

Supporting drought affected farmers and communities: Learning from those experiencing drought

Brief Report #1 from the 2018 Regional Wellbeing Survey



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Introduction

Concern about the impacts of drought on farmers and communities has been regularly reported in the Australian media in recent months and years, accompanied by calls from a range of groups for a variety of different types of action to be taken to increase resilience to drought, and to provide support to those impacted by it.

It is important as part of these conversations to ensure that the voices of those who are currently experiencing drought, and who have experienced drought in recent years, are heard from as part of processes of developing and adapting responses to drought (e.g. Nelson et al. 2008). In particular, it is important to find out what types of support and action are found to be most useful by those living in drought-affected communities, and views about the types of actions that could help most.

The 2018 Regional Wellbeing Survey asked a number of questions on these topics. This brief report provides a summary of key findings from the data collected. The Brief Reports series presents data with minimal interpretation, to enable the voices of rural and regional Australians to take priority. Future work will analyse the data collected in more detail, to better understand what helps predict a community that is better able to provide support and remain cohesive during drought, and when a community is under levels of stress that make it difficult to do this. In future years, it will be possible to analyse whether people who reported investing in different actions to help prepare for and cope with drought are able to recover more rapidly from drought, and/or experience less severe impacts during drought. With drought ongoing in many areas at the time of data collection, this brief report focuses on reporting who is experiencing drought, the effects of drought, and what is (and isn't) helping those who are currently experiencing drought.

The data

Data in this report were collected during November and December 2019 as part of the 2018 Regional Wellbeing Survey. Participants were recruited in the survey using a range of methods, which are described in the *Regional Wellbeing Survey User Guide*, available to download at www.regionalwellbeing.org.au. In total, 15,083 people participated in the survey in 2018, with the majority living in rural and regional areas (including regional cities such as Wagga Wagga), and a comparison sample living in major cities (defined as Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth and Canberra). A total of 2,459 farmers participated in the survey.

Data presented in this report have been weighted to be representative of the adult population of Australia.

What did we ask people about their experiences of drought?

The survey asked a large number of questions about wellbeing, resilience and liveability. These included a number that asked about experiences of drought. Some were asked of all survey participants, while some were asked of farmers only as they were specific to farming. The topics asked about included:

- Views about usefulness of different types of drought support, for communities and for farmers

Who is aware of drought in their local region?

While drought affects many communities, not all members of a community will report being affected by drought. Survey participants were asked '*Did drought affect your local region during this period (even if it didn't affect you or your household personally)*' in 2018, 2017, 2016, 2015, 2014,

2009-2013 or 2003-2008. This question was not intended to enable identification of drought incidence, but rather to identify those people who were aware of drought affecting their region. This is an important distinction, as different people will identify and define drought in different ways – it is likely that in a given community, some people will define the local region as being in drought while others will not. However, at an aggregate level this measure does identify the proportion of people who are concerned about the extent of rainfall deficiency occurring in their local region, even if their concern is triggered by differing levels and periods of rainfall deficiency.

Across Australia, 30.1% of residents reported their local region being affected by drought in 2018, while 48.7% felt their region was not affected by drought, and 21.2% were unsure. This differed significantly for farmers and non-farmers: 68.4% of farmers reported experiencing drought in their local region in 2018, and only 25.3% reported no drought and 6.2% reported being unsure.

Figure 1 shows the proportion of people reporting being aware of drought in their local region in different periods of time. It shows that a much higher proportion reported experiencing drought in their local region in 2018 than in any other period asked about; this is also consistent with past survey results, with participants in previous years being less likely to report their local region being in drought than was the case in 2018.

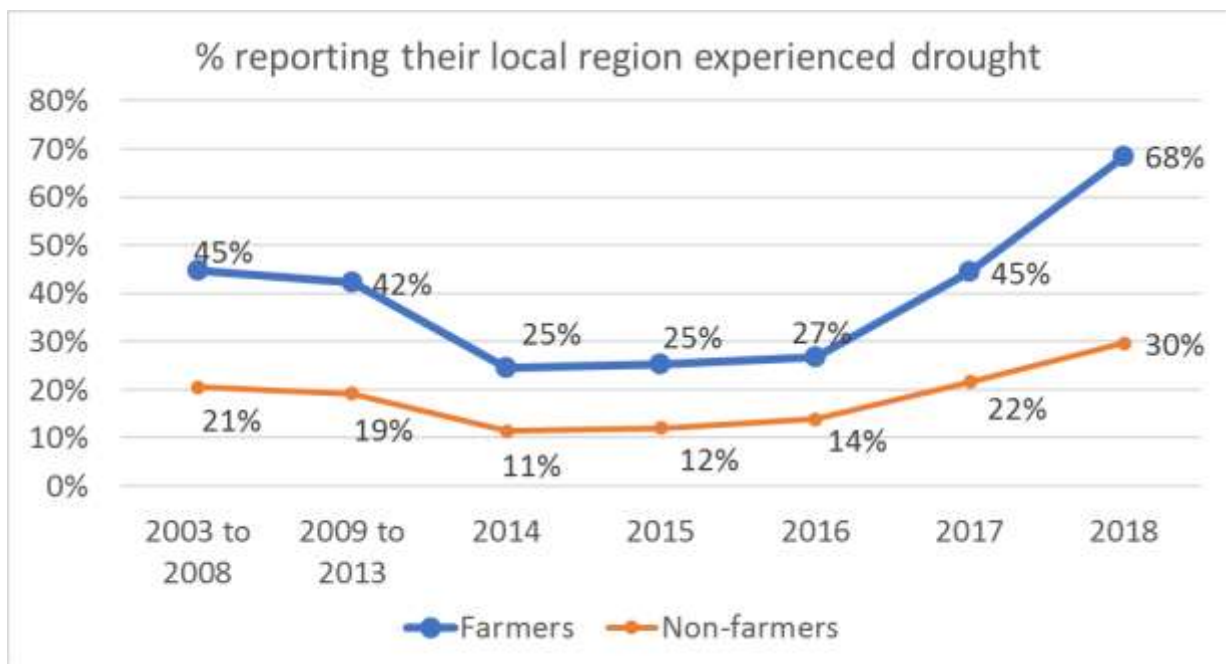


Figure 1 Proportion of residents self-reporting their local region experienced drought at different points between 2003 and 2018

These reports of drought are reasonably consistent with Bureau of Meteorology mapping of extent of rainfall deficiency, which shows similar trends over time. Figure 2 shows maps of 18 month rainfall deficiency for four periods: October 2012 to March 2014, July 2014 to December 2015, April 2017 to September 2018 and April 2018 to September 2019. The point at which survey data were collected – November to December 2018 – was in the middle of the final period shown.

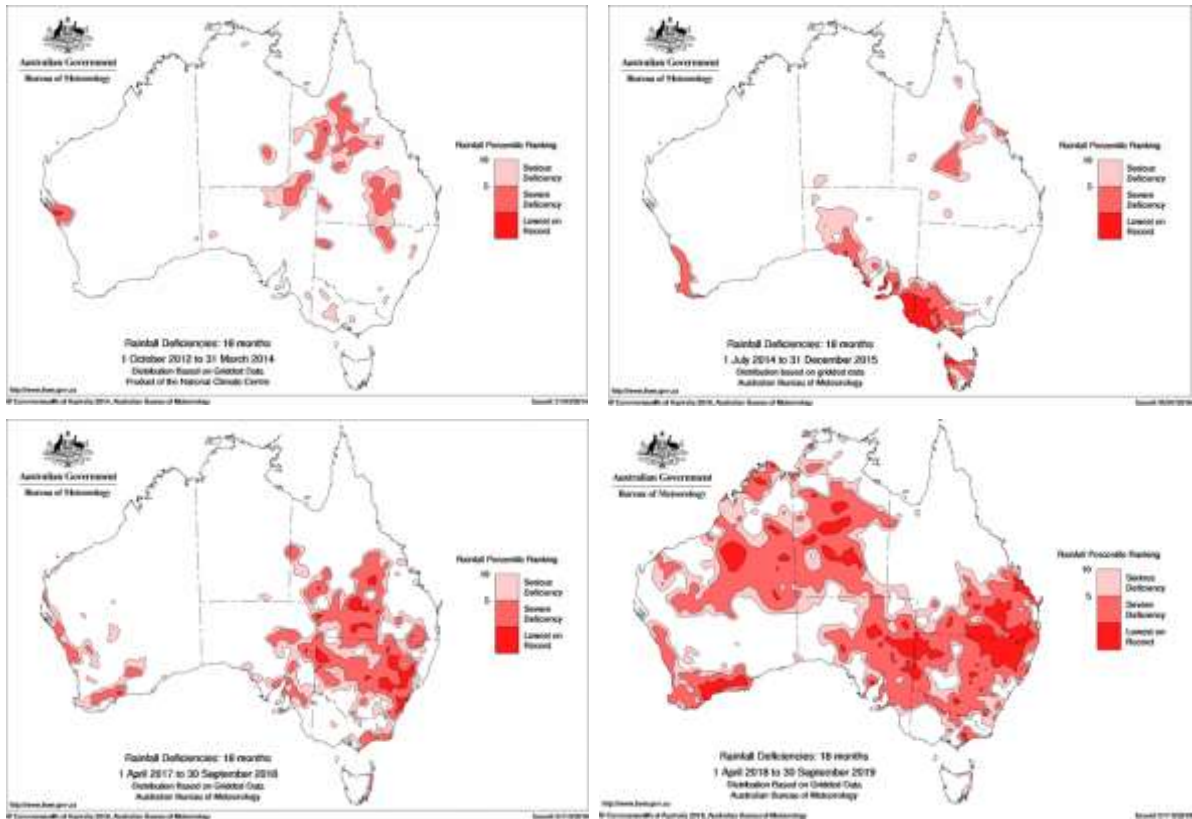


Figure 2 Eighteen month rainfall deficiencies reported by Bureau of Meteorology as of March 2014 (top left), December 2015 (top right), September 2018 (bottom left), September 2019 (bottom right) (source: Bureau of Meteorology drought reports, www.bom.gov.au)

Who has been personally affected by drought since 2014?

