

Rural People in Times of Recession

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Rural "crises" have been a significant feature of our physical and social history since the early days of European settlement. Our landscape is both harsh and vulnerable, and the climate accentuates the vulnerability of that environment. In the beginning farmers imposed traditional English methods of agriculture on the land, including clearing and irrigating without any real understanding of the consequences these methods would bring to the landscape. Soil erosion and salinity are part of the heritage of those days which we will have to deal with for generations to come. Nevertheless, Australian farmers have developed techniques for farming this country that have been copied in other dry-land areas throughout the world.

This, however, has not meant freedom from the consequences of the physical and economic environment, and the last decade has, in many ways, been one of the harshest in our history – in terms of its effects on the rural communities.

Today, we are experiencing a terrible time in rural Australia. The fact is that many farmers in the grain growing areas have not recovered from the 1982–83 drought. In those years, and the ones which followed, many farmers had to borrow in order to survive. Few could foresee the great rise in interest rates, and even those who took a pessimistic view (later substantiated) about the prices their produce would bring, found difficulty in coping with the effects of the squeeze between rising costs, falling prices, and high interest rates.

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The result has been that many farmers and their families have paid a huge price, in emotional, spiritual and physical terms, from the struggle to survive through this period of prolonged uncertainty and anxiety. The fact that Australia is undergoing a recession and many people in urban areas are being retrenched, or made redundant and businesses large and small are failing and becoming bankrupt, should not take away from the pain in rural areas. There is a quantitative difference between losing a job and losing a heritage. Yet that is precisely what is happening in rural Australia. It is not possible to work or minister in the country without coming into contact with people of the third, fourth or even fifth generation on the same land, who have lost, or who are in grave danger of losing their heritage. These are not incompetent farmers, but good farmers, many of whom find themselves caught in a situation which is not of their making and is beyond their capacity to resolve on their own. The resultant grief and guilt are distressing beyond imagining.

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In such a situation the words coined by bureaucracy to describe assistance to leave the farm – 'Rural adjustment' (which basically means get big or get out) can be shallow and hurtful. Most farmers have a sense of 'too little, too late' and a corresponding sense of helplessness and powerlessness.

Carlo Pelandra, in his research

following the Friuli Earthquake, concluded that:

Disaster accelerates all pre-disposing factors, both positively and negatively, in terms of the psychological, social, and economic factors.

That is to say, for example, that individuals who were coping well prior to the event, would probably come through the experience strengthened; communities which had a strong sense of their own identity, good networks and services, would experience increased bonding, and success in achieving additional community facilities, programs and so on; and finally those communities which were experiencing economic growth prior to the event would find that growth accelerated.

The converse is also true. Those people who were finding life difficult prior to the event will have even more trouble afterwards. Whether they were vulnerable because of their age, or ill health, or the lack of kin or community support, or the lack of financial resources – any of these problems will be compounded by the event. Relationships that are unstable or unhappy are less able to withstand the pressure, with consequent breakdown.

The same is true for communities. Those in which there was pre-existing tension or division will find that the event exacerbates those divisions. And communities experiencing economic decline inevitably have that decline accelerated.

The implications for disaster recovery management have been to ensure that those individuals who are personally vulnerable because of their circumstances, are given the resources, the support, and the information they require so that they may not be damaged by the experience. This is also true for communities at both a

social and economic level. Since it is a basic premise that "communities recover best when they manage their own recovery", then in such circumstances of disaster, crisis, or change the task is to ensure that communities are given access to the information, resources, and specialist services and support they require in order to manage and sustain their own recovery.

Those communities which lack a sense of hope or vision will find it difficult to respond to the challenges which the present situation presents.

It is our belief that these same principles apply in the present situation of rural recession. Those communities which lack a sense of hope or vision will find it difficult to respond to the challenges which the present situation presents. However, communities which have identified their own needs, organised to gain access to the resources, information, and support services they need, acted to strengthen their community networks and establish their own support and action groups, have shown that crisis can be managed with consequent long term benefits for all.

