

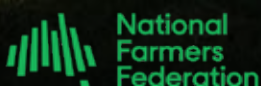
# Farms in Focus Report 2026

Insights that capture the voice  
of Australian farmers

**Weatherhead**

Center for International Affairs  
at Harvard University

In collaboration with





# Contents

<b>A message from CommBank</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Perspectives from our partners</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Key findings</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>A closer look at the results</b>	<b>10</b>
What farmers are concerned about	10
What farmers feel hopeful about	12
Profitability expectations	13
Practices farmers are adopting	14
Rates of adoption by farm size	16
Rates of adoption by ownership status	17
<b>Return on investment expectations</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Barriers to innovation</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Key enablers to support innovation</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Turning insight into action</b>	<b>24</b>

## About this research

Harvard University partnered with Commonwealth Bank of Australia (CBA) to survey Australian farmers, in collaboration with the National Farmers' Federation and the Australian Farm Institute. More than 500 farmers engaged in the survey, with 348 providing complete responses used in the analysis. The survey was conducted between 16 November 2025 and 16 March 2026, and included farmers engaged in all types of farming, across all Australian states and territories. The study sample included farmers managing large and small farms and those farming on land they own as well as those leasing land or managing farms for owners.

Respondents were asked questions about their major immediate concerns today and when looking ahead 5 years, and their views on positive changes that could improve profitability. They were also asked for their overall predictions for profits in the current year and over the next 5 years as well as recent experience with extreme weather events.

Detailed questions were asked about their adoption (or plans for adoption) of a range of newer/innovative management practices for production across different commodities, as well as other aspects of business and land management such as energy and water use and conservation. Farmers were asked about specific motivations for adopting new approaches and expectations for their return on investment, as well as the main barriers generally to adopting newer approaches.

# A message from CommBank

Kylie Allen, Executive General Manager, Regional and Agribusiness Banking, Commonwealth Bank



Australian farmers are strongly committed to growing food and fibre profitably, contributing to thriving rural communities, and leaving the land in a better place for future generations.

The Farms in Focus survey engaged more than 500 Australian farmers about their situation today, along with what they are planning and what they need to be successful and secure. Most are not expecting a dramatic uplift in profits, but nor are they overwhelmingly pessimistic, despite input costs and the impacts of extreme weather top of mind. While this survey was completed prior to the conflict in the Middle East, these developments are likely to further increase uncertainty for farmers. The dominant mood is cautious, pragmatic and focused on finding ways to make the farm business more resilient.

To counter those challenges, farmers are highly motivated to boost productivity and reduce costs. They are leaning into innovations with that primary goal in mind, while also seeing benefits for things like soil health, biodiversity and water quality.

The key challenges noted by farmers are how to get started, how to tailor their approach and how to access the support they need to implement

change. That becomes even more difficult for farmers looking to create carbon projects or achieve sustainability accreditation, which often involve high levels of complexity and documentation.

Encouragingly, the survey demonstrated a strong view among farmers that continuing to adopt innovative new practices and land management strategies are expected to deliver returns. In fact, the survey found these farmers have stronger outlooks for profits overall in the next 5 years.

**"Our farming operational decisions are driven by economics and the wellbeing of our animals and land."**

*Surveyed livestock and cropping farmer from Western Australia*

At CommBank we are continuing to find ways to bring valuable and relevant insights to farmers to support their decision making, and we seek to deliver financial solutions that recognise farmers' long-term goals. I hope you find this research interesting.

# Perspectives from our partners



**Prof. Michael J. Hiscox**

**Clarence Dillon Professor of International Affairs, Harvard University**

**“Understanding the future of Australian agriculture begins with listening closely to the farmers who are now dealing with some enormous challenges.”**

The research conducted by my team combines behavioural economics and advanced survey and experimental methods to understand how people make decisions in complex and uncertain environments. This study, conducted in partnership with the Commonwealth Bank of Australia builds on a long-standing relationship between Harvard University and CommBank, which has brought together academic research and industry insights since 2016.

Farms in Focus was commissioned to provide an evidence-based view of how current pressures are being experienced on the ground in agriculture, and to ensure that the perspectives and experiences of farmers themselves are at the centre of the analysis. The survey was supported by the National Farmers' Federation and the Australian Farm Institute. Hearing

directly from farmers is critical to understanding how decisions are being made in practice.

Drawing on a national survey of more than 500 engaged farmers across all states, territories and farming operations, this research captures a diverse set of perspectives. By capturing the viewpoints of farmers, the survey aims to provide an empirical foundation for discussion, and to support informed engagement between producers, industry and policymakers.

We hope this work contributes to a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing agriculture today, both in Australia and beyond.

**Weatherhead**  
Center for International Affairs  
at Harvard University





**Katie McRoberts,  
Executive Director,  
Australian Farm Institute**



**“Good policy requires assumptions to be tested against the realities of managing a farming business in a volatile environment.”**

Farms in Focus provides insight into the complex decisions farmers navigate every day. For the Australian Farm Institute, research grounded in producer experience is essential to developing sound public policy that supports the long-term resilience, wellbeing and prosperity of Australian agriculture. This work adds depth to the national conversation by giving industry leaders and policymakers a clearer understanding of the realities shaping decision-making on Australian farms.

