

The *Enhancing Community Networks for Drought Resilience in the Riverine Plains* project used a series of workshops to help people in the region better prepare for future droughts. Its aim was to build capacity, share knowledge and help improve community resilience to future droughts. This project was supported by FRRR, through funding from the Australian Government's Future Drought Fund.

The workshops resulted in the following drought preparation strategies:



What do we need to start doing now to prepare for future droughts?

✓ Livestock:

- Improve stock water by updating water systems to every paddock and cleaning out dams.
- Identify “backup systems” for water supply.
- Fence off dams to improve water quality and increase biodiversity.
- Update farm layouts and management zones.
- Fire management and pathways around house and sheds.
- Strategies to stop paddocks eroding.
- Have a plan of when to start feeding stock, and know the trigger point for off-loading stock.
- Update sheepyards.
- Create a stock containment area, a small paddock with good water and shade.
- Increase silage and pasture stores to two years' supply.
- Have good dogs for ease of stock management.
- Focus on soil health and fertility.
- Establish drought tolerant pasture species.

✓ Grain production & irrigation:

- Focus on soil health and fertility. Test your soils and monitor crops to identify the most limiting factor and address that now.
- Trial multispecies and cover crops.
- Have strategies to stop paddocks eroding.
- Complete silage/hay planning.
- Maintain high phosphorus levels.
- Build/upgrade on-farm grain storage.
- Upgrade weigh bridges and trucks.
- Have bores rather than relying on irrigation water allocation from the river.
- Carry over irrigation water to the next year when you don't need it.
- Build water storage to take advantage of off-allocation irrigation water.
- Buy more water for irrigation.
- Consider crop choice and water use of irrigated summer crops.
- Improve the uniformity of application and infiltration of water from the irrigation system.



Business:

- Have a long-term strategic plan and implement it.
- Be flexible.
- Have a cashflow budget and regularly review it.
- Upskill on the impacts of climate change.
- Have good networks around you, such as small farmer groups to help plan.
- Be proactive with succession transitions. Start a conversation now with the next generation as a family.
- Plan ahead for purchase of inputs and capital items to get work done in a timely manner.
- Have a conversation with your bank now.
- Review if the business has the appropriate management structure.
- Utilise government grants and low interest rate loans on new or existing infrastructure that can help prepare for future droughts.
- Put money aside considering taxes and what is needed now. Consider Farm Management Deposits (FMDs) to ensure payments can be made in a bad year.
- Communicate with family members.
- Restructure loan repayments.
- Consider off-farm investment versus on-farm.
- Utilise houses on the farm for younger generation or additional income.
- Expand the operation or take on a new enterprise for diversity.
- Look for opportunities to diversify income streams before and during a drought e.g., contracting, off-farm income.
- Better equity due to high land values provides an opportunity to invest in drought management strategies.
- Have a plan of your business triggers e.g., when do you not plant a particular crop, or when do you start destocking.
- Maintain equipment to ensure it is in a usable state at all times to maximise efficiency and minimise risk.
- Strategically diversify locations of farms.
- Know when it is time to exit farming.
- Make key decisions when times are good.
- Consolidate debt.

Personal:

- Enjoy the good years.
- Find something you enjoy doing.
- Stay connected and keep communication open.
- Look after yourself; good eating and sleeping habits.
- Look for kids' support programs.
- Check in on people through regular phone calls.
- Plan a holiday to get away.
- Keep physically and mentally fit.
- Advocate for occasional counsellor training for service providers.

Thank you to all the community groups who hosted the workshops, and to the industry professionals who contributed their time and expertise.



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