While many people are aware of drought affecting their local region, not all will be personally affected by drought even when it is occurring locally. Survey participants were asked to what extent they had personally been affected by drought since 2014.

Of those who reported drought occurring in their local region since 2014, a total of 34% of non-farmers and 63% of farmers reported that they had been severely or very severely affected by drought at some point since 2014 (Figure 3). Of those reporting having experienced drought in 2018, 66% of farmers and 36% of non-farmers reported experiencing severe or very severe impacts from drought.

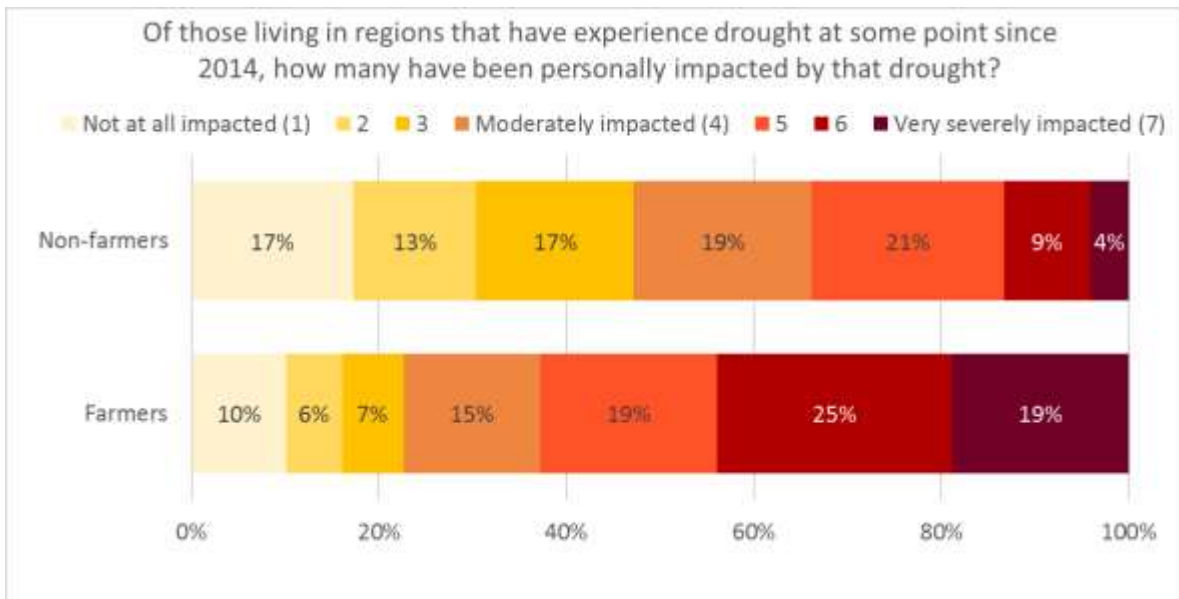


Figure 3 Extent to which residents reported being personally impacted by drought since 2014 (only those who reported drought occurring in their local region were included)

Figure 3 focuses on just those who identified their region was experiencing drought. However, in many cases some people – particularly non-farmers – may be unaware their local region is experiencing rainfall deficiency, particularly if they are not impacted by it. When all Australian residents are included, including those who did not report any incidence of drought in their region since 2014, then the total proportion of the Australian population reporting severe or very severe impacts from drought at some point since 2014 is 41% of farmers and 6% of non-farmers. This is likely a better representation of the total proportion of people personally affected by drought across the country in 2018.

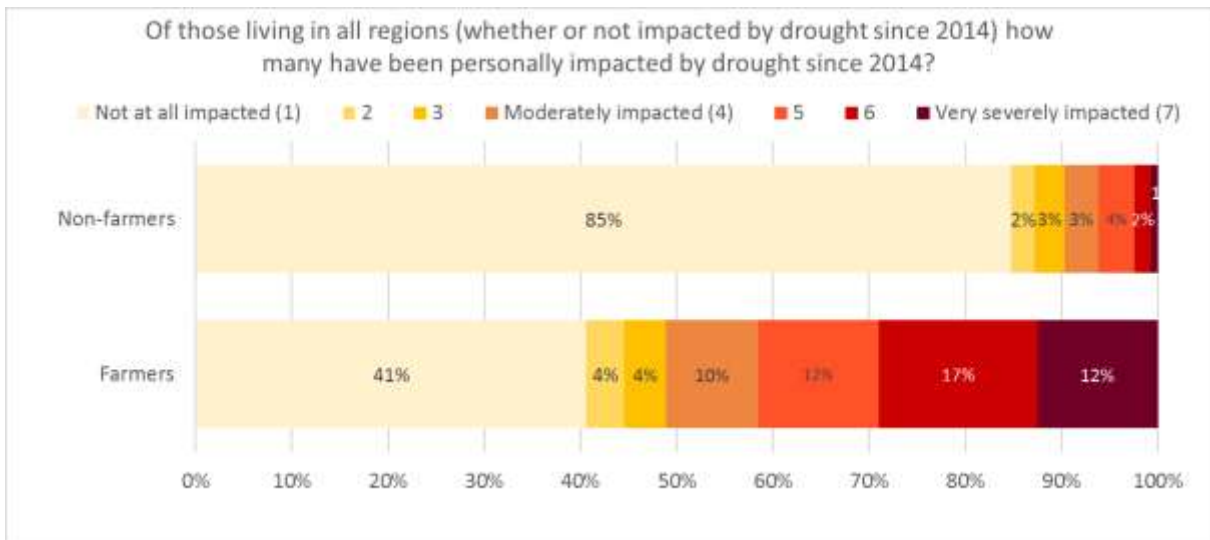


Figure 4 Extent to which all Australia residents reported being personally impacted by drought since 2014 (whole population, including those who did not report drought occurring in their local region between 2014 and 2018)

Overall, 44% of Australian farmers report having been personally severely or very severely affected by drought at some point since 2014, with the large majority of these affected by drought at the time the survey was conducted in late 2018, while 6% of non-farmers were personally impacted by drought in this period.

Effects of drought

Those who had experienced drought were asked the extent to which it impacted them, and the specific types of effects drought had on their lives.

As shown in Figure 5, the majority of farmers reported that drought had resulted in the following effects:

- Reduced farm production (87%)
- Reduced ability to invest in their farm business (82%)
- Reduced income (79%)
- Increased workload (69%)
- Reduced attractiveness of the local landscape (63%)
- Reduced time spent socialising with family and friends (61%)
- Reduced ability to get off-farm work (49%)
- Reduced farm expenditure (45%) or increased farm expenditure (43%)
- Reduced involvement in community organisations (43%, compared to 16% who increased involvement)
- Reduced desire to stay in farming (40%)
- Increase in how much people in their community support each other (38%, compared to 19% saying this decreased as a result of drought).

This highlights that the effects of drought go well beyond farm production and income to affect all aspects of life, particularly ability to maintain social connection and enjoy living in rural landscapes. While 38% feel community support for each other increased, the high reduction in socialising, as well as impacts on off-farm work as well as on-farm work, highlight the interconnected impacts of drought across the whole community and multiple aspects of a farmer's life beyond their farm activities.

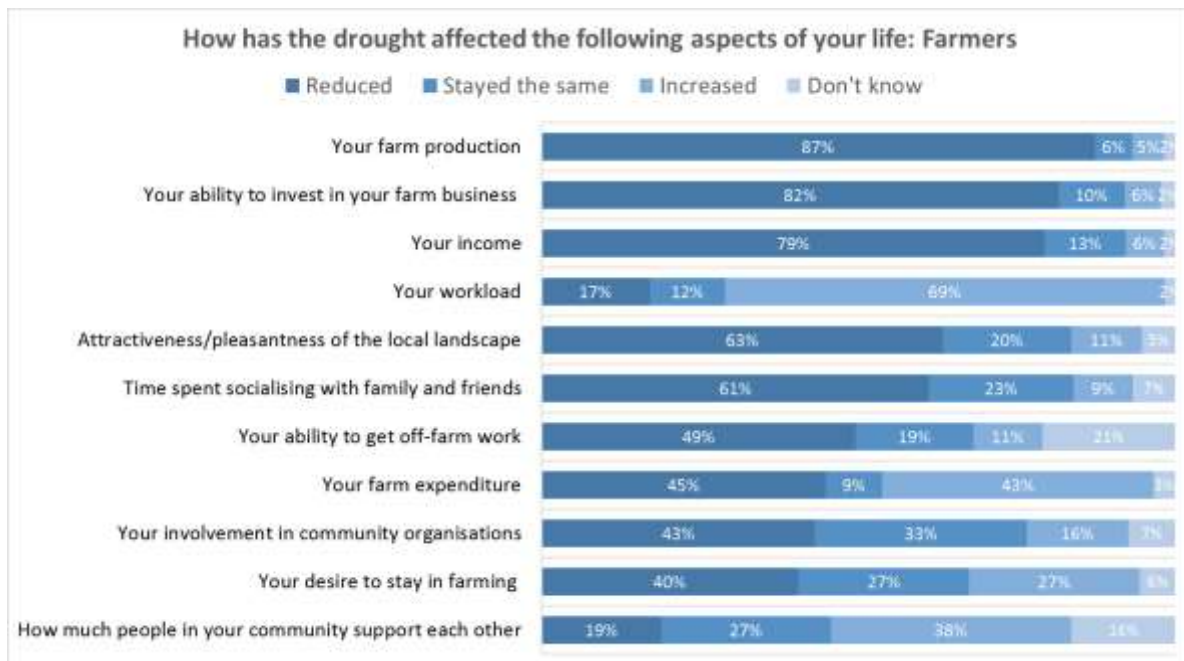


Figure 5 Effects of drought on farmers who have experienced drought in their region since 2014

As shown in Figure 6, non-farmers were much less likely than farmers to report a range of effects, with the main effects reported being:

- Reduced attractiveness of the local landscape (68%)
- Reduced income (47%, significantly less than the 79% of farmers reporting reduced income)
- Increased workload (45%)
- Reduced time spent socialising with family and friends (42%)
- Reduced ability to get off-farm work (49%)
- Reduced farm expenditure (45%) or increased farm expenditure (43%)
- Reduced involvement in community organisations (32%, compared to 27% who increased involvement)
- Increase in how much people in their community support each other (49%, compared to 17% saying this decreased as a result of drought).

