

*Owning our future*



# Inquiry into Retaining Young People in Rural Towns and Communities

A submission to

Regional Services and Development Committee of  
the Parliament of Victoria

by

The National Council of Young Farmers

2006

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## Introduction

This submission has been compiled by the National Council of Young Farmers (the Council) for the inquiry into Retaining Young People in Rural Towns and Communities for the Regional Services and Development Committee of the Parliament of Victoria.

The issue of retaining young people in rural towns and communities is of significant national interest across Australia, affecting long term sustainability and prosperity. The inquiry's highly relevant to the Council as the

term of reference corresponds with aspects of the Council work-plan, in particular, focusing on young people in rural business establishment, training and development and promoting positive image of rural Australia, especially in relation to agriculture, fisheries and forestry.

The Council compiled 5 questions which were designed to address the terms of reference of this inquiry and provide additional information for Council work-plan items. Individual submissions were also encouraged.

In the absence of a definition of 'rural' or 'young people' in the call for submissions, we have used the age range of 18-35; and the term rural/regional to cover small towns and communities, including regional centres.

The submission contains responses from 52 individuals (aged 18-35) currently living in, moved from or to rural/regional Victoria. Also incorporated into the discussion points are collective opinions from general discussions and factors identified at the 2005 National Young Farmers Forum (NYFF).

The submission does not attempt to provide all solutions to all the issues identified as the Council is still developing their strategies and focus. However the submission does highlight the factors that the Council sees as important to retaining young people in rural Australia.

## The National Council of Young Farmers

*“The National Council of Young Farmers (Council) provides a communication channel between young rural people and the stakeholders of agriculture, fisheries and forestry. Council members, like many young rural people, are focused on delivering long term solutions, as they have the most to win, and lose from the decisions made today” –The inaugural National Council of Young Farmers, February 2006*

The aim of the Council is to provide young rural Australians (18-35) with a powerful, ongoing and direct voice in Canberra. The Council reports directly to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Peter McGauran and to the Government on issues and opportunities facing young people involved in Australia’s agriculture, fisheries and forestry sectors. The Council aims to improve access to Government and industry by young people keen to make a positive contribution; and to represent the young people in agriculture, fisheries and forestry industries.

The National Young Farmers Council members are:

- **Bernard Baxter**, dairy farmer, Cobden, Victoria
- **Michelle Croker**, agricultural marketing consultant, Tamworth, NSW
- **Colin de Grussa**, grains and sheep farmer, Esperance, Western Australia
- **Benjamin Jowett**, agribusiness development manager, East Hawthorn, Victoria
- **Phillip Kerr**, seafood industry R&D and training expert, Warrnambool, Victoria
- **Moira O’Brien**, cattle farmer, Mataranka, Northern Territory
- **Ashley Ratcliff**, viticulturalist, Angaston, South Australia
- **Paula Sheehan**, forester, Albury, NSW
- **Frances Warwick**, wool and sheep farmer, Carrieton, South Australia
- **Richard Wright**, cotton grower, Moree, NSW
- **Matthew Young**, horticulturalist, East Sassafras, Tasmania
- **Gregory Zillman**, beef feed-lot manager, Dalby, Queensland

## National Young Farmers Forum 2005

The National Young Farmers Forum (NYFF) was held in Canberra over two days in September 2005. One hundred people involved in rural industries, aged between 18 and 35, were invited to discuss issues affecting rural and regional Australia and were given the opportunity to develop strategies to address these issues.

Australian Government Ministers, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry officers and industry leaders challenged participants to think of constructive actions that could improve the performance and position of their industries. The event also provided the opportunity for young people to meet and network with influential people within agriculture, fisheries and forestry industries.

Throughout the Forum it was agreed that the main priority for agriculture, fisheries and forestry industries should be developing and refining:

*An economically viable and environmentally sustainable rural and regional Australia that attracts and fosters strong communities into the future.*

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The council surveyed young people aged 18-35 and asked them “how would you attract/retain young people in rural/regional Victoria?” The three most common replies were: Career opportunities, lifestyle and relationships.

52% of our individual respondents left rural Victoria for various reasons (see Question 1) and of those 75% have/are planning to return. It was felt by the Council that this unexpected finding could be used to highlight the opportunities that exist in rural/regional Victoria, especially for those individuals with the drive and motivation to succeed. The factors affecting ‘why they came back’ can be used to encourage more young people to consider careers/lifestyles based in rural Victoria (Australia).

