



# Community Trust in Rural Industries

## 2023 Research Insights

### Year Four

#### About the Program

The Community Trust in Rural Industries (CTRI) program is a multi-industry research collaboration to understand, track, and build the community trust and acceptance of Australia's rural industries. Through understanding what contributes to the relationship between our rural industries and the wider community, we can then deepen that relationship for the better.

Since the beginning of the program in 2019, CTRI has canvassed over 22,000 Australians via an annual representative survey. The first three years of the program focused on discovering what communities think and feel about rural industries, Year Four begins the next phase of research: tracking how issues at the heart of the community-industry relationship change over time.

The CTRI program is a unique collaborative program of work between AgriFutures Australia, Hort Innovation, Australian Eggs, Meat and Livestock Australia, Cotton Research and Development Corporation, Fisheries Research and Development Corporation, Grains Research and Development Corporation. The program has produced a longitudinal dataset that both provides a pathway to trust and acceptance for rural industries and allows ideas for farmers, foresters and fishers to take action based on what is most important to their community.

#### Expanding our understanding

Two new sets of measures were investigated in 2023:

- A Investigating how people are looking for, thinking about and perceiving rural industry information.
- B A deep dive into trust and acceptance of retailers to understand differences in trust and acceptance of these groups compared to Rural Industries as a whole.

These new measures were introduced to help understand trends seen in the previous years of research, and provide data that helps to make decisions when thinking about outreach to the Australian community.

#### Understanding the results

Year Four has shown continued robust trust and acceptance of rural industries. Environmental management, animal welfare, and industry responsiveness remain the most important drivers of community trust in Australia's rural industries, with new trends emerging such as rural identity. These findings will be summarised in this document.



## Trust in, and acceptance of, rural industries remains strong

Year Four of the program has shown that the importance of rural industries to the Australian community continues to grow. Trust in, and acceptance of, Australia's rural industries has remained strong since the program first began in 2019. With an increase of 12% since the baseline survey, acceptance of rural industries continues to grow.

### Year Four snapshot



**91.4%** of respondents agreed that rural industries are important to our way of life in Australia.



**87.8%** of respondents agreed that regional communities are important for producing safe, high quality food and fibre products.

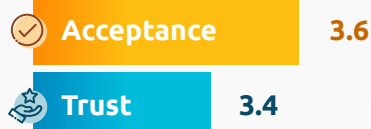


**85%** of respondents agreed that rural industries generate significant jobs in regional areas.



**61.7%** of respondents said they feel connected to farmers, fishers and foresters when they buy Australian rural industry products.

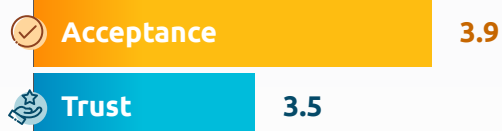
#### Year One (late 2019)



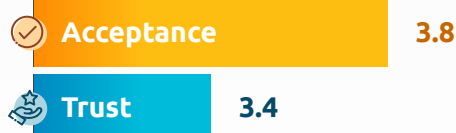
#### Year One (May 2020 - Covid-19 pulse)



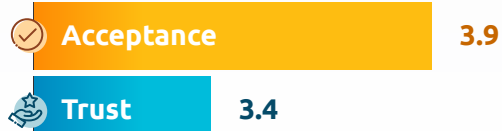
#### Year Two (late 2020)



#### Year Three (early 2022)



#### Year Four (mid 2023)



Ratings of trust and acceptance  
(1 = not at all, 5 = extremely)

## Management of environmental performance is the strongest driver of trust in 2023



**83%** of Australians agree that environmental management is a shared responsibility across all Australian rural industries.

Environment has increased in importance to the community this year. The more confidence that communities have in rural industries to manage their environmental impacts, the more trust grows. As concerns regarding resource availability ease, so do concerns about the appropriate use of these resources. For community members, the environmental outcomes of rural industries hold more importance to their trust and acceptance of rural industries than making a profit.

Farmers, fishers and foresters in Australia are committed to working in a sustainable way



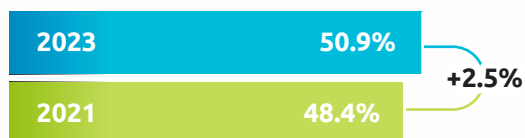
Economic sustainability of Australian rural industries should not come at the expense of environmental management



Australian farmers, fishers and foresters are responsible stewards of land and sea



Australian farmers, fishers and foresters manage their environmental impacts effectively



*Percent of sample supporting statement*

## Animal welfare continues to be a complex, important topic

Animal welfare was the second strongest driver of trust in Year Four. The extent to which farmers are perceived to treat their animals with dignity and respect is most important to the community, with 5% more Australians agreeing to this than in 2021 (64%).



**Three quarters** of Australians agreed with the statement "the welfare of animals is not just about the absence of harm to them."



