with timeframes and steps needed, and we have confidence that we are doing the things to get there. This was the most significant change for me because it has given me confidence to know what our goals are and that we can achieve them.

A small number of aspiring young farmers **increased savings rates** following workshops. 6% of aspiring young farmers reported increasing their savings rates following the events. In particular, the *Bank Ready* and *Bank Savvy* events help clarify the savings required to afford a deposit for farmland, and these attendees reported increasing their savings rates in recognition of these requirements.

“I haven’t changed anything except to save more money because the opportunity is there, to possibly own land one day, to dream.” – Young farmer

A small number of young farmers and fishers **actioned direct advice** from the workshop. These were significant outcomes linked directly to the session content – usually involving approaching a bank asking for a loan or restructuring their current business. These outcomes occurred for a small number (4%) of aspiring young farmers and fishers.

“After the Bank Ready workshop, I went to the bank and tried to get a loan. I was unsuccessful, but I kept trying. After the Business Ready I tried again and got a small loan. Now I’ve got a paddock, and I’ve got the cows. I got the GST, ABN, and BAS all setup - I’ve never had them before.” – Young farmer

Most (68%) aspiring young farmers and fishers **did not take action** in the months following the workshops. The most common reason cited was because there were limited opportunities for people in their farming situation to immediately apply the knowledge they gained from events. These attendees did not own or manage a farming business, so were not ready to influence business structures or talk to banks. However, a large number of attendees said that, while they had not changed their behaviour, the workshops were relevant to their future.

Outcomes for all young farmers and fishers: networking

KEY FINDING

Young farmers and fishers have developed networks through the program with over one third continuing to draw on them. By attending events run by the program they have formed connections with new people and reconnected with those they have established connects with.

There were some cases of significant impact where young farmers and fishers' attitudes towards networking had transformed; that is, they placed a significant value upon networks and were maximising the opportunities to actively expand and purposefully draw upon networks for their benefit.

Opportunities to connect

Facilitating and supporting social connections between young farmers and fishers was an important principle underlying the program. The **program provided many opportunities for young farmers and fishers to connect**: all events included some social time to encourage attendees to mingle and meet new people, even the coaching programs incorporated farm visits and joint workshops.

Many young farmers (57% of those attending) **met new people at events** and reported having a conversation with them. Many young farmers (46%) reconnected with people they already knew at events. Just 10% of event attendees did not speak to anyone.

There were many cases where **meeting new people provided a sense of support** during hard times. One interviewee spoke of how the people they met at events discussed the drought and how they were coping. The program aims to develop these networks so young farmers and fishers can draw upon these networks during future crises.

"I spoke to people during the breaks when we had the workshop at Moree. I spoke with a nice woman there who shared stories about her farm. We could talk about how they are handling the current climate." – Young farmer

Meeting new people also provided **different ideas and perspectives on farming**. Young farmers were willing to share information and learn from others about different ways of working. Case study 4 highlights the significance of this outcome for one young farmer.

Case study 4 – Understanding different options and avenues for farming and business

The most significant change from the program for me has been the understanding of the different options and avenues for farming and for the business, which came from talking to other people we met at events. This is the most significant change for me because there are no guidelines for how farming should be done, people use different methods. Learning from this can help us through drought that is a natural part of the cycle out here.

Furthermore, young farmers were **connecting with others** following events. 36% of young farmers and fishers interviewed after attending an event had connected with others because of the program. These connections were additional to the existing connections farmers had before attending the events.

“There was one bloke that I did meet there, and he's become my friend on social media and we stay in touch a bit more. He is on a property in a different region. It's good to see how he does things differently to me.” – Young farmer

Young farmers were **creating strong relationships and learning from each other** through networks created at events. Interviewees spoke of how they had followed up with people they met at events that they wanted to learn from and had spoken in detail about their farm and business. This outcome occurred after participating in conference farm tours when young farmers wanted more information, and after regular events where young farmers developed a strong connection.

“One of the places [on the farm tour] – we went there for 90 minutes, and I was so intrigued by their business, so over Zoom I got hold of the guy's number and had a yarn with him, and then he invited me over for the day. I knocked around with him all day on his farm and I learned heaps. It was so good, I got heaps out of that meeting... We've exchanged a couple of phone calls since October, it's going to be a long lasting relationship” – Young farmer

Impact: Transformed attitudes towards networking

There were some cases where young farmers and fishers' attitudes towards networking had transformed; that is, they placed a significant value upon networks and were **taking the opportunities to actively expand and purposefully draw upon networks for their benefit**. While all young farmers and fishers who engaged with the program were given opportunities to connect with others, these individuals were maximising these opportunities for their personal gain (such as in the quote above). Many of these individuals were coaching participants who had been pushed to network, and realised the potential benefits from these experiences. As an illustration of the value placed upon networking, two coaching participants highlighted their networks as the most significant change from the program, considering it to be more important than any changes to profitability, knowledge, or skills. One of these examples is case study 5.

Case study 5: Connections and networks

The most significant change from the program for me has been the connections and networks we have developed and talked to. The program opened our eyes to the importance of investing in good people and them in turn investing in us and having win-win-relationships.

Before the program, I made a lot of mistakes, mistakes that other people have already made. Now we have a greater understanding of the value of shelling out finances, in a lot of cases to get good advice. Whether it's agronomy, taxation, solicitors, or grain marketing advisors, we're not so scared now. We don't see the finances that we spend on these people as a cost, we see it as an investment. We also have a much bigger group of people that we can throw questions to.

This change has a very big leveraging effect, meaning we can incorporate or use all this different advice and wisdom and other people's skills to grow our business at a faster rate of knots, not just for us but for others as well. We don't want to feather our

own nest only, but we want to grow our business to benefit the broader community as well.

This is the most significant change for me because it has probably brought the most confidence into my life – relying on more people so I don't have to lie awake at night trying to solve everything, it's better peace of mind. It brings more courage into my life and business.

To what extent are outcomes likely to endure?

KEY FINDING

The outcomes around profitability and drought preparedness for coaching participants will endure. Young farmers and fishers have formed relationships which they draw upon years after engaging in the program and will continue to draw upon in the future. Furthermore, the actions taken as a result of the program will equip individuals to repeat these actions again in the future. A significant number of aspiring young farmers who are not in a situation to apply skills have learned new knowledge and skills which they will apply in the future.

The outcomes around **improved profitability for coaching participants will endure**. All the farmers and fishers with improved profitability expected these benefits to continue; whether through improved margins, lowered interest repayments, or new practices and strategies which could be replicated in future years. All three case study participants that participated in coaching in 2018-19 said that the outcomes had endured in the years since coaching had finished, and would continue into the future.

The outcomes around **improved drought preparedness will endure**, due to improved profitability and permanent steps taken to prepare for drought. It follows that, if improved profitability continues, then improved viability and financial preparedness for drought will endure too. In addition, the steps taken to prepare for drought – such as investing in silos – have long-term outcomes that will allow them to conserve feed during the coming decades. Case study 6 speaks about the significance of drought preparedness during the recent drought and into the future, and the additional outcomes as a result of being prepared.