*“I have returned to regional Victoria for work.”*

There are significant employment opportunities in rural/regional Victoria especially in the primary industry sectors like agriculture, forestry and fisheries. There is the potential for innovative and traditional business development and the flow on services required to maintain people, businesses and infrastructure.

It is however, crucial for rural and regional communities to attract and retain the people willing to give it a go.

*“We are pretty lucky in our town because there are is a vibrant agriculture industry which has the spin-offs of secondary services & support businesses. They bring in enough critical mass to support the schools, community groups, health care systems etc. There is no shortage of employment and people tend to return or stay around.”*

It is also crucial for active, visible, vocal, policy driven support for rural business and industries by federal, state and local Governments.

Whilst it has to be acknowledged that consumer demand and stakeholder pressure directly influence changes in government policies and resource use, primary industries are affected by what is deemed to be acceptable or preferred in the marketplace and through any associated changes in policy. As a consequence, state government Policies must be science based and focus on long-term strategies for sustainable resource use not a short-term grab for urban votes.

This gives way to a broader issue for rural industries – the need to communicate with the wider community. Effective communication needs to be a two-way process - informing the community of existing sustainable practices as well as taking on board community concerns so as to be more responsive to their needs (NYFF).

### **Recommendation 1 Promote Rural Industries and Rural Communities**

*“Promote a positive image of rural and regional Australia in order to attract people to rural industries and sustain the communities in which they operate.” NYFF*

There was a time when being a farmer, forester or fisher was seen as a noble profession, socially acceptable and even admired. However, broader community attitudes have changed.

Increasingly, there is a growing divide between urban and rural communities in Victoria along with other states and territories in Australia. It is common for Victorians living in the urban community (Melbourne) to believe that the rural community adds little value or negatively impacts on the sustainability of the state. Portraying a positive image of rural and regional Victoria is essential to ensure it remains a significant contributor to the state economy and for securing a strong workforce.

The fields of agriculture, forestry and fisheries are becoming increasing sophisticated, requiring a highly educated and skilled workforce. However falling student numbers at higher education institutions offering agriculture, forestry and fisheries courses suggests that fewer

people are interested in careers in these sectors. It maybe that young people aren't aware of the employment or career opportunities that exist within the sectors, or the sectors are not seen as desirable, rewarding or profitable or people do not want to live in rural/regional Australia.

This presents an opportunity for the state government to ensure that secondary school career advisors are informed and supportive of the many career opportunities within rural and regional Victoria. Our council members have heard numerous stories about careers advisors giving negative or giving discouraging feedback to students interested in pursuing a career in a rural industry.

As reported by The Agriculture and Food Policy Reference Group (AFPRG) "rural areas face significant problems securing permanent and casual labour" and the long term viability of the sector "will depend on securing both skilled and un-skilled labour at competitive rates."

The AFPRG report goes on to point out that although the agriculture sector cannot compete with higher salaried sectors or urban attractions; some of the rewards for working in rural areas are "likely to be non-financial, such as a healthy lifestyle and an opportunity to work outdoors".

Therefore, in order to meet the growing demand for labour, skilled and un-skilled, we need to promote the new and changing opportunities in agriculture, forestry and fisheries, encouraging the uptake of undergraduate places, traineeships and apprenticeships.

As discussed in the National Farmers Federation's 2005 *Labour Shortage Action Plan*, we need to "seek to change the current narrow perception of farm employment to a perception of opportunities throughout the Australian agricultural value chain both in Australia and internationally". The same can be said for forestry and fisheries.

While there are many opportunities to promote a positive image of rural and regional Australia, there is more that can be done by the Victorian government.

During the last 12 months, there has been significant expenditure on an advertising campaign promoting the state, its innovative businesses, and infrastructure developments. This could also provide the opportunity to promote innovative businesses within rural and regional Victoria, including businesses within the primary production industry and its value chain within rural/regional Victoria. The Victorian government has also to be commended on their recent advertising campaign promoting regional Victoria as a great place to live and raise a family.