**71%** of respondents agreed that animal welfare is a complex topic.



**43%** of participants disagreed with the statement "I don't really worry about the welfare of fish like I would cows, pigs or chickens."



**47%** of participants agreed with the statement "animal welfare in rural industries needs to improve even though it means meat and dairy prices will increase."

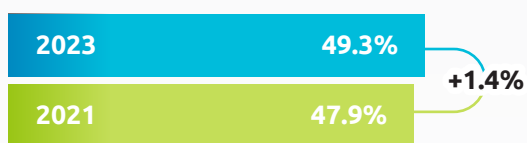
**"All farmers of any kind whom I've come across in my lifetime have a great respect for their animals and their production of food and do all they can to provide a healthy environment."**

Comment from 2023 survey participant.

## There is a continued need for rural industries to demonstrate their responsiveness

When industries are felt to be genuinely engaging with the community on their concerns, trust in rural industry grows. In 2023, 52% of Australians agreed that rural industries are prepared to change their practices in response to community concerns. Gradual increases in this score since Year One (44%) indicates a strong foundation for responsiveness in rural industries for building community trust, and highlights the need for rural industries to engage with their communities.

Regional communities receive a fair share of the benefits from rural industries in Australia



Australia receives a fair share of the benefits from rural industries in Australia

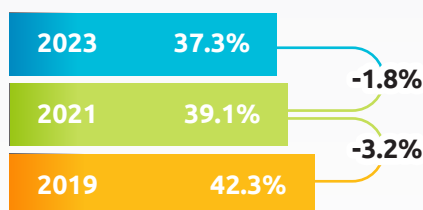


Percent of sample supporting statement

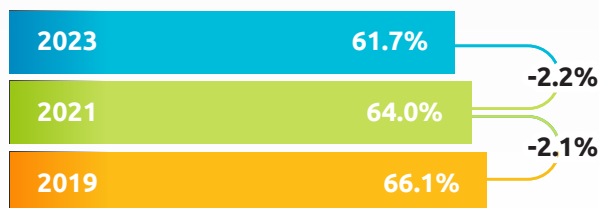
## Rural identity and heritage felt by Australians has emerged as a driver of trust to watch

A sense of shared identity amongst the community can increase trust in rural industries. Since 2019, there has been a 5% decrease in agreement to the statement "rural industries are part of my heritage", with this decline comes the risk of a deterioration between rural industries and communities. There is an opportunity to proactively engage with those who feel less connected, in particular younger generations to strengthen their sense of identity, connection to the community and the wider industry.

Rural industries are a part of my heritage



When I buy Australian rural industry products, I feel connected to the farmers, fishers or foresters who produce them



Percent of sample supporting statement



## How Australians find information on, and talk about rural industries

New focus questions introduced in Year Four seek to understand how participants think and feel about that information about rural industries. The answers to this block of questions, when viewing from the community as a whole, showed fairly normal distribution, with a large percentage of neutral responses on how people seek out, perceive and talk about information relating to rural industries.



**47%** of participants agreed that the information they see is an accurate representation of Australian rural industries, with 40% responding as neutral.



**44%** of Australians felt that most people share their views on rural industries, with 45% responding as neutral.



**24%** of Australians actively seek out information on rural industries, compared to 43% who don't.

When this data was investigated, it could be found that participants who knew more people working in a rural industry influenced their perception of it. Those with deeper connections to rural industries were more likely to go looking for information, and be more sensitive to it portraying rural industries in a negative light. This presents an opportunity to reflect on how rural industries communicate and respond to articles presented about it.



## Where to from here?

Year Four's key findings show that rural industries remain trusted and accepted by Australians, and that they have real impacts on the social, economic, and practical dimensions of our way of life. This helps community members recognise the value of trust drivers like environmental management or animal welfare, which can demonstrate industry responsiveness, create connections to rural identity, and build overall trust.

As the CTRI program continues, it will explore more deeply what matters the most to the rural industry community. Rural industries will need to embrace their vulnerability in order to build trust with their communities through meaningful conversations. Building trust will provide rural industries with greater licence as they respond to and engage with community feedback, with mutual confidence that these relationships can survive.



**"Farming is a way of life for many, and it is an extremely important part of Australia's culture, and should be encouraged and assisted as much as possible."**

Comment from 2023 survey participant.



Australian rural industries embarked on this research program in 2019 committed to the development of a deeper understanding of the role and drivers of community trust in their respective industries. Community sentiment that environmental management is a shared responsibility and the central role this plays in driving trust in rural industries is validation for this collaborative approach. It also speaks to the pathway forward for rural industries to deepen this relationship with the Australian community further. This work has shown that the risks and opportunities of community expectation in this relationship are not constrained by what crop or product is created, but by the capacity of rural industries to foster a collective approach to the issues that contribute to community sentiment where appropriate, and to develop industry-level strategies that clearly speak to this broader commitment.



#### CITATION

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