

COMMUNITY TRUST IN AUSTRALIA'S RURAL INDUSTRIES

A national survey
2020





CITATION

Voconiq (2020) Community trust in rural industries: A national survey. Voconiq, Australia.

© 2020 AgriFutures Australia

All rights reserved.

IMPORTANT DISCLAIMER

The information contained in this publication is intended for general use to assist public knowledge and discussion and to help improve the development of community trust in rural industries. You must not rely on any information contained in this publication without taking specialist advice relevant to your particular circumstances.

While reasonable care has been taken in preparing this publication to ensure that information is true and correct, the Commonwealth of Australia gives no assurance as to the accuracy of any information in this publication.

The Commonwealth of Australia, AgriFutures Australia, the authors or contributors expressly disclaim, to the maximum extent permitted by law, all responsibility and liability to any person, arising directly or indirectly from any act or omission, or for any consequences of any such act or omission, made in reliance on the contents of this publication, whether or not caused by any negligence on the part of the Commonwealth of Australia, AgriFutures Australia, the authors or contributors.

The Commonwealth of Australia does not necessarily endorse the views in this publication.

This publication is copyright. Apart from any use as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, all other rights are reserved. However, wide dissemination is encouraged. Requests and inquiries concerning reproduction and rights should be addressed to AgriFutures Australia Communications Team on 02 6923 6900.

A herd of white cows is grazing in a lush green field during the golden hour of sunset. The cows are scattered across the frame, with some in the foreground looking towards the camera. The background shows a rolling landscape under a warm, orange-hued sky.

RESEARCHER CONTACT DETAILS

Dr Kieren Moffat
Voconiq CEO and Co-founder
info@voconiq.com

VOCONIQ, OUR STORY

Voconiq is an Australian data science company built on a platform of research developed by Australia's national science agency, CSIRO. The Voconiq founding team spent 11 years in CSIRO building this science platform, engaging over 70,000 community members in 14 countries to understand what leads to deeper trust between industries, companies and governments, and the communities they work alongside. Founded in 2019, Voconiq was created as a vehicle for delivering this science as a service globally. Voconiq is the home of Engagement Science and we are passionate about giving voice to communities large and local about the issues that matter to them and helping those that work alongside them to listen to community voices effectively.

To learn more, go to www.voconiq.com

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Community Trust in Rural Industries Program is a jointly funded initiative of AgriFutures Australia, Australian Eggs, Australian Pork Limited, Cotton Research and Development Corporation, Dairy Australia, Fisheries Research and Development Corporation, Sugar Research Australia, Grains Research and Development Corporation, LiveCorp, Meat and Livestock Australia and the NSW Department of Primary Industries. National Farmers' Federation is also a project partner and AgriFutures Australia is the managing agent.



CONTENTS

4

Acknowledgements

6

Introduction

8

Why focus on trust? Why now?

9

The research process

10

Who completed the national survey?

12

Australia's relationship with its rural industries

14

Important issues for Australia's rural industries

19

What leads to deeper community trust in Australia's rural industries?

21

Challenges to achieving deeper trust and acceptance

23

Conclusion

INTRODUCTION

Australia's farmers, fishers and foresters play an important role in our country. They work in a diverse number of industries – from beef, lamb, pork and livestock export to cotton, wood and grains, from fish and eggs to sugar and dairy. These industries produce much of Australia's food and textiles, which are grown or produced all around the country. Rural industries in Australia also have large and complex value chains, often shared across industries, that take raw materials and turn them into food and other products that are consumed domestically or exported.

The Community Trust in Rural Industries project is a program of collaborative research to understand the nature of the relationship between Australia's rural industries and the Australian community. Importantly, this three-year research program demonstrates a commitment by Australia's rural industries to engage directly with the community to guide industry activities and inform the thinking of their members.

In Year One of this research, Voconiq researchers: engaged with program funders to determine the goals and ambition of this work; conducted interviews with a broad cross-section of industry participants and external stakeholders to determine key issues related to community trust in rural industries; desktop research to understand how these issues are discussed and framed in the public conversation, and; completed a nationally representative survey of 6,461 Australians. A comprehensive process of rural industry engagement on these results has also taken place to support extension and outreach for effective use of these data insights by rural industry stakeholders.

This report provides a summary of the national survey results using data collected between the 2nd of December 2019 and 30th of January 2020.

OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

The national survey aimed to achieve two broad goals: determine the main drivers of community trust in and acceptance of Australian rural industries, and to determine a baseline of Australian community attitudes toward a wide range of issues related to Australian rural industries.

DRIVERS OF TRUST AND ACCEPTANCE

This research found that community expectations, views and experiences drive trust in rural industries, which then drives acceptance of rural industries in Australia. Building community trust is therefore important for rural industries to maintain and grow community acceptance in Australia.

The main drivers of community trust in Australian rural industries were:

- Environmental responsibility – farmers, fishers and foresters acting as stewards of the land and sea, operating sustainably,
- Industry responsiveness – the extent to which industries listen to and change their practices in response to community concerns, and
- The value of rural industry products to the lives of Australians – the extent to which industry products contribute real value to the lives of community members.

Other factors that were important in contributing to trust in rural industries were faith in regulations to ensure industry accountability, knowledge of community members about the challenges rural industries face (e.g. drought), and how fairly the benefits of industry activity are distributed throughout community, especially with respect to regional areas.

BASELINE MEASURES OF TRUST DRIVERS

Australians were clear in their support for Australian rural industries, with most participants indicating moderate or strong levels of trust in these industries to act responsibly, and similarly high levels of acceptance of rural industries.

Australians indicated broad agreement that rural industries manage their role as environmental stewards of the land and sea effectively, although there was some concern about specific issues such as the impacts of runoff from rural industries on coastal environments, and complexity in the views of Australians about sustainable management of oceans and using appropriate amounts of water. There was very strong agreement, however, that environmental management is a shared responsibility across all Australian rural industries.

The national data showed that rural industries were seen to be broadly responsive to community concerns, but there was less agreement (and high levels of uncertainty) about the extent to which rural industries are prepared to change their practices in response to community concerns.

In fact, looking across all the issues explored in this national survey, Australians systematically indicated higher levels of uncertainty (i.e. choosing neutral or middle values on rating scales provided) on questions that related to environmental responsibility and industry responsiveness. This is a key challenge for rural industries as its current strong levels of community trust and acceptance are a product of community views on these issues.

There was very little uncertainty, however, about the value of rural industry products in the lives of Australians. The great majority of participants in the nationally representative survey of Australians agreed that the products of farmers, fishers and foresters play an important and central role in the lives of Australians.

