The Future of Farming in Rural Amenity Landscapes: The role of planning and governance in a changing landscape

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All photos were taken in Indigo Shire by the Author
Certificate of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at Charles Sturt University or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgment is made in the thesis. Any contribution made to the research by colleagues with whom I have worked at Charles Sturt University or elsewhere during my candidature is fully acknowledged.

I agree that this thesis be accessible for the purpose of study and research in accordance with the normal conditions established by the Executive Director, Library Services or nominee, for the care, loan and reproduction of theses.

__________________________________________
Jane Margaret Roots

June 2013
This thesis is dedicated to my parents, June and Fred Roots, who instilled in me an interest in geography in all its forms, a curiosity about places and a desire to find meaning at the intersections of the human – land relationship.
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The data collection process proposed for this research was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee, Office of Academic Governance, Charles Sturt University, Panorama Avenue, Bathurst, NSW 2795, on 10 December 2009, in a letter to Jane Roots from Ms. Julie Hicks, Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics Committee (please see Appendix 2).

The protocol number issued with respect to this research project was 2009/117.
List of Papers and Presentations based on this research

Refereed Journal paper

Refereed Book chapter

Non-refereed Conference and Seminar Presentations
22 July 2009 “Farmer perspectives and land use change in Indigo Shire.” Presentation to the North East Catchment Management Authority Community Liaison Reference Group, Wodonga, Victoria.


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Abstract

This research investigated the role of farming and land use planning in creating and maintaining rural amenity landscapes. While there has been considerable academic interest in the phenomenon of amenity migration, and the creation and destruction of amenity landscapes, far less attention has been paid to understanding the societal influences that affect the decisions of the existing farming community. To a large extent, the public amenity value of these landscapes is directly dependent upon the land management decisions of numerous individual farmers. Yet current governance processes and planning paradigms are challenged by the myriad of landscape scale issues facing agriculture, as well as the growing diversity and complexity of rural communities.

The research involved a qualitative case study of an attractive and agriculturally diverse landscape in north east Victoria, Australia. Similar to rural amenity landscapes found in New Zealand, North America, Europe and elsewhere in Australia, Indigo Shire is experiencing a steady influx of non-farming residents who have the potential to affect the visual diversity and economic resilience of these landscapes in both positive and negative ways. What makes Indigo Shire unique is that agriculture has remained an important economic contributor to the Shire in spite of these changes.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with forty eight key informants including farmers, local government staff, Councillors, planners, and agri-business advisors. Data was also gathered through observations of local planning forums, public meetings and workshops addressing land use issues, as well as analysis of secondary documentation.

The study found a plethora of perspectives about the challenges and opportunities emanating from the landscape scale changes. Increasing land prices, subdivision of land, competition for scarce water resources, new community demographics and evolving environmental expectations are adding to an already uncertain world of volatile commodity prices and climate change implications. However, an increasing rural population also brought expanding markets and more vibrant local communities. Contrary to much of the literature on amenity landscapes and rural land use change, this study showed that the majority of farmers have adapted to the changing circumstances with a diversity of approaches and enterprises.
While there was minimal conflict between farmers and non-farmers, this study found that the increasing social, economic and political heterogeneity of these landscapes created clear policy challenges in relation to the planning and governance of rural spaces. Local government planning processes were struggling to address the needs of this multifunctional landscape and the tools available did not fit the complexity of uses in this diverse landscape. Farming and food production for local consumption as well as export were issues with which local government had very little involvement, but were intrinsic to the health and well-being of the Shire’s communities, economy and landscapes. There is an opportunity to further develop local food systems to build an appreciation of the attributes of local farms as well as take responsibility for the integrity, stability and beauty of amenity landscapes.