A conscious effort is needed to ensure that promotional activities completed by the state government of Victoria include relevant content from rural and regional Victoria. This will assist to create a positive image in urban communities and reinforce the positive aspects within rural Victoria.

*"Sustainable resource use is increasingly becoming an indicator of any successful operation." NYFF*

There is also a need to raise awareness within urban and regional communities that primary producers are environmentalists and take seriously their responsibility of looking after the land and waterways on which they make a livelihood. Victorians need to understand that the vast majority of Victorian farmers, foresters and fishers are good custodians of the environment.

The reality of business in the global world requires ever increasing growth in production and productivity, whilst having minimal impact on the environment. Primary producers are embracing opportunities for increased energy efficiency and matching production to environmental conditions and capabilities.

In order to improve the sustainable resource use, image and business outcomes; individuals, privately owned industries and government agencies, need to work/invest co-operatively to take responsibility for their own environment and work force requirements.

Parks Victoria is working closely with farmers in weed and pest management and environmental sustainability. This is one example of where the state government could actively promote this excellent working relationship, leveraging the urban communities trust in Parks Victoria and using this to help promote the environmental focus of Victoria's primary producers.

There are also several federal government initiatives that are being introduced that the Victorian government could support. This includes the numerous recommendations made within the report by the Agriculture and Food Policy Reference Group. Implementation of the recommendations within this report would assist the sustainability of rural and regional communities within Victoria.

*“Innovation used to its full potential - creating farming systems and practices that are more profitable and sustainable” NYFF 2006*

The stereotypical image of rural people being iconic, salt-of-the-earth, battlers, fighting for every drop of rain is almost as damaging as the cartoon image of ignorant, old-fashioned and slow. The modern farmer, forester and fisher are innovative, educated, environmentally responsible and not looking for government hand-outs. They do want a business environment that encourages and rewards innovations and new business establishment; they do not want mountains of red-tape.

67% of our individual respondents said they were interested in or are involved in a rural business. Now we need to make the pathways for establishing those businesses as streamlined as possible.

The implementation of innovations by those involved in agriculture, fisheries and forestry is crucial in achieving more profitable and sustainable enterprises. The new businesses emerging with primary production as a focus, use the latest best practice models, satellite imagery, GPS technology, genome-mapping, software development to name a few.

The Victorian government can assist by promoting the programmes available to producers to access to innovations and use the innovations as a draw-card for people interested in cutting edge technology and exciting careers. In keeping rural industries at the forefront of advances in technology and innovative approaches, the sector will ensure that consumers are satisfied with production methods and the resulting end products, which may serve to alleviate potential conflicts between consumers and producers.

One example is that the Victorian government should immediately lift their moratoriums on the commercial use of GM crops and work with the Australian government, industry and researchers to achieve a nationally consistent traceability and tolerance protocols, and to clarify the legal liability surrounding the use of GM organisms in agriculture and food products. The state government has not taken the opportunity to promote the environmental and economic benefits of GMOs to Victorian consumers.

This initiative would provide the government with an excellent platform to positively promote rural Victoria. The lifting of moratoriums would support the Victorian government's public comments on promoting biotechnology, assist viability of primary producers within the state, and would provide an opportunity for the state government to promote the importance of this technology for Victorian rural businesses and assist to create a positive image of the industry.

## **Recommendation 2 Lifestyle and Community Cohesion**

*“Attract and fostering strong communities into the future”. NYFF*

*“Lifestyle is also very important as career alone without a satisfying lifestyle will not keep me here.”*

Lifestyle, as a factor of personal satisfaction is difficult to measure as it revolves around perception, individual experiences and expectations. The role of ‘the community’ be it local, regional or global, on an individuals level of satisfaction with their lifestyle is impossible to quantify. However what we do know from our surveys is that ‘lifestyle’ is an important component in the reasons why people still stay or return to rural/regional Victoria. A recent report by Mission Australia 2006 stated that “shared networks, norms, values and understandings, facilitate co-operation within and between groups”.

Community cohesion is not something that takes care of itself, especially in today’s fast paced, business focused, global orientated, era of economic rationalism. The 2006 Mission Australia report found that “those communities with strong networks are more likely to be more cohesive and thus better able to ‘bounce back’ from adversity” and that “social cohesion could provide a formidable ally to community renewal projects”.

