

TRANSCRIPTION FROM VIDEO – THE YARD YARDS

March 2007

Michael Geddes: I'm Michael Geddes, we have got three children, Kirsten here, Alex and Izak, my wife Ely, grew up on the adjoining property. We have 700 cross-bred ewes for prime lambs. We are cropping about 800 acres. 2002, 2004 and 2006 now have been pretty much disasters.

We spend the best part of the year trying to grow a crop and you would take a sample into the buyer and they say 'we can't accept it' and you just feel like you've lost, yeah. It's one of the few times you feel emotional on the job, walking out of that building after they've said that they can't buy your grain, because it's not up to any saleable standard.

Bob: Gooday, my name is Bob, this is my wife Roslyn, and this is five of my twelve children. (six) six sorry. I didn't see the little one at the front. There has got to be a future in farming. Someone has got to farm, for the country it is a big challenge, it really is a big challenge, we will fight it, we will hang in there all the way. We really will. Especially for the kids, because it's a great life for them.

Yeah it's a good life. It's a hard life, but it's a good life.

Children: A drought is when there is not enough water to share around everyone, so everyone gets stressed, not just because they've got to feed their cows and that, but because they have got to feed their family.

It rained on Dad's birthday last month.

That was only we just got a little bit of water on my Dad's birthday, but last time when it was proper rain and it was heavy was about a year ago.

Liz Spicer: I'm Liz Spicer, I'm Chaplain of the Kyabram Secondary College. Many students come to me with problems that are happening at home. Maybe Mum and Dad are fighting over finances, there isn't enough money for the school books, not enough money for uniforms, but the main thing is, um, some of the Mums were saying that the Dads wouldn't ask for help and I think being strong people on farms, they don't tend to ask for help.

Kelvin Round: My name is Kelvin, returning to the farm that I was born on fifty odd years ago. Things look a bit different, of course it's a dry year, and that doesn't help at all. But what put us out in 1995 was a succession of wet years, it just rained and rained and rained, and nothing came up. The driveway, the kids used to roar down here when they were little, the garden, even in the '82 drought, we had a lawn, it was quite a nice place, the house doesn't look much now, there is only the toilet left. Yeah, it's sad to return and see it like that, because no-one lives here, but that's a fact of life. Hell it's dry.

Michael Geddes: Everyone knows it's bad and it's not telling anyone anything new. Things can't go on the way they are for much longer.

Nigel McGuckian: My name is Nigel McGuckian, and we run a consulting firm here in Bendigo. Most of my work involves working with farmers in some way, helping them make decisions. Farming is a very complex business and farmers are really, in my experience, very good at making complex decisions. So if you are a farmer out there, remember you are good at making these complex decisions, what you have to

do is to just take some steps to create an environment where you are comfortable to make those decisions with the others around you.

Ted Gretgrix: Well there is a whole range of options if you talk to people early enough. There is obviously changes they can make on the farm, about changing their farming systems possibly. They might need some technical advice from someone about ways they can do that. There are other options, such as reducing debt, possibly by selling off part of their farm, or some of their assets, and scaling back their operations by seeking some other income source, like getting a part-time job or somebody working off farm.

Kelvin Round: We tried things; I worked off farm, working in shearing sheds, helping people cart hay, whatever I could do. That helped in the short term, but not a lot of money. We were always in debt. You would have a good one good year and you would go to the bank to put some money in and the next year, you would be going back to get it and a bit more back.

Nigel McGuckian: When it comes to money, people will often avoid doing the sums. Sometimes because the sums are ugly. You know I don't want to do the sums, because it will make it seem worse. In most cases, doing the sums makes it seem better, because then you can manage it.

Michael Geddes: There is a part of me that enjoys shearing, just because it's so demanding and you can't be worried about the other stressors while you are doing it.

Dr. Rob Gordon: Drought is a chronic stress situation. Many of the tasks required in a drought or chronic stress situation are very time consuming and exhausting and if they just get absorbed in that, then after a while, there is a sense they are on a treadmill and it becomes meaningless, because they are not changing the big picture. The stressed person is still just focusing on the next thing that has to be done.

Michael Geddes: You try and keep on getting up and doing the next job, but instead of doing something that's making you money, you are getting up just trying to control the damage that has happened in the last year.

It should be a happy place for a kid to grow up, the farm, but it's sad when you are struggling to keep it happy.

Dr. Rob Gordon: When we are in stress mode, we very rapidly start to feel desperate, and if that doesn't change we will slide into feeling hopeless, which is depression country. So when people start to find that the thought is coming up in their mind 'what is the point of it all, should I end it?' this is a sign that they have lost the connection with whatever it is that has made their life meaningful.