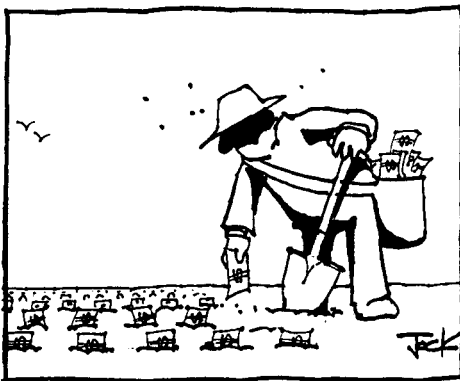
'Rural' - Definition

Rural, of course, means more than just 'farmers'. It applies to all those people who believe that they are country people. From the most remote areas of the nation, to the people living in regional centres, are people who consider themselves to be part of rural Australia. Although precise definitions about what constitutes 'rural' and 'remote' (involving complex formulas weighting such factors as distance from state capital, tertiary institutions and teaching hospitals) are developed, and needed, by those Government departments who are responsible for grants to such areas, for our purpose the matter is much simpler. We believe that the people in the best position to determine this are the people living outside metropolitan areas. And to this end, if you consider yourself to be rural - you are rural.

Economic Context - Income and Employment

In looking at the realities of a recession for rural people it is salutary to consider some of the basic figures regarding income and employment, or the lack of it, before we go on to deal with some of the personal consequences for country people, and the multiplier effect of both of these on their communities.

In the 1990-91 fiscal year, the average net farm income fell 67%; from \$62,000 to \$20,000 (more than 30% below the average weekly earnings (Dept. of Agriculture). When considering specific commodities the picture is alarming; for 'broad-acre' farmers, the average family farm income was \$29,783 in 1989-90, with a massive projected slump to \$96 in 1990-91 (according to Australian Bureau of Agriculture and Resource Economics [ABARE]). Sheep provide a similar but even worse picture, with \$30,782 for 1989-90 and a projected \$4,874 for 1990-91 (ABARE).



It is interesting to compare the change in prices for a basic commodity (wheat) and a luxury commodity (crayfish) over a twenty-five year period. In 1976 a bag of wheat was worth about \$2.00: a bag of crays about \$8.00. Today wheat is worth around \$10 a bag; crays are around \$1,500.00 per bag! While the costs for both grower and fisherman have remained similar, even though dramatically increased, primary producers have not seen their costs matched by price increases.

In terms of unemployment in rural areas, there has been a quantum leap in the numbers of people registering

for Department of Social Security Unemployment Benefits. Recent figures released in Victoria for the past twelve months indicate the extent of this increase. For example, the offices in regional centres recorded the following increases:

Wangaratta -	107%
Hamilton -	92%
Horsham -	97%
Morwell -	77%
Shepparton -	72%
Swan Hill -	76%

The figures available underline how geographically widespread the increase is. However, any figures must be seen as an underestimate due to the constant out-migration of youth from rural areas, and the difficulties farmers (or their spouses) have in attaining eligibility for Unemployment Benefits. Other statistics, not referenced here, have shown disproportionately high youth unemployment in rural areas.

The Personal Consequences

The above statistics can only hint at the personal costs on individual lives, on family life, and on the life of communities. Three stories illustrate this.

The First Family, like many others, has been operating their property for the past one hundred years. They have 2,000 acres (now seen to be the minimum size to be viable if sheep and grain are your primary products). Two sons have come home onto the farm, but this was not an option which could be given to the third. Money was borrowed in 1987 at 13%, to purchase the additional land needed to support the partnership. At this time the wife resigned from her job as family support worker - a job she enjoyed - looking forward to a time for increased leisure.

Interest rates rose 22% by 1989, which meant \$70,000 a year had to be found for the repayments of interest alone. The plans for the new home-stead have been deferred indefinitely. Just when it was envisaged things could be taken a little easier, times are particularly tough. Off-farm income is almost impossible to come by and even increased productivity

has made no difference. In fact income is down and anxiety is compounded by a sense of vulnerability as neighbours 'sell up' to survive.

In 1991, the battle to get their crop in met with three major obstacles. The lack of autumn rains meant that it was not possible to sow in April or May – it was simply too dry, and so the best of the autumn growing season was lost. In June, the rain came, heavily and persistently, and it was too wet to sow through the winter. Even though, in normal years September is regarded as too late to sow, in desperation this farmer, like a number of his neighbours, has been working round the clock to get a crop in. It is the classic line of "TOO DRY, TOO WET, TOO LATE". With estimated incomes less than the cost of production it is little wonder people are losing hope.

The effects on the family's well-being are profound, if not immediately obvious. The husband is unable to sleep at night (although he is always tired), there is a brittleness underlying the way family members relate and increased asthma attacks have become something to deal with on an everyday basis for the wife, one son and two grandchildren.