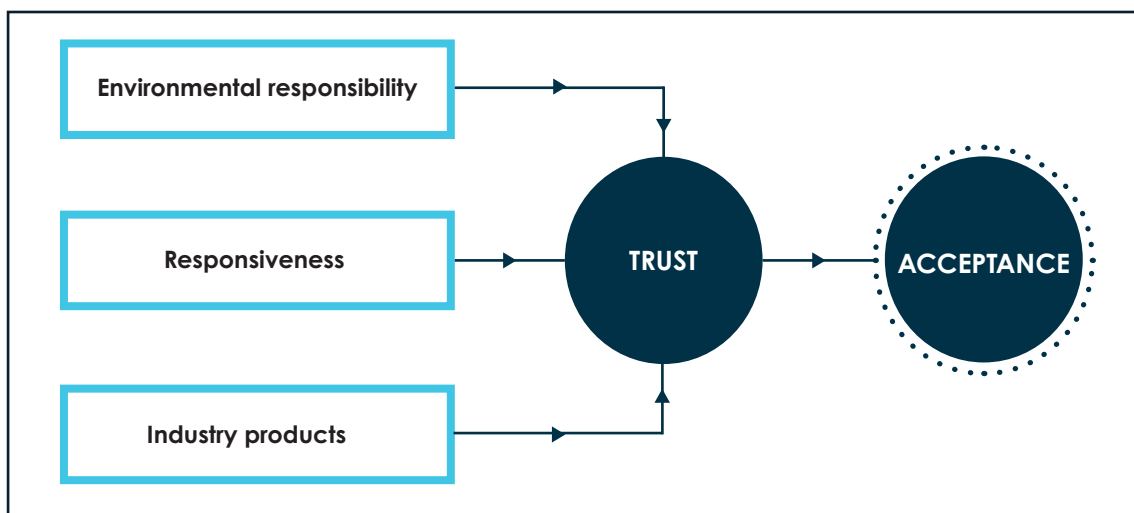
ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS

Australians agree that rural industries in this country play an important economic role, creating significant employment in regional areas. Australians also indicated strong support for regional communities in general, and that strong regional communities are important for producing safe, high-quality food and fibre products.

Australians strongly endorse animal welfare as a key issue and obligation for those industries that involve animals, and that food safety is both an area of strength for rural industries and an area where some industry practices prompt concern (e.g. the use of genetic modification, fertilisers and other chemicals).



In this first year of research, the Community Trust in Rural Industries program has delivered a pathway to deeper community trust and acceptance for Australia's rural industries, and baseline measures of Australian sentiment on these drivers of trust and other relevant issues. These data provide key insights for where and how Australian rural industries may engage the Australian community most effectively and highlighted those areas where there is work to be done in supporting a more reflexive, constructive relationship with all Australians.





WHY FOCUS ON TRUST? WHY NOW?



Community expectations around the way Australian rural industries operate is changing rapidly. Enabling Australia's rural industries to understand these expectations as they evolve is important to ensuring rural industries engage productively with the community.

The level of community acceptance of Australian rural industry products, and the practices they use to create them, is instrumental in shaping the operating, regulatory, social and consumer context in which they operate. CSIRO research on public attitudes towards a range of industries at local and national levels in Australia and internationally, shows that community trust is central to building community acceptance of industries and their practices. This work demonstrates that trust acts as a vehicle that translates community expectations and experiences into acceptance; trust is both a product of what industry does and a key driver of community acceptance^{1,2}.

For Australia's rural industries, ensuring community trust that the products Australians use to feed and clothe their families, build their houses, or export to foreign markets, and that the way they are produced is consistent with community expectations, is fundamental to their ability to operate with freedom. Understanding how to build deeper levels of trust with the Australian community creates new opportunities to grow and develop rural industries in this country in ways that reflect the expectations of Australians; to proactively engage the community on what matters most in this relationship.

This report is the first product of a multi-year program of research to determine the key drivers of community trust in and acceptance of Australia's rural industries. This report also provides a baseline of community sentiment for these drivers, enabling Australian rural industries to understand where they are currently positioned on these key issues, to see themselves through the eyes of community members, and where these industries may most productively engage Australians to build a stronger, more reflexive relationship.

¹ Moffat K, Lacey L, Zhang A, Leipold S (2016). The social licence to operate: a critical review *Forestry: An International Journal of Forest Research* 89 (5), 477-488, <https://doi.org/10.1093/forestry/cpv044>

² Moffat K, Murphy S, and Boughen N. (2019) Australian Egg Industry Community Research Report 2019. CSIRO, Australia. <https://research.csiro.au/eggs/results/>

THE RESEARCH PROCESS

The Community Trust in Rural Industries project is a three-year program of work, allowing this research to build on its findings and explore specific issues in greater detail as they emerge. A multi-year program of work also allows Australia's rural industries an opportunity to evaluate how community sentiment changes over time alongside industry activity and changing conditions (e.g. drought, food safety and security).

This report describes the key findings from a national survey of Australian attitudes toward rural industries in this country. The survey instrument was informed by a broad stakeholder engagement process in this first year of the project to ensure that the work was informed by a range of perspectives. Participants from within a broad range of agriculture industries, and perspectives from outside of the sector were comprehensively canvassed to inform the types of questions included in the survey instrument.

A community survey was used for several important reasons:

- it allows Australia's rural industries to understand the views of a representative sample of Australians³,
- it allows many more Australians to share their perspectives about Australia's rural industries than would be possible using other methods,
- the data that is collected can be analysed in ways that allow us to understand the pathways to deeper trust between Australia's rural industries and the Australian community.

To collect this data, a research panel was used.

Research panels are used frequently in survey research of this kind to access a group of people that reflect the broader Australian population on specific demographic attributes. In this survey, participants were matched broadly with Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data for age, gender, and education levels in each Australian state. Participants 18 years and over were also drawn from across Australia to ensure that those in regional areas also had a voice in this important research.

Data collection for the community survey was completed between the 2nd of December 2019 and the 30th of January 2020. Of the 7,329 surveys that were completed, 6,461 were included for analysis after data cleaning⁴.

³A representative sample is a group or set chosen from a larger statistical population according to specified characteristics. In this sample, these characteristics were national proportions of age, gender and education as determined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics

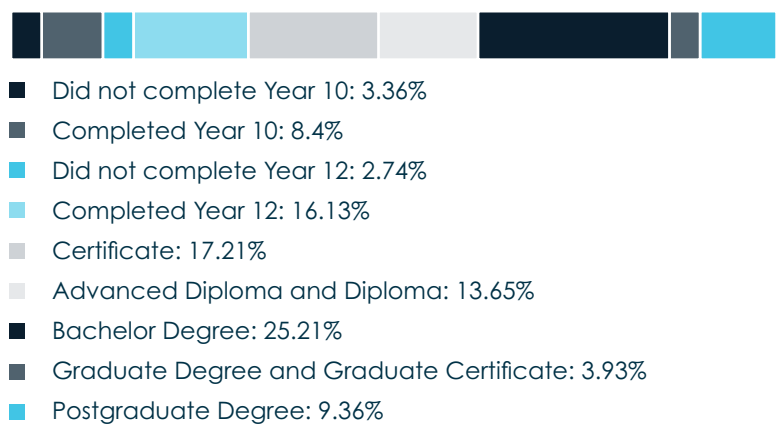
⁴'Data cleaning' is conducted in order to ensure the quality of data included in analyses is high. This involves screening and potential removal of surveys where, for example, participants answered the survey very quickly (i.e. less than 5 minutes), in ways that indicate lack of attention to the content of questions, and extreme or consistent responding on survey questions (i.e. answering '1' to all questions). For more detail on what this involves, see Meade AW and Bartholomew C. (2012) Identifying careless responses in survey design. *Psychological Methods*, 17(3), 437-455. DOI: 10.1037/a0028085.

WHO COMPLETED THE NATIONAL SURVEY?