This research concluded that inland rural amenity areas can be working multifunctional landscapes comprising both productivist and post productivist elements. When these elements are balanced, amenity landscapes can foster social and economic resilience. However, governance and planning arrangements need to be more assertive and proactive in facilitating appreciation of the role of farming in rural amenity landscapes.
"The charming landscape which I saw this morning, is indubitably made up of some twenty or thirty farms. Miller owns this field, Locke that, and Manning the woodland beyond. But none of them owns the landscape. There is a property in the horizon which no man has but he whose eye can integrate all the parts, that is, the poet. This is the best part of these men's farms, yet to this their warranty and deeds give no title."

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1836)

Chapter 1 – Introduction

The research issue

This study explores the role of farming and land use planning in creating and maintaining rural amenity landscapes. It has been undertaken in response to growing concerns, locally and elsewhere, about the irreversible loss of ‘traditional’ agriculture and the consequences on the vibrancy of local communities, the visual diversity and the economic resilience of these landscapes.

Rural landscapes in the 21st century are places where many of the causes and effects of social, economic and environmental change coalesce. The global issues of food production, energy security, protection of biodiversity, climate change and loss of agricultural land are all grounded, reproduced and contested in rural areas (McDonagh, 2012). This complexity makes rural landscapes a challenging and relevant space to study.

Amenity landscapes are definable rural landscapes that produce a broad array of goods and services which go far beyond the traditional production of food and fibre. They are multifunctional landscapes evolving from a fundamentally different settlement pattern (Gosnell & Abrams, 2011). They encompass a mix of production, consumption and protection values and uses (Holmes, 2006) where the social and cultural aspects as well as the economic outputs of the landscape are consumed (Mitchell & de Waal, 2009; Tonts & Grieve, 2002).
Traditional rural pursuits are particularly vulnerable to land use change arising from counterurbanisation and population redistribution (Argent, Tonts, Jones, & Holmes, 2009; Barr, 2003). Agricultural activities have, in many cases, created the ambient attraction of these landscapes, but these activities are also threatened by the impacts of increasing in-migration, also known as amenity migration, to these areas.

An extensive array of academic literature addresses the causes and effects of amenity migration. While much of it deals with the sociological and demographic aspects of the migration process (i.e. who is migrating and why), there has also been considerable interest in the geographical manifestation of these changes (Argent, Smailes, & Griffin, 2007; McGranahan, 1999). Authors have researched physical changes in the landscape, and subsequent impacts on the environment, natural resources and the economic productivity of the land. Others have studied how these landscapes can be managed to enhance or preserve the values that underlie their attractiveness [See Chapter 2]. However, there has been limited research on the role of land use planning in driving or reacting to these changes, or the views of longer term farmers with respect to the future of farming as an economic activity and as a contributor to landscape amenity.

In rural amenity landscapes, a key driver of change is the subdivision of agricultural land for non-farming residential use which can affect the cultural and aesthetic values of the landscape (Curry, Koczberski, & Selwood, 2001; Gurran & Blakely, 2007; Paquette & Domon, 2003). These changes can also have both positive and negative natural resource and environmental management impacts (R. E. Jones, Fly, Talley, & Cordell, 2003; Mendham & Curtis, 2010), affect biodiversity values (Hansen et al., 2005; Luck, 2011), and negatively affect productive land management (Klepeis, Gill, & Chisholm, 2009). The interactions between the newcomers and the existing population have had variable and complex implications in small rural communities, highlighting the diversity of social responses to land use change (Argent, 2011; Ruiz & Domon, 2012). However, it appears that there has been far less attention paid to the other social actors such as planners and local government, in addition to the ‘shrinking traditional rural population’ who remain in the landscape (Argent, Tonts, Jones, & Holmes, 2011).

In many inland rural amenity landscapes in westernised nations, farmers continue to hold and control the majority of land while still contributing to the local economy. However, their land is often considered expendable by local planning authorities and
their economic livelihoods are under threat for a myriad of reasons, creating a diverse public discourse on the expectations of agricultural land use and management.