**Michael Guerin,  
CEO,  
National Farmers’ Federation**



**“Australian farmers are managing constant change and opportunity, with the collective strength of the sector depending on their experiences being reflected in the decisions that shape it.”**

Farms in Focus matters because it turns the lived experience of producers into clear national signals about what is changing on farm and where action is needed most. As the peak national body representing farmers and an independent policy development vehicle, the National Farmers’ Federation supports research that strengthens advocacy, informs policy, and helps ensure farmer and community voices are not just heard, but acted on.

# Key findings

**“The game changer on soil health for me was realising how grazing in a different way could save me money and support the land’s productivity longer-term and potentially help me out manage a drought.”**

*– Surveyed livestock farmer from Queensland*

## Farming practices we asked about

- Rotational grazing
- Multi-species pastures
- Lower methane livestock management
- Improving animal health/reducing steroids and antibiotics
- Recycling effluent and manure
- Agroforestry
- Integrating livestock and cropping systems
- Multi-crop rotations
- Low or no tillage
- Cover crops instead of fallowing
- Stubble retention
- Biofertilisers or buffers with fertilisation
- Variable rate spraying or fertilisation
- Water-saving irrigation
- Protecting against runoff
- Land rehabilitation and reforestation
- Conserving native vegetation
- Planting trees (e.g. shelter belts, riparian areas)
- Fencing dams from livestock
- Erosion control
- On-farm renewable energy
- Equipment powered by renewable energy

# Half

of farmers expect profitability to remain stable over the next 5 years, with rising input costs and impacts from extreme weather conditions the leading concerns.



# About two thirds

of farmers expect a positive return on their investments in new approaches.



# 30%

of farmers find it a barrier working through the suitability of practices to implement.



# Half

want clearer return on investment information on new approaches, and 24% highlight advice, guidance and peer support as a barrier.



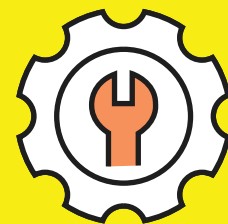
# 43%

identify financial support for transitioning to new approaches as a need.



# 40-50%

of farmers are responding to challenges by adopting or starting to adopt innovative approaches to their farming production management.



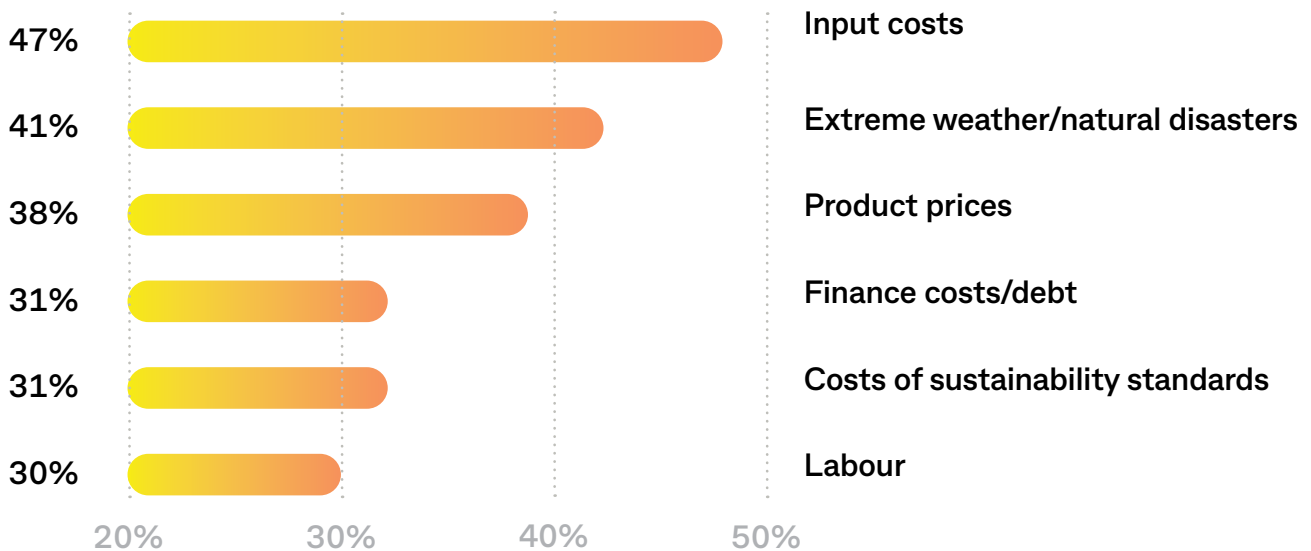
# A closer look at the results

## What farmers are concerned about

Whether they're looking at the season right in front of them, or 5 years down the track, the two biggest concerns for farmers are input costs and extreme weather conditions.