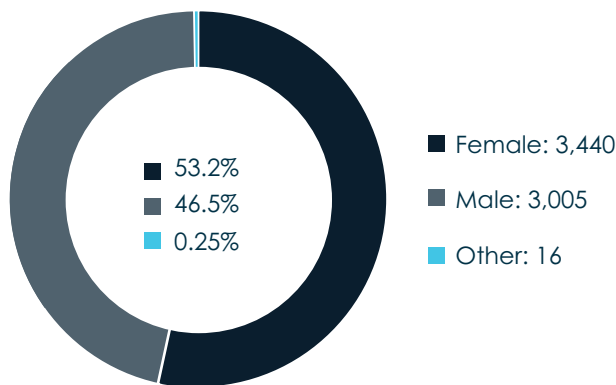
TOTAL PARTICIPANTS



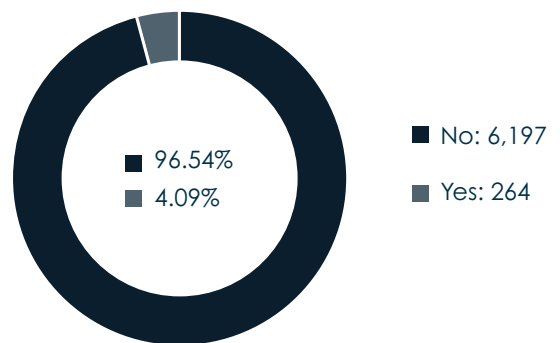
EDUCATION LEVEL



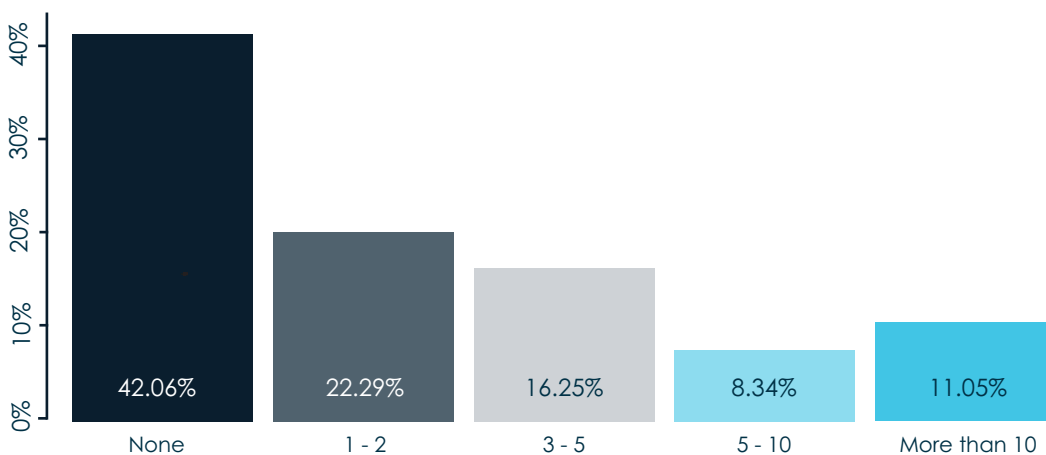
GENDER



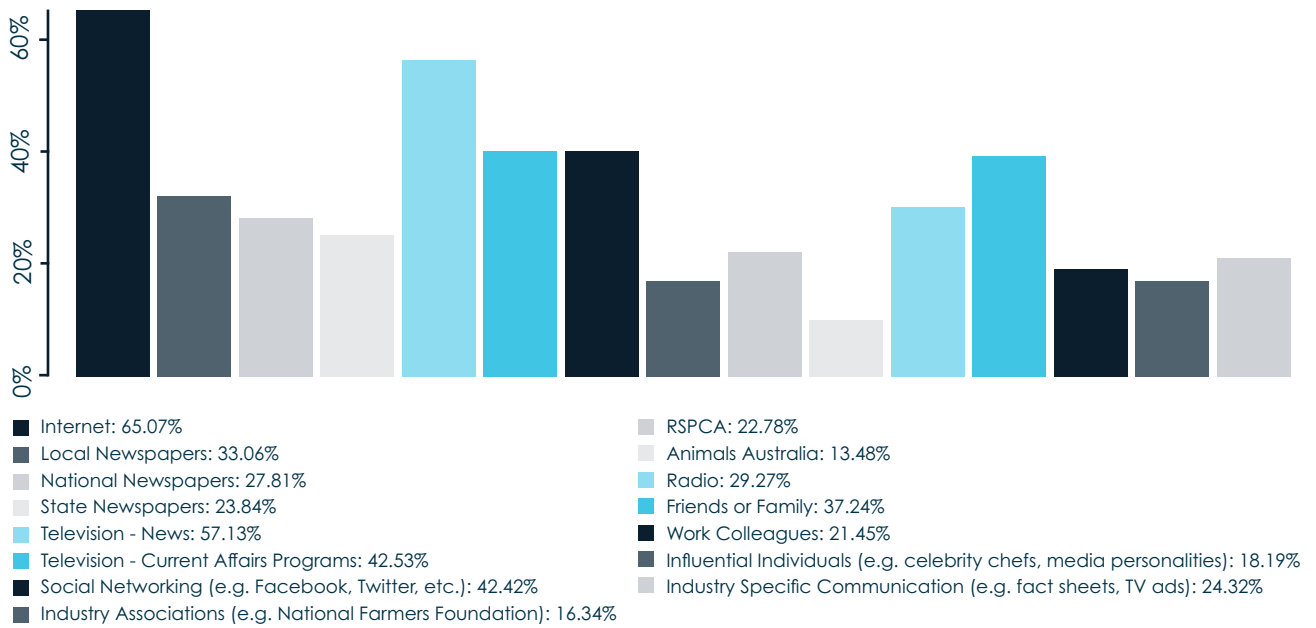
ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIGHT ISLANDER PEOPLES STATUS



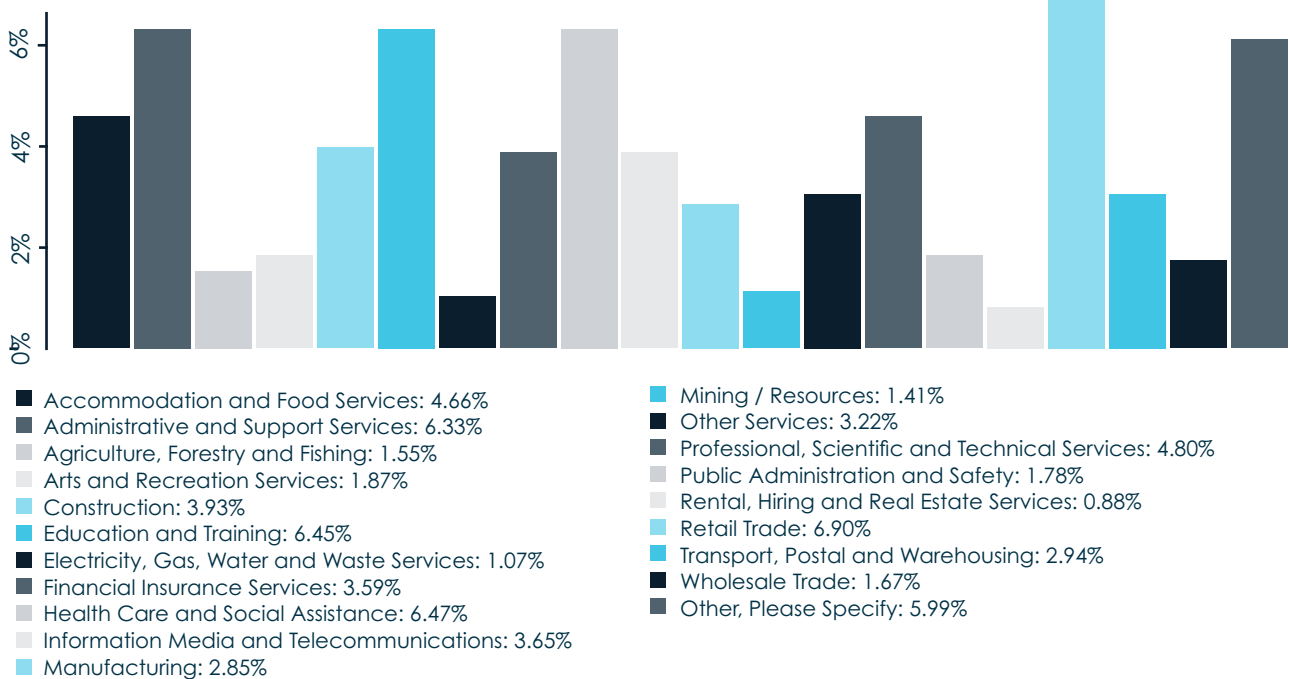
HOW MANY PEOPLE DO YOU KNOW THAT WORK IN RURAL INDUSTRIES?