Daryl Cordy: Well I know of people that have taken their life with suicide and stuff like that – just the pressure has got to them too much, and they have sold everything up and they just think there is no tomorrow, where if you have counsellors or, um, the Shire or the um Rotary Clubs, or just someone to talk to to take those pressures off you, and get another perspective of things, like you have still got your family and you still have got your health, so there is always tomorrow as far as I'm concerned.

Terry Melvin: Men's Line Australia is for men who are dealing with family and relationship issues, and we are particularly attentive to those warning signs that someone may be on the edge in terms of thinking about taking their life. Men's Line

Australia is also available to family members and we are increasingly aware that supporting the carers or family members is a very important strategy in them supporting their husbands or the male members of their family.

Pray for Rain Group:

(singing) (Advance Australia Fair)

We pray Father God that you will have mercy on this land and you will send the rains quickly.

Denis Wood: The last drought was upon us, and I suffer fairly badly from stress and I didn't quite know what I was going to do and I come and joined the prayer group, which really inspired me and supported me in decisions I made.

Paul Quirk: My name is Paul Quirk, I am from Burnside in the Goulburn Valley and we are dairy farmers, my wife and myself and three sons. Back in 2002 there was a group of about six of us and we got together on a social basis just to meet once a month, whereby we would go to someone's house, have supper and a few beers, and just talk about what was happening – it was a way of getting away from the place, talking about our problems and realising we weren't on our own. Then in about September last year, with the onset of the drought, this serious one, we then got together again and we've been doing that once a month, and had a really good Christmas break-up where all the kids are invited as well as just our wives and husbands.

Um, since that we had a suggestion from one of the members that the feeling of I guess it's desolation where you are on the property on your own and you don't feel like going out and working, because you haven't got the money to spend on capital improvement, and one of the group suggested that maybe we have a working bee of our group, and get together and we help one another to do a job which takes a long time to do on your own, but which with six blokes, takes a very short time. It's a lot of fun. We talk and we joke and we also discuss the problems we've got and we work through them. Then after that we all go inside and have lunch at whoever's farm it's at. So yes, it's good. Everybody is helping one another.

It's not your fault that this drought is here. It's not a management problem. It's really not your fault. So get out and talk to your neighbours and not necessarily your neighbour next door, it can be somebody who is a good mate down the road. Just get with them occasionally and have a bit of a social gathering with them just at your place.

Nigel McGuckian: It might be two people, it might be ten people, but get together and the rule is be open and be honest about everything, because the more open and honest you are, the more you help yourself and the more you help other people.

Dr. Rob Gordon: And we know this state of depression where people are wondering what the point of it all is, is really a very easily treatable problem, it really just requires getting into communication with someone who has got the training, to help you understand what is happening and help you make a plan to get out of it.

Michael Geddes: In 2004, it was getting too much, probably thought about it for a month or two, but it would have been good to talk to someone. We'd called in to the Centrelink office, just asked for a counsellor. I think David was the one who answered the call and who was the appropriate person to speak to at the time. Once he'd started, made the first visit, you didn't regret anything from there on, but initiating it, that was the hardest job on the farm at the time.

Kelvin Round: It's roughly six years ago I think six years this Easter that I started doing training. We did licences for ? forklifts, back-hoes, excavators, skid steers, bulldozers, graders and all that stuff, we can do tickets for all those.

Nigel McGuckian: Farmers as a group have so many skills that often they don't recognise they've got, but they are called transferable skills. Skills that you have used on the farm, that someone else would find valuable.

Kelvin Round: The skills the farmer has, whether he is a normal wheat sheep cattle or whatever farmer, has about 120 skills. So he's fairly broadly based. An ordinary factory worker only has or only need, but may have, only 17 or 18 skills. So I started thinking yes we are pretty clever after all, we can do a lot of things. All we've got to do is set our minds to it, apply it and we should be right.

Nigel McGuckian: You know, how do you measure happiness? People have to measure their own happiness I suppose. They have to judge whether it's working for them.

Michael Geddes: If we hadn't caught up with David, I don't think we would be here today.... He was critical in keeping everything rolling, yeah. Just had the same jobs in front of you, but the way you approached them was a lot better.

Nigel McGuckian: Think about the range of people that might be out there who can help you, and there are lots of people. There is rural counsellors, there are psychologists, there are counsellors, there are consultants, um, there are neighbours and friends, there are people from the church, there is people you know and trust, just invite them over, have a cup of tea and invite them to talk.

Liz Spicer: I think it's okay to ask for help and that is what we have to get across to people, we are all in it together.

For all drought enquiries contact Drought Personal Support Line 1300 655 969 or Drought Information Line 136 186
www.dpi.vic.gov.au/drought.

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