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The second family moved to a rural community of 2,500 using all their savings to take over a local service station. They were a young couple with four children. The husband was a motor mechanic with considerable prior experience and expertise in the spare parts and motor trade.

The family took over the business in 1989, just as the economy was starting to tighten. This meant that an increased number of customers began to 'book things' – the usual practice in rural areas becoming a necessity for some. The young owners of the garage could not afford to carry their customers in this way and began to request or even demand cash for

goods and services provided. This led to resentment and reduced business – as well as increased isolation for the newcomers. Not only did they lack the knowledge of the unwritten community rules to play by in this rural community, but also they lacked the skills to change those rules.

As well as this, the tough times forced people to insist on patch-up work on their vehicles and machinery, even when it was explained that this was neither a long term nor economically wise solution. Their insistence meant customers often returned angry, and frustrated, venting their feelings by abusing the proprietor when the repairs failed. The business went downhill, failing within two years. The husband became depressed. After six months the situation was desperate, and with the support of his wife he started job hunting. He was encouraged by being informed by the Commonwealth Employment Service that if he found a job elsewhere, he would be entitled to a relocation allowance. Finally he secured a position in the metropolitan area, but was then informed that he was not actually entitled to this relocation allowance because other people in the area could have also done the job. He cannot appeal against this decision until he is informed in writing – and the letter is still not forthcoming.

The current situation is that the husband is working 250 km from where his wife and children are living, as they cannot afford the costs of moving.

The stress and anger they are carrying is evident when talking with them, and their bitterness towards rural people very apparent. This story highlights the critical need to assist newcomers to integrate into the community, so that everyone is playing by the same rules, and common expectations exist.

The third family have a dairy farm, bought in 1980, as they had a strong desire to return to the country after ten years in Melbourne.

They worked hard to build the property up and within four years had plans drawn to build a new home, as they now had four children and were

living in a two room cottage. The price slump of 1985–86 put the house plans on hold and the wife went back to nursing at the local hospital to support the family.

The struggle continued, with high interest rates challenging their ability to survive. Along with so many others the recession has resulted in 1991 prices being lower than 1990, and costs of production higher.

The final blow was a phone call to the wife informing her that her last shift at the local hospital would be on 31 December 1991 due to the Government's rationalisation of health services.

Each of these stories underlines poignantly the sense of grief, frustration, anger, and despair, as well as some of the emotional and physical effects on relationships and personal well-being.

In terms of health, this family just hopes that no-one gets sick enough to require a doctor. If they do, they will have to wait until other business can be done at the same time, so as to maximise the benefits of a trip to town. And the one prescription is shared amongst all family members who may contract what appears to be the same illness.

Each of these stories underlines poignantly the sense of grief, frustration, anger, and despair, as well as some of the emotional and physical effects on relationships and personal well-being. The context is also important: for these things are happening to people who are already under-resourced in terms of the provision and accessibility of the kind of information, resources, and support services they need when going through crisis, loss or change.

The Community Consequences

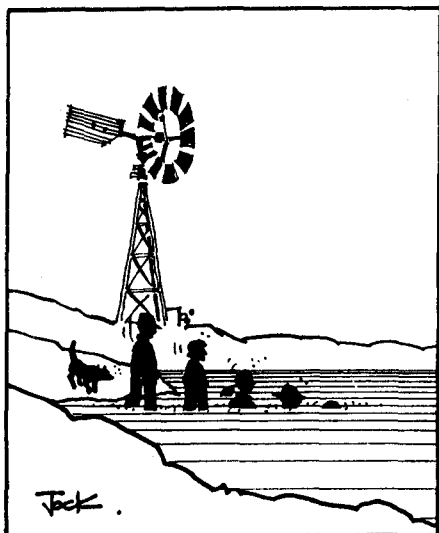
All of this has multiplier effects for the community. Individual consequences are multiplied by the number of people suffering the reduced income and spending in the community, the strain on existing services and staff, the lack of those services, the lack of

support programs and information systems, the difficulties with accessing all or any of these because of a lack of skill, or distance factors such as time, cost of travel and telephones. There is, in many places, a loss of morale, not just at an individual, but a community level, with a corresponding loss of energy to work at turning things around. Additionally, there is a widespread feeling of being besieged by central government policies, poor seasons, and a lack of understanding from the 'city'. The recession represents a time when people can not get jobs, businesses can no longer survive, self esteem dives and people leave rural areas in despair.