PLEASE HELP US UNDERSTAND WHERE YOU GET MOST OF YOUR INFORMATION ABOUT AUSTRALIAN RURAL INDUSTRIES



WHAT INDUSTRY OR AREA DO YOU WORK IN CURRENTLY?



AUSTRALIA'S RELATIONSHIP WITH ITS RURAL INDUSTRIES

To understand how Australians feel about rural industries in the broader national context, community members were asked a range of questions about the contribution of Australian rural industries to the economy, the role of farmers, fishers and foresters in Australian society, and the value community members place on the products of these industries.

Community members were also asked about their level of trust and acceptance of rural industries and their members, and how responsive these industries are to community concerns.

RURAL INDUSTRIES ARE CENTRAL TO AUSTRALIA'S STORY

Overall, Australians feel strongly that rural industries in this country contribute significantly to Australia's economy and are important to our way of life (86% of participants agreed with these statements, respectively). Community members also indicated

strongly that farmers (91% agreement; see Figure 1), fishers (80% agreement) and foresters (71% agreement) play an important role in Australian society currently, and that rural industries are an important part of our history in Australia (86% agreement).

Australians also indicated strong agreement that the products of Australia's rural industries are important to Australian life, with 93% of community members agreeing that vegetables provide important nutrition in the Australian diet, 86% that Australian fibre producers provide important materials for goods in Australia, 84% that meat provides important nutrition in the Australian

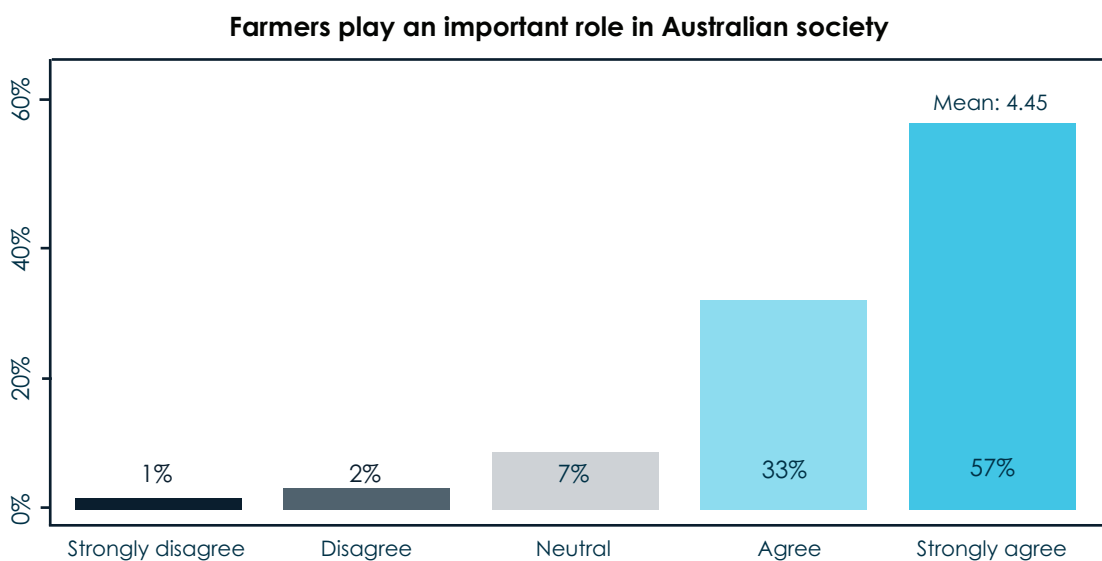


Figure 1. Importance of farmers in Australian society

diet, and 75% that the forestry industry provides important products for Australia.

TRUST AND ACCEPTANCE OF RURAL INDUSTRIES

When asked to rate their level of trust in Australian rural industries overall, community members were again positive with 87% of participants indicating moderate or stronger levels of trust in rural industries to act responsibly, and only 13% indicating lower levels of trust (see Figure 2). Levels of trust in the chief rural industries representative body, the National Farmers Federation (NFF) were very similar to rural industries overall. Trust in rural industries and the NFF were higher than for all levels of government and large food retailers, and similar to levels of community trust in animal welfare advocacy groups.

Also of note in this data is that the proportion of Australians indicating low levels of trust in rural industries (13%) and the NFF (15%) were small relative to state and federal governments and large retailers (between 45-48% at the time of data collection), and animal welfare advocacy groups (22-23%).

Consequently, acceptance of rural industries in general (56% agreement, 13% disagreement), and farmers, fishers and foresters (62% agreement, 10% disagreement) was also strong and positive, indicating these industries as a whole have a solid platform on which to build a deeper relationship with the Australian community.

RESPONSIVENESS OF AUSTRALIA'S RURAL INDUSTRIES

Community members were also asked how responsive they felt Australian rural industries are to community concerns. Half of participants indicated they felt rural industries listen to and respect community opinions (12% disagreed), and 44% indicated agreement that rural industries in Australia are prepared to change their practices in response to community concerns (18% disagreed). On both of these questions there were sizeable proportions of participants that chose a 'neutral' response. Perhaps helping to explain this uncertainty, 50% of community members agreed that "some rural industries in Australia do not seem interested in community concerns about how they operate".