Case study 6: Improved drought preparedness

The most significant change from the program for me has been our drought preparedness. Before the coaching we would have said 'this is getting too hard, we are going to lose more money than we make.' Now, coming out of the drought last year, there were a lot of farmers struggling, and we realised we can make this business work. Overseas in Israel they use every square meter of grass. We had land we were not using to the best of our ability. Now we are growing off every bit of land, you might only get 5 bales but every bale counts, that's less bales than you need to buy. The program contributed to this by keeping us going during drought, and hearing from other young farmers kept us hungry to continue. In the future there is going to be another drought, and another flood. There will be tough times again. Having all that feed sets us up for the next tough time. This is the most significant change for me because we feel prepared for the next drought or flood.

Aspiring young farmers learned **business knowledge and skills they will apply in the future**. The opportunities for most young farmers and fishers to apply new knowledge and skills are limited, as more than 80% do not currently own or manage a farming business. However, 41% of aspiring YF&F said that they learned something they expect to use in the future.

"The workshop was always a future focused thing, not a right now thing." – Young farmer

Young farmers are likely to **repeat actions taken as a result of the program**. The knowledge and experience which comes from acting once improves the confidence to do so again. Case study 7 provides an example of how approaching a bank once after a *Bank Ready* workshop prepared him for approaching a bank again three years later.

Case study 7: Approaching a bank

The most significant change from the program for me was giving me the idea to approach a bank. Beforehand I had never attempted to do anything like that, I was only 18 at the time. It wasn't until after the workshop that the thought even crossed my mind. Even though I never ended up using the loan because my plans changed that has been really helpful, even three years later I used the information when applying for a home loan. This was the most significant change for me because I had not even thought about that before the event.

Young farmers were also **creating long lasting relationships** with others who attended events. Case study participants explained how they were still in contact with farmers they met at events two years previously. Some of these networks were with older farmers who had attended events out of interest. While the program targets young farmers and fishers aged 18-35, older farmers were also allowed to attend.

"We definitely got lots of networks from the program We met an 80-year-old farmer who attended an event [in 2018] on behalf of his boys, the networking with him was really valuable. He was around here on the weekend [in 2021] and has planted a new crop where each plant has a benefit for the soil, so we'll probably put that crop in as well." – Young farmer

2.2 Processes and implementation

This section identifies what has been learnt about young farmers and fishers by delivering the program; the most effective ways to engage with them and ways that were less effective

Did the program meet the needs of young farmers and fishers?

KEY FINDING

The program met the needs of young farmers and fishers across NSW by delivering face-to-face events across all LLS regions and continuing to provide online events during COVID.

The program was most successful at meeting the needs of beginners in business – young farmers and fishers who traditionally focus on the outdoor work rather than the business. The program has successfully adapted to feedback by building upon these events for beginners with new events and courses that meet the needs of young farmers and fishers who were more advanced in business.

The program had limited success in meeting the needs of fishers and small-scale farmers due to the limited capacity of the program team. The program team focused upon designing and delivering events targeted towards the largest groups, such as cattle farmers. Events and courses tailored to fishers and small-scale farmers were offered in the final six months of the program.

The program had limited success in meeting the needs of a significant group of young farmers (33%) who work on a family farm. Succession planning is important for this group, and there were few events dedicated to this topic. As such, there is no evidence of improved succession outcomes.

Most farmers and fishers who attended were in the target age demographic and did not own or manage their own farm or boat.

The program **reached 5,242 attendees from 136 events**, including the two conferences. More than 2,000 young farmers and fishers attended face-to-face events, including over 500 who attended the conferences in 2020 and 2021.

The program was **well attended for the different types of events**, suggesting that young farmers found the events highly relevant. Single-night events had 26 attendees per event on average for the lifetime of the program (face-to-face), plus both conferences had over 250 delegates. Table 2 shows that the most common single-night events Bank Ready and Business Ready had 25 attendees per event, and Startup Stories and Bank savvy all had at least 30 attendees per event.

Table 2 Number of registrations per event, by event type (face-to-face, single-night events only)

Event type	Number of events	Average attendance per event
Bank Ready	42	25
Bank Savvy	14	30
Business Ready	14	25
Startup Stories	12	34
Small scale farming	9	33
Other	7	19
Business Edge	4	13
Profit Ready	4	30
Communicate	3	10
All face-to-face single-night events	109	26

The program **continued to reach new farmers** who had not participated in the program before. 63% of young farmers and fishers who attended events in 2020 and 2021 were attending a Young Farmer events for the first time.

The program reached **young** farmers and fishers. 77% of event attendees were within the target audience for the program (aged 18-35). 19% of attendees were aged 36 or above, and 3% were aged 17 or less.

The program had a **wide geographic reach and consistently engaged young farmers in all locations**. The program delivered at least five events in all LLS regions aside from Greater Sydney. The program delivered two or more events in all regions in 2018/19 and 2019/20 aside from the North Coast. Implementation was disrupted by COVID in the final year of the program, but the team still delivered events in all regions aside from Hunter. Table 3 shows how the program consistently engaged farmers and fishers in all regions at least once per year, with small exceptions.

Table 3 Number of single-night events held per year, by LLS region (note: conferences and farm tours excluded from this data)

LLS Region	2017 /18	2018 /19	2019 /20	2020 /21	Total
Central West	3	10	3	10	26
Riverina		10	2	1	13
North West	1	3	3	3	10
Western		2	4	3	9
Central Tablelands	1	2	3	2	8
North Coast	4	3		4	11
Hunter	2	3	2	3	10
South East	1	2	3	1	7
Murray		3	2	1	6
Northern Tablelands		2	2	1	5
Greater Sydney			1	3	4
Online			6	18	24
Total	12	40	31	50	132

This region with the most concentrated reach was **the Central West** LLS region, with 26 events held. The region with the second highest number of events was Riverina with 13. Program staff indicated the focus on this region was partly due to the program’s use of networks: the existing networks for the program team were based the region where they lived.

“We are Central West dominated. So could we have achieved more in the North and South of the state if we had better networks in those regions.” – Program team member

The program **reached many small towns across the state**. The program delivered single-night events in 65 different locations, in addition to online events that were accessible by anyone with internet access. Figure 1 illustrates the number of different locations where events were held.



Figure 1 Location of single-night events

Events consistently **received highly positive feedback from attendees**. Overall, 69% of event attendees indicated they highly valued the event (that is, rated it six or higher on a scale of 1 – 7). This was consistent for all events, with the most positive feedback coming from Business Edge and the Conference, and even the lowest rated event receiving highly positive feedback from 61% of respondents. Table 4 shows the rates of highly positive feedback for the different types of events.

Table 4 Number of attendees who highly valued the event (rated it 6 or higher out of 7)

Event type	Highly valued the event
Business Edge: Young guns	81%
Conference	80%
Small Business Week	77%
Special one-off events	72%
Business School	72%
Profit Ready	70%
Startup Stories	70%
Business Ready	67%
Bank Savvy	64%
Bank Ready	61%
All events	69%

The program also **delivered podcasts** for young farmers. The high number of listens suggests that young farmers value the podcasts. The program has released 34 podcast episodes for a combined total of 21,000 listens so far. Figure 2 shows that the podcasts were consistently reached 1,000 listens per month since the first series was released in February 2020 following the young farmers conference. The program released new series in June 2020 and February 2021, which directly targeted succession planning and a new season is on getting into farming *without* a family farm was launched in June 2021.