According to Sharon Guerra, a rural counsellor in the Victorian Mallee,

Your home is your business and your business is part of the community. If you lose your farm then you lose your identity.

In turn, the community loses its people and its life force. As farm sizes are increased in order to remain viable, the distance between neighbours also increases and the farming communities diminish in numbers, vitality and person power.



This situation, together with the need to make do with family labour on farms rather than employing locals, results in less opportunities for off-farm income for all community members but particularly the young people. They move to larger centres or the metropolitan areas in search of employment and a lifestyle that can sustain them. Some are fortunate and succeed, but many, lacking the skills

or the contacts, become 'triple failures': failing at home, failing in their community and then, often, failing in the city.

" your home is your business and your business is part of the community. If you lose your farm then you lose your identity."

It is essential that rural communities acknowledge the demographic changes that are occurring, with approximately 50% of the population moving into or within rural communities during a five year census period. This will require a significant commitment on the part of both the newcomers and the residents of long-standing to consider the good of the community and utilise the pooled skills, resources and information to determine and achieve the best possible future for their community. A sense of belonging is critical as it brings with it an understanding of a sense of place and therefore a pride and long term commitment to the future of that community.

The Rural Health project was funded by The National Better Health program in order to examine and document the effects of health of an extended crisis such as that which rural people are currently experiencing. Rochester Shire was chosen for this study. Using a community development approach, the project is working with people not only to identify health issues, but to implement a range of strategies to enable the community to respond in positive and preventative ways.

This project has already shown there are strong links between the rural crisis and health which is substantiated by research both in Australia and other parts of the world. The increase in stress, and in stress related illness, as well as dysfunctional coping mechanisms have led to increased alcohol and drug consumption and suicide in rural, as distinct from urban areas.

A common initial position taken by some locals was that there are no problems in their community. For

some, this was a matter of ignorance or insensitivity, for others it was 'denial', with a consequent need to hold on to this denial. But as time has gone on, the impact of the recession is allowing fewer and fewer people to escape either its direct or indirect effects, let alone maintain the denial that there is anything wrong, or that folk aren't hurting.

The Basic Needs

It is our conviction that if individuals and communities in rural Australia are going to manage and sustain their own recovery it will be because their needs for information, resources and support are met.

People need **INFORMATION**.

Crisis creates uncertainty - information reduces it. Information helps arm people against isolation and helplessness, and reduces the effects of anxiety caused by uncertainty. Rural people need good information about all kinds of things: where they can go for help and advice; what services are available for them; how the finance industry is dealing with people in their situation; what kind of support is being offered in their own communities; and how to recognise and cope with stress. Information needs to be given through all levels of communication - personal networks, groups and meetings, newsletters and the media.

In respect to the provision of up-to-date information in regional areas, the Public Service Board (1986) has characterised rural Australia as being in a "less than equitable position" in respect of access to information (Kellehear).

In the United States, schools in small rural communities suffering the effects of the rural crisis have responded to the children's needs by providing information and discussion sessions on Introduction to Loss, Change as a Result of Loss, Stress and Relaxation and the Farm Crisis. This was to both acknowledge the stress the children were suffering as a result of their families' economic situation and provide them with the information and coping strategies to respond to it more effectively.

People need **RESOURCES**.

Crisis creates loss and dependence. Resources reduce dependence, and help people regain their independence.

At the moment people particularly need economic resources; in the end, many problems would fade if commodity prices were at a just level, and farmers began to get a fair return for their labour.

Additionally, rural people also need access to the social security system which is intended to prevent many of the drastic family and personal consequences which are resulting from the present circumstances. Access to these resources is increasingly difficult, and the tests designed to prevent abuse of the system, are applied in ways which inevitably discriminate against farmers and rural people.

In Columbia USA, a career hot-line for rural residents has been established to provide a statewide career information service. This service resulted from the lack of attendance at workshops, and the realisation that anonymity might better fit the personality style of the typical self-reliant farmer. The staff had knowledge of career information, knowledge of and empathy for the rural situation, the ability to assess a caller's needs rapidly and the ability to retrieve information quickly and communicate it effectively.

People need **PERSONAL SUPPORT AND CARE**.

Crisis, particularly when it continues over an extended time, can lead to an intense emotional and physical reaction. At such times people need personal support and care.