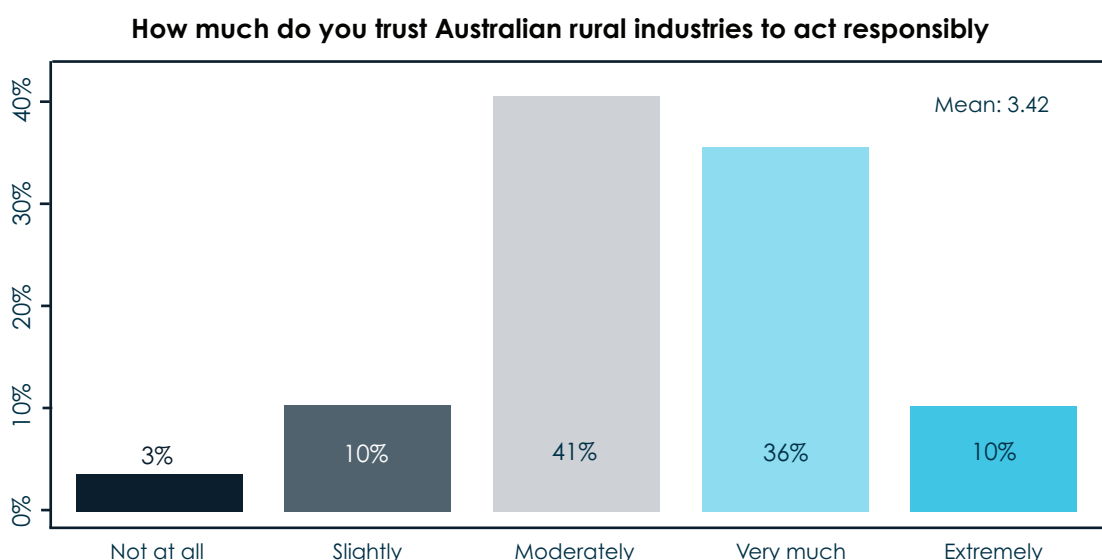


Figure 2. Ratings of community trust in rural industries to act responsibly

IMPORTANT ISSUES FOR AUSTRALIA'S RURAL INDUSTRIES

Australia's rural industries are diverse, as are the issues that relate to their activities. Community members were asked their perspectives on broad set of challenges and opportunities for Australia's rural industries, including the effects of industry activities on the environment, and the role that external events, like drought, have on farmers, fishers and foresters.

WATER, THE ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE VARIABILITY

Australia's rural industries, more than any other, have a deep and vital connection to the natural environment. What was clear from the community survey is that Australians see their rural industries as stewards of the land and sea, with 56% of participants

indicating agreement that rural industries manage this role responsibly (only 11% disagreed). Australians also strongly believe that environmental management is a shared responsibility across all Australian rural industries (86% agreement; see Figure 3).

About half of Australians surveyed felt that Australian rural industries manage their environmental impacts effectively (15% disagreed), although on more specific

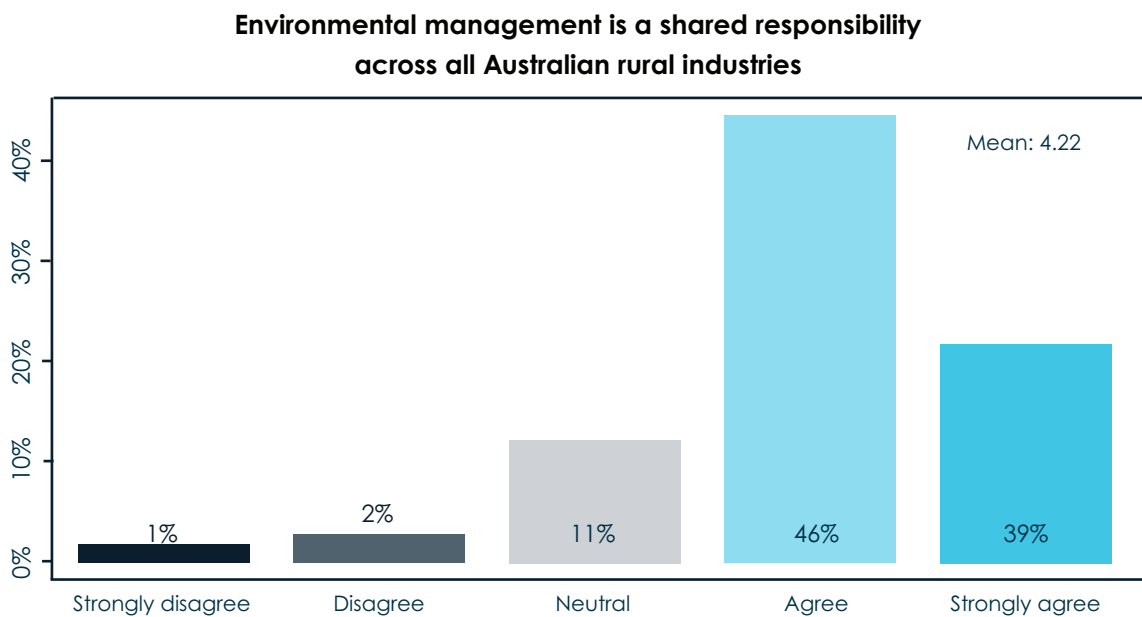


Figure 3. Ratings of shared responsibility for environmental management in rural industries

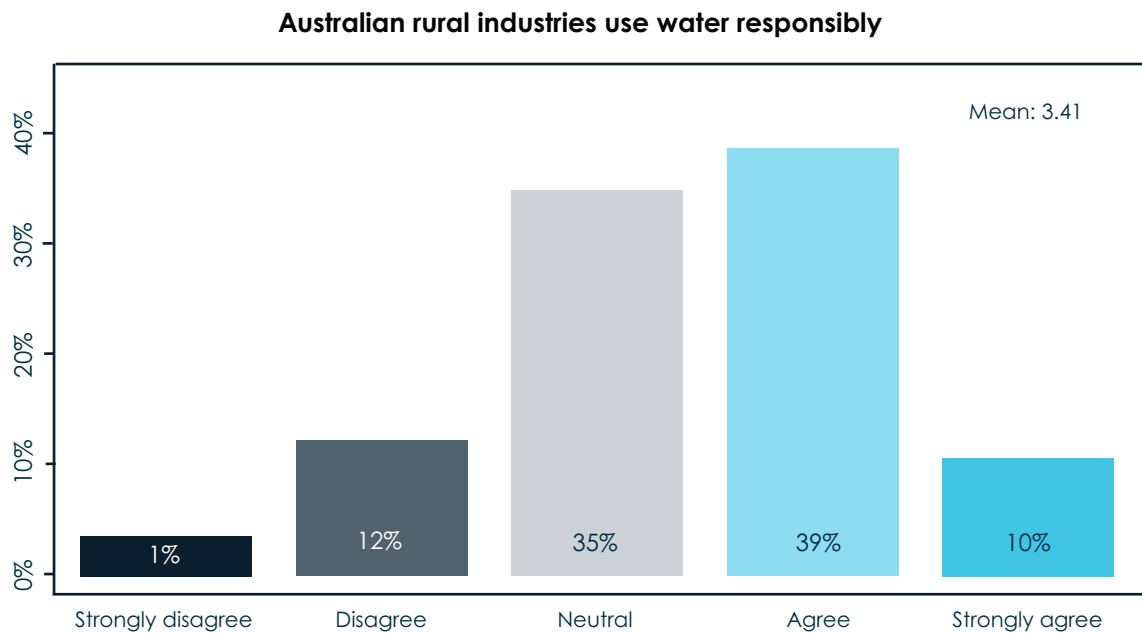


Figure 4. Ratings of responsible water use by rural industries

issues such as the effect of runoff from rural industries on coastal environments (e.g. the Great Barrier Reef), 55% indicated they felt this caused damage.

Similarly, while Australians overall were supportive that rural industries use water responsibly (see Figure 4), there was some complexity around the management of water for specific uses. For example, similar proportions of Australians agreed (35%) and disagreed (31%) that Australia's oceans are managed sustainably. 25% of Australians surveyed agreed that Australia's rural industries use more water than they are entitled to, with 39% disagreeing with this statement.

There was consistent strong agreement, however, that climate change will make the lives of farmers, fishers and foresters harder in the future through longer droughts and more intense heatwaves, and less water available. 65% of participants agreed that farmers play an important role in addressing climate change through, for example, the storage of carbon in soils.