The loss of agricultural land and hence productivity due to subdivision and development of low density residential lots is a cause of concern (Buxton et al., 2007). This situation not only affects the amount of land available for agricultural production, but also increases the price of land, reducing the ability of existing farmers to expand their land holdings, increases costs associated with providing public infrastructure and affects the attractiveness of the landscape (Sinclair & Bunker, 2007). This is the manifestation of the ‘cycle of farmland conversion’ (Daniels & Bowers, 1997) shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Cycle of Farmland Conversion
source: adapted from Daniels and Bowers (1997)

While this cycle of conversion can be seen as a physical process, it is inherently a political one, involving complex interactions between planning, agricultural productivity, amenity values and community support.

Land use planning processes and the viability of local agricultural activities have the potential to influence this cycle of conversion. Local government planners and elected representatives balance competing interests and drive complicated public agendas about rural space and future needs. Existing farmers are at the interface between the motivations and needs of a growing and heterogeneous rural community and the
landscape consequences of changing land use. However, the relationship between planning as an influential and political force, the expectations of the existing rural farming population and the role of local food and fibre production has rarely been looked at in terms of its impact on the creation and maintenance of rural amenity landscapes. Rural planning and the associated governance processes have received minimal attention in the amenity migration and landscape change literature, and rural planning continues remains a minor player in the broad field of planning research.

In many instances, changes in land use could affect the visual landscape which is a large component of the amenity landscape’s aesthetic appeal (Essex & Brown, 1997). The ‘rural idyll’ created by traditional agricultural activities and other land uses may be compromised, potentially leading to a destruction of that landscape due to its ‘commodification’ (Mitchell, 1998; Tonts & Grieve, 2002) in addition to the loss of the multiple functions and values of a well-managed agricultural landscapes (Dramstad & Fjellstad, 2011). There are also concerns about the loss of farmland and the subsequent implications on food production (Australian Farm Institute, 2012; Millar & Roots, 2012).

Concerns about food security, genetically modified food, animal welfare and farming practises, traceability within the food chain, social justice and environmental sustainability all reflect the emerging and dynamic facets of agriculture as a social and ecological activity as well as an economic and spatial one (Lawrence, Richards, & Lyons, 2013; Parberry & Wilkinson, 2012; Woods, 2012). The expectations and changing role of agriculture are currently challenging political systems at all levels and will ultimately be manifested in the decisions about the future use of land for farming.

This research explores the trajectories of rural amenity landscape change, exposing the tensions and conundrums between the so-called ‘inevitability’ of the ‘cycle of conversion’ and the increasing social and economic pressure on the spatiality of food and fibre production. If these landscapes are attractive because of their small farms and ‘bucolic’ land uses and these are under threat, what is needed to help productive ‘working’ farms remain in the landscape? What are the barriers as well as the potential opportunities for farming in these areas? In essence, is it possible to create sustainable, multifunctional, ‘working and living’ landscapes?

By looking at a rural landscape through the lens of agricultural production as both a creator of amenity and a provider of commodities, this research considers how the
landscape change process due to an increasing rural population is being experienced and managed with respect to the laudable goals of local and regional sustainability.

This study portrays the voices of longer term farmers, local and state government officials and Shire Councillors – the people who have a significant stake in the ‘how’, ‘where’ and ‘why’ of the use and management of an attractive rural agricultural landscape. It seeks to discover how farming as a land use fits into the phenomenon of an amenity landscape and the role of planning in determining the future trajectory of productive rural spaces. This research is occurring at a time when the broader public are asking similar questions about the future use of agricultural land in terms of food production and local food security.

Research Questions and Methodology

The aim of this research was to critically examine how agricultural activities and land use planning affects the creation and maintenance of sustainable rural amenity landscapes. The following broad questions concerning agricultural activities, planning and rural landscape change guided this research:

1. How does land use change affect farming activities in amenity landscapes?
2. How do planning processes impact on farming activities in amenity landscapes?
3. What are the perceptions of the role of farming in amenity landscapes?
4. What are the implications for the future of farming in amenity landscapes?