People can feel helpless, and powerless in the present circumstances. It is common to find people so crushed by their situation, that when their bank manager informs them that they are to send in their cheque books, they simply give up, and wait for the inevitable. Many become depressed, and feel overwhelming guilt and failure. It comes as a shock to neighbours when the auction signs are

posted - to realise that this was happening and they were not aware of it. At the very time they most need to talk and gain support, people in this situation of powerlessness are least able to. Finding personal support in the country can be very difficult.

However, the knowledge that when it comes to dealing with an apparently impossible situation you are not on your own, is a powerful factor in helping people cope with crisis, loss, and change.

The experience in previous crises has demonstrated the value of support groups. In 1985, for example, the establishing of IMFAS, (Isolated Mallee Families Action Support) proved life-saving in the informal as well as formal support it gave to many people.

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There is accumulating evidence of a direct effect of social supports on health. Most notably, four prospective population based studies have found higher mortality during follow-up periods ranging from thirty months to twelve years in adults with weak as compared to strong supports. Evidence implicating weak social supports as a risk factor for morbidity exists, but is less impressive than for mortality. Several studies have found increased rates of psychological impairment, particularly depression, in people with poor supports.

It is important to note that people who work in rural areas, particularly in the provision of human services, are often over-stressed, and are themselves in need of support, de-briefing, and additional training.

Responding to the Recession

Crisis, which affects the total community, demands a total community response. This means that central and local government bodies,

non-government and voluntary agencies and groups must work together in order to ensure that the community comes through the difficult present time, enhanced and not diminished.

It is accepted that communities recover best when they manage their own recovery, then it becomes essential that a partnership is developed between all levels of Government, non-government agencies and local communities to ensure that the communities have access to and the ability to fully utilise the resources, information, and specialist services and support needed to effectively respond to their needs.

This is not to imply that these are in place: in many, if not most rural communities the needed services, resources and information systems are either inadequate, or non-existent.

The challenge for rural communities is to focus simultaneously on the personal development and support of their residents and the social change needed to respond to the issues impacting on the community.

We believe a community development approach offers the most potential for change and growth. Rothman defines this as:

... a process that creates social and economic progress for the whole community, with its active participation and fullest possible reliance on the community's initiative.

It is encouraging to note that in other parts of the world, in similar situations, programs have been developed using community development principles, which have shown that when people are helped to understand what is occurring, the unexpected and unwanted change can also present opportunities. Moreover, the partnership of a strong, positive and enthusiastic community allied to the wider resources of government and outside agencies can work to produce a response that leads to healthy change and growth.

Within the Shire of Rochester, for example, the responses to this situation have been to undertake a needs analysis, develop a community plan, produce an information directory, employ a Community Services Officer

as a first port of call for the residents of the Shire, and provide positive backing to community endeavours such as the Rural Health Project.

At times like that of a recession it can be difficult to maintain hope and a positive vision of the future, but people often have quite practical ways of responding. For example, one community began with simple social initiatives like annual barbecues to welcome newcomers and annual luncheons just to get together. On a personal level a group of farmers suggested, "don't read rural or farming newspapers" (the focus is on the negative side of every equation), and "don't attend clearing sales" (as people feel they can't focus on their successes but rather compete for the 'prize' of being the 'worst off').

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In some communities of high unemployment, Enterprise Centres have been established, so that new businesses can have access to support services, business expertise and new customers, ie. the other tenants. A large percentage of small businesses fail in the first twelve months of operation, therefore the sharing of resources and support services is a major benefit, together with community spirit that is developed in these centres. Funding has been provided by all levels of Government and Philanthropic Trusts, although they have the potential to become self-funding within a relatively short period. They have been established throughout the world in towns as small as 500 population and can be open to all enterprises or have a specific focus, for example, high technology enterprises, art-craft and trades.

It is important for communities to identify their strengths and then capitalise on them. In the West Australian community of Manjimup, where there was high unemployment, they decided to add value to their most prevalent natural resource of

timber. A timber park was built, depicting aspects of the timber industry. This is now both a tourist attraction and the base from which project workers operate. There are currently seventy enterprises in the area involved in the production of furniture, turned and carved works and sculptures with one hundred and fifty-nine people employed on a full time basis and an estimated turnover of \$5 million in 1990.

Furthermore there were seventy-five thousand visitors to the Park in 1990 and the Western Australian Tourism Commission suggest that each tourist averages an expenditure of about \$48 which means \$3.6 million comes in to the town from those visiting the centre.