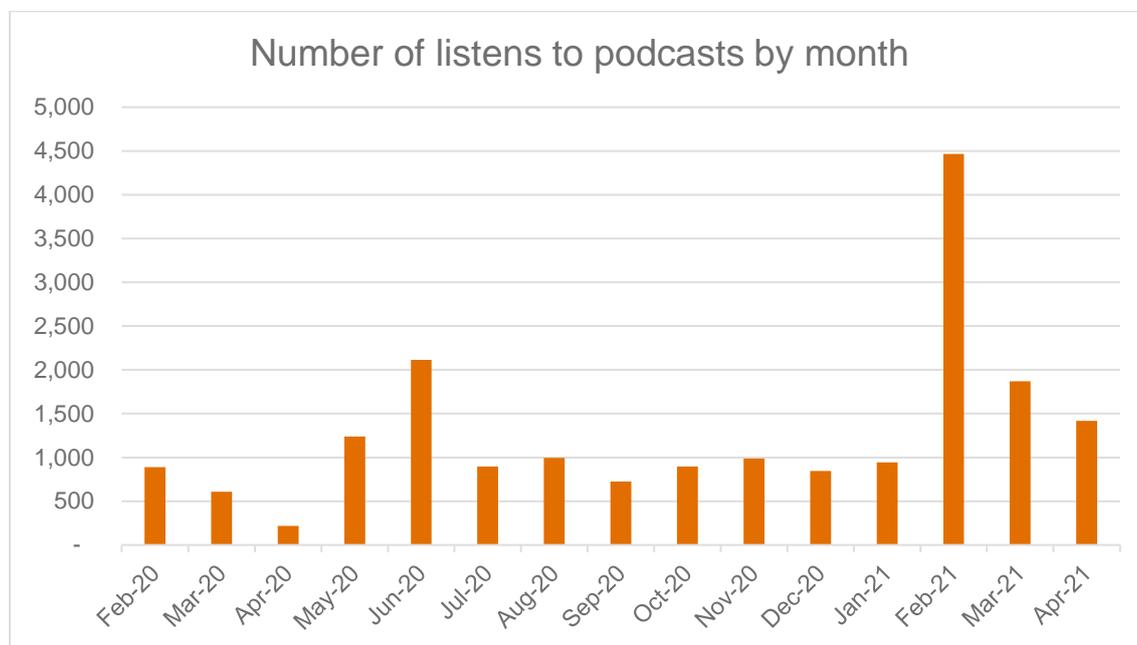


Figure 2 Number of listens to podcasts by month (all podcasts)

The program has delivered activities for young farmers in different farming situations. The program has delivered events and resources targeted at on-farm young farmers, aspiring young farmers and fishers, and those working on a family farm (see Table 5).

Table 5 Activities targeted towards young farmers in different farming situations

Current farming situation	Activities targeted to this audience
Own or lease a farm (19%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individual coaching program
Aspiring young farmers (81%) (all those who do not own or lease a farm)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bank Ready Farming without a family farm podcast series
Working on a family farm (33%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate Succession podcast series and resources

Current farming situation	Activities targeted to this audience
All young farmers and fishers (100%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conference • Startup Stories • Business Ready • Bank Savvy • Propagate podcast series and numerous toolkits • Externally subsidised courses

Program delivery was **limited around succession planning for those on a family farm**. Advisory committee members indicated that the largest gap in the program was around succession planning. While the program delivered a succession planning podcast targeted towards young farmers on a family farm, this activity was delivered late in the program, and it is presumed that podcasts are less effective than events or individualised coaching (there was little evidence of outcomes from podcasts available for this evaluation). The program also piloted ‘Communicate’ events for this group unsuccessfully.

Program delivery had **limited success reaching young fishers**. This was mainly due to the small cohort of young fishers (interviewees suggested there were less than 100 fishers under 35 in all NSW), the need for the program team to prioritise the largest groups, and the limited program team experience with fishing. Young fishers were invited to events along the coast, and fishers participated in the individual coaching program. However, there were no events or courses targeted directly towards fishers until the final six months of the program, when a coaching course for fishers was subsidised.

Program delivery was focused upon generic farming with limited scope to target specific industries. Events for small-scale farmers and a course for dairy farmers were delivered in the final six months of the program. Before this time, events such as Startup stories spoke about a specific industry but were relevant and aimed towards young farmers in all industries. Four team members said that the team was unable to meet the needs of fishers and small-scale farmers for most of the program period, and that the specialisation required to meet the needs of these groups was limited due to the size of the program team.

“[The opportunity for improvement is to have] another staff member. They would be in a coordinator role, and we would get them to focus on fishing and small-scale farmers. These are two areas we are not addressing much but would like to more. Anecdotally the needs of fishers are different to some of the programs we are offering, so our content does not transfer straight across.” – Program team (2020)

The program has been **most successful at meeting the needs of beginners in business**. The ‘Getting Started’ series of single-night workshops (Bank Ready, Business Ready, Startup Stories) were all aimed towards young farmers and fishers who lacked experience with banks or business plans. 43% of attendees indicated they learned new information at the events for the first time.

“I haven’t been into a bank in over 3 years. I’ve never had a loan... So it was a good to learn how to approach several banks and find the best loan and a bank manager that actually understands where you want to go to.” – Young farmer

By meeting the needs of beginners, some of these program events were not **useful for young farmers and fishers who were more advanced in business**. 31% of event attendees indicated they did not learn anything new at the events they attended. However, these events could still benefit young farmers

and fishers by reinforcing existing knowledge and networking. Many interviewees said that while the event was introductory, it reinforced their existing knowledge. Program events also provide secondary benefits such as networking to all attendees regardless of prior knowledge.

The program also **delivered events that were for those more advanced in business**. One such event was Bank Savvy, which has successfully met the needs of an audience with an intermediate knowledge in business. Bank Savvy covered more advanced topics such as vendor finance and leasing farms, and had the highest rate of attendees learning new things out of all single-night events.

“I got plenty out of it as it gave me clarity on vendor finance and lots of information for when to look for loans.” – Young farmer

What did we learn about young farmers and fishers?

KEY FINDING

The program has gained a greater understanding about the different clusters of young farmers and fishers, identifying 19% of program participants as having established their own business and the remaining 81% aspiring to manage their own business in the future. This group includes one third of participants who currently work on a family farm. Each of these groups have specific needs that the program sought to meet. Each of these clusters have different needs that were met by the program to differing degrees.

The evidence collected illustrates a lot about young farmers in NSW. Figure 3 shows the farming situation of young farmers who attended events:

Only **19% of young farmers** and fishers **manage a business**, that is, own or lease a farm. Young farmers and fishers in this situation were able to implement new skills and knowledge around budgeting, staff management, and business models straight away. Farms owned by these young farmers were typically new, small and did not produce enough income to support a couple. It was common for young farming couples to have one partner working on-farm and another working off-farm.

The inverse is that **81% of young farmers are aspiring** to own or manage a farming business in the future, but do not do so in the present. For most young farmers, advice for on-farm business management cannot be implemented immediately. In most cases the information was preparing them for the future or guiding them to take small steps towards business ownership. These farmers are not classified as primary producers under the NSW Government definition, so therefore are not eligible for much of the government support available.

A large group (17%) of young farmers work in non-farming jobs— such as in a school or office – but hope to move into farming in the future. Many of these farmers are saving funds so they can acquire farmland and searching for opportunities to buy small plots of land.