### Immediate concerns for farmers





**Promote low-cost energy-saving equipment to lower operating costs."**

*Surveyed livestock and cropping Farmer from Victoria*

**"I would like clearer disaster risk management training, including practical toolkits."**

*Surveyed livestock and cropping Farmer from New South Wales*

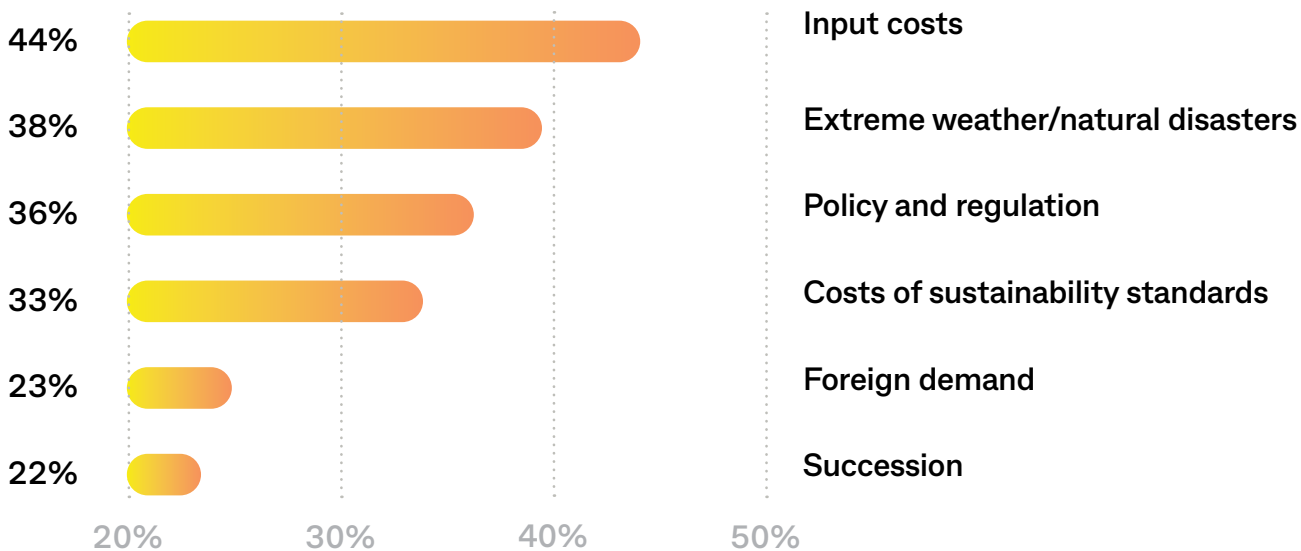
**"Promote precision agriculture to reduce costs and minimise environmental impact."**

*Surveyed livestock and cropping Farmer from Queensland*

**"Strengthen water resource management and promote the application of water-saving technologies."**

*Surveyed livestock and cropping Farmer from New South Wales*

### Longer term concerns for farmers (next 5 years)

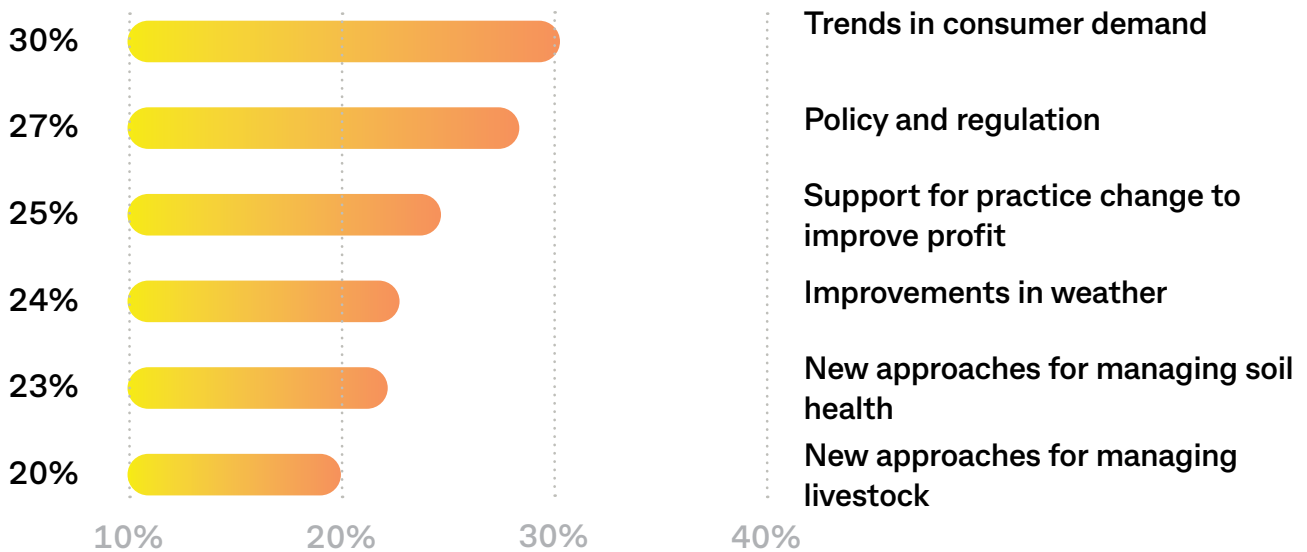


## What farmers feel hopeful about

The power of Brand Australia continues to generate optimism among Australian farmers, with growing demand for their products the leading reason for farmers to feel good about their future prospects. This positivity was especially strong among beef (28%), sheep meat (26%) and cereal, pulse/legume producers (26%).