The practical stages of the Community Development process are as follows:

*** Awareness of the reality**

- It is important that the demographic changes, social and economic trends are acknowledged and responded to.
- The multiplier effects of retrenchments, foreclosures on farms, business failures must all be acknowledged in terms of the social, emotional and economic implications
- Identify the community's **strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats** i.e. do a SWOT chart.
- Social change can only begin when the community's current situation is known.

*** Involvement by the whole community in responding to the issues identified**

- Participatory Planning is critical so that people are aware of the process and opportunities for involvement - this will require an open process, a personalised invitation to residents to become involved and support once they are involved
- Effective Information Systems need to be in place to ensure greater access and empowerment - both formal and informal systems are essential

- Utilise the media to both gain input from community members and inform them of issues, proposed action, as well as heightening the community's profile and gaining support on a wider level.

- A balance of **participation, expertise and leadership** is pivotal in successful community development processes.

*** Energy, ideas, skills and action are required to ensure implementation of the process.**

- informal and formal opportunities for skill development are important and a wide range of vocational, leisure, personal development and community development courses should be available

- promotion of natural leaders who can motivate and inspire by both being a role model and actively leading the community is extremely useful

- community gatherings for the purpose of generating re future directions and specific areas such as enterprise can increase cohesion, a sense of belonging and a commitment to the community in the longer term

- **those communities which survive are the ones that have the maximum number of positive responses to any one situation**

*** prepare a plan of action, implement it and build in on-going evaluation**

- A written plan is important so that people can know the envisaged direction. This is not to say changes can not be made if and when necessary, but it does provide a reference point for discussion and action.

- Identify and utilise all available skills and resources within the community - there are always massive local resources and they are often under-utilised.

*** Acknowledgment of people's rights**

Government must have a vision for the future of rural Australia and ensure its policies reflect the importance of the rural sector. As pointed out by Kellehear, rural people are often totally omitted in national policy statements or merely mentioned at the outset. Even in the "Health for All Australians" report, rural people did not warrant a mention! The Department of Primary Industries and Energy does have a policy statement on social justice for rural Australia but to date there is a lack of resources provided for implementing the policy as well as the lack of a long term perspective.

If this situation is to change, rural people must become actively involved in informing their parliamentary representatives of their concerns and visions and come together with them to forge policies in a cooperative and collaborative manner.

Future Directions

The economic base of any community will always have a dramatic impact on the well-being of residents and the community as a whole. It is not possible to consider the social trends and changes in a community without firstly examining the economic base and the changes that may have taken place. Governments need to be kept informed of the impacts that their policies are having on rural communities so that shared responsibility can be accepted for future action. Communication links need to be strengthened to ensure rural people do have ready access to decision making people – cost, distance and time are all factors that need to be considered in bringing about this access. It becomes clear that when all sectors of the community work together, social and economic progress is possible.

What is needed are SYMBOLS OF HOPE so that rural people won't give up but will maintain their strong sense of identity and belonging. Such symbols have the capacity to unify, to bring a sense of hope renewal and healing. They stand in contrast to the words and actions of people, often political figures, who convey messages and images of insensitivity and a lack of understanding.

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Symbols of hope may include:— acknowledgment from Government that a change of policy is needed: for example, an increase in the level of assets allowed to enable more farmers to receive Family Allowance Supplement; a change in the Austudy criteria; a new industry starting up in town; increased commodity prices; a well attended and successful community event; a sculpture or logo clearly depicting how the community perceives itself and proudly displaying this to the rest of the world, with a strong sense of pride. For example, in the Tasmanian township of Sheffield the history and lifestyle of the community has been depicted by using twenty-three murals on external building walls, resulting in a strong sense of pride and a significant increase to the number of tourists visiting and therefore a strengthening of the business sector with increased employment opportunities.

WE MUST LOOK FOR THE POTENTIAL, NOT THE PROBLEM.



"Well, Mother, looks like we're just had a minor setback"

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APPENDIX 1**INDIVIDUAL CONSEQUENCES
OF THE RECESSION**

- * Enterprise (farm/business) becomes increasingly marginal
- * Geographic and emotional isolation
- * Living with prolonged uncertainty can lead to: increased stress; fatigue; anxiety; increased tension in home; increased alcohol consumption.
- * Intense emotional reactions
Feelings of: hopelessness; guilt; fear; anger; failure; sadness.
- * Physical Symptoms: Hypertension; Depression; Ulcers; Lowered immune response leading to an increase in colds, flu, viral illnesses, gastric problems, cancer etc.
- * Wide seasonal variations in work requirements – during a recession holidays aren't possible and therefore tension levels increase in the home.