33% of young farmers are working on a family farm. This group had some capacity to take on and implement new knowledge and skills gained through the program depending on the dynamics on their family farm. Succession planning is relevant for this group of farmers, which often requires negotiating with other siblings and family members about how to split the assets.

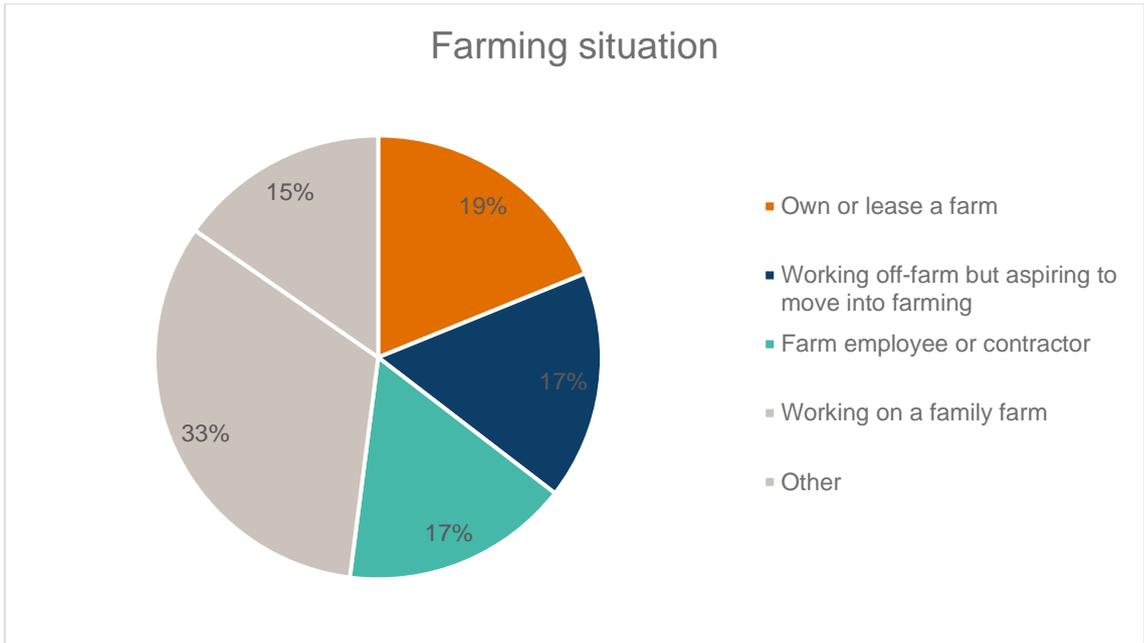


Figure 3 Farming situation of event attendees (n=1753)

A large group of young farmers were **beginners in business**. Two program team members explained how the first ‘Getting Started’ series of single-night events (*Bank Ready, Business Ready*) was initially pitched at too high a level and had to be brought back to basics. The *Getting Started* series has continued to receive strong attendance during the life of the program – consistently receiving 25 attendees per event.

“I haven’t been into a bank in over 3 years. I’ve never had a loan... So it was a good to learn how to approach several banks and find the best loan and a bank manager that actually understands where you want to go to.” – Young farmer

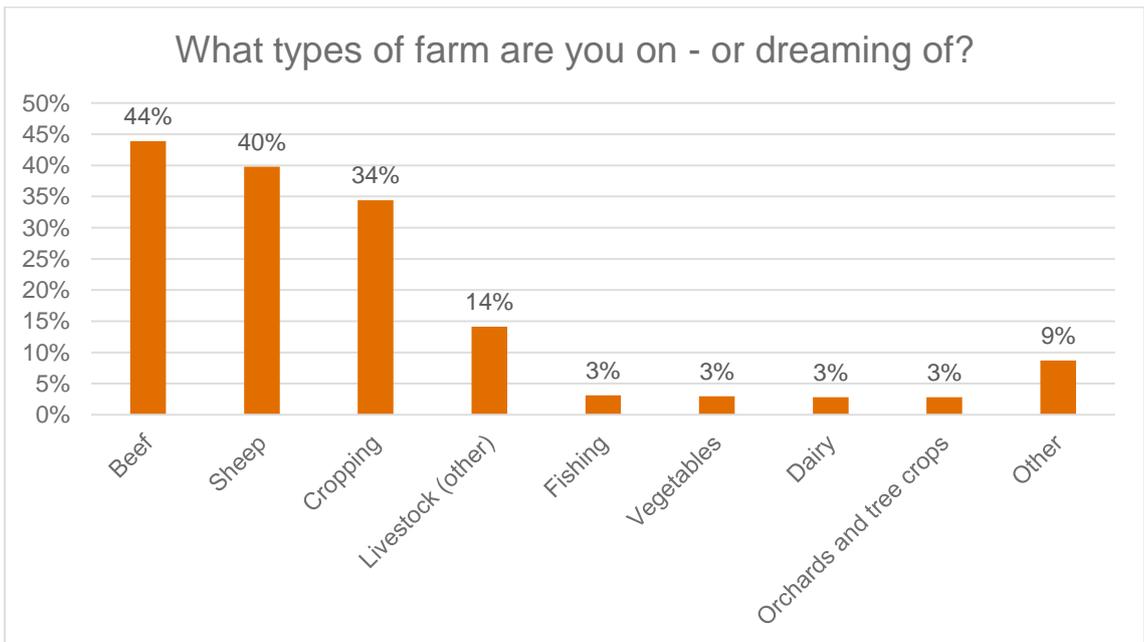


Figure 4 Preferred industry of aspiring young farmers (n=4,048)

Which methods for engaging young farmers and fishers worked well?

KEY FINDING

The program found that the local champion model for organising single-night events worked well. They also found that personalised business Facebook profiles were the best way to communicate with the audience, and relatability was key to all successful engagement.

The **'local champion' model** (see box below) for identifying and delivering events worked well. The program consistently delivered events with 30 or more attendees, even in regional locations and when events had already been delivered in previous years. Two team members said that the local champion model works well as a customer-centered delivery mechanism because:

- It **leveraged the buy-in** of interested individuals by only delivering events that young farmers ask for. One subcontractor spoke of the importance of localised needs: the needs of farmers change significantly across the state, and the events are responsive to those needs.
- It **leveraged the local networks** of interested individuals to get other people to attend events. All program team members said this model of promoting the event through word-of-mouth of young farmers and local networks was more effective than targeted promotions from the program.
- events were at **convenient times** based on the availability of local young farmers.

The 'local champion' model

The program identifies and delivers events using a 'local champion' model which follows the steps below:

1. The program promotes the different single-night events available through the website, and asks young farmers to express interest in an event
2. An interested young farmer reaches out to the team and says "Hi, can you run a Bank Ready event here?"
3. The program team member says "Yes we can, but we don't know anyone from your area, can you tell all your mates? We need 15-20 people to be keen for an event to happen."
4. The interested young farmer champions the event to others in their local area, raising awareness and getting commitment to attend from others through Facebook and word-of-mouth
5. The local champion and the program team decide on a date which suits the attendees and help cater the event to local needs.

*"Maybe there is footy training on Thursday, and band practice on Tuesday, so we do Wednesday. Maybe we can't do a November event because of harvest." –
Program team member*

Successful events were almost always run in a **casual setting** that young farmers were familiar with and comfortable, such as a local pub. Two program team members said that events needed to be in locations within the comfort zone of young farmers.