JOBS, DOLLARS AND REGIONAL COMMUNITIES

Australians strongly believe that Australia's rural industries play an important economic role through the export of products to overseas markets (74% agreed this is good for Australia) and through creating significant employment in regional areas (82% agreed; see Figure 5). In fact, the survey data showed overwhelmingly that Australians from all over the country feel that regional communities are important to Australia (89% agreement), and that strong regional communities are important for producing safe, high-quality food and fibre products in this country (85% agreement).

There was less agreement, however, that farms are as safe as workplaces in other industries (only 46% agreement) with 44% of community members considering working in rural industries a dangerous activity. Australians indicated strong concern for

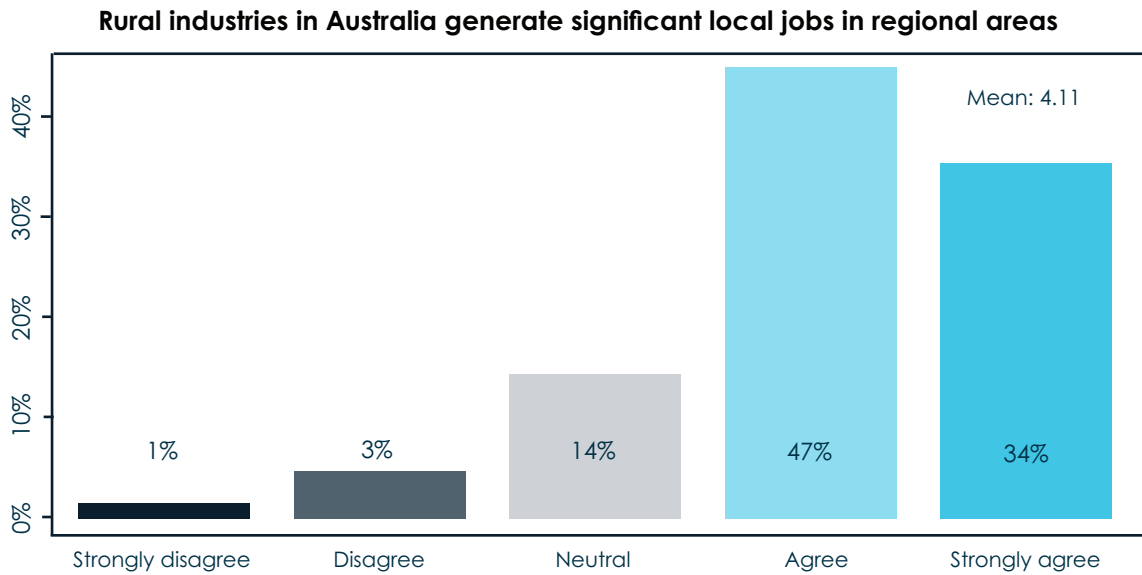


Figure 5. Ratings of rural industry employment in regional Australia

the health and wellbeing of farmers and regional communities, with 89% indicating agreement that it is important that health and safety of farm workers is prioritised and 74% agreeing that addressing mental health challenges is a priority for Australia's regional communities (see Figure 6).

ANIMAL WELFARE, AGRICULTURAL TECHNOLOGY AND FOOD SAFETY

The wellbeing of animals in Australia's rural industries is a key priority for the Australian community. 80% of participants indicated agreement that the welfare of animals is not just about the absence of harm to them (see Figure 7), for example, and 84% of participants agreed that rural industries have an obligation to provide a high level of welfare for animals in their care. Future work may also examine perceptions of the treatment of animals in rural industries alongside community expectations of care.

When asked about issues related to the safety of food and other products, Australians feel strongly that food produced in Australia adheres to strict food safety

standards (84%) and that it is necessary to maintain strict biosecurity controls to protect our rural industries (89% agreement). Australians were concerned about the use of technologies such as genetic modification to increase the productivity of rural industries (52% indicated concern), and 65% of Australians felt farmers should find better ways to increase crop yields and control pests than using chemicals (65% agreement). Reflecting the complexity of these issues, however, community members also acknowledged that currently the use of fertilisers and chemicals by rural industries is necessary.

Addressing mental health challenges is a priority for regional communities in Australia

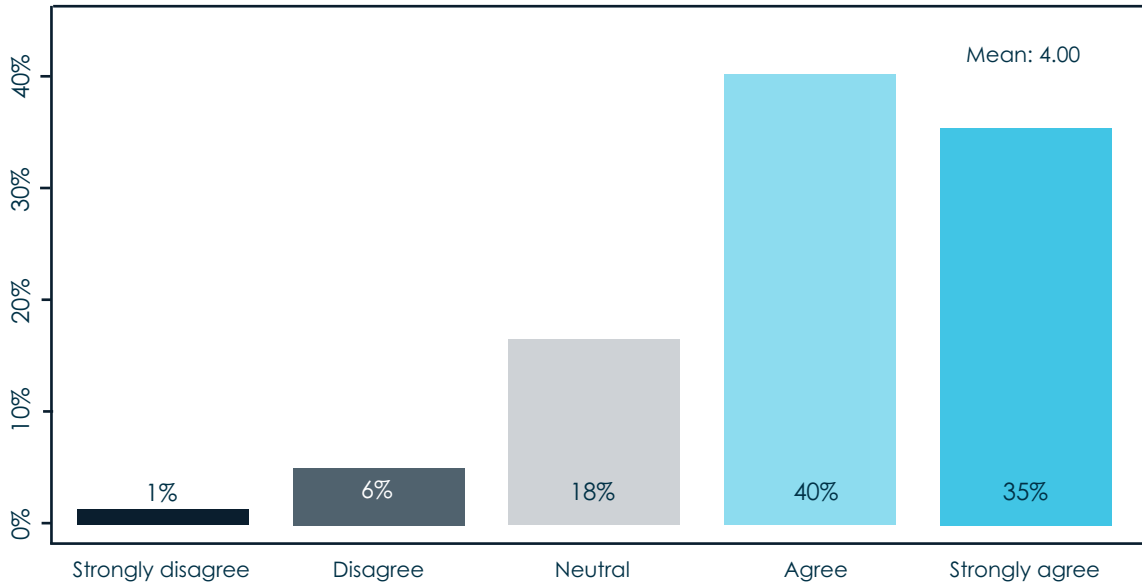


Figure 6. Ratings of importance of addressing mental health challenges in regional Australia