Farmers also hope for a changing policy environment that will unlock profits (26%) and additional support for implementing new farming approaches (25%).

### Main hopes for improvements in profitability (next 5 years)



**"It is hoped that the research can strengthen cooperation with actual experimental fields in the industry, thereby shortening the time from field trials to practical application."**

*Surveyed livestock and cropping farmer from Victoria*

**"I hope that the research will place greater emphasis on the prediction and response to seasonal droughts, and provide more accurate irrigation scheduling tools."**

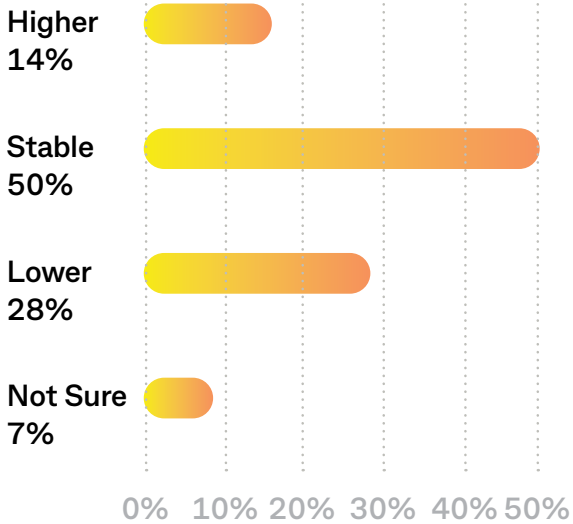
*Surveyed livestock and cropping farmer from Victoria*

## Profitability expectations

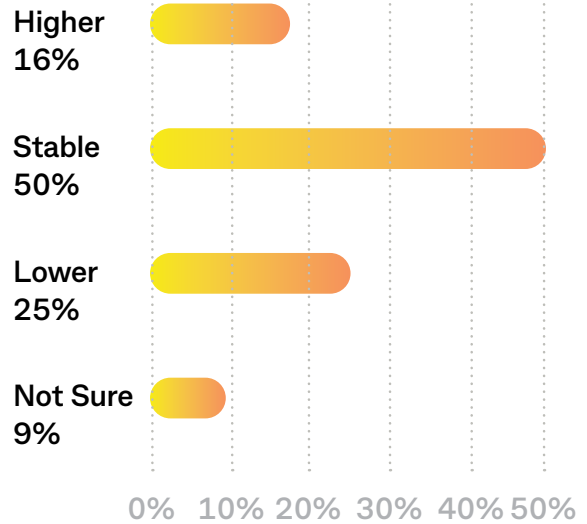
Most farmers expect their 5-year profitability to be at or above current levels – though a quarter of respondents forecast a drop, driven by rising costs, impacts of extreme weather and outlooks for commodity prices.

### Outlook for profits this year compared with last year

#### Immediate



#### Over next 5 years



**"It is hoped that the research can cover the network and equipment maintenance strategies in remote areas to ensure stable data transmission."**

*Surveyed livestock and cropping farmer from Victoria*

**"It is hoped that there will be more rapid and low-cost methods for soil health testing, which are suitable for use in the field on-site."**