This highlights that the effects of drought are significant for many non-farmers, although typically being less severe than they are for farmers. Similarly to farmers, these effects go beyond impacts on income to affect all aspects of life, particularly ability to maintain social connection and enjoy living in rural landscapes.

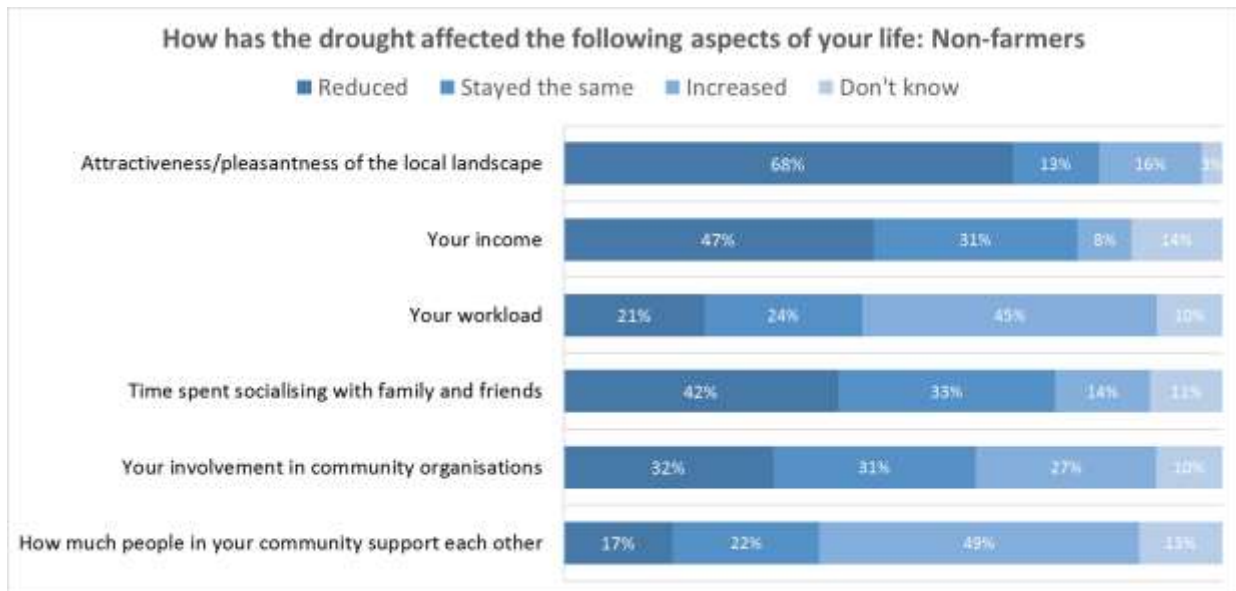


Figure 6 Effects of drought on non-farmers who have experienced drought in their region since 2014

Drought support

Survey participants were asked their views about the most important types of drought support that should be provided to (i) rural communities being affected by drought and (ii) farmers being affected by drought. This was asked of all participants to enable identification of differences in views about appropriate types of support.

Drought support for rural communities

Survey participants were given a list of different types of drought support, and asked to identify the five most useful from the list, from 1 = most useful to 5 = fifth most useful. Findings were then compared for people living in drought affected communities, in communities not affected by drought, and for farmers and non-farmers.

The types of drought support asked about were:

- Donations of goods for drought affected communities
- Donations of cash, petrol vouchers or gift cards that can be spent by drought-affected families in their local community
- Grants for community events to bring people together during drought
- Financial support for small businesses affected by drought other than farms
- Support for increased mental health counselling in drought-affected communities
- City people visiting drought affected communities and spending money there
- Providing free holidays for those affected by drought, to give them a chance for a break
- Grants for investment in infrastructure such as roads, buildings, parks or other community facilities during drought to help provide income and jobs

Participants could also identify other forms of drought support for communities if they wished to; only a small proportion identified other forms of drought support and typically did not identify these as being the most useful.

As shown in Figures 7 and 8, farmers as a whole, and farmers who had been severely impacted personally by drought, ranked the same five types of support as being most important (albeit not in the same order):

- Mental health counselling was most commonly identified as a 'top 5' most useful form of support, and those severely affected by drought typically rated it higher in their 'top 5' compared to those who were not severely affected by drought, indicating its importance to those experiencing severe impacts
- Financial support for small businesses other than farms affected by drought: This was consistently considered a 'top 5 most useful' form of support, although typically ranked as second to fourth most important rather than most important out of the top 5 by both those severely impacted and not impacted by drought since 2014
- Donations of cash, petrol vouchers or gift cards that can be spent by drought-affected families in their communities was ranked as most or second most important by 44% of those severely impacted by drought and by 41% of all farmers, and was in the 'top 5 most useful' for a majority of farmers
- Grants for community events to bring people together was considered a 'top 5' most useful form of support by just over 70% of farmers, although slightly fewer of those severely impacted by drought
- Donations of goods for drought affected communities was rated as most or second most important by 38% of farmers (whether or not affected by drought), and by just under 70% overall
- Grants for investment in community infrastructure such as roads, buildings and parks was considered less important by most, although over 50% considered this one of their top 5 priorities.
- Fewer considered providing holidays for drought affected families or city people visiting drought-affected communities and spending money, high priorities, although 40% of those severely impacted by drought did identify these as a 'top 5' priority.

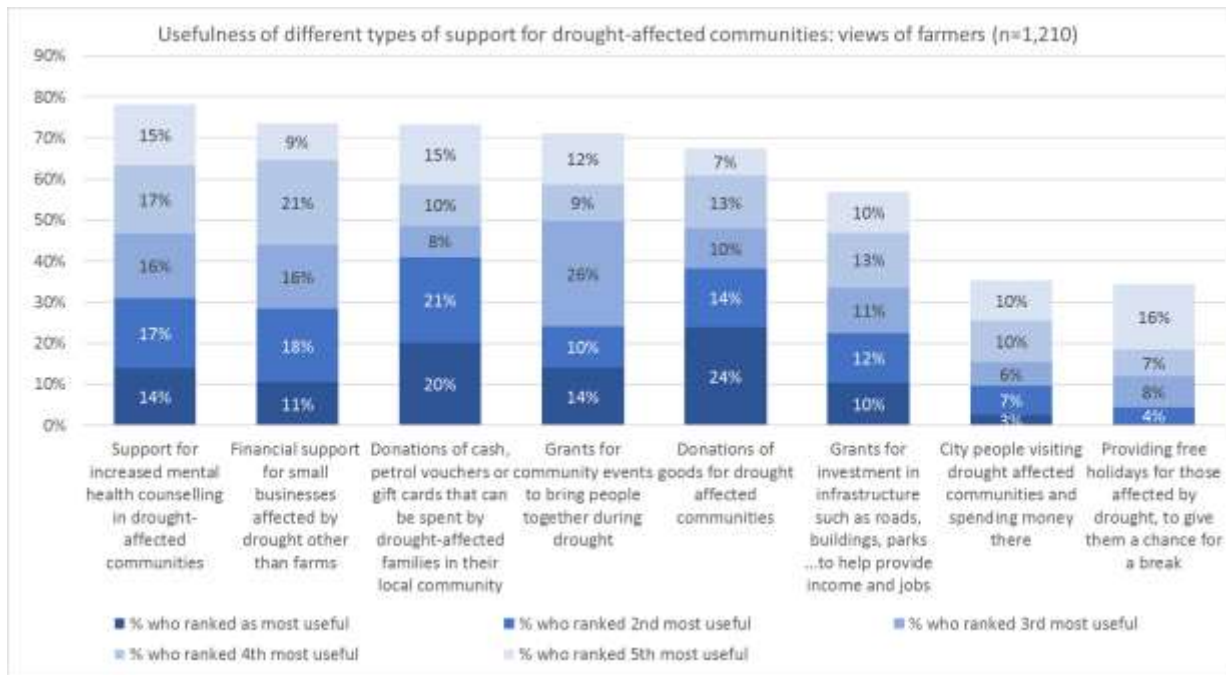


Figure 7 Useful of different types of support for drought-affected communities: all farmers