The welfare of animals is not just about the absence of harm to them

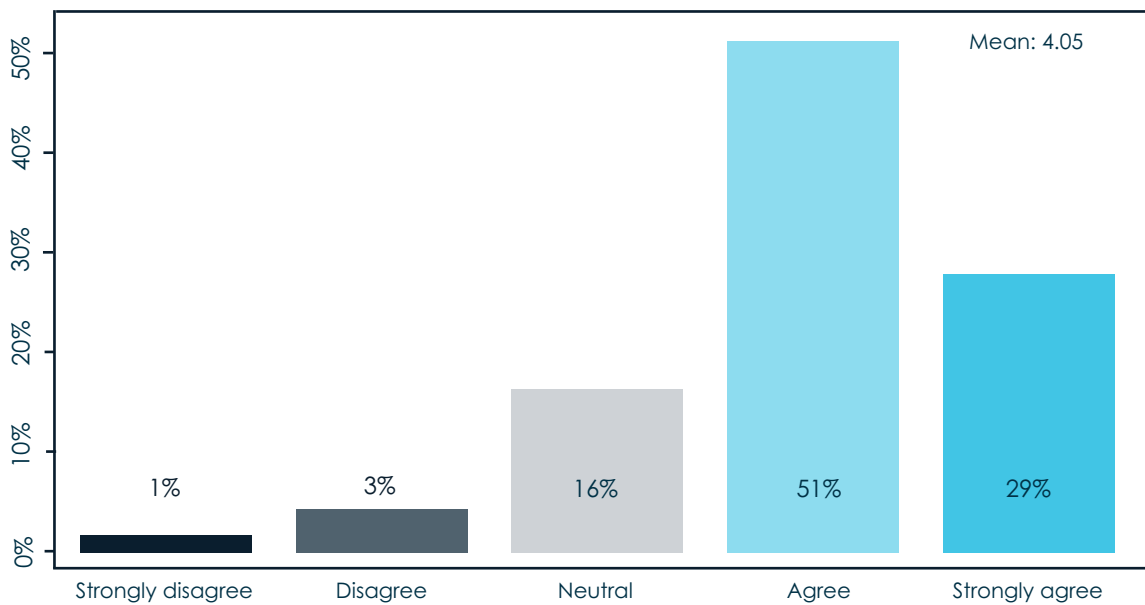


Figure 7. Ratings of animal welfare sentiment

WHAT LEADS TO DEEPER COMMUNITY TRUST IN AUSTRALIA'S RURAL INDUSTRIES?

The Community Trust in Rural Industries program of work has as its primary goal to determine and understand how these industries may develop deeper and stronger relationships with the Australian community. In this section, additional analyses have been used to determine the most important areas that affect community trust and acceptance of Australia's rural industries, and how these insights may be most usefully applied to achieve this goal.



PATHWAYS TO TRUST AND ACCEPTANCE

Using a sophisticated statistical technique called path analysis, the key attributes of a stronger relationship between the Australian community and Australia's rural industries were identified.

1.

TRUST IS A VEHICLE

The path model (see Figure 8) shows trust as central, operating as a vehicle that translates the experiences and expectations of community members into their level of acceptance of Australia's rural industries: as trust in rural industries increases, so does the level of community acceptance of these industries. As discussed above, trust is fundamental in relationships between industries and community because it creates room for innovation, for benefit of the doubt when things go wrong, and confidence in the products farmers, fishers and foresters produce. For Australia's rural industries, the next key question to explore is what leads to stronger trust with the Australian community?

2.

RESPONSIBLE STEWARDS OF THE LAND AND SEA, OPERATING SUSTAINABLY

Environmental responsibility was the strongest driver of trust in Australia's rural industries; the more responsible and sustainable rural industries are seen to be the more trust community members have in them. A specific set of environmental issues were found to be most important in driving trust, including responsible use of water, effective management of environmental impacts, commitment to working in a sustainable way, placing long term environmental stewardship ahead of short-term profits, and being "responsible stewards of the land and sea".

3.

INDUSTRY RESPONSIVENESS

The second strongest driver of trust in rural industries was industry responsiveness to community concerns. Specifically, that rural industries listen to and respect community concerns and rural industries are prepared to change their behaviour in response to community concerns. The more responsive to community concerns Australia's rural industries are, the stronger community trust in farmers, fishers and foresters will be. This is key because it shows that it is action on challenging issues, and not just words, that Australians value in this relationship with rural industries.

4.

YOUR PRODUCT IS YOUR BOND

Quality of rural industry products was found to be the third strongest driver of trust in Australian rural industries. This driver reflects the importance of products such as meat, eggs and fish in the Australian diet, Australian fibre products (e.g. wool, cotton) in materials created by and through Australian rural industry activities, and the products of the forestry industry used in Australia; the more important these products are seen to be by Australians, the more they trust the industries that produce them. Put another way, the more that Australians believe that the products of our rural industries add real value to our lives, the more community members trust rural industries.

Analyses also revealed a strong positive correlation ($r = .54$) between rural industry responsiveness and perceptions of environmental responsibility. This means that the more responsive the community feel rural industries are on the issues that concern them, the more positively rural industries are viewed in terms of their environmental responsibility (and vice versa). This is an important finding and reinforces the power that productive engagement with the community can have on the way that challenging issues are viewed by the Australian community.

In addition to the three main drivers of trust in rural industries detailed here, there were additional factors that were important in driving trust in rural industries. These included how effective community members feel regulation of industry activities are, how much knowledge community members have about the challenges these industries face (e.g. drought), and how fairly they feel the benefits of rural industries are distributed to the community, particularly in regional areas.

These are important layers of meaning in this work to date, showing that when the Australian community are confident that rural industries comply with the rules determining acceptable industry practices, better understand how rural industries work, and are confident the benefits (economic or otherwise) created through rural industries are being shared fairly throughout community, and especially to regional communities, trust is stronger.

Together, these results lay out a pathway for building a stronger relationship between rural industries and the Australian community; a pathway characterised by responsive industries engaging on the issues that matter most to the Australian community, like environmental responsibility, and contributing real value to the lives of Australians through quality products. Community trust in Australia's rural industries is in the hands of Australia's farmers, fishers and foresters.



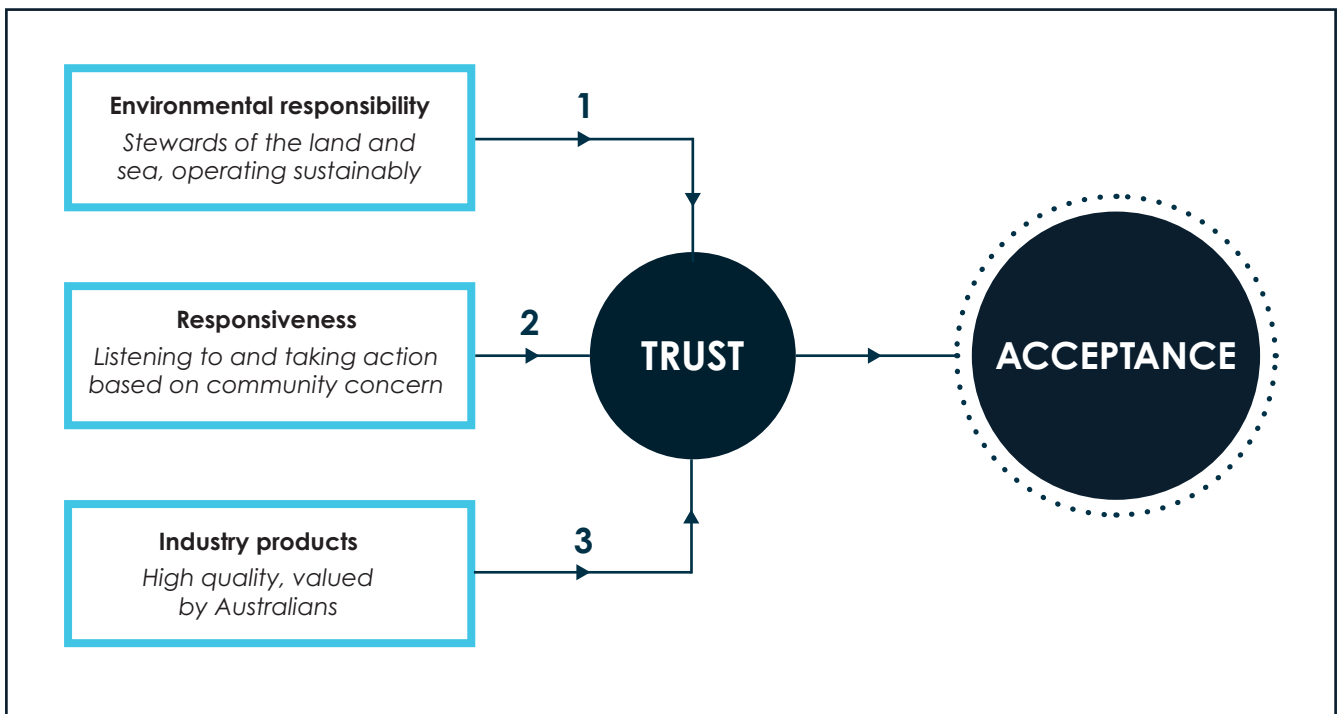


Figure 8. Pathways to trust and acceptance of Australia's rural industries

HOW TO READ THIS PATH MODEL

When reading the path model on this page, follow the arrows from left to right. The direction of the arrow indicates the direction of the relationship; for example, trust leads to acceptance. The values on the arrows reflect their relative importance in driving trust in rural industries. All pathways in this model are positive, which means that the more responsive that participants feel rural industries are, for example, the more trust in rural industries they have.