The research aims and questions informed the choice of methodology and structuring of the research. The focus of this thesis is on perspectives and gaining an understanding of particular experiences and contexts, thus the methodology chosen was exploratory, interpretive, constructivist and reflective. I utilised a constructivist approach, based on a case study, seeking ‘specificity, exceptions and completeness’ (Yin, 2003) as part of an intensive analysis of perceptions, experiences and location.

I was interested in exploring the context-specific actions, reactions and interrelationships that influence people’s perceptions and behaviour. Yin (2003) also points out that case studies are typically carried out in close interaction with practitioners, and
they deal with real management situations where the relationships between key variables are being explored. This was also true in the circumstances of this research.

Qualitative research methods were followed and data collection involved in-depth, semi structured interviews with 48 people, detailed field observations of eight public workshops and forums, and analysis of documentary data [See Chapter 3].

The interview data was obtained from local full-time food and fibre producers as well as professionals involved in local and State government planning and economic development, agri-business professionals familiar with agricultural activities in the Shire, senior managers in local government and Shire Councillors. Farming participants were identified through purposive and snowball sampling methods, selecting individuals with a broad knowledge and experience in farming and land use change issues across industry sectors and from all parts of the Shire.

All interview data was transcribed into text, along with all other field observations and reflections. Analysis of the qualitative data was inductive and interpretive, using a systematic process of coding (NVivo©) and categorising to de-contextualise and re-contextualise the data according to themes and topics. This was done through examining an initial subset of the data for major and minor concepts, similarities and contrasts, then creating categories based on themes and relationships.

Other less formal field observations which provided context and depth to the research involved attendance at public meetings, community events and farmer’s markets, visit/tours of the farming areas of the Shire, community consultation/meetings related to regional planning, catchment management and land use, and local agri-business events.

The documentary data incorporated literature about planning, agricultural change, community engagement, natural resource management theory and practice, and relevant case studies. Other data used included federal and State government rural policies, local and State planning documents, agricultural policy documents, community consultation reports, statistical information, conference and workshop proceedings, as well as articles in journals, local magazines, newspapers, and community websites and newsletters.
The Case Study – Indigo Shire

The case study of Indigo Shire provides a specific context in which to study the research problem [see Chapter 4] but the relevance of the research is not limited to this particular landscape. Existing literature indicates that rural land use change is occurring in other amenity landscapes in Australia, North America, Europe, the United Kingdom and Scandinavia. While it is recognised that there are limits as to how much a case study can be generalised as farming and planning processes exist within particular environmental and political constraints, I consider that this particular study can contribute to our understanding of:

- the role of small farms in maintaining the attraction of amenity landscapes;
- the role of land use planning in addressing some agriculture issues and opportunities at a landscape scale; and
- the role of local agricultural production in contributing to local food security and the overall ‘amenity’ of these rural landscapes.

Indigo Shire is a small rural shire located in North East Victoria, approximately 270 kilometres north east of Melbourne. Encompassing an area of 204,381 hectares, the
Shire includes the higher rainfall and inland slopes of the Great Dividing Range to the drier and flat River Murray floodplain, parts of the Kiewa River valley as well as the historic towns of Beechworth, Chiltern and Rutherglen as shown in Figure 2.

In 2012, Indigo Shire had an estimated residential population of 15,431 (Indigo Shire Council, 2012b) and an annual growth rate of just over 1% between 2006 and 2011 (Department of Planning and Community Development, 2011). The Shire’s economy is based on agriculture and tourism. In 2011-12, food manufacturing and the agricultural sector accounted for 42% ($223.8 million) of the Shire’s Gross Value Added and there were 1250 people employed in the agricultural industry sector, including food manufacturing (Indigo Shire Council, 2013). A broad range of agricultural industries are present, including dairy, beef, sheep, wine, horticulture and grains.