“If they are out of their comfort zone they shut down. We had a workshop in a Town Hall, it was too formal, and we had low engagement. The same workshop ran at a pub the following year had heaps of engagement.” – Program team member

Events were always run during **weeknights in the evening**. Two members of the program team explained that daytime events consistently had low engagement – even short lunchtime Zoom events – and local champions almost never nominated events on the weekend. One team member explained that this was the same for posting to social media – posts in the evening always received the most engagement.

“Engaging young farmers on the weekends are impossible. Mostly because they only have one day off a week, they are at the pub or the footy. Weekend stuff is really challenging.” – Program team member

The best way to engage with young farmers was through **Facebook**, and Instagram to a lesser extent. Young Farmers found out about the program and program activities through Facebook (52%) and word of mouth (28%). The program team emphasised that Facebook allows young farmers to see who is contacting them, unlike in a text message. Email and Twitter were not effective means to communicate with young farmers and fishers.

“We message people on Facebook or Instagram before the workshops. If we text, they don’t recognise the number and won’t respond. Facebook is different because they can see who is speaking to them. They don’t use email at all.” – Program team member

Personalised Facebook business profiles were the best means of talking to young farmers and fishers on Facebook. Two team members explained that personalised business profiles worked well because young farmers wanted to feel they were speaking to a person rather than an organization. Both interviewees said that while people often reached out to the program Facebook page for first contact, they almost always messaged the personalised business profile in later communication. The team has also created an alias profile which allows young farmers to message in individual even if that member is no longer a part of the program team.

“I have an Alex McDonald profile – an alias who runs the page. Because [the former team leader] is in the photo they address their messages to Alex. We all respond as Alex. It works because we are all logged into the account, so we can all see the messages and take turn responding without referring them onto others.” – Program team member



Tim Flynn Yfbp

Young Farmer Business Program Coordinator!!

Figure 5 Personalised Facebook business profile for one team member

The program team emphasized **relatability** during all communications and events. One team member explained that all team members and facilitators – including accountants and other guest speakers – were required to speak at length about their farming background and relate to the audience. Young farmers were much more likely to approach with someone they already knew and could relate to. Events were less successful if the speakers were unable to relate to the audience.

“We establish trust with the audience. The content is scripted to develop trust between the audience and facilitator... Relatability is also important – all the presenters need to tell a story about their association with farming. Often, they have a block on the edge of town, or they grew up in a farming family. The young farmer project team do that as well at the workshops. We are not a government employee: One member has pigs, another is from a farming family, I am from a farming family.” – Program team member

The program team learned that they **cannot assume young farmers will realise the value in great programs**, even if they were highly successful and relevant to their needs. Two members highlighted that the individual coaching program had fantastic outcomes for all participants and was high value for money. However, the program struggled to attract applicants. The first round of coaching had seven applications, and the second round had four applications. The program team developed a marketing campaign for the third round, which emphasised the importance and value of coaching and the relatability of the business coach. This marketing campaign was much more successful, and the program team received 43 applications.

“We did a really targeted marketing campaign. We really looked at it from a marketing perspective: what are the barriers: they might not see value in coaching as a concept, they did not know the presenter, and did not understand coaching. So, we addressed each of these: we interviewed Nigel Kieren and got him to speak for two minutes about the value of business coaching at the conference; we got the coach to do a video telling them about him; and I did a video stepping out how to apply and what the program would look like. We really focused on pumping that out. Other times we probably relied on whipping something up and assuming ‘this is a great program and young farmers will see value in it.’” – Program team member

The team also found that **young farmers liked binge-listening to podcasts**. The program has released 34 podcast episodes for a combined total of 21,000 listens so far. The program team stressed the importance of releasing the entire series at once to allow young farmers and fishers to binge the podcasts, rather than gradually releasing them week by week. Young farmers explained that podcasts were easy to consume, as they could download the podcasts and listen to them while doing fieldwork.

“A lot of people here and myself do podcasts while sitting on machines or tractors or while feeding sheep, because that’s what people here do all day every day- just sitting in the ute trailing grain out.” – Young farmer

Young farmers were **willing to share business information with others**. Two program team members said they were surprised at the openness and lack of secrecy of young farmers.

“One big thing I learned about young farmers is how open they are to other young farmers. I always had the perception in farming that ‘nobody tells anyone why what they are doing and why they are doing it’, there has always been a really secretive nature. But in the program I have realised that young farmers were really open to sharing with others and learning a lot from each other.” – Program team member

Reflecting this willingness to share, young farmers were **able to learn from each other** rather than relying on the older generation. Young farmers sharing information about their business became a key feature of the program, through the *Startup* stories, coaching, and conference farm tours.

“I thought they needed to learn from the older generations, but they are able to learn a lot from each other.” – Program team member

Young farmers and fishers were **open to learning about other industries**. Feedback on events suggested that young farmers preferred information and presenters that were catered to their industry. However, many young farmers and fishers took lessons from farmers in other industries that could be applied in their own. Six individual coaching participants explained that they had learned a lot from the other types of industries, and especially the common challenges and how they had responded.

“There’s always valuable things that come out of it that might not be the direct link to you making change, but it plants the seed that grows from there” – Young farmer

Which methods of engaging young farmers and fishers do not work?

KEY FINDING

The program learned that running competitions were often ineffective with this audience, and that workshops on broad topics like ‘Communication’ received low interest.

The program team trialled many new methods and approaches to engaging young farmers and fishers, some which were unsuccessful. The program team adapted to focus on what worked, but a list of engagements that did not work and reasons for them are below.

Group coaching was **unsuccessful when participants were in different farming situations**.

Participants in Group Coaching had different farming situations – some owned a business, some worked on a family farm, and some were employed outside of farming. The diverse audience made it difficult for the coaches to deliver fit-for-purpose content which met the needs of all participants. Six farmers and fishers said the Group Coaching course did not suit their situation. From this learning, the Advisory Committee discussed the importance of target courses to farmers in a specific situation to ensure they were fit-for-purpose.

Running competitions or offering prizes did not work well. The team struggled to run competitions or give out prizes such as business resources or conference tickets. One program team member was unable to explain why this was the case but suggested that young farmers did not like doing the activity required to be eligible for the prize, even if it was as simple as tagging a friend.

The **Communicate single-night events failed to attract young farmers**. The program piloted three ‘Communicate’ workshops in 2018 aimed at supporting difficult conversations about succession but had limited attendance (30 attendees across three workshops). One program team member indicated this was counterintuitive, because communication was a critical part of succession – which is relevant for 33% of young farmers who are working on a family farm. In addition, the outcomes from the workshop were positive – the Communicate workshop had higher levels of satisfaction than any other single-night event in 2018/19, and attendees applied many of the skills learned in the weeks following the workshop. Program staff suggested two reasons that this pilot was unsuccessful. One team member explained that they did not use the ‘local champion’ model, hence the lack of attendees. Another team member indicated that young farmers do not see the value in communication skills, despite the importance and positive outcomes (similarly to the challenges in promoting the coaching program).