CHALLENGES TO ACHIEVING DEEPER TRUST AND ACCEPTANCE

In this report, a national survey of community attitudes toward Australia's rural industries has shown that trust and acceptance of these industries is currently strong. The path model then demonstrated what is most important for Australia's rural industries to focus on to build deeper trust and acceptance with the Australian community. However, a closer look at several questions used in the survey demonstrates a key challenge to the position of rural industries in their relationship with the Australia community: uncertainty.

When examining the results from this survey of Australian attitudes toward rural industries, it is important to focus on the level of agreement and disagreement with the statements presented around a broad array of issues and topics connected with these industries. However, it is also useful to examine the level of uncertainty in these same questions. Put another way, the proportion of Australians that did not indicate agreement or

disagreement on key issues (i.e. selected '3' on a scale from 1, strongly disagree, to '5' strongly agree).

These responses may be interpreted in a number of ways, including that community members were indicating a neutral position on a topic or that they did not have enough information or knowledge to make a more definitive judgment. This is particularly relevant



where this kind of responding is seen on topics that have a strong connection to trust in rural industries.

To explore this further, responses for all the questions used in this survey were organised by the level of neutral or uncertain responding. That is, questions were organised in order of the proportion of people that answered '3', from highest levels of neutral responding to lowest. These questions were then organised according to how strongly each of them was correlated with community trust in rural industries.

As per the figure below, this then provides a four-box quadrant with every question asked in this survey falling into one of four categories. Of primary interest in the current research are those topics or issues falling into either of the categories marked by high uncertainty and a strong relationship with trust (positive or negative).

This analysis revealed that all the topics or issues that had both high levels of neutral responding or uncertainty AND had strong relationships with trust,

related to:

- Responsiveness of rural industries to community concerns, and
- Environmental responsibility.

The good news is that community trust in Australia's rural industries is the product of its actions and behaviours: these industries have control over their own future. This report has outlined the power that engaging productively with the Australian community can have for rural industries, and on what issues to focus this engagement for greatest effect. Meaningful and genuine community engagement is not easy, however, particularly as Australia's rural industries are so diverse in the nature of their current relationships and interactions with the Australian community. The challenge then, is for Australia's rural industries to work together to meet the expectations of community; to live up to the esteem in which Australians hold farmers, fishers and foresters.

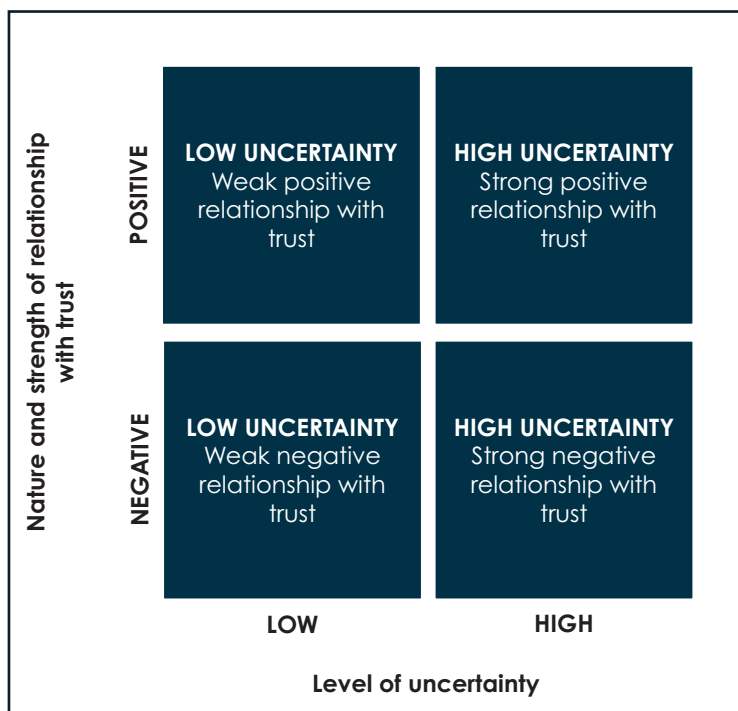


Figure 9. Illustration of the four-box quadrant within which all survey questions were mapped by level of uncertainty and strength of relationship with trust in rural industries

CONCLUSION

The Community Trust in Rural Industries program of work is providing key insights into the nature of the current relationship between the Australian public and Australia's farmers, fishers and foresters, and providing a pathway to deeper trust and acceptance of these industries. A national survey of the Australian community has also provided a clear view of the challenges for Australia's rural industries in achieving this goal.

KEY FINDINGS

A national survey of Australian attitudes has demonstrated that trust in and acceptance of Australia's rural industries is strong. Community members view farmers, fishers and foresters as being important to Australia's economy, identity and future. The products of these industries are highly valued, as are the communities in regional Australia that produce them.

Australians do not see farmers, fishers and foresters as just producers of important materials and goods for sale in Australia and overseas, however, but as "stewards of the land and sea". This comes with a responsibility to use natural resources like water in sustainable ways, to ensure the safety of the people that work in these industries, and to ensure the welfare of animals that are so important in many of these rural industries.

Community members from across the country indicated strongly that there are issues that concern them about the practices of Australia's rural industries, particularly around environmental impacts, the use of chemicals and genetic modification to enhance yields, and ensuring food is produced safely.

A deeper analysis of the national survey data revealed that not only are many of these issues important to Australians, they underpin the community's trust in and acceptance of Australia's rural industries. Path analysis showed that where community members feel that

Australia's rural industries are acting as "stewards of the land and sea, operating sustainably", demonstrating responsiveness to community expectations and concerns, and continuing to produce materials and food that are important to Australian society, trust in rural industries will grow.

However, the reverse is also true: trust in Australia's rural industries may be undermined, for example, by poor environmental stewardship, ignoring the concerns of community, and placing short term economic benefits ahead of longer-term value in the products of these industries. A strong level of agreement within the community that 'environmental management is a shared responsibility across all Australian rural industries' is a clear signal that Australians expect rural industries to work together to meet the high expectations that come with the trust of the Australian public.

The good news is that community trust in Australia's rural industries is the product of its actions and behaviours: these industries have control over their own future. The challenge for these same industries is to work together to be accountable against these high community expectations, to live up to the esteem in which Australians hold farmers, fishers and foresters.



VoconIQ.
Engagement Science
Insights

**activated
understanding**

Community . Corporate . Specialised