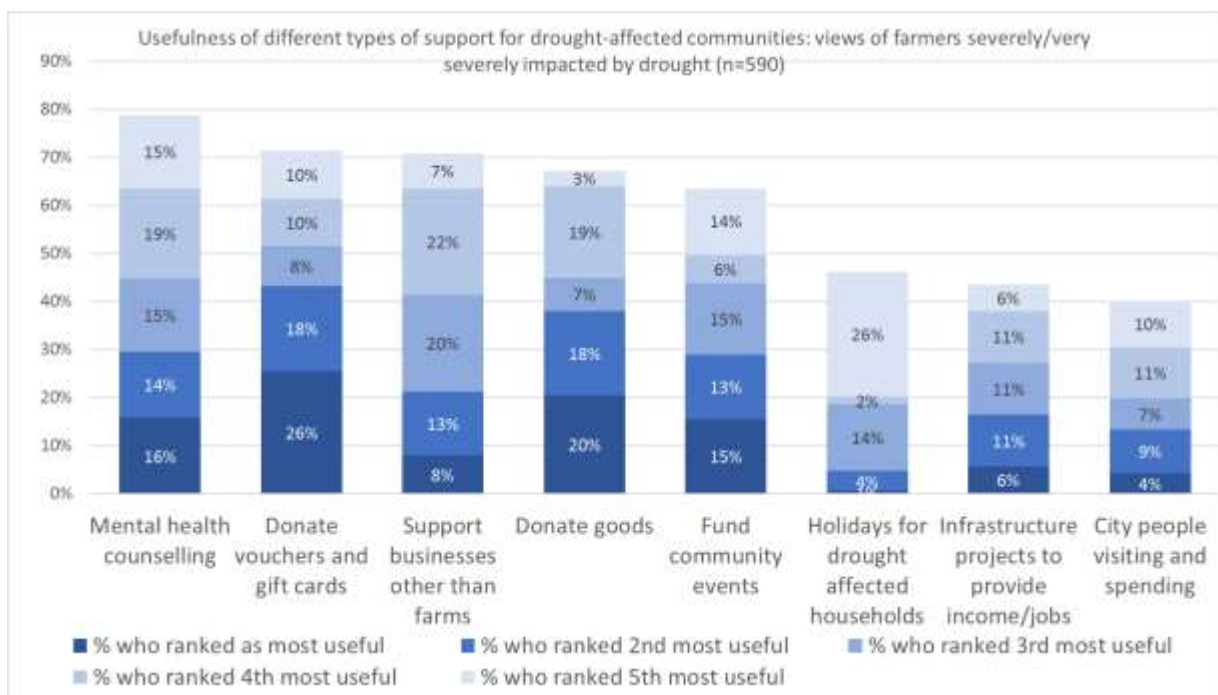


Figure 8: Useful of different types of support for drought-affected communities: farmers severely impacted by drought

As shown in Figures 9 and 10, non-farmers had somewhat different views to farmers about the best forms of support for drought-affected communities:

- Donations of cash, petrol vouchers or gift cards were most commonly considered a 'top 5' most useful form of support, and more often ranked as first or second most important, than other forms of support; non-farmers were more likely to include this in their top 5 than farmers

- Mental health counselling was slightly less commonly identified as a 'top 5' most useful form of support by non-farmers donations of cash, vouchers and gift cards, although a similar proportion considered this useful as was the case for farmers
- Financial support for small businesses other than farms affected by drought: This was consistently considered a 'top 5 most useful' form of support by just over 80% of non-farmers, although typically ranked as second to fourth most important rather than most important out of the top 5 by both those severely impacted and not impacted by drought since 2014
- Donations of goods for drought affected communities was rated as most or second most important by many, but by fewer who were severely affected by drought compared to non-farmers more generally
- Grants for investment in community infrastructure such as roads, buildings and parks was considered less important by most, although over 60% considered this one of their top 5 priorities and it ranked fifth overall for non-farmers
- Grants for community events to bring people together was considered a 'top 5' most useful form of support by just under 60% of non-farmers, and ranked sixth overall in the list of priorities, a lower priority than was the case for farmers
- Fewer considered providing holidays for drought affected families or city people visiting drought-affected communities and spending money, high priorities, although 40% of those severely impacted by drought did identify attracting city visitors as a 'top 5 priorities', compared to only 15% to 17% of non-farmers identifying holidays for drought affected households as a high priority.

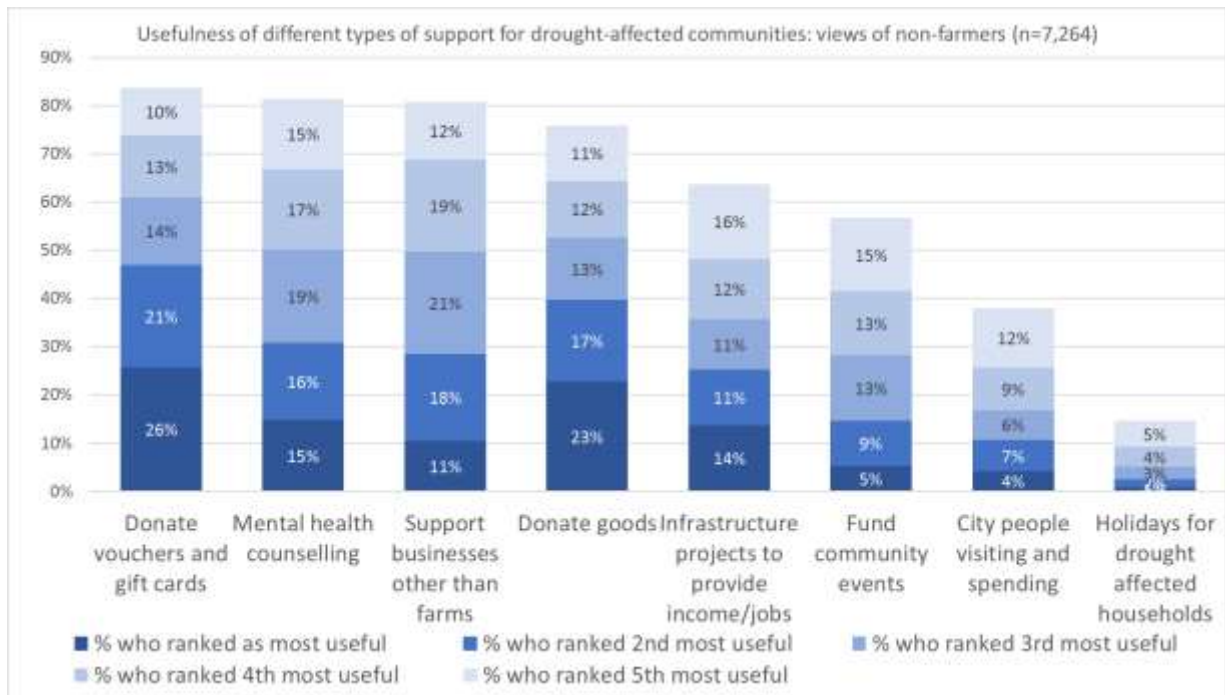


Figure 9: Useful of different types of support for drought-affected communities: all non-farmers

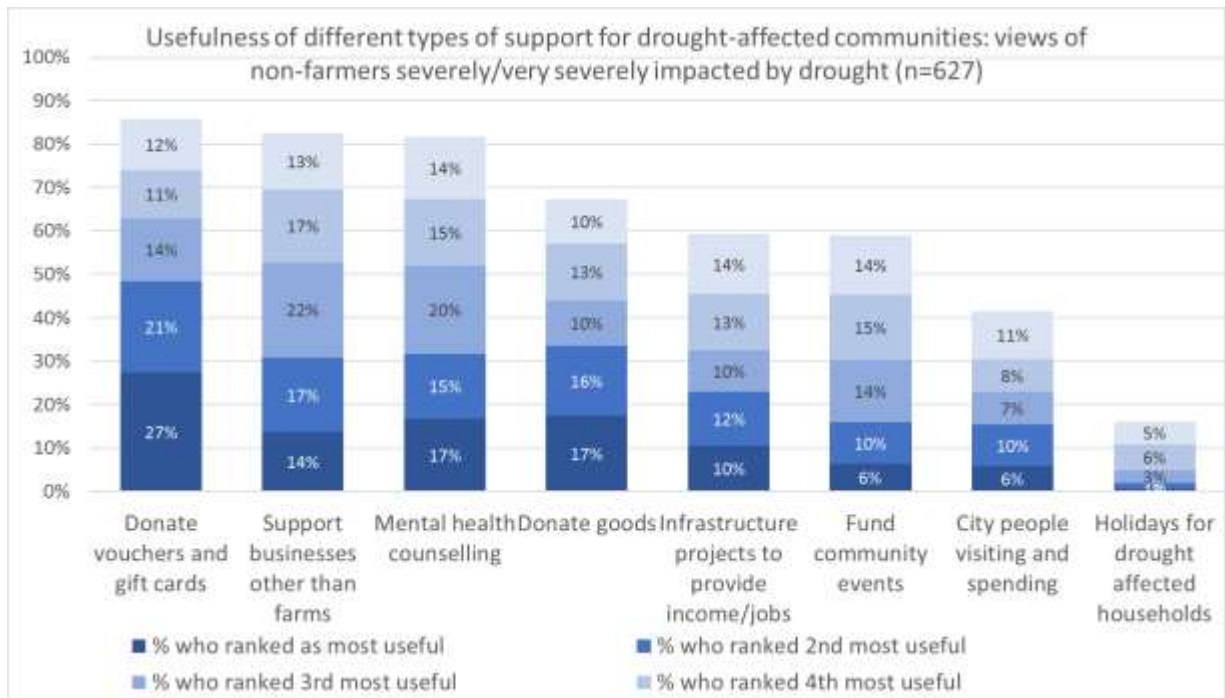


Figure 10: Useful of different types of support for drought-affected communities: non-farmers severely impacted by drought