“Young farmers don’t see the value in communication skills. They are obviously important, but you need to sell them subtly: package it in with something else, tell them

something about what they are in. Similarly to the conference: we had communication speakers who got great feedback, but if you run an event based on purely communication you won't get a crowd.” – Program team member

The team found that **asking for too many details on sign-up forms** for grants registrations was a barrier for many young farmers applying. Instead, the program team found that asking for a picture of their drivers' licence and ABN was effective; as it was quick and easy for young farmers, and it provided the team with everything they needed to know.

Subcontractors needed to be flexible with dates to meet the availability of young farmers. The 'local champion model' allows interested young farmers to set the date for single-night events according to the availability of the local community. One team member explained that events were unsuccessful if subcontractors provided a limited set of dates for delivering events.

Webinars did not work with Western LLS based young farmers. It may be intuitive to use online methods to target young farmers in the Western regions, as delivering face-to-face workshops required longer travel for both the facilitators and attendees. However, one team member explained that young farmers based in Western regions of the state had minimal online engagement due to low interest and ability to connect online.

“Webinars do not work when trying to target Western LLS young farmers. They will not even dial in. So if we tried to do a webinar on the mouse plague it would be useless, because those guys who are most affected will not be able to connect.” – Program team member

How has the program used evaluation and evidence to inform the design?

KEY FINDING

The team has successfully drawn upon evidence to inform the ongoing design and delivery of the program. This has been supported by a strong focus upon outcomes and evaluation, and clear strategic learning processes that allow for the team to draw upon evaluation evidence to inform strategic decisions about the program moving forward. This use of evidence is in line with best practice strategic learning and provides an example of how to implement a customer-centred program.

The focus upon outcomes and evidence has provided benefits to the program team. Two program team members highlighted the benefits from collecting outcomes data from participants.

“The dashboard and ongoing reporting have been invaluable. It has helped us talk about the value of the program, plus it has informed drought policy. Having all this evidence also shows the professionalism of the program. Evidence is embedded into program design and evaluation... all this evidence is valuable because it focuses on outcomes.” (Meeting notes with program team)

Using evidence for strategic learning

The evidence collected was **harnessed to inform ongoing decisions and deliver a customer-centred program**. The program had two clear learning processes with the second focused on strategic learning about the program design based on outcomes (these processes are explained below). Two program

team members and the advisory committee highlighted the use of evidence to inform learning as a strength of the program.

“[This program is a great example] in how to design and implement a client-centred program; how to design new pilots and manage programs based on data, how to be effective, and how to use evaluation to do things better... There has been a lot of best practices that other programs can learn from.” (Meeting notes with program team)

The learning processes were also in line with **best practice strategic learning** processes. The learning processes fit within the first two loops of the Triple-Loop² model for organisational learning, and they align with the Centre for Evaluation Innovation’s definition of strategic learning.

Strategic learning is the use of data and insights from a variety of information-gathering approaches—including evaluation—to inform decision making about strategy.³

The program had clear processes for **learning about implementation**; that is, learning about the quality of events on a continuous basis. The program team learned about implementation by attending events, speaking to young farmers and fishers who attended events, talking with event facilitators, and reviewing the feedback survey responses collected at the end of each event. All of the data that informed this learning was focused on *event quality and immediate outcomes* (whether participants had learned something new at events.)

The program also had clear processes for **learning about program design**: that is, learning about whether the program was creating the desired change, what was working, and what needed to change. The central process for learning was through triannual (three times a year) Advisory Committee meetings. This learning process was informed by data on *intermediate and long-term outcomes* (what actions people took following events, the impact of the program on them) and *the context*. The major data inputs were:

- Interviews with young farmers and fishers who had attended events or participating in case studies
- Evaluation reports and analysis against key design and inquiry questions
- Experience and perspectives of young farmers and fishers on the advisory committee

Figure 6 illustrates the two key learning processes and the different data that informed these processes.

² Tamarack Institute, Tool: Single, Double and Triple Loop Learning; retrieved from <https://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/hubfs/Events/Multi-Day%20Events/Community%20Change%20Institute%20-%20CCI/2017%20CCI%20Vancouver/Resources/Tool%20-%20Single%20Double%20Triple%20Loop%20Learning.pdf>

³ Center for Evaluation Innovation (2011). Evaluation to Support Strategic Learning: Principles and Practices; retrieved from <https://www.evaluationinnovation.org/publication/evaluation-to-support-strategic-learning-principles-and-practices/>

Strategic learning processes		Data that informed this learning
<p>Learning about implementation <i>'are we doing things right?'</i></p>	<p>Reviews after each event (continuous)</p>	<p>Event quality and immediate outcomes (what people learned at events), informed by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program team attending events and speaking to attendees and facilitators • Collecting feedback surveys at the end of events
<p>Learning about program design <i>'are we doing the right things?'</i></p>	<p>Triannual advisory committee meetings</p>	<p>Intermediate and long-term outcomes (what actions people took following events), informed by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation interviews with participants 6-8 weeks after they attended events, case study interviews • Analysis against key inquiry questions in evaluation reporting <p>Understanding of the context and issues affecting young farmers and fishers, informed by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience and perspectives of young farmers and fishers on advisory committee

Figure 6 Program strategic learning processes

Was the program implemented as intended?

KEY FINDING

Prior to March 2020 the program was **largely implemented as intended**, with 124 workshops delivered. The program has delivered a full breadth of activities in line with the original intent of the program.

The program has **successfully implemented a full suite** of events, subsidies, and resources, engaging young farmers in all activities and reaching thousands of young farmers and fishers in the process. The program has delivered 124 events, five coaching courses, two conferences, subsidised three external courses, and developed resources including three podcast series and eight toolkits. In total, these activities reached over 4,000 participants and received over 30,000 downloads or listens. A summary of the total program activities and reach is in Table 6.

Table 6 Summary of program activities and total reach

Activity type	Number of activities and total reach
Single-night events	124 events attended by over 4,000 participants
Coaching program	Three individual coaching courses with 12 participants Three group coaching courses with 41 participants
Young Farmers conference	Two conferences with 556 attendees* Six farm tours with 270 attendees*
Externally subsidised courses	21 external courses with 265 places subsidised
Resources	Three podcast series (34 episodes) with over 20,000 listens Eight toolkits with over 11,000 page views One website with over 140,000 page views

This **breadth of activities is in line with the original intent** of the program. The program logic, developed in September 2018, identified the key types of activities the program aimed to deliver. All have been delivered in some form (planned activities are listed in bold below):

- ✓ **Facilitate capacity building and knowledge exchange:** Over 120 events, five coaching courses, two conferences, 21 external courses, and multiple resources.
- ✓ **Shared network spaces:** Over 120 events and two conferences, including 102 face-to-face events.
- ✓ **Bespoke coaching/ mentoring:** six coaching courses, including three individual coaching courses.
- ✓ **Sharing success stories with peers:** 19 startup stories events and two conferences speaking about successful startups, video and blogs of all individual coaching participants and advisory committee members.
- ✓ **Provision of tools and resources:** eight toolkits, three podcast series.
- ✓ **Communications and marketing:** continued Facebook presence, consistent promotions of all events, average of 30 young farmers registering and attending each single-night event.

The program was able to **successfully scale up and add new events over time by subcontracting established events**. In the first year the program delivered 12 single-night events (11 of these were *Bank Ready*). In the second year the program team was able to pilot and deliver 40 events, including four new events (*Business Ready*, *Startup Stories*, *Bank Savvy* and *Communicate*).

