

# Working Off-Farm



*"Farmers think that they are just a farmer, when a lot of research shows that farmers have a huge range of skills they can transfer and use in other places."*

Nigel McGuckian, Agricultural consultant

Many farmers believe that they have little knowledge of businesses other than farming. They often do not recognise that they have a range of skills that are readily transferable to off-farm employment. How often do we hear "I am only a farmer, I can't do anything else".

This seems to be a view mostly held by farmers themselves, as farmers have a vast range of skills that can go largely unrecognised. It can be a daunting task for farmers to consider another form of employment.

There are many reasons why farmers may wish to consider off-farm employment. They may wish to work part-time, or part of the year off the farm, or may be considering selling the farm and taking up a full-time job. Off-farm employment can assist with risk management (not all eggs are in the farm basket), provide cash flow, training opportunities and social benefit.

The wide ranges of skills that farmers have are easily transferable and are highly valued in other industries. Gaining recognition for these skills can increase confidence and can open up a wide range of employment opportunities. There are also many opportunities for gaining nationally recognised qualifications for current skills.



*"I've just finished a course - Certificate 4 in Workplace Training and Assessing; I've also got a job doing heavy machinery licensing for excavators, front end loaders, fork lifts and also truck driver training."*

John White, cereal farmer,  
Wycheproof

The first step in making a change is to consider the range of skills that a farmer uses to run the farm. Some of these skills are common to all farmers and some skills are more specific to the individual. It is a matter of identifying the skills and then describing them in a way that makes sense in another workplace.

## Skills

For good reason, farmers are renowned for their practical skills, initiative, ability to work independently, to fix things and to work hard when needed.

Some of the skills that farmers may not recognise that they have include:

- Able to look at the big picture and plan a work schedule. Farmers have to prioritise and organise a variety of jobs throughout the year
- Manage and maintain different types of machinery and engines
- Manage finances and work to a budget
- Manage staff and co-ordinate projects.

There are also practical skills that many farmers have. Skills such as welding, construction, driving heavy vehicles, repair and maintenance of machinery and fencing are often in demand.

*Stuart Willder is a beef producer in the Hamilton district. He works off-farm as a nurse and health educator delivering seminars around Victoria.*





Rob Murray, decided on a career change into arboriculture after farming for 30 years in the Beaufort district.

*"The boss said can you go out and get that truck going? Take a spare battery, some diesel and a few tools and go and*

*see what you can do. So I threw a few things in the ute and thought, sure I can do that sort of stuff. Farmers have lots of skills."*

Rob Murray, Arborist, Melbourne

Skills can be identified through a process known as "recognition of prior learning and experience". A trained facilitator can help to work out what skills you already have. These skills may then be recognised for a qualification or part of a qualification. This prevents unnecessary training and can fast-track gaining a nationally recognised qualification.

There are many courses available that might increase your options for employment. There are short courses that offer the qualifications needed for jobs such as fork lift driving, asset maintenance, chainsaw operation and chemical handling.

## Where to get more information

- **"Rural Skills Connect"** – For confidential, free assistance with getting off-farm work, farmers can access the Rural Skills Connect Program. They may be referred to a **"Skills Store"** for an assessment of current skills. Individualised professional assistance will be available to assist with formal recognition of skills. This may include additional training and education. For more information on the Victorian Government drought initiative **"Rural Skills Connect"**, contact the Department of Primary Industries on 136 186 or visit the DPI website at [www.dpi.vic.gov.au/drought](http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au/drought).
- **"Skills Store"** is for you, if you
  - Need to get a nationally recognised qualification for your current skills
  - Want to re-train or re-enter the workforce
  - Have skills and experience but no qualifications to prove it
  - Need information on courses or training for employment or career improvement but don't know where to start

For more information on the "Skills Stores" program and for store locations, call 1800 809 834 or visit the website at [www.skills.vic.gov.au/skillsstores](http://www.skills.vic.gov.au/skillsstores).

- *There is still a life after farming* book has chapters devoted to helping farmers think about what skills they have and how they might go about finding a job off-farm. This book is available free of charge from the Department of Primary Industries on 136 186.

Published by the Department of Primary Industries, August 2008.

© The State of Victoria, 2008

This publication is copyright. No part may be reproduced by any process except in accordance with the provisions of the *Copyright Act 1968*.

Authorised by the Victorian Government, 1 Spring Street, Melbourne 3000  
ISBN 978-1-74217-132-6 (print)

ISBN 978-1-74217-133-3 (PDF)

**Disclaimer:** This publication may be of assistance to you but the State of Victoria and its employees do not guarantee that the publication is without flaw of any kind or is wholly appropriate for your particular purposes and therefore disclaims all liability for any error, loss or other consequence which may arise from you relying on any information in this publication.

**For more information about DPI visit the website at [www.dpi.vic.gov.au](http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au) or call the Customer Call Centre on 136 186.**

If you would like to receive this information/publication in an accessible format (such as large print or audio) please call the Customer Service Centre on: 136 186, TTY: 1800 122 969, or email [customer.service@dpi.vic.gov.au](mailto:customer.service@dpi.vic.gov.au)