The Victorian state and local governments could actively support and encourage programmes that do not necessarily revolve around sport.

Younger people, especially young professionals find it difficult to get involved in community groups when they are new to an area. They may work in rural places but go back to urban centres on weekends, in the long-run these individuals will return to the urban centres if there is nothing to anchor them to the rural town. There are many examples of successful community groups based on social not just professional networks eg. The Young Sheppartonians.

The employers of young people who have moved into an area for the work, need to take an active role in community cohesion and offer support, networks and assistance to their employees. This support may be as straight forward as helping get onto the books of the local doctor, finding suitable housing or child-care facilities or it may involve co-operative funding of a local network for younger workers that develop inter-business networks with a large component of social interaction that is not dominated by older men.

As the rural Australian community becomes less homogeneous, the communication of community expectations also needs to change. The message will only be understood, if it is delivered in a way the receiver can understand.

Small communities can sometimes be their own worst enemy, actively opposing change and intolerance of individual differences, preferences and new-comers, especially migrants. State and local governments are local business need to support change, be inclusive and reward community spirit.

### **Recommendation 3 Maximise Career Opportunities**

*“Worked for 18 months in Melbourne then returned to SW Victoria for work / relationship.”*

In the competitive labour market of today, we need to actively entice people to live and work in rural and regional Australia. As discussed in recommendation 1, the long term viability of the agriculture, forestry and fisheries sector depends upon securing both skilled and un-skilled labour at competitive rates.

Aside from ensuring that high school career advisers are aware of the opportunities that exist in rural/regional areas and continuing to support programmes like Farmbiz, the State and local governments can be innovative too and “buy” their future employees.

The development of a network of government and industry sponsors could support students through higher education and apprenticeships in exchange for jobs, paying HECS or living allowances, may influence young people to remain in, return or move to rural/regional areas.

Cadetships could be further developed that are either undertaken by tertiary students in the final year of their course, completing the final year is over two years as a 'half-time' student, while developing skills in parallel at an appropriate workplace and earning a valuable income or as on-going support through out the years of study. The student could return to the sponsor business during semester breaks to gain work experience and at the end of study work for the sponsor for an agreed period of time eg. three years.

This is not only an opportunity to encourage students that went to the city to study, an incentive to return but could also give the individuals raised in urban environments an opportunity to see out-side the city limits. By giving young people from the city a positive experience in rural/regional Victoria, the state government can ensure we can continue to build strong relationships across Victoria.



Bernard Baxter - The Modern Dairy Farmer. Checking the daily milk production.

## SUMMARY OF SURVEYS

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### Question 1

#### Why did you leave / stay in rural/regional Victoria?

**52% of our individual respondents left rural/regional Victoria.**

By far the greatest response to “why did you leave rural/regional Vic?” was due to education requirements (81%); inclusive of secondary school (>1%) and Uni/Tafe/Apprenticeship. Other factors cited included Employment/Career, Family and Lifestyle.

The quality, quantity, reputation and diversity of education institutions in other places were more attractive and were seen to be more likely to lead to better career opportunities.

*“I left rural Victoria to attend boarding school because of the higher quality of education in Melbourne compared to rural towns. I then enrolled in University in Melbourne and enjoyed the city life.”*

*“Needed to leave to engage in university studies and to follow career path in early stages.”*

*Not planning to return as she sees no job prospects for her back in the bush as she wants to work as an architect.*

Some courses that lead to careers in rural based industries are only offered at the larger Universities. For example a Bachelor degree in Forest Science is only offered at the University of Melbourne Carlton campus, Australian National University in Canberra and Southern Cross University in Lismore.

Other factors include the perceived negative stigma associated with living in rural areas or being involved rural businesses/ primary industries.

*“I do have to be very careful about discussing what I do as forestry is seen as being very “politically incorrect” and farmers are seen as no better”.*

*“Agriculture has a negative perception to people that aren’t involved and that profile has to be lifted. Ag has troughs and peaks like other industries”*

*“Don’t want to have the lifestyle of a farmer”*

*“If you want to be seen as a loser, you stay locally but if you want to be seen as successful you go away to study and work. Only those who don’t have what it takes, stay at home or locally.”*

Interestingly of the 27 who left, 75% have returned or plan to return to rural/regional Victoria. See Question 2 for further discussion.