Drought support for farmers

All participants were asked to rate the usefulness of the following forms of drought support that can be provided specifically for farmers (not including other forms of support which can help both farmers and non-farmers, which were asked about as part of the questions on support for drought-affected communities):

- Grants to help farmers invest in on-farm infrastructure to reduce impacts of drought e.g. improving water infrastructure
- Interest rate subsidies or low interest-rate loans for farmers to invest in improving property to reduce impacts of drought
- Providing a weekly household payment to farm households severely impacted by drought e.g. Farm Household Allowance
- Providing donations of hay/fodder to livestock farmers
- Grants to drought-affected communities to invest in infrastructure such as buildings and roads, providing alternative employment opportunities
- Providing vouchers farmers can spend in local shops and businesses
- Grants to help farmers exit farming
- Transport/freight subsidies
- Support farmers to put funds aside in good years to be used in drought years (e.g. Farm Management Deposits or other mechanism)
- Income-contingent loan in which you are provided a loan but only have to repay it when your income is above a minimum threshold (similar to HECS)
- Rebates on rates, vehicle registration or other government charges during times of drought

As shown in Figures 11, 12 and 13, there were reasonably similar views about the usefulness of various types of support:

- Grants for on-farm infrastructure to reduce the impacts of drought: This was ranked second by farmers overall, but was also the action most often ranked 'most important' (by 37% of farmers, and 26% of farmers severely affected by drought, as well as 39% of non-farmers), making it the action most strongly ranked as highly important across all groups
- Weekly household payments: These were considered one of the top five most useful forms of support by over 60% of both farmers and non-farmers, although often as the second or third most important rather than the first
- Interest rate subsidies and low interest loans for investment in actions to reduce impacts of drought were ranked third by farmers and fourth by non-farmers, with 50% to 60% considering this a 'top 5 most useful' action
- Donations of hay and fodder were considered fourth most useful overall by all farmers, but second most useful by farmers severely impacted by drought. This type of support was ranked third by non-farmers
- Rebates on rates, registration and government charges was considered a top 5 most useful by 41% of all farmers, increasing to 61% of farmers severely affected by drought, suggesting it is very useful during acute periods of drought impact
- Vouchers farmers can spend in local businesses were considered highly useful by 36% of all farmers but 50% of those severely impacted by drought, again suggesting these are important sources of support when experiencing acute impacts of drought
- Grants for community infrastructure investment that can provide jobs for drought affected farmers were considered useful by 40% of all farmers and 35% of those severely affected by drought
- Support for farmers to put aside funds in good years, such as Farm Management Deposits, were considered a 'top 5' most useful by 35% of all farmers and 30% of those severely impacted by drought.
- Transport and freight subsidies were considered a 'top 5' by 30-35% of farmers

Relatively small proportions considered income-contingent loans for investment in drought action by farmers, or grants to assist farmers exit farming, as in their top five most useful forms of support: 20% or less considered income-contingent loans a high priority (most preferring low-interest loans or interest subsidised loans), and 14% or less considered supporting farm exit a useful form of drought support.

These results highlight that there is strong support for a mix of investment in actions targeting the following areas:

- (i) providing support for farmers when experiencing the most acute impacts of drought (weekly household payments, donations of hay/fodder, vouchers for spending and rebates on rates and government charges), and
- (ii) enabling farmers to make longer term investments in reducing the impacts of drought on the farm business, through investment in on-farm infrastructure or changing the farm business operations to reduce the impact of drought, using either grants or interest rate subsidies/low interest loans.

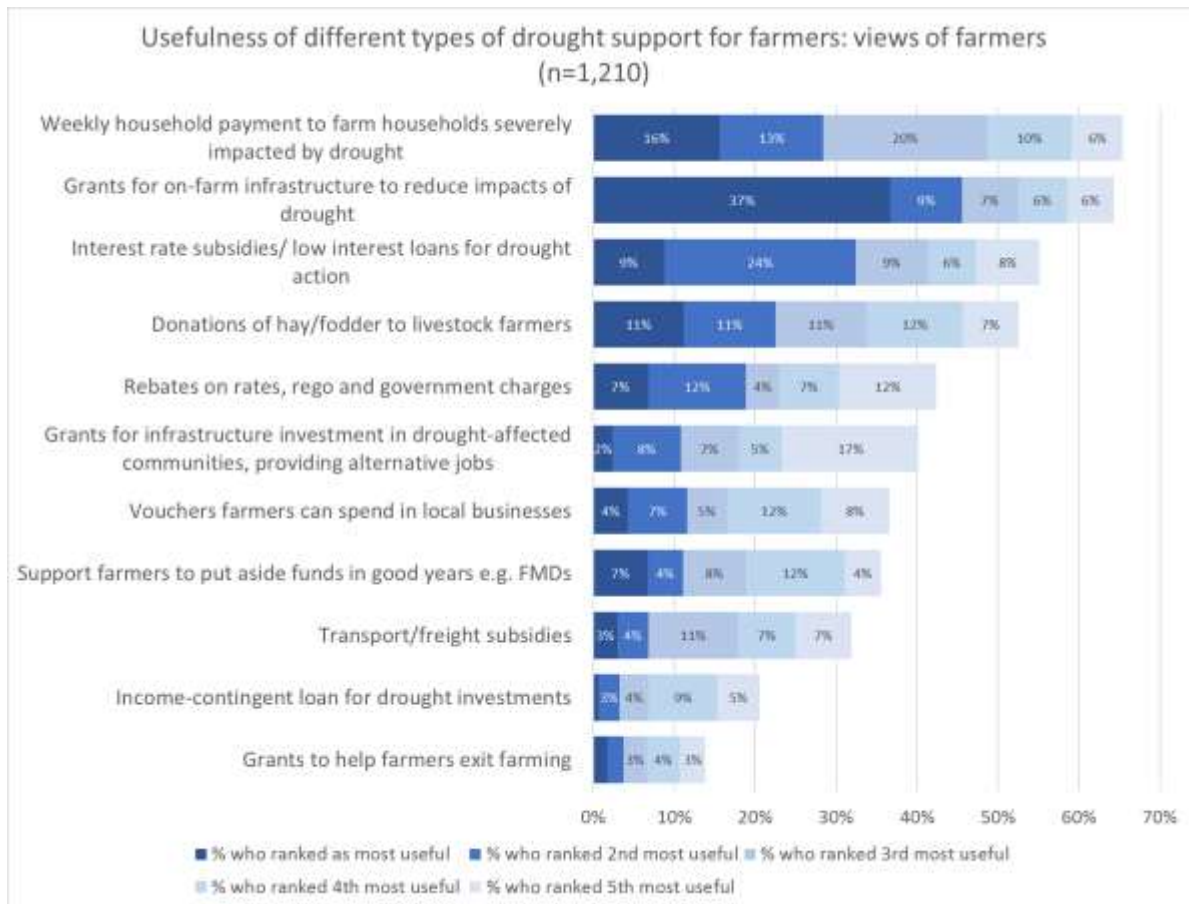


Figure 11 Usefulness of different types of drought support for farmers: all farmers

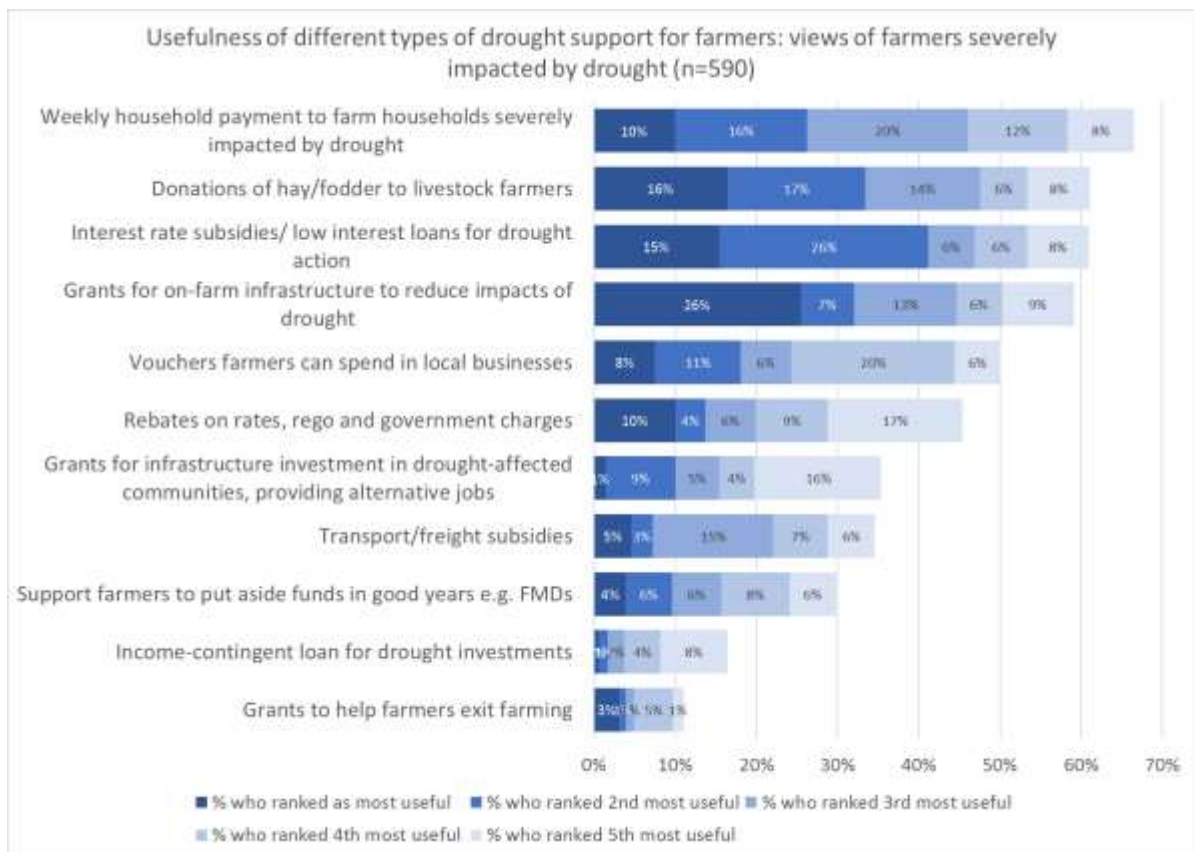


Figure 12 Usefulness of different types of drought support for farmers: farmers severely impacted by drought