Over time the program team was able to subcontract the delivery of established events such as *Bank Ready*, *Business Ready*, and *Startup Stories* to external providers, which allowed it to simultaneously deliver events to young farmers and fishers and develop and pilot new activities. Table 7 shows the number of single-night events delivered increased significantly once the new events had been developed, and remained consistent for the rest of the program. In addition to single-night events, the

bulk of other activities – including the two conferences, the externally subsidised courses, and the podcasts – were all delivered in the final two years of the program.

Table 7 Number of events and attendees, single-night events (note this excludes externally subsidised courses, conference and farm tours)

Financial year	Events	Attendees
2017/18	12	328
2018/19	40	1,043
2019/20	31	1,327
2020/21	42	1,386
Total	127	4,094

Piloting and developing new activities with a small program team presented a major challenge to implementation. The three-person program team oversaw and managed an increasing number of subcontractors and activities as the program progressed, which constrained the time available to design and pilot new activities. This resulted in many activities being developed late in the program’s lifetime: most externally subsidised courses, and specific workshops dedicated to fishers and small-scale farmers were delivered in the final six months of the program. Three team members said that developing and delivering any new activities was challenging with the number of program staff.

“We have a lot of funds and great ideas, but not the time and resources to execute them all.” – Program team

While the program was able to successfully outsource the delivery of many established programs, **finding new subcontractors became increasingly difficult**. Midway through the program the team had contracted, or were in discussion with, most suitable organisations operating in NSW, and there was limited capacity for the existing subcontractors to deliver additional workshops. Two program team members said that finding new subcontractors to deliver events had become challenging, and the team struggled to find a contractor to deliver *Business Ready* in the later part of the program.

“The representative bodies are doing a great job, but we have run out of groups! I would not want to give them more workshops. I think they are doing a great job at the current level.” – Program team

How did the program respond to the contextual challenges (drought, bushfires, and COVID)?

KEY FINDING

Implementation was significantly affected by COVID-19 as the program could no longer run face-to-face workshops. However, the program adapted to this challenge by successfully introducing online workshops and thereby reaching a significant number of young farmers remotely. Interviews with

participants suggest that outcomes from online workshops were similar to those from face-to-face workshops, with the exception of outcomes relating to networking and social connections.

The program team **considered the impact of drought when pricing activities**. The original program business case recognised that finance was the largest barrier facing young farmers and fishers, followed by a lack of financial and business management experience. With the business case written in 2017 as the drought intensified, the capacity for farmers and fishers to pay was further constrained. Two team members said that young farmers had limited capacity to pay for events, and the program team considered this when pricing single-night events, subsidising courses, and coaching.

“This is a drought-stricken audience. We were very conscious of this – what is a realistic price for someone in drought right now? What are young farmers and fishers able and willing to pay, at a time when training yourself is seen as a luxury? We were conscious of that. It has led to conservative pricing in response to the drought conditions.” – Program team (2019)

The program **maintained its strategic purpose as a drought preparedness program**, focusing on preparedness while acknowledging the impact of drought and bushfires on young farmers and fishers. The severity of drought and bushfires which occurred between 2017 and 2021 saw many government activities dedicated to drought response and recovery, but this program maintained its focus on the long-term drought preparedness rather than shift focus to immediate response and recovery.

“This is not a drought response program. [The program] is about increasing the preparedness of the sector to be able to handle drought, increase their ability to assess risks, and the maintain financial stability. [Drought preparedness and resilience] does effectively underpin the whole program. We are aiming to create the next generation of farmers and fishers who are more robust in going into times of adversity, so potentially they don’t even need the government to respond to it.” – Program team

COVID-19 and online events

Program implementation was **significantly affected by COVID-19**. All face-to-face activities, including the single-night events, were postponed due to lockdown restrictions. However, the program team **adapted to deliver events online**. The program delivered 24 online single-night events, with the majority (22) delivered in 2020.

Online events received significantly higher attendance compared to face-to-face events. The average event registrations for online events exceeded 35, compared to 26 for face-to-face events. This was mainly due to greater accessibility for attendees. Online events could be attended by young farmers and fishers across all regions of NSW, whereas face-to-face events were generally only accessed by people within 100km of the venue.

Online and face-to-face events received **similar feedback in terms of knowledge and perceived value**. Table 8 shows that workshop feedback for both types of events was consistent, and there was not a statistically significant difference in the responses between the two event types. This indicates that online events were delivered to a quality and manner consistent with the traditional face-to-face events.

Table 8 Comparison of workshop feedback for face-to-face and online events, 2020 and 2021

Category	Face-to-face	Online
Highly likely to do something different (n=1,023)	51%	53%
Highly valued the workshop (n=1,124)	68%	61%
Significantly improved business knowledge (n=1,122)	43%	41%

However, **online events were less effective at creating networks and a feeling of belonging** compared to face-to-face events. Two members of the program team said this was expected, as face-to-face events provide more opportunity to talk to others before, during, and after the event. Table 9 shows that attendees of face-to-face events were much more likely to meet someone new or reconnect with an old friend compared to online events.

Table 9 Comparison of networking outcomes for event attendees, face-to-face and online events

Prompt	Face-to-face	Online
I have met someone new	60%	40%
I have reconnected with someone I know	50%	24%
I didn't talk to anyone	6%	32%
I am going to catch up with someone from this event again in the near future	32%	28%

How efficient was use of resources?

KEY FINDING

Program delivery was **efficient due in part to outsourcing specific activities and events** to independent subcontractors. Most of these subcontractors were industry associations or volunteer-run organisations that must be efficient to remain viable. Other subcontractors offer specialised coaching services which could not be delivered by the program team. However, the program team experienced the process for engaging new subcontractors challenging due to the requirements of government procurement processes. There were also a small number of inefficiencies when multiple subcontractors were required to collaborate on individual tasks or projects. Finally the externally subsidised courses were expensive.

Program delivery was efficient due to the practice of subcontracting established events to an external organisation. Some of these events – such as Individual Coaching and Group Coaching – are most efficient when delivered externally as the program team can engage **specialist contractors** – such as business coaches – to deliver a fit-for-purpose service to young farmers and fishers. Other events – such as *Bank Ready* and *Startup Stories* – are subcontracted to **industry associations and volunteer-based organisations** which must be efficient to remain viable. In total, more than 60 single-night events were delivered by industry associations or volunteer-based organisations.

The process of **engaging new subcontractors was inefficient** due to the requirements of government procurement processes. These procurement processes are a necessary component of all government programs and outside the control of the program team. However, these requirements have a disproportionate effect on the program due to the large reliance upon subcontractors. The program team rated the efficiency of the process for finding new contractors as three out of five, where 1 is very inefficient and 5 is very efficient.

“Getting a new contractor is a lengthy process, this is a challenge for the program. It might take 3 months to get a keynote speaker” – Program team

The **ongoing management of existing contractors was efficient**. Once a subcontractor had been engaged, they could deliver their commitment with minor support from the program team. The program team rated the efficiency of the process for ongoing management of existing subcontractors as four out of five, where 1 is very inefficient and 5 is very efficient. In addition, three subcontractors rated the efficiency of their engagement with the program team at least a 4 out of five. All highlighted the responsiveness from the program team as a strength.