**COMMUNITY CONSEQUENCES
OF A RECESSION**

- * Loss of population
 - exporting young people
 - farm sizes increase to maintain viability
 - loss of jobs
 - increased percentage of dependent people i.e. over 65 and under 18 years which places a greater strain on community resources
- * Loss of hope and vision
- * Less people participation
 - people focussed on survival

INDIVIDUAL COPING STRATEGIES

- * Establish exact financial situation
- * Talk to partner, accountant, friends
- * Seek out rural/financial counsellor
- * Go to the Bank Manager – but don't go alone
- * Obtain specific information re specific Government programs e.g. Rural Finance, Social Security, Austudy, Rural Adjustment, Retraining and Employment.
- * Seek out off-farm income for family members when possible
- * Maintain contact with friends, family and groups:
 - Car Pool when possible
 - Become part of Rural Watch
 - Join farmer support Groups
 - Gain access to services and information – they need to be flexible, appropriate and local
- * Take the risk to identify others in a similar position and talk with them – you will never be the only one, although it may feel that way.
- * Seek out information on stress
- * Seek out professional counsellors
- * Join a support group
- * Lobby for change at a local, state or national level.
- * Visit the health service you have confidence in but never be afraid to get a second opinion
- * Seek out alternative approaches to dealing with illness, particularly those which do not depend on medication
- * Maintain a healthy diet, regular exercise and take time for relaxation using meditation or other such techniques
- * Organise "time out" for all family members
- * Get friends to join you for a picnic locally or other forms of activities.

COMMUNITY COPING STRATEGIES

- * Acknowledge the reality of the situation
- * Maintain a belief in the community and a sense of belonging
- * Ensure training opportunities are available
- * Community gatherings
- * Symbols of hope using community arts activities
- * Assist people to acknowledge their changing circumstance and contribute in the most practical way possible

COMMUNITY CONSEQUENCES OF A RECESSION (cont.)

- * Greater demand for services
- * Increased pressure on service providers
- * Increased levels of tension – scapegoating, anger
- * Less LG \$s to undertake projects – can't be seen to be extravagant – can't increase rates more than the CPI – less if possible

This together with current Government policy to centralise or at least regionalise services, has resulted in a decline of services and people in small rural communities.

COMMUNITY COPING STRATEGIES (cont.)

- * Provide services when needed – in user friendly mode
 - * Ensure organisational support, training, de-briefing
 - * Community problem solving
 - * Local Government
 - responsive
 - aware and informed
 - pro-active
 - * Knowledge and skills of what their rights are and how to preserve them.
-

APPENDIX 2

Rural Health Project

The National Better Health Program and the Uniting Church in Australia have joined forces to improve the health of Rural Australians.

Their joint project "Better Health – Rural Health" is a response to the effects of the recession on the health of people living in rural communities and on the viability of the communities themselves.

The effects of the rural crisis are being felt at every level of personal and community life; relationships, attitudes and outlook are affected by economic stress. This is contributing to a growing need for greater access to information, support and resources in rural areas.

Communities can manage their own recovery from crisis by identifying their own needs, becoming better organised, strengthening their own networks and setting up support and action groups.

When this occurs, not only is the crisis managed more effectively but also new and innovative responses emerge to care for people in need and ultimately their health and well-being improved.

The four key objectives of the project are:

- * Firstly, to examine and document the effects on health by an extended crisis, of the kind that many rural people are currently experiencing.
- * Secondly, to prepare a video on the innovative approaches being taken by Moree and Sea Lake communities in responding to health issues such as farm safety and stress resulting from the rural downturn.
- * Thirdly, to undertake a community development project in the Shire of Rochester – identifying major health issues and implementing a range of strategies at the personal, organisational and community levels.

- * Finally, to develop a kit of resource material which will be available to all rural communities.

A significant component of this project will be the involvement of the media to ensure that people have access to the information they require in their own homes.

To this end a series of radio programs will be developed, with resource material developed and made available to people who require more detailed information and/or referral to relevant agencies.