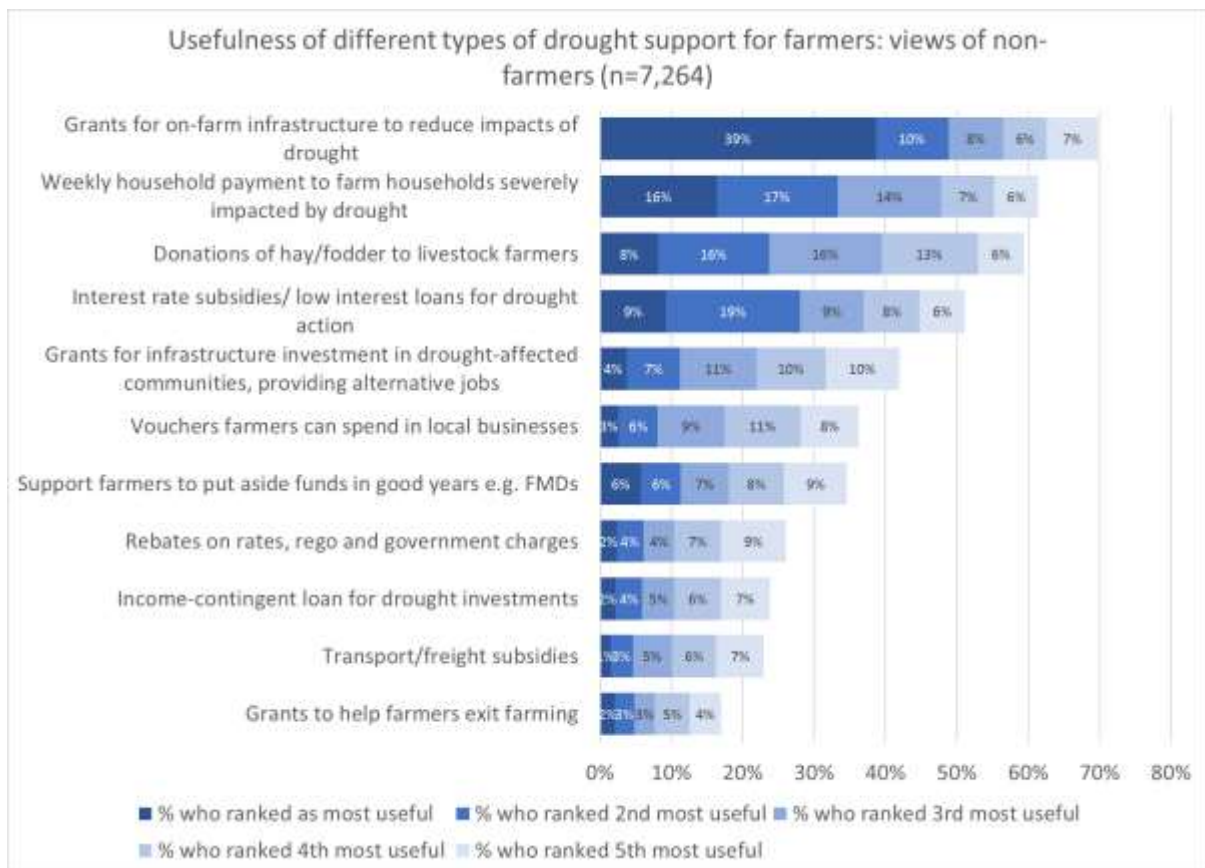


Figure 13 Usefulness of different types of drought support for farmers: all non-farmers

Where are farmers getting support during drought?

Farmers were asked whether they had been able to provide support to others during drought, whether they had received support from any of a number of sources, and whether they had either chosen not to seek or had rejected offers of support. They were also asked if they felt government support was targeted to the right farmers during drought, and whether they could readily find support during drought if they needed it.

These items help better identify where farmers are receiving support from, where they aren't received support from, and whether they experience barriers to accessing support.

Of farmers who reported experiencing drought in their local region in 2018 (Figure 14):

- 48% were able to support other farmers also experiencing drought
- 40% felt their bank/financial institution was supportive during the drought and 46% did not
- 30% had received support from other farmers during the drought
- 24% had received support from non-farmers in their community
- 20% had received support from local businesses.

This suggests a potential need to support a wider range of community organisations – including local businesses and non-farmers – to enable them to provide support to farmers during drought.

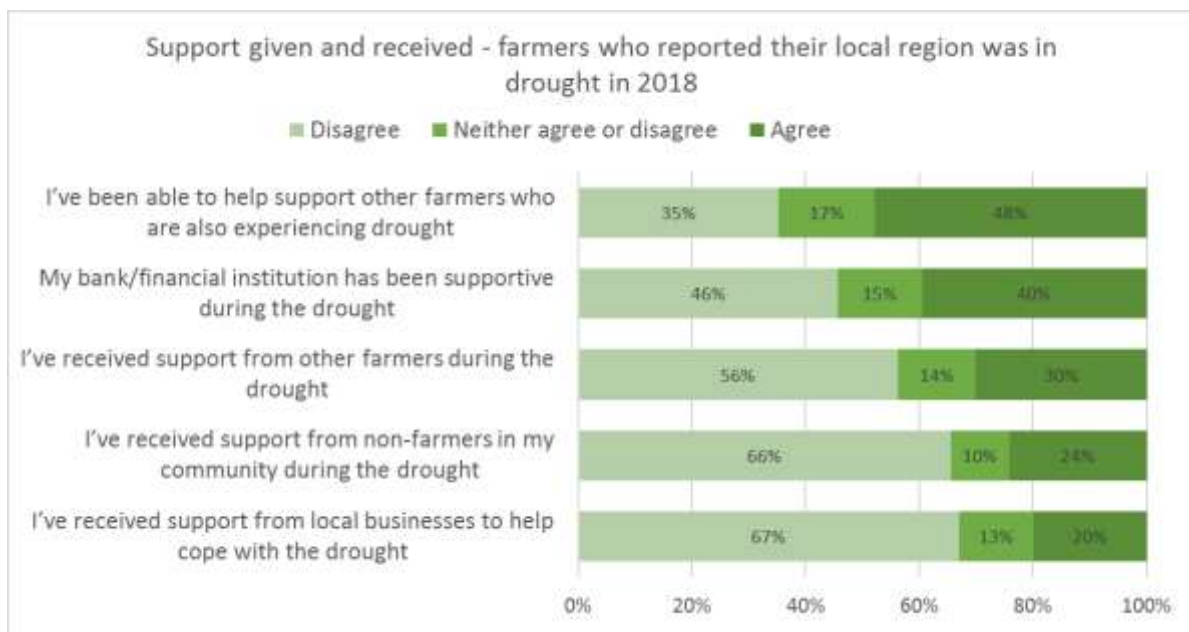


Figure 14 Support given and received by farmers who reported their local region was in drought in 2018

When asked their views about asking for and accepting help, of farmers who reported experiencing drought in their local region in 2018 (Figure 15):

- 73% were reluctant to increase farm debt as a way of coping with drought, even if their bank was willing to loan them money
- 67% did not feel comfortable to ask for help even when experiencing challenges due to drought
- 64% hadn't applied for some types of drought support because applying was too hard or complicated
- 58% felt they knew how to find support during drought if they need it, while 31% did not

- 51% felt the government sometimes gives too much support to farmers who haven't invested enough in preparing for drought.
- 41% had said no to some types of drought support they had been offered.

This suggests that in many cases, a key reason farmers are not receiving support is because they either feel uncomfortable asking for it, find it too difficult to apply for, feel a sense of stigma about receiving support as they may feel it is viewed as an indication they are inadequately prepared for drought, or feel support should go to others who need it more.