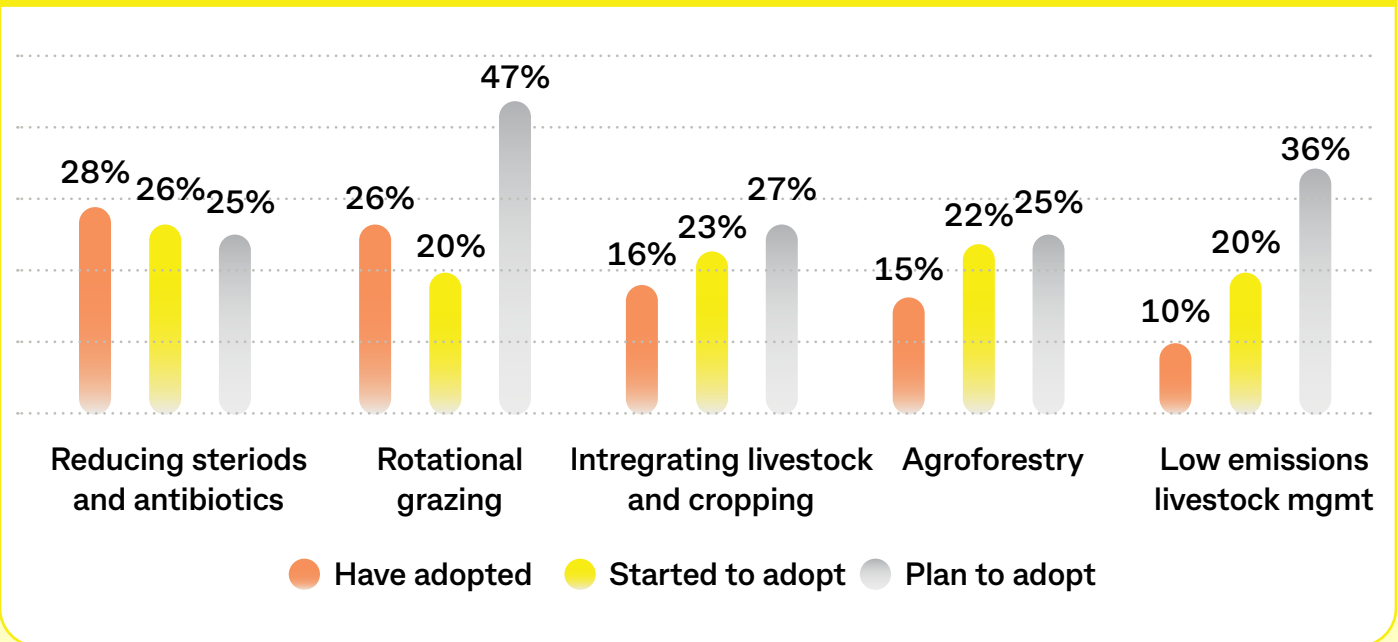
*Surveyed livestock and cropping farmer from New South Wales*

## Practices farmers are adopting

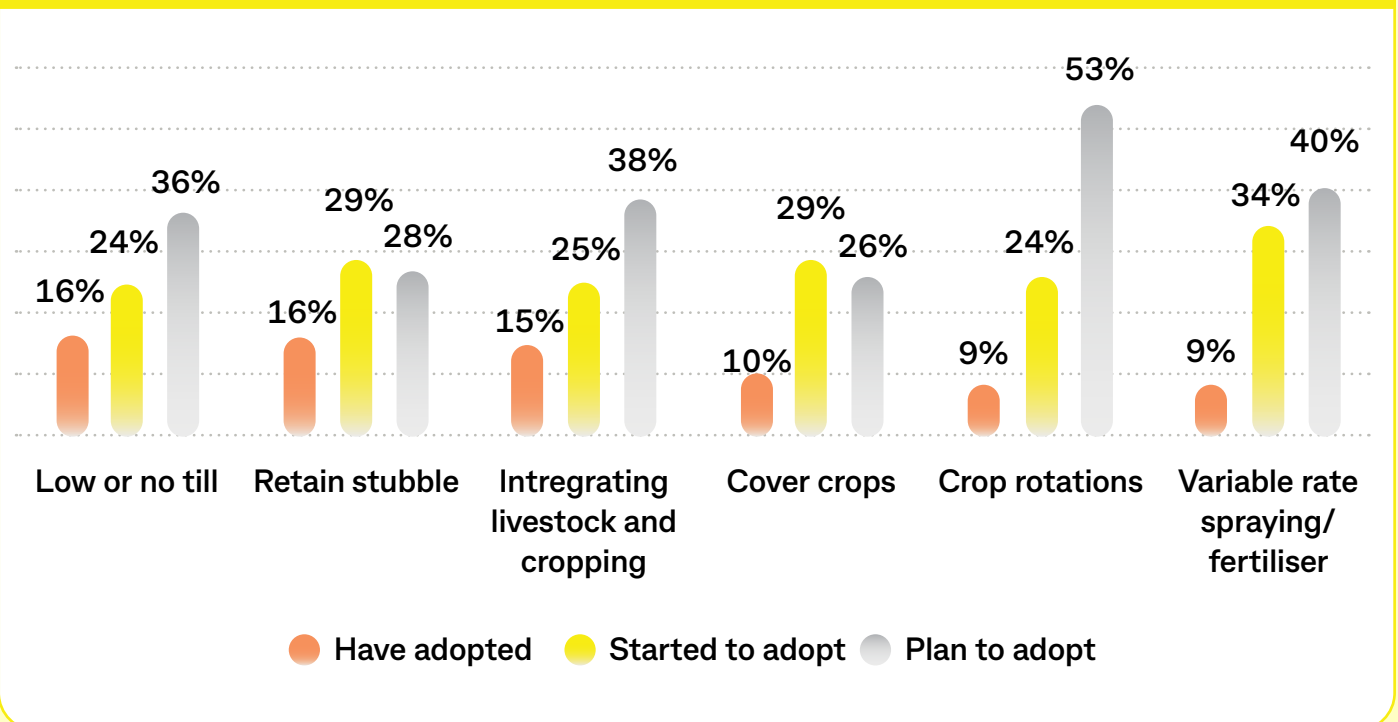
Producers are leaning into opportunities that drive cost reduction like variable rate inputs, or seeking productivity gains through practices like rotational grazing, crop rotations and multi species paddocks.