There were multiple mentions of intolerance in smaller communities to individuals who don’t fit or are unwilling to conform to the ‘norm’.

*“Young people who are different do not feel comfortable in small rural location .They say that there is a great deal of pressure to conform and to pretend to fit in by doing what the majority do and looking like the majority. Young people who look different, express themselves differently, have same sex orientation, practice the arts, don’t play sport or any way are not conforming are isolated and even ostracised. Young people have told us that there is no or little privacy in small rural communities and little scope for individuality.”*

*“Look for ways to embrace personality differences and celebrate diversity. Saw many people leave small towns due to not fitting-in.”*

## **42% of our individual respondents stayed in rural/regional Victoria.**

The reasons for staying are often tied back to family/relationships 50%, career opportunities 45%, the other main factor mentioned was lifestyle.

*“Why would you live anywhere else?”*

The city may be seen as *“too fast and expensive – good for a visit”*

*“not far away and easy to visit if need be, can’t offer the landscape, easy going atmosphere”.*

## **0.06% Moved to rural Victoria**

Two respondents moved to rural/regional Vic. for employment and 2 for relationships. Individuals who moved from the urban centres found it hard to make friends and establish a social circle out-side pre-existing contacts.

*I “grew up in Melbourne, moved to rural Vic for work. I did find it hard to make friends and establish a social circle out-side pre-existing contacts.”*

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## **Question 2**

### **Are you planning to leave / return to rural/regional Victoria? Why?**

40% of our individual respondents said that they planned to **stay** in rural Victoria.

38% of our individual respondents said that planned to **return** rural Victoria.

#### **to stay**

The over whelming factors for **staying** in rural Victoria were cited as:

- Family/Relationship
- Employment opportunities
- Lifestyle

Health/ Education Services and opportunity were also mentioned.

*“Not planning to leave as he really enjoys the lifestyle surrounding him in the country.”*

#### **to return**

Many of our respondents had left rural Victoria for study and had returned again (75% returned).

The over whelming factors for **returning** in rural Victoria were cited as:

- Employment opportunities
- Lifestyle
- Family/Relationship

It is interesting that many of our respondents have returned for work which goes against the generally accepted view that there is a lack of employment or opportunities in rural areas and that once young people leave they do not come back. It was felt by the Council that this unexpected finding could be used to highlight the opportunities that exist in rural/regional Victoria, especially for those individuals with the drive and motivation to succeed. The factors affecting ‘why they came back’ can used to encourage more young people to consider careers/lifestyles based in rural Victoria (Australia).

*“I have returned to regional Victoria for work.”*

*“Worked for 18 months in Melbourne then returned to SW Victoria for work / relationship.”*

*“I will remain in regional Victoria, provided there are suitable career opportunities in the areas” I am interested in.*

*I am “looking forward to being able to take my knowledge back and therefore contribute to local community.”*

For some, they may have inherited property (hopefully not with any associated debt) or *“when they have children as they would like their children to grow up in safe, healthy environment”* although maybe not to the same town where they grew-up.

Towns that have the advantage of diverse industries and processing facilities were seen as the most attractive due to the associated services, larger populations and more opportunities.

*I “returned as I had been sponsored to study accountancy by a local business. Had a commitment to return to the town for a set period of time and work for the sponsors and 10 years later I am still there. I have bought a house, gotten married and have no intention of going anywhere.”*

*“Major decision as to why I left rural Victoria was employment opportunities. Now that I have the experience I have obtained a role in rural Vic.”*

**to leave**

>1% of our individual respondents said that they had plans to leave rural Victoria for education, career opportunities, relationships and difficulty in becoming part of the community.

*“Yes I am planning to leave Victoria in August 2006 due to my partner’s career move to NT”*

**Not to return**

22% of our individual respondents said that they would not return to rural Victoria as they had careers and relationships that were urban based.

*There are “greater job opportunities in the city and all my friends are in Melbourne. A large variety of pass times in Melbourne ie Football, concerts, restaurants, parks, shopping etc. compared to regional Vic”*

*“Went back to Melbourne. Professional female with my partner living in another part of Vic. I did find it hard to make friends. Didn’t play sport and if you hung out at the pub then you got a reputation (un-deserved!)”*

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## Question 3

### What would influence your decision to stay / return?

Listed in decreasing order of importance as recorded by our respondents.