“Once we have a good relationship it is smooth sailing, we just play a minor supporting role.” – Program team

There were some cases of **inefficiency when multiple subcontractors were required to collaborate** on individual tasks or projects. This occurred mainly during the conference, which was the largest single event the program ran and required the greatest number of subcontractors. Three team members said that having multiple subcontractors on single projects was complex.

“Multiple subcontractors in similar projects leads to unnecessary complexity. For example, the marketing and PR for the conference... effectively there were five stakeholders complicating what could be a very simple process.” – Program team

The **externally subsidised courses were expensive**. One team member highlighted how the externally subsidised courses required a considerable cost to the program (the program often covered 90% of the course costs).

To what extent did the program contribute to improved capacity of industry groups?

KEY FINDING

The program contributed to the capacity of subcontracted organisations by engaging them to deliver established events such as *Bank Ready* and *Startup Stories*. Through delivering these events, subcontractors have expanded their networks and learnt more about opportunities available for their members, gained internal stability, and incorporated the feedback from young farmers to inform their internal decision-making and policy development. This improved capacity will further benefit young farmers and fishers in the future because these subcontractors – including NSW Young Farmers and Future Farmers Network – have organisational missions aligned to supporting young people in agriculture.

Single-night events are subcontracted to organisations such as NSW Farmers and Future Farmers Network which have **organisational missions aligned to supporting young people in agriculture**. These relationships are mutually beneficial because it allows each party to harness the other's networks and support each other to build the capacity of young farmers and fishers. For example, the money paid to subcontractors will be reinvested towards these shared objectives rather than contributing towards corporate profits. Across the program more than 40 events were subcontracted to these organisations.

Subcontractors were able to leverage their experience to inform **their internal decision-making and policy development**. Three subcontractors explained that the face-to-face engagement with young farmers and fishers allowed their organisations to stay in touch with the needs and issues facing young farmers and fishers. |

“[The most significant change has been] informing our policies. By having us there, facilitating, and really engaging with young farmers in those workshops, we can hear firsthand about the challenges for young farmers, and we can feed this back into our internal policies.” – Subcontractor

Subcontracted industry groups have benefitted from **access to the opportunities and networks** provided by the program. The program offers a suite of events, coaching, and grants, and has an established network with different organisations, programs, and services both within and outside government. Two subcontractors indicated that involvement with the program allowed them to develop networks, making them aware of the services available and **connecting their members with these services**.

“[This involvement] gives us exposure to DPI and opens up other doors. Our networking [through these events] allows us to become more familiar with who is doing what, and then we are able to point people in different directions. Being able to connect people to opportunities is pretty much the core of our organisation.” – Subcontractor

Subcontracted volunteer-based organisations have benefitted from the **stability** and income provided by the program. The financial certainty provided by 12-month contracts allow organisations to plan and act towards their **long-term strategic interests** rather being limited to a short-term focus. Two subcontractors said that the 12-month contracts provided stability for themselves, which created additional benefits to continuity and strategic planning of volunteer-based organisations.

“The continuity is the biggest change for us... You cannot undersell the benefits to our planning and strategy. Financial certainty for a [volunteer-based organisation] is not easy to come by.” – Subcontractor

3 Conclusion

The program has achieved its mandate to build the drought preparedness of young farmers by improving their business skills knowledge, and networks. This has contributed to young farmers and fishers taking steps to improve the viability and profitability of their businesses. Drought preparedness (or business planning for fishers) underpins all these steps – from approaching banks, developing business plans, and managing the business day-to-day, young farmers are preparing their business to remain viable in a drought-affected future.

The program catered for the different situations of young farmers and fishers. Coaching was most appropriate for the minority of young farmers who own and manage their own business. This coaching resulted in the most outstanding outcomes from the program. The single-night events and resources were directed towards the majority (81%) of aspiring young farmers that attended events but do not own their own business, and the outcomes for this group were focused on steps towards owning a business in the future.

There is strong evidence that the individual coaching program should continue with all participants benefitting from this tailored approach. Furthermore, continued demand from young farmers suggests the single-night workshops are still relevant. The program has developed important intellectual property – such as networks and knowledge of how to engage with young farmers – which can be leveraged for a future program.

4 Recommendations

The following recommendations were developed from the findings above and discussed with the program advisory committee.

- **Continue the program:** The program has delivered on its mandate to improve drought preparedness, the relevance of which has been demonstrated by the recent drought. There is strong demand from young farmers and fishers for more events, and the existing networks and knowledge mean the program team is well-positioned to continue efficiently.

There are three sub-recommendations related to continuing the program:

- **Maintain the individual coaching program:** A coaching program tailored around young farmers in similar farming situations (owning or leasing a small farm, hoping to grow in the future) will be more fit-for-purpose than coaching programs open to farmers of all ages. In addition, young farmers will be more willing to share and participate with others like them rather than older and more experienced farmers on larger operations.
- **Develop an offer to support succession.** Support to navigate the dynamics of succession is the largest gap in the program offerings and outcomes related to succession were limited. Succession planning is a complex process relevant to a significant number of young farmers which involves more than business skills – it also requires an understanding of family dynamics and the different ways succession can occur. The program team has built the relationships, networks and understanding of young farmers to be in a position to develop an offer for a problem of this complexity.
- **Stop or reconsider subsidising external courses:** Externally subsidised courses are a significant cost for the program. However, the long-term benefits from designing and delivering a course– such as the ability to replicate the course in the future for a lower cost or networking and learning about young farmers and fishers through their engagement with the program – accumulate to external providers rather than the program team.
- **Consider how to further improve attitudes towards networking:** The program provides substantial space for young farmers and fishers to network, and most develop connections. There is an opportunity to maximise the value of this network by encouraging participants to follow the example of those few that significantly expand and purposefully draw upon these connections to a major extent.
- **Consider how the learnings about engagement can be incorporated into other programs:** The program team has tested and refined many methods for engaging with young farmers. These methods and learnings could be incorporated into other areas of the department in line with the goal to deliver customer-centric programs.
- **Consider how the evaluation and learning processes can be replicated in other programs:** The program has successfully integrated evaluation into ongoing design and delivery of the program, which provides a case study in strategic learning and implementing an outcomes-focused, customer-centred program.

A new NSW DPI program has been developed under the Future Drought Fund, which has similarities to the coaching under this program. The evaluation team has highlighted some considerations for the new program:

- **Develop a recruitment campaign:** The program team faced challenges recruiting young farmers and fishers to apply for the individual coaching program, despite the significant outcomes for participants. In addition, young farmers indicated that being in drought at the time made them more willing to apply. Learnings from the final (successful) recruitment campaign can be leveraged for the new program.
- **Consider how group sessions will work for participants in different farming situations:** Consider the likely different farming situations of older farmers and how that will impact the group aspects of the program. All individual coaching participants were at similar stages – young, limited debt, relatively new to ownership and managing a small business – and the program has had significant outcomes. Group Coaching was unsuccessful when participants were in different farming situations, as the diversity hindered the group dynamics and made it difficult for coaches to deliver fit-for-purpose content.
- **Consider how to deliver coaching to farmers who are not tech-savvy or connected to internet:** All individual coaching participants were young, tech-savvy, connected to the internet, and able to access and interact during weekly online coaching sessions. However, other farmers may be less technology-literate or be based in parts of regional NSW with limited online access.

5 Appendix 1 Theory of Change

