



RESILIENCE GRIT & TENACITY

Trauma & sacrifices of a generational farmer

I am a 4th generation cattle farmer in the Snowy River country. I bought the farm from my parents in 2000 and unfortunately, my partner and I divorced 10 years later. To keep the family farm, I needed to refinance the property during the settlement.

Over the coming years, the drought started to creep and I couldn't grow fodder for my cattle. For a couple of years, I had to buy feed at inflated prices. The condition of my cattle was diminishing, and calving had plummeted significantly. It was a hard decision, but I had to destock.

I had substantial debt, growing by the day. I was forced to return to full-time work in the city to support the farm and manage debts. For 3 years I travelled every weekend from Melbourne to western Victoria to collect hay and then return to the farm to feed my cattle, an exhausting 1200km round trip.

If life wasn't hard enough, in 2019 the bushfire ripped through my property destroying everything. My home, family house, all machinery, infrastructure and fencing. Devastatingly, I did lose some cattle, but some survived.

I needed help to recover and was advised to contact RFCS Gippsland to access bushfire grants.

Once the RFCS helped with accessing a range of grants to get my priorities sorted, they then continued to support me, and together we developed a longer-term recovery plan. While feeling so emotionally and physically overwhelmed, having this support was invaluable for me to move forward. Having a prioritised To Do list and budget was extremely helpful to keep me focused.

Unfortunately, having to work off-farm for many years due to the drought, I was not eligible for a Concessional Loan offered by the Government to cover the financial short-fall. Although frustrating and disappointing, I resigned to having to do all the additional manual labour myself. The RFCS helped me access the Farm Household Allowance so I had the time to do this work and build up my herd again.

The RFCS officer helped me nut out what my ultimate goal was, and we made a plan to achieve it within 5 years. All I really want is a productive farm that provided enough income to live off without having to find other work.

Although I needed financial support to survive during recovery, I didn't want to rely on it, and we discussed options to source alternative income to cover my living expenses. I also accepted support from Agriculture Victoria who assisted with the condition of my cattle, calving, stock capacity, soil testing and fence mapping.

Finally, after a productive summer I was able to cut hay for the first time in over six years. With this renewed hope, the RFCS are now helping me focus on my ultimate goal. They identified that I needed to consider diversification options to reach my goal, as cattle sales alone was not going to achieve this. I also needed to consider options to financially protect the farm from future droughts. I decided that incorporating farm stay cabins on the property, as well as provide contracting services to smaller farms would be a great option to stay living on my family farm.

It's all been a fairly traumatic experience. Being a farmer is mentally and physically exhausting in the best of times. But the last few years have nearly broken me. The RFCS have also been very conscious of how I'm feeling and make sure I only take on what I can handle, as well as be a listening ear at times while linking me with additional support I needed.

I am continuing to work with RFCS Gippsland as they help me feel empowered again, especially knowing that I can work smarter and everything I am working on is getting me closer to my goal. I only wish I contacted them earlier... I may not have had to spend 3 years working so hard to keep the family farm I love so much.