Multiple selections were permitted.

35 Employment opportunities	16 Business Success	12 Tax Incentives
28 Lifestyle	13 Health / Education Services	07 Communication infrastructure
17 Family/Relationship	13 Cost of Living	04 Transport / Roothing Services

Once again the importance of career opportunities, lifestyle, relationships and family, were significant factors that influenced peoples decided to stay or return.

*“Lifestyle is also very important as career alone without a satisfying lifestyle will not keep me here.”*

*“Have bought a house, gotten married and have no intention of going anywhere.”*

Many young people have said that access to services and the development of reliable infrastructure (roads, telecommunications, transport, health, education, and recreation) would influence their decision to stay or go. Unfortunately for some small towns it may be too late to reverse the loss-of-services experienced as the critical mass population required is just not there.

*“Take a very targeted approach and identify where people will not want to live and focus on the rural and regional areas where people will want to live and build capacity around these areas to promote and attract people.”*

*“We are pretty lucky in our town because there are is a vibrant agriculture industry which has the spin-offs of secondary services & support businesses. They bring in enough critical mass to support the schools, community groups, health care systems etc.”*

*“There was a 3mth waiting list to see a dentist”*

*“My decision to stay in Bendigo was based on proximity to schools, services (electricity, water, Internet, health services etc) and sporting teams”*

There are many businesses that require staff to be based in rural/regional towns. The trick seems to be in keeping them there. For some sectors like agriculture, forestry and fisheries, the biggest problems are retaining skilled professional personal. The results from our survey suggest that finding ways to incorporate young people into the community and enabling a friends/lifestyle component out-side of work will increase the likelihood of retention.

*“We have a shortage of professional, tradespeople, skilled and semi skilled and tax incentives would possibly encourage them to move to rural Victoria”.*

One respondent said they would not return, no matter what incentives there were in place.

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## Question 4

### How would you retain/attract young people to rural/regional Victoria?

Listed in decreasing order of importance as recorded by our respondents, multiple selections were permitted.

40 Employment opportunities	22 Tax Incentives	17 Family/Relationship
26 Lifestyle	21 Communication infrastructure	17 Cost of Living
25 Health/Education Services	18 Business Success	17 Transport / Roading Services

Employment opportunities were seen as the most important factor in retaining and attracting young people to rural/regional Victoria, however careers alone will not make them stay.

*“I have returned to rural Victoria with my agribusiness job”*

*“Yes to help father run the fish farm”*

Whilst some respondents did not see that opportunities existing in rural area for suitable career pathways, many are actively involved in rural businesses and support services. Dynamic, ambitious people will succeed in their chosen field, no matter where they are; rural/regional Victoria needs to ensure that these people are aware that career/business and lifestyle opportunities exist outside of urban centres, and actively encourage them to ‘set-up shop’ in rural/regional Victoria.

State and local governments must be seen to actively sustain, support and encourage rural businesses and associated infrastructure, with due consideration to long-term sustainability. Successful businesses will ensure that there are career opportunities within rural/regional towns.

*“Promote rural industries more, agriculture has a negative perception to people that aren’t involved and that profile has to be lifted. Ag has troughs and peaks like other industries.”*

*“Other young people need to be made aware of lifestyle of country Victorians. Fantastic opportunities available and cost of living is a major benefit”*

Lifestyle was another main factor that influenced the population dynamics of rural/regional areas. On the most part the positive aspects of living outside urban centres was highlighted and have been mentioned in the earlier questions.

*“Relationships and lifestyle are major reasons, easy place to live, much nicer than living in the city”*

*“Lifestyle. People & Relationships. Country Landscape. Agriculture. Easy going atmosphere.”*

*“Promote healthier lifestyle and good place to bring up kids”.*

*“want to raise kids in the bush, have a good business and all the services you need are there and can come to the urban community for short periods to gain what haven’t currently got.”*

Community cohesion is an important part of a successful town and in retaining young people within the towns.