They also see opportunities in innovations for management of soil, water, vegetation and energy to support better business outcomes and resilient landscapes. Across all 24 practice areas we asked about, there were either strong existing rates of adoption or robust intentions to adopt. While there is wide variation in the extent to which farmers have adopted these practices, the strong insight is that there is clear evidence of the increasing scale of adoption or intention around these evolutions in farming techniques.

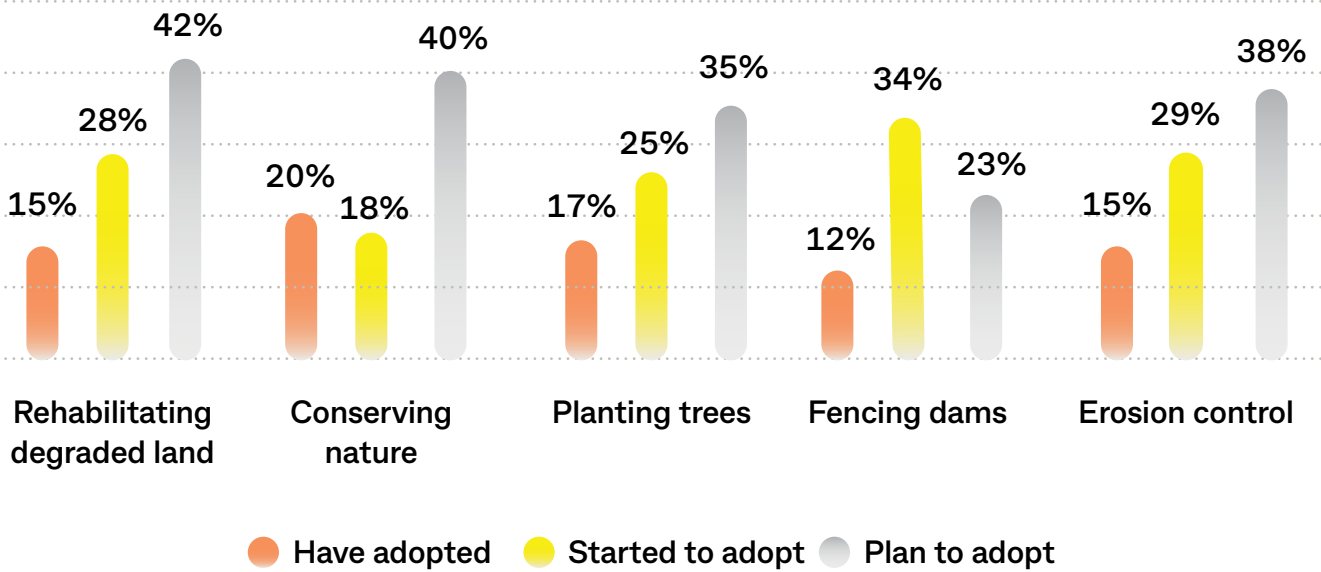
### Livestock



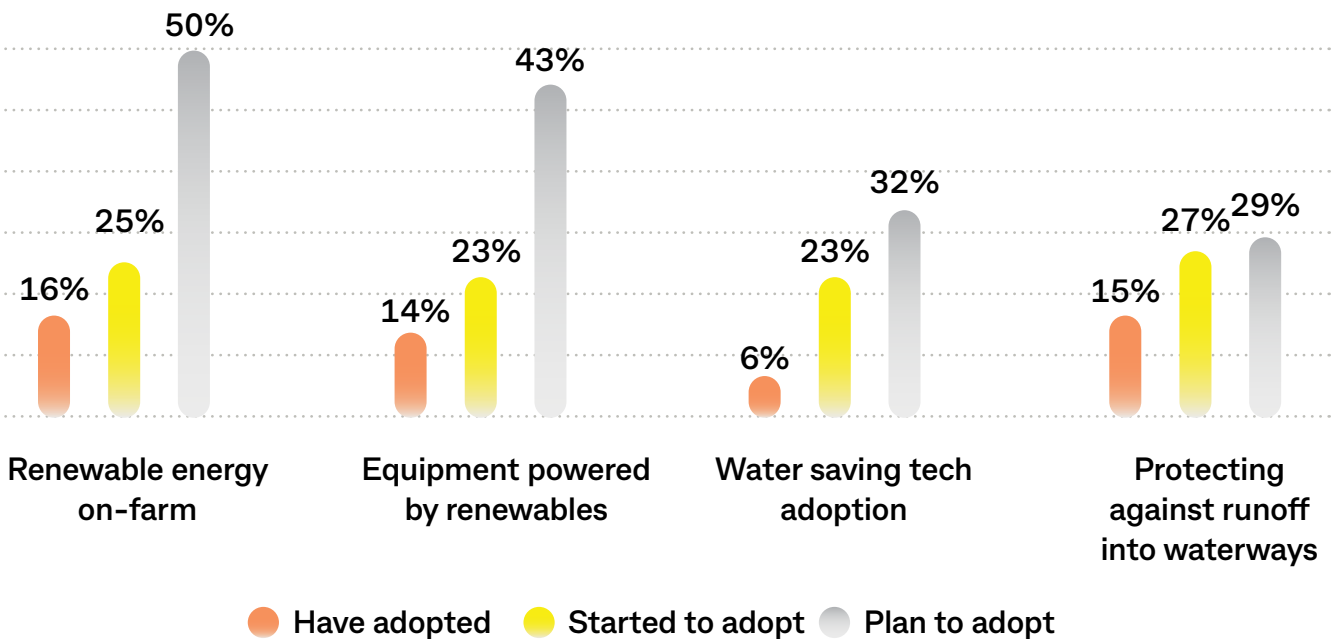
### Cropping



## Land management



## Energy and water



Smaller farms are emerging as early movers on innovation, with generally higher rates of adoption, while land ownership also appears to be a major enabler of long-term practice change, with owners far more likely than leaseholders to have adopted approaches.

## Rates of adoption by farm size

	Rotational grazing	Reducing steroids and antibiotics	Variable rate spraying/fertiliser	Retain stubble	Planting trees	Renewable energy on-farm
<b>Total area &lt;100ha</b>						
Have started to adopt	22%	19%	14%	14%	30%	10%
Have adopted	47%	53%	21%	57%	42%	48%
<b>Total area &gt;100ha</b>						
Have started to adopt	20%	27%	35%	30%	25%	27%
Have adopted	23%	24%	8%	13%	14%	12%

**"It is hoped that there will be more empirical studies on rotational grazing and the efficiency of forage utilisation."**

*Surveyed livestock and cropping farmer from Victoria*

**"It is hoped for more long-term experimental data on crop rotation's effect on soil structure and carbon sequestration."**

*Surveyed livestock and cropping farmer from Victoria*

**"For the use of compost and organic fertilisers, provide practical guidelines for on-site testing and cost recovery."**

*Surveyed livestock and cropping farmer from New South Wales*

## Rates of adoption by ownership status

	Rotational grazing	Reducing steroids and antibiotics	Variable rate spraying/fertiliser	Retain stubble	Planting trees	Renewable energy on-farm
<b>Own</b>						
Have started to adopt	14%	25%	26%	25%	22%	19%
Have adopted	40%	44%	15%	30%	28%	26%
<b>Lease</b>						
Have started to adopt	19%	27%	37%	31%	30%	23%
Have adopted	5%	5%	3%	3%	2%	2%

**"Support precision agriculture tools accessible to family farms."**

*Surveyed livestock farmer from Victoria*

**"Study climate-resilient grazing strategies for large rangelands."**

*Surveyed livestock farmer from Western Australia*