![Figure 2: Location of Indigo Shire in North East Victoria](image-url)
This case study was chosen as it contains elements typical of rural amenity landscapes as well as encompassing attributes which make it unique and worthy of a more in-depth study [see Chapter 4 for more detail]. The key aspects of Indigo Shire which make it a relevant case study are that it:

- is an inland rural amenity landscape undergoing noticeable change from traditional agricultural practices to a diverse and multifunctional economy;
- is under pressure from increasing rural residential development although, as there is no significant urban presence within the Shire and due to its proximity to two large regional centres, development is scattered relatively evenly throughout the landscape;
- contains a very wide variety of agricultural practices and products covering a spectrum of profitability and viability, with agriculture remaining a dominant industry in terms of Gross Value Added and employment;
- has diverse geographical, environmental and cultural attributes which make it an easily identifiable amenity landscape; and
- has statutory and non-statutory public engagement processes within a traditional planning and governance structure, similar to many small rural shires in Victoria and elsewhere.

In Australia, the landscapes of Indigo Shire could be compared to the Adelaide Hills and Fleurieu Peninsula in South Australia, the Yarra Valley, Macedon Ranges and Bendigo Corridor of Victoria, the Blue Mountains and Hunter Valley of New South Wales, the Margaret River area and the inland south western part of Western Australia and the Atherton Tablelands of Queensland, among other attractive landscapes undergoing changing land uses. A key point of difference with some of these landscapes is that Indigo Shire is well beyond regular ‘commuting distance’ to a large metropolitan area, and it retains a strong agricultural sector based on grain and cereal production, dairying, viticulture and food tourism.
Thesis Overview

This chapter has introduced the main concepts of amenity landscapes, agricultural change and planning processes within the context of this study. It has also identified the research questions which will be explored in the remainder of this dissertation. The remainder of the thesis is briefly outlines below.

While a brief discussion of the theoretical underpinnings of rural landscape change has occurred here, these foundations are addressed more comprehensively in Chapter 2 – Understanding rural amenity landscapes, farming and planning. Divided into three parts, this chapter covers a broad spectrum of Australian and international literature. The first part deals with theories on counterurbanisation, rural migration and amenity landscapes. The second section explores the changing paradigms of agricultural landscapes and the role of agriculture and food systems in amenity landscapes. The third part focuses on the evolution of land use planning processes and community engagement as a form of institutional governance dealing with demographic change. International perspectives on rural planning are also reviewed, providing a brief overview of contemporary planning issues in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom. The evolution of rural land use planning in Australia and Victoria in particular is also described. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the lack of integration evident in the literature addressing the relationship between amenity landscapes, agriculture and rural planning.

Chapter 3 describes the methodological approach followed in this research. The epistemological and ontological stances which determined the methodology chosen for this research are explained and details about the data collection process, including the ethical approval are provided. Supporting material is included in relevant appendices. The theory construction and explanation of how the various methods contribute to the ‘trustworthiness’ (Guba & Lincoln, 1982) of this research is also presented.

Chapter 4 provides a detailed description of the social, economic and physical attributes of the case study area, Indigo Shire. In addition, information regarding land use changes, the potential impact of climate change, evolving land ownership patterns and recent agricultural activity is also presented to provide further context for the data collected and discussed in subsequent chapters. At the time of writing, the economic and agricultural statistics based on the 2011 census had not been released by the
Australian Bureau of Statistics. Therefore, the data available in many instances is from 2006 and reflects the early years of south eastern Australia’s Millennium drought and the economic conditions prior to the Global Financial Crisis. This is relevant as the qualitative data was collected in 2009-2010 while the area was still in drought and as the impacts of the Global Financial Crisis were being felt.

**Chapter 5** includes an analysis of the data collected in response to the first research question ‘How does land use change affect farming in amenity landscapes?’ The responses from participants are divided into the social, environmental and economic impacts and adaptations being experienced and observed by farmers, local government employees, Councillors and agri-business advisors.