*“Important to invest in community life – create a sense of belonging for people – art festivals and festivals that build the community strength. Got to make sure young people have an enjoyable experience before they leave so more likely to come back again. People going to the urban areas from a strong community are more likely to go back.”*

*“Support and nurture family relationships. Provide extension services to tackle problems of mental health, succession/financial planning.”*

*“There is a group called the Young Sheppartonians which was originally created by businessmen/professionals in the area. They were finding that youth out of the cities were coming out for 12mths to gain experience then head back to the city. One of the reasons was the lack of social contacts out side of work. They got together in 1997 and formed the Young Sheppartonians which is a social group with the sole aim to get people together to meet others in the area. This has been a success at its important to business in the area to promote it. This has led to many from out of the area staying for longer then originally planned.”*

*“Set-up professional contact bodies/networks aimed at professional development, community building etc. Now that our societies seem to be more secular, the role that was once played by the local church parishes have not been replaced by inclusive community groups. As our communities become more diverse, we need more anchor points for community identity. There actually are many groups already so may-be it is more a matter of knowing about them, having a Local council that is interested in community cohesion and acceptance of diversity is important.”*

*“As a community, I believe we also need to address family relationships. I know quite a few young people who have left farming or the family business as they find it difficult to communicate with the older generation and then leave as they can not work with them. Being in business can be difficult, but being involved with a farming business can sometimes be impossible. Maybe we need to work together with Government to expand the rural councillor network. The problem is also getting people to discuss the issues, and in my experience this has been quite difficult, particularly with the older generation. Quite often, these family problems can be the driving force behind young people leaving.”*

However negatives parochialism, isolation and the pressure to conform were also listed. Small communities can sometimes be their own worst enemy, actively opposing change and intolerance of individual differences, preferences and new-comers, especially migrants. Welcoming, inclusive, dynamic rural communities are more than a day-dream.

*“Look for ways to embrace personality differences and celebrate diversity. Saw many people leave small towns due to not fitting-in.”*

*“Young people who are different do not feel comfortable in small rural locations.”*

*“Quite often, these family problems can be the driving force behind young people leaving”*

*“I did find it hard to make friends and establish a social circle out-side pre-existing contacts and work colleagues.”*

*“I have had friends that have travelled to regional areas for career progression however have left due to the lack of ability be become involved in society. Sports clubs are one way of social interaction, however many don’t play your normal sports thus leaving them with little other choice.”*

As our reliance on technology increases and technology itself improves, the way our businesses operate and our spatial relationships with stakeholders, customers and clients will continue to change. We have been hearing about virtual classrooms, CCTV cameras connected to real-time GPS-satellite data-transfer units with ‘area-constraint’ alarms, medical procedures performed with surgeons in a different hemisphere from the patient, it does not seem out-side the realms of possibility that any business can be located anywhere if good reliable broad-band telecommunications and transport infrastructures were available.

*“Improve access to services and the development of reliable infrastructure (roads, telecommunications, transport, health, education, and recreation)”*

*“Telecommunications infrastructure has to support people moving back to the bush such as good online services.”*

*“Communication infrastructure is crucial for all areas as job revolves around internet.”*

*“Communication – can make more flexible employment options, businesses more flexible to move to rural areas.”*

*“Roading networks to local regional centre – if safe/easy to travel about, more likely to live in a rural area & either commute to regional centre for work or go to regional centre for entertainment.”*

*“Decent coffee – better infrastructure – faster and easier access into urban regions from rural”*

*“We need to entice people to leave urban centres to work in rural towns – we need health systems that work, communities that are nice places to be, industries that are socially, environmentally and economically responsible.”*

Business/tax incentives were also listed as possible ways to attract/retain young people in rural/regional Victoria.

*“Fuel and transport subsidies to put regional business on a level playing field with urban business.”*

*“Tax incentives – need to be able to earn money”*

*“Incentives for large businesses to stay in the bush –eg transport companies”*

*“Employment but difficult for government to stimulate. Country already has advantages so don’t need subsidies. Country has to stand on its own feet.”*

*“Tax incentives should be considered given most tax revenue is provided for the benefit of metropolitan people/areas”*

*“Tax inventiveness definitely. Ability to make farm business successful”*

*“Have government and industry bodies that are not afraid to stand-up to the radical environmentalists/special interest groups who are brainwashing urban populations about poor land management practices by farmers and foresters. We do not need ingratiating policies driven by vote buying panderers pushing a short-term agenda.”*

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## Question 5

### Are you intending to become involved in a rural business?

67% of our individual respondents said they intend to or are already in a rural business.