**"Develop pest control methods friendly to native wildlife."**

*Surveyed livestock farmer from Tasmania*



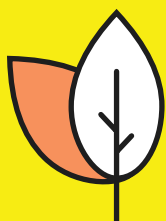
# Return on investment expectations

Farmers believe their investments in new approaches will pay off.



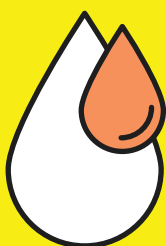
## 24%

of livestock farmers who have adopted any of the new approaches to livestock management expect profits this year to be higher than last year; only 8% of those who have not adopted any new approaches expect higher profits this year.



## 9%

of crop producers who have adopted any of the listed approaches to crop management expect higher profits this year compared with 6% of those who have not adopted any approaches



## 23% Expect Higher Profits

Among farmers who have adopted any new approaches to land management or energy and water management, 23% expect higher profits this year than last, compared with less than 10% of those who have not.

**"We derive significant income from carbon credits from our environmental planting for carbon sequestration."**

*Surveyed livestock farmer from Queensland*

**"The more farm advice and data confidence we can have to adopt practices, that are beneficial to the environment, animal health and the bottom line the better."**

*Surveyed livestock and cropping farmer from New South Wales*

# Barriers to innovation



One standout finding is that for many farmers, implementing change is difficult, sometimes to the point they choose to postpone or not proceed with changes.

For many farmers who delay or decide against changes, the issue is not lack of interest but practical and structural constraints that limit farmers' ability to act.

**"Time to vet opportunities is a barrier to change, easier to do things we've always done."**

*Surveyed livestock farmer from Queensland*

**"A continuous cost-benefit analysis tool is needed to assist farmers in evaluating the production period and return cycle of new technologies."**

*Surveyed livestock and cropping farmer from South Australia*

**"It is hoped to have a better data sharing platform to facilitate farmers to upload field data and obtain personalised advice."**

*Surveyed livestock and cropping farmer from New South Wales*

One significant barrier is obtaining sufficient financing to adopt innovative practices. Alongside this, farmers highlight challenges in identifying the most suitable practices for their operations, as well as limited access to advice, guidance and peer support to help them make confident decisions. Uncertainty around returns also remains a key constraint.