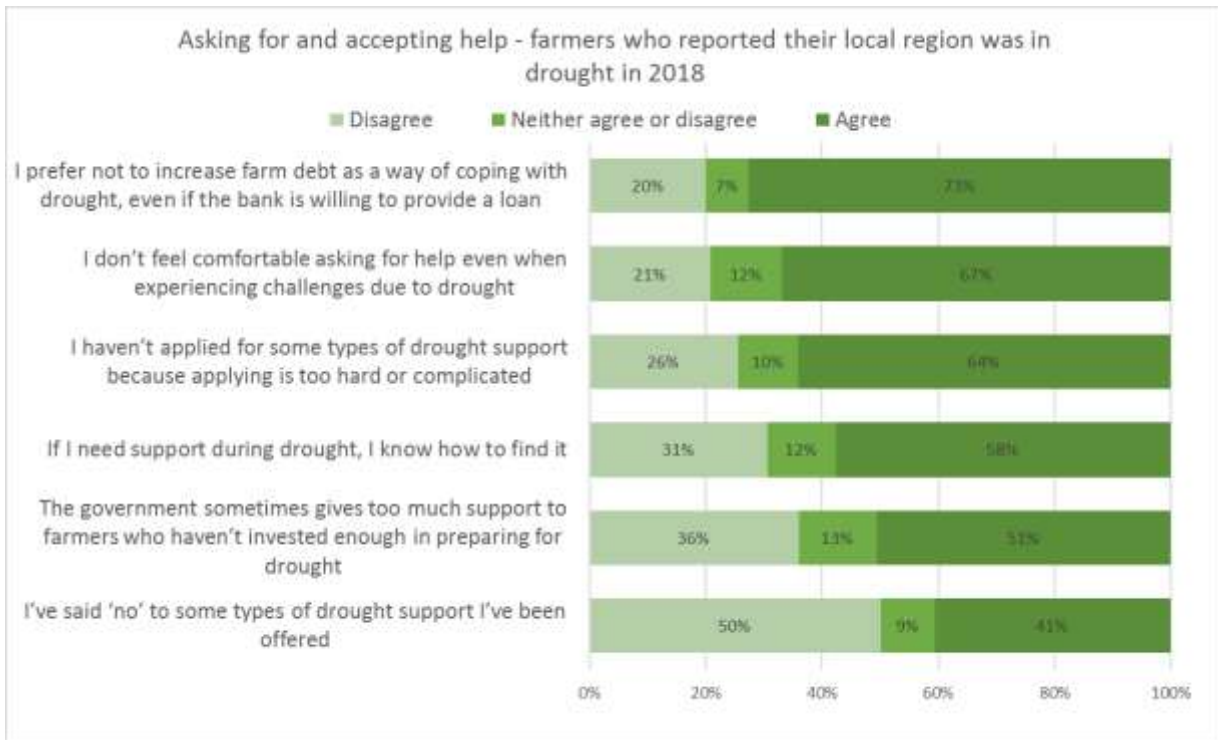


Figure 15 Asking for and accepting help – views of farmers who reported their local region was in drought in 2018

What on-farm actions have farmers invested in to reduce impacts of drought – and which do they find most useful?

Farmers were asked whether they had invested in any of a number of actions with the aim of helping improve their preparedness for drought. Some of the actions asked about were longer-term actions that can typically be built up in non-drought years and then drawn on in drought years (for example building off-farm investment levels to provide resources to draw down in difficult years), while others could be done either as a shorter term response to a drought expected to continue for some time, and/or as a longer-term strategy, such as reducing long-term stocking rates or increasing fodder held on farm.

As not all actions are applicable or relevant to all types of farms, farmers were asked to indicate whether they had done the action, hadn't done it, or whether it was not applicable to their farm. Those who indicated 'N/A' were then excluded from the analysis: this means that the proportion reported to have undertaken actions shown in Figure 16 represents the proportion of farmers for whom an action is potentially applicable/relevant to their farm, who have undertaken the action.

Of all farmers:

- 71% of those with stock report having reduced long-term stocking rates on their farm to enable maintaining tock longer during drought; this was more common amongst those experiencing drought at the time of the survey (77%) and less common for those not experiencing drought (60%)
- 69% had increased the average amount of fodder held on farm (72% of those in drought and 65% of those not experiencing drought)
- 66% had invested in improving farm water storages to either reduce evaporation or slow water flow (67% of those not in drought and 67% of those in drought)
- 65% had improved watering points to enable better access to water in times of low water in dams
- 63% had increased or improved grain or fodder storage infrastructure on the farm
- 56% reported destocking earlier than most farmers during periods of low rainfall to help maintain groundcover: this suggests that many are destocking earlier than they previously would, however given the high proportion of farmers reporting doing this, it is unlikely all are doing this earlier than other farmers
- 56% invested in increasing off-farm income sources to help diversify income
- 54% invested in improving water retention in soil on part or all of the land they manage
- 53% invested in more water efficient pasture or crop varieties
- 53% changed use of fertiliser or soil additives to increase water use efficiency
- 50% of irrigators invested in more water efficient irrigation systems
- 49% of irrigations changed timing of irrigation water delivery to their farm
- 45% increased off-farm investments to provide funds to draw on during hard times on the farm
- 45% invested in changing timing or intensity of crop or pasture seeding/planting
- 45% of irrigators reported investing in more permanent water entitlements
- 44% invested in new or expanded drought lot/confinement feeding/ feed pad facilities.

The results suggest that there are many farmers who feel their property could have further investment in a range of these actions who have not yet been able to invest in them. Additionally, it is likely that many of those who have already invested to some extent in these actions could make further investments in them over time, particularly in actions such as changing use of fertilisers or soil additives to increase water use efficiency, which can change over time as new knowledge becomes available about the optimal ways to do this.

The results also highlight the wide range of actions taken by farmers to prepare for drought and increase resilience to drought. It is important to then identify whether these actions have been useful in helping farmers cope with drought.

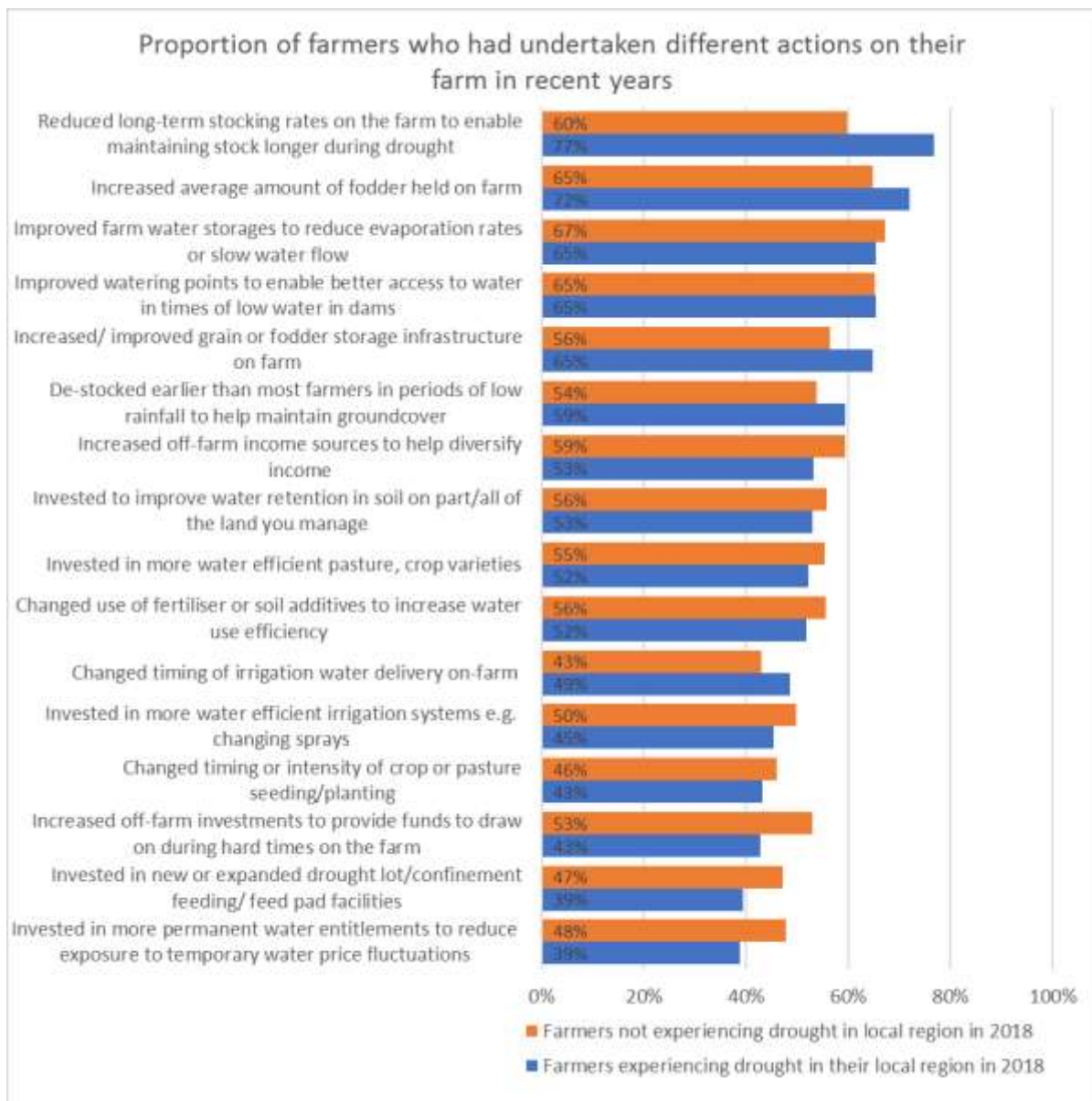


Figure 16 Proportion of farmers who have invested in different actions to help them prepare for drought

When asked how useful investments they had made to prepare for drought were, the majority of farmers who had undertaken each action, and who were experiencing drought in their local region in 2018, reported the action was very useful:

- More than 90% reported that de-stocking early and investing off-farm to provide funds to draw on during hard times were very useful.
- Between 80% and 89% found improving grain and fodder storage, increasing fodder held on farm, reducing long-term stocking rates on the farm, and changing timing or intensity of crop/pasture seedling/planting very useful.
- Between 70% and 79% found investing in drought lot/confinement feeding/feed pads, improving farm water storage to reduce evaporation or slow water flow, investing in more permanent water entitlements, changing use of fertiliser or soil additives, improving watering points, and changing timing of irrigation water delivery useful

- Between 60% and 69% found increasing off-farm income, investing in more water efficient crop and pasture varieties and more water efficient irrigation systems, and improving soil water retention, very useful.