33% of our individual respondents said they did not intend to run a rural business, although some were employees in a rural business.

### If YES , which business structures are you intending to use or know about ?

Capital outright purchase

*“Already business owner. Capital outright purchase; Leasing; Contracting; Share farming”*

*“Looking at settling up a flower farm on husbands farm.”*

*“Potential to buy rural property at some stage”*

*“Already involved in a financial consulting company for Agribusiness, specialising in price risk management. Also involved in family farm to a small degree.”*

*“Always gathering info as need equity position”*

*“Interested in setting up his own fishing boat for tuna”*

## Inquiry into Retaining Young People in Rural Towns and Communities

*“Perhaps but only if it looks as though he could get long-term employment from it. Is interested in a capital outright purchase by working in the city and then later on perhaps moving back to the country for the lifestyle”*

### Share farming / Joint venture

*“About to start succession planning for family property. While still employed by a bank, staff loans are very appealing and lessen the burden of high interest rates”*

*“Already share-farming, way land pricing is going, the days of people owning your own farm is not going to be an option. Not worth buying outright. Leasing is going to be the way the industry goes. Love to have more info on share-farming in dairying as more family members come into the business”*

*“Need more info on share farming, joint ventures post farm gate”*

### Telecommunication infrastructure

*“Already involved in a financial consulting company for Agribusiness, specialising in price risk management. Also involved in family farm to a small degree.”*

*“Communication services– Public Relations services for rural/regional clients.”*

*“Not enough capacity to deal with issues surrounding business structure – not particularly professional or people to get good advice on rural business structure. Need information on all structure.”*

### **If NO , Why not ?**

*“Many young people are put off the business that their families are engaged in whether it is farming or small businesses such as retail or service. They say that they don’t want to work long hours for little return and to be so dependent on the vagaries of weather, seasonal conditions and market forces. They do not see enough optimism and rewards in rural businesses as they know them. They also have limited understanding of the opportunities for well paid and rewarding careers available. Hopefully changes to careers advice and better qualified careers teachers will remedy this.”*

*“Not at this stage, however maybe later on in life.”*

*“No – I am happy with what I am doing – ie Rural banking”*

*“No Working as a primary school teacher, happy in the state system.”*

*“Working for a company and happy being on wages. Enjoy the flexibility & when you leave work, you leave work.”*

*“Working for the public service & have a good steady job.”*

*“Been there, done that and its sucks”*

*“Don’t want to have the lifestyle of farmers”*

*“Unlikely to make money and climate change is a greater risk to the rural industry”*

*“Knows the above, but just wants to work for someone and not have the responsibility to run a business by himself”*

*“☒ Financial return on investment Uncertainty due to ☒ infrastructure”*

*“Poor return on farming”*

## SUMMARY

Members of the National Council of Young Farmers are an example of the many passionate people that reside in rural and regional Australia. They, along with their peers, are proud to be involved in rural Australia, believing this has given each of them qualities that will enable them to make a significant contribution to the society in which we live.

It is evident that while a high percentage young people from rural/regional communities in Victoria go to Melbourne to study, their empathy and understanding of the quality of life that rural/regional Victoria offers, ensures they are often keen to return to this environment. Many are able to seek immediate employment outside Melbourne while others stay, attracted by other opportunities within the state capital.

Importantly, most of those young people intend to return to rural/ regional Victoria at some time during their life, particularly at a time when there is a suitable employment opportunity, or the lifestyle is a driving factor. This is an important factor for the state government to recognise, that without continued employment opportunities and infrastructure development within rural and regional Australia, young people will go to the urban centres, and be less likely to return.

It also identifies the importance of maintaining a strong link between rural and urban communities. There is a growing divide between the two and this is sure to create significant issues for the state government if allowed to continue. Division within our communities would ensure that few urban people would move to rural and regional areas and young people would be unlikely to return due to the lack of empathy for rural and regional communities. In addition, as seen in the past, urban voters would ensure policy development that restricted the ability to maintain sustainable communities in rural and regional Victoria.

The state government needs to look closely at educating the urban community of the importance of rural and regional communities, to promote the fact that primary producers are the custodians of the environment, are vital to provide fresh produce and timber products and ensure the continued viability and sustainability of the state.

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