**"It is hoped that there will be phased technical introduction paths tailored for different-sized farms to reduce the initial investment pressure."**

*Surveyed livestock and cropping farmer from New South Wales*



**“We hope to have a more transparent cost breakdown and return model, which will facilitate my explanation of the investment value to banks or cooperatives.”**

*Surveyed livestock and cropping farmer from Queensland*

Additional structural barriers emerged in relation to schemes, such as carbon, biodiversity or accreditation schemes. The most cited were the time and cost associated with monitoring and reporting requirements, and the complexity and legal requirements of schemes.

**“Current sustainability frameworks are complex, place more administrative burden upon farmers at a time when extra labour is costly and difficult to find.”**

*Surveyed livestock and cropping farmer from South Australia*

Farmers pointed to key enablers that could support them:



Simpler paperwork and data requirements for adopting and reporting practices



Reliable, accessible information on expected return on investment



Greater certainty around operational and productivity benefits

Overall, the findings suggest the challenge is not the motive for farmers to innovate but enabling them to do so more easily and with greater confidence.

All Farmers

Livestock

Cropping



## Key enablers to support innovation

	All Farmers	Livestock	Cropping
Simpler paperwork and data asks	49%	48%	51%
Certainty on yield benefits	39%	41%	42%
Reliable ROI information	39%	41%	43%
Opportunities for additional revenue	37%	38%	44%
Green premium (price)	34%	37%	34%
Financial incentives	26%	28%	19%
Access to finance	25%	23%	25%
Planning and technical support	25%	21%	24%

**"It is hoped that the dissemination of research results will be more practical, providing practical operation manuals, training courses and localised examples."**

*Surveyed livestock and cropping farmer from South Australia*

**"I hope there will be more demonstration bases for crop rotation and diversified livestock farming, which can help us reduce the risks associated with a single crop."**

*Surveyed livestock and cropping farmer from South Australia*

**"Could we increase the availability of local training resources, especially for practical courses on new technologies (such as precision agriculture, drone monitoring)?"**

*Surveyed livestock and cropping farmer from New South Wales*

**"There is a lack of clarity and demonstration of Australian success stories that help to inspire other Australian farmers."**

*Surveyed livestock farmer from New South Wales*



# Turning insight into action

Farms in Focus shows an industry looking at practical resilience. The findings reflect a sector balancing ongoing pressures with a determination to maintain performance.

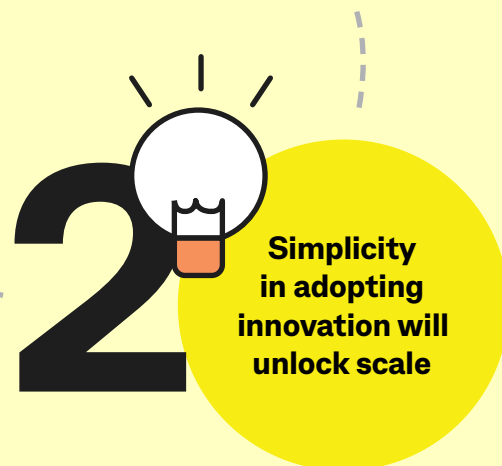
Australian farmers are navigating rising costs, extreme weather and increasing complexity while remaining open to changes that improve the performance of their operations. Farmers are not short on appetite for innovation, but they are weighing decisions against cost, complexity, confidence in returns, and risk.

The opportunity for industry, government and finance providers is to make adoption easier, more tailored and more commercially transparent, so farmers can invest in practices and technologies that make sense for their operations.



Farmers are engaging with a wide range of practices, but uptake depends on how well these can be adapted to specific operational contexts, with suitability and financial return as key considerations in decision-making.

With almost half of farmers citing complexity as a barrier, the industry's next step isn't just innovation - it's making innovation easier to implement, measure and finance.



Farmers are seeking clearer line-of-sight on returns - whether through better data, trusted advice, or market signals. Building that confidence will be critical to supporting farmers choosing to accelerate adoption across the sector.

At CommBank, our focus is on working alongside farmers to elevate their perspectives, share practical insights, help build confidence around investment payoffs on farm, provide flexible finance, as well as specialist support and simpler pathways to adoption.

We stand beside Australian agriculture to:



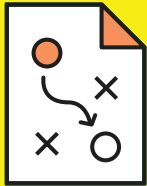
Support investment in productivity-enhancing and resilience-building practices



Provide flexible, long-term financing 'through the cycle', which recognises the realities of farming across seasons and through transitions



Connect customers with specialist expertise from our Agribusiness and carbon teams to help turn strategy into action



Collaborate with partners on research projects to provide practical, data-led insights like Farms in Focus, Farming for the Future and emissions measurement and reduction tools developed by Ruminati

## At CommBank, we're committed to helping you build thriving and resilient farming businesses.

Because progress isn't about standing still - it's about backing businesses to keep moving forward, season after season, with the right support behind you.

To learn more or explore how the findings apply to your operation, speak with your CommBank Agribusiness Executive.





**Visit: [commbank.com.au/agribusiness](https://commbank.com.au/agribusiness)**

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