An important aspect of the pilot project will be the team approach taken to all activities with community workers from the Shire of Rochester, outreach workers from Echuca and Bendigo, students from Shepparton and Bendigo Colleges together with the project team all working with residents of the Shire of Rochester to identify the health issues currently confronting them and then implementing the most appropriate strategies to meet these needs.

The pilot project will continue until April 1992 but it is envisaged that the approach initiated will be the basis of an ongoing response to meet the needs of the community, in addition to providing a model, and resources, to other rural communities throughout Australia.

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Agreed Framework of Goals, Principles and priorities for Action identified by the Commonwealth, State and Territory units responsible for Rural Affairs, the Australian Local Government Association, and key Non-Government Organisations from a Planning Workshop held in late June 1991.

OVERALL GOAL

To facilitate the realisation of the social, economic and cultural potential of communities in non-metropolitan Australia

Principles

While acknowledging that there is wide diversity of economic, social and environmental circumstances in which people in non-metropolitan Australia live there are common needs. Five principles have therefore been identified to guide action to achieve this goal. These are:

1. *Social Justice*, so that all residents of non-metropolitan areas have the chance to achieve a personally fulfilling life through access to services which maintain and develop their cultural and social well-being and economic potential through:
 - specific consideration to particular circumstances and requirements;
 - improving access to services and
 - providing adequate resources and support for community development
2. *Economic Management*, which creates an environment that allows increased competitiveness of existing industries, and diversification of the economic base, for the benefit of residents in non-metropolitan areas and for the Australian economy as a whole.
3. *Environmental Management*, that optimises the net benefits to the community from the nation's resources, having regard to efficiency of resource use, environmental considerations and an equitable distribution of the return on resources.
4. *Innovative Responses* to economic and social change to ensure sustainable long term growth and community development.
5. *Consultation*, which is essential to ensure that non-metropolitan Australians have the opportunity to participate in decisions relating to policies and programs which affect their lives, families and communities.

Sub-Goals or Objectives

A. COORDINATION

1. **National Approach** - To develop a common national approach to non-metropolitan issues (with, as far as possible, common goals, priorities and key directions in rural affairs across all levels of government, and key non-government organisations) involving extensive consultation with non-metropolitan communities.
2. **Policy Advice** - To ensure that:
 - needs and aspirations of rural and remote people are identified and considered in the development of policies and programs by government and other relevant organisations.
 - implications for non-metropolitan areas of all policies and programs are specifically drawn to the attention of the relevant level(s) of government and other relevant organisations.
3. **Consultation/Participation** - To develop consultation, participation and co-ordination strategies both within and between Commonwealth, State and Local Government (including regional and community councils) and non-government organisations; and to encourage effective non-metropolitan policy making, planning and program implementation.
4. **Information** - To develop and exchange data and information about factors influencing the social well-being and non-metropolitan communities and the sustainability of their economic and environmental base.
5. **Awareness** - To raise (to a high level) the awareness of non-metropolitan issues and opportunities within government and non-government organisations and the community generally.

B. ECONOMIC POLICY AND DEVELOPMENT

6. **Economic Base** - To assist non-metropolitan communities to adjust their economic base to be competitive and sustainable.
7. **Economic Reform** - To assist non-metropolitan communities to participate effectively in the processes of structural adjustment and micro-economic reform.
8. **Investment** - To promote and assist in increasing, where appropriate, the levels of private sector and public sector investment in non-metropolitan communities.
9. **Employment** - To increase employment opportunities in order to ease the transition process for the enterprises and people involved in rural adjustment.
10. **Physical Infrastructure** - To identify areas of need in non-metropolitan areas (such as transport, communications, power and water supplies) and develop policy for the provision of infrastructure to enhance economic growth and community development.
11. **Responsive Action** - To encourage all levels of government, industry and community to adopt constructive, flexible and innovative responses to changes in economic conditions that influence non-metropolitan areas.

C. SOCIAL POLICY AND DEVELOPMENT

12. **Social Justice** - To improve access, equity, equality and opportunities for participation, for all non-metropolitan residents.
13. **Social Impact** - To ensure that the social impact of changing economic conditions, new projects and public policies on non-metropolitan residents is monitored, and that action is taken where appropriate to ease the transition processes.
14. **Social Infrastructure** - To identify areas of need in non-metropolitan areas (such as housing, libraries and recreation centres, health, welfare, education and training, and information services); to develop policy and advocate provision of infrastructure and services that enhance the quality of life and improve opportunities for personal growth and community development.