

RURAL INDUSTRIES ON TRACK WITH TRUST - KEY DRIVERS, RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES REVEALED

The Australian sugar industry is partnering with other agricultural industries to help build community trust in and engagement with the broader agricultural sector. Through a research project into the drivers of community trust, it has been revealed that trust and acceptance are high, but there are other areas of uncertainty that provide risks and opportunities for the sector.

The *Community Trust in Rural Industries Program* is a partnership involving ten Rural Research and Development Corporations (RDCs) - including Sugar Research Australia; the National Farmers' Federation (NFF) and the NSW Department of Primary Industries. This initiative is designed to drive cohesive and consistent responses to the community trust issues shared by all agricultural producers.

SRA's Dr Harjeet Khanna, General Manager, Research Funding Unit, said the research has given the sugar industry insight into the drivers of community trust and acceptance across the sector.

"The first round of research indicated that trust in rural industries is high—Australians believe primary producers play an important role in society and are a vital part of Australia's history. The community also highly values the food and fibre produced by rural industries," Dr Khanna said.

"The key drivers of trust were identified as environmental responsibility, responsiveness and products of rural industries. This means the community sees rural industries as stewards of the land and sea, and expects us to use resources responsibly and sustainably.

"The community wants to know it is being heard and understood by rural industries, and seeks ongoing reassurance that their concerns are being addressed.

"This is something we are already very familiar with in the sugar industry. The

industry has always been innovative and shown strong environmental stewardship – but there is an ongoing need to engage the community in the great work that is happening right across our industry."

Dr Khanna said the project would help all rural industries work together on community trust issues.

"There is opportunity for industries to respond productively and consistently. The research showed that one industry acting irresponsibly negatively affects their opinion of all rural industries. Having available guidance on best-practice approaches and calling out irresponsible operators will empower industries to build trust in their own industries and in the sector," said Dr Khanna.

The research uncovered a number of topics that large sections of the community were uncertain about, meaning they do not have strong views one way or another or have gaps in their knowledge around Australian rural industries. Some of the top areas of uncertainty included whether rural industries listen to and respect community concerns, responsible water use and rural industries' run-off causing environmental damage to coastal areas.

Notably, most of the topics the community wants more information on or is uncertain about relate to the two key drivers of trust - environmental responsibility and responsiveness.

According to the Program's lead researcher, Chief Executive Officer and Co-founder of Voconiq (a CSIRO spin-off company), Dr Kieren Moffat, trust is crucial for industry and business because it translates expectations and experience into acceptance.

"There are big implications for any industry, sector or individual business when the community questions it or its practices. Trust is the vehicle to acceptance and

what is required to avoid this risk. It's what enables an organisation or industry to be given the benefit of the doubt when things go wrong, it provides a license for innovation and flexibility to experiment, and a general freedom to operate," said Dr Moffat.

"The Community Trust in Rural Industries Program is uncovering what's affecting trust and acceptance of rural industries, and where there are clear opportunities for industries to take action, which we have now identified as environmental responsibility, responsiveness and products of rural industries.

"We are also seeking to understand how food and fibre industries relate to each other in the minds of the community, and see how these interrelationships affect trust and acceptance, so we can understand the preconditions for sector wide risk through the actions of specific industries within it," said Dr Moffat.

"The findings show that the pathway to building and maintaining community trust is to be genuinely responsive to community attitudes, particularly around environmental sustainability and resource use. The key is to demonstrate responsiveness through action, and there are huge opportunities for industries who do this," he said.

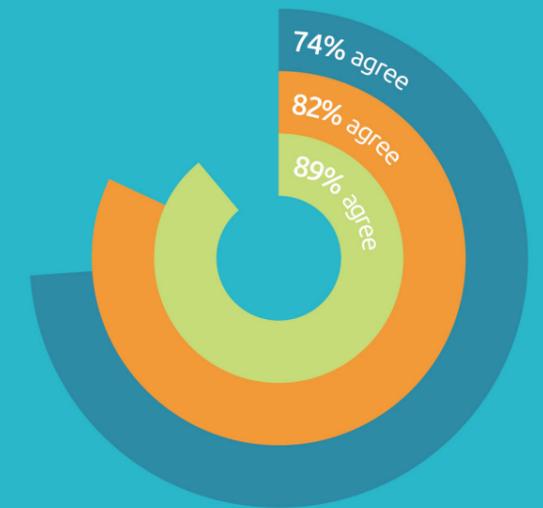
Over an initial three-year period, this community research will provide insights on cross-sector issues and best practice approaches - the first round of results and analysis has just been completed. Ongoing engagement will be conducted to make research outputs available as an input to food and fibre industries developing their own strategies.

Years two and three research will seek to benchmark the results of the first year, but also examine certain areas in more depth and detail as required. ■

Driving export revenue and regional jobs

Australians strongly believe that:

- Australia's rural industries play an important economic role through the export of products to overseas markets
- Australia's rural industries play an important economic role through creating significant employment in regional areas
- it is important that health and safety of farm workers is prioritised



Rural Industries are Important



Trust and Acceptance are High



For more information on the project, please contact Virginia Johnstone, project manager, E virginia.johnstone@seftons.com.au

The 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.

It involves community research by Voconiq amongst a sample of more than 6000 Australians over a three-year period to provide insights on cross-sector issues and best practice approaches. Of the 7329 surveys that were completed, 6461 were included for analysis after data cleaning.