This suggests both that farmers are finding multiple types of activities useful, and that in some cases there is scope to continue working to identify how to make different actions as useful as possible for farmers.

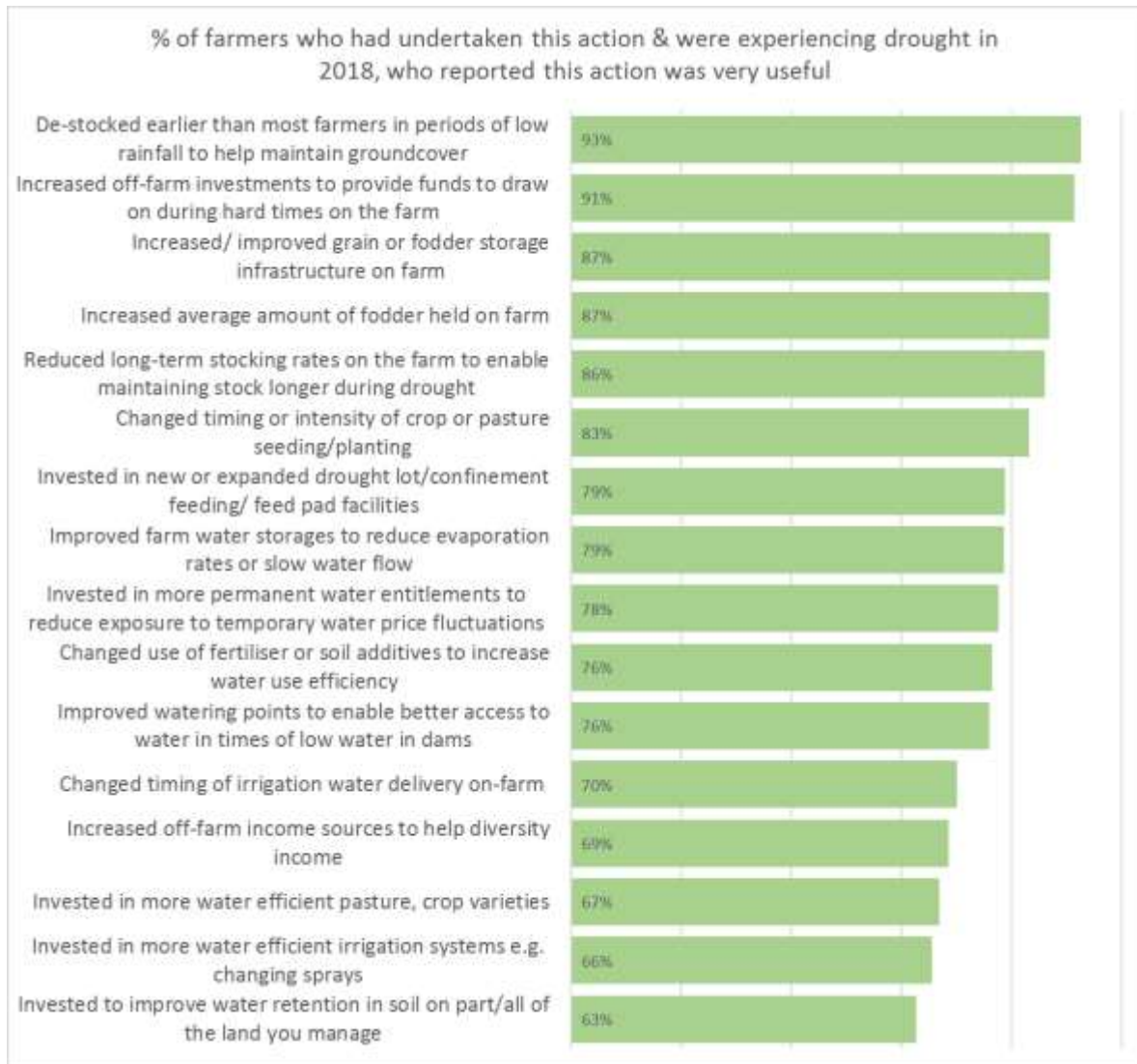


Figure 17 Usefulness of different drought preparedness investments, rated by farmers who had undertaken them and were experiencing drought in 2018

Discussion and conclusions

This brief report highlights the complexity of supporting communities and farmers impacted by drought. Five key recommendations have been developed based on these initial results. All of these need more in-depth investigation.

1. **Invest in both 'coping' and 'resilience' strategies.** Much work examining how to increase resilience to drought focuses on recommending a focus on increasing preparedness for drought, in preference to 'after the fact' investment in supporting those impacted by drought. This approach focuses on shifting from a crisis response approach to one of risk

management and preparedness (Wilhite 2005, Wilhite et al. 2005). The findings of this report support this, but also highlight the importance of recognising that in some cases, short-term support during drought may be necessary to enable farmers and communities to have the capacity to invest in those longer term resilience strategies. Short-term income, social and mental health support can help those experiencing acute impacts to cope with periods of acute stress, and in turn enable more productive and effective long-term investment and decision making. Shorter-term support to help people cope with drought was considered as important by those experiencing drought as actions that assist in longer-term resilience to drought. It is likely that supporting coping during the hardest times increases ability of farmers and communities to then be able to invest in longer-term strategies that increase resilience to drought. Providing support targeted predominantly at coping, or predominantly at building resilience, may fail. The former will reinforce helplessness in drought cycle by not assisting people to build resilience to drought; the latter may be ineffective due to not ensuring those experiencing severe impacts receive short-term assistance to cope. For many farmers, short-term assistance is necessary for them to then be able to invest in longer-term resilience strategies.

2. **Respond to the social as well as economic effects of drought.** Much current support focuses on income support for farmers and, in some cases, rural businesses and communities more broadly. The finding suggest a strong need to ensure there is investment in providing support for health and wellbeing in addition to direct economic support. This can in turn lead to improved social connection and support within communities. Achieving this requires providing not only counselling services, but also actively supporting and enabling people affected by drought to maintain social contact and connection. This is critical as a person's social networks are key providers of support during challenging times: reduced social contact reduces access to both emotional and practical support during drought, and is likely to have negative impacts on mental health and wellbeing. Having social connection is a key form of support in challenging times, and supporting wellbeing enables improved decision making and action during drought. Other studies have also identified that social isolation during drought has significant negative impacts (Dare et al. 2011), highlighting the need to focus investment holistically on the range of impacts of drought.
3. **Increase access to effective mental health support.** Increasing mental health support was identified by both farmers and non-farmers as an important form of support in drought. Many residents of drought-affected areas may be reluctant to access to mental health support for many reasons. Recognised issues include stigma, lack of anonymity in rural communities, lack of access to services and strongly beliefs of stoicism held by many farmers (e.g. Berry et al. 2011). Mental health services should be well connected to other types of drought support (agricultural, social and financial), and potentially be provided in non-traditional forms that span the range from prevention (actions encouraging increased help-seeking and social support early in drought processes) to response to mental health crises.
4. **Support a range of organisations so they can in turn support others.** Many farmers report receiving relatively little assistance from local businesses or non-farmers, and also identify a need for better support for local businesses affected by drought. It is important to ensure that assistance provided to groups such as farmers also supports other groups in local communities, particularly local businesses impacted by drought. This is important to avoid the perverse outcome of supporting farmers at the expense of local businesses. It is likely that a stronger preference was given by survey participants to providing income support in forms that can be spent in local communities over the donation of goods because the former can in many cases better support maintaining local businesses and economic activity. Ideally,

those impacted by drought should be able to identify and access a range of sources of support.

5. **Give, don't ask.** With a majority of farmers feeling uncomfortable asking for support, a key challenge for those seeking to provide support is to identify how to provide support without the farmer feeling they have to ask for this help, or that they have to identify their need. This is something that can be difficult when experiencing high levels of stress and workloads as many do during drought. Providing practical guides that assist different groups in identifying the types of assistance that can be most useful may provide one avenue for enabling groups who want to provide support to be able to do so more easily, with less requirement to wait for farmers to ask for assistance.
6. **Invest in reducing stigma associated with asking for help.** Many farmers affected by drought are reluctant to accept help, and more likely to offer it to others. It is likely that in some cases, there is a lack of willingness to accept short-term help to cope with severe impacts of drought, due to concern it will be viewed as an indication a farmer has not adequately prepared for drought. In situations where the current drought is of greater intensity, differing timing and longer duration than have typically occurred in the lifetime of most farmers, it is important to acknowledge that drought preparation strategies recommended in the past may not be sufficient to enable farmers to cope with such unprecedented conditions. This in turn means there is a real need to ensure farmers can accept both shorter term help to cope, and longer-term assistance to invest in further and different drought resilience strategies – which may in some cases extend to large-scale transformation of farming systems to focus on different enterprises better suited to longer-term climatic patterns.
7. **Support both on- and off-farm drought resilience strategies.** A majority of farm households in Australia earn some income off-farm (Schirmer et al. 2015), and for many farmers who participated in the survey, diversifying income and investments to include off-farm income generation is an important resilience measure. This points to a need to consider not only what can be done on the farm to improve resilience to drought, but how to invest in rural communities to increase drought resilience and provide a range of income sources that do not all vary with drought.
8. **Drought support should be invested in at all times – not just during drought.** Many of the actions most useful for addressing impacts of drought are ones that can be invested in – and in many cases may be most readily invested in – when communities and farmers are not experiencing the worst impacts of drought. There is a need to identify the optimal timing for different types of drought support through drought cycles, to enable farmers and communities to invest in drought resilience and preparedness when not experiencing drought, and to receive appropriate support when experiencing the most acute impacts of drought.

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