Data collection results are also presented in **Chapter 6** in relation to research question two: ‘How do planning processes impact on farming activities in amenity landscapes?’ Respondent’s views on the impact of land use planning processes on farming are presented, including the relationships between local government and farmers, land use policy setting and community engagement.

**Chapter 7**, the final results chapter, presents the perceptions of the role of farming in amenity landscapes, responding to the third research question: ‘What are the perceptions of the role of farming in amenity landscapes?’ The first part of this chapter provides an overview of farmers’ adaptation to the current landscape and the economic and social changes occurring within each of the agricultural sectors. This has provided an indication of the viability and sustainability or otherwise of the sectors, according to producers. Following that, the data on the contribution of agriculture to the Shire, both in terms of social and economic currency, is presented. The final section explores the issues around the production of food for local consumption.

**Chapter 8** provides a discussion of the key findings in the context of the research questions by integrating the main themes arising from the data with the broader literature on amenity landscapes, rural planning, agriculture, and food production. The discussion encompasses four interrelated themes, showing that farming can have a continuing and meaningful role in amenity landscapes although there are challenges in relation to planning processes and governance arrangements. The value of local food production as a vector to connect communities with their landscape, thereby building an appreciation of the output of local farms is also explored within the context of amenity landscapes and potential viability of small farms.
Chapter 9 is the conclusion and addresses the final research question in terms of the implications for the future of farming in amenity landscapes. Further research and knowledge gaps are also identified.

Plate 2: Allans Flat and the Baranduda Range
“The love of field and coppice,
Of green and shaded lanes,
Of ordered woods and gardens
Is running in your veins,
Strong love of grey-blue distance
Brown streams and soft-dim skies
I know but cannot share it,
My love is otherwise.”

Dorothea Mackellar (1904)

Chapter 2 – Understanding rural amenity landscapes, farming and planning

Introduction

Rural landscapes, their meaning, appearance and management, are an intriguing and integral part of how people relate to the environment. Landscape change is both a cause and an effect of the people inhabiting and creating them and subsequently involves a complex mix of social, physical and political values. This makes for a fertile field of inquiry. By focussing on rural areas and the specific roles of farming and planning in the creation and use of amenity landscapes, this review weaves together literature found in three different areas, specifically:

- the evolution of rural amenity landscapes and the values attached to them;
- the economic, cultural and environmental role of agriculture and food systems in rural amenity landscapes; and
- land use planning in practice and governance processes in rural landscapes.

Each of these very broad research fields contains an extensive breadth and depth of literature. A key element in undertaking this literature review was to understand the theoretical frameworks underpinning each of these fields, and then to look for the synergies and the gaps to inform the research. This review has been divided into three parts which are described below. At the end of each section, a brief summary and synthesis of the issues raised is provided.
Part one deals with the cultural genesis and physical reality of amenity landscapes. It addresses how amenity landscapes have been defined in the literature, including why and where they occur. The causes and effects of the movement of people to the countryside are explored, focussing on the impact of amenity migration on attractive agricultural landscapes. The main theoretical frameworks within which rural land use change is embedded are then discussed, along with emerging theories about amenity landscape change.

The second part looks at the changing expectations of agricultural production as a land use in amenity landscapes in the context of evolving social, economic and environmental perspectives on agriculture, emerging issues of food security, opportunities for local food production and alternative farming arrangements.

The third section of this chapter explores the current discourses on rural land use planning, working landscapes, sustainability and engaging the community in response to societal expectations about democratic processes. A brief description of the array of potential tools used in land use planning is provided as an indication of the complexities of, but also limitations to, managing the dynamic process of land use change. This is then followed by a summary of the evolution of planning in Australia, setting the context for the Victorian planning system. A review of the different planning approaches between the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom where the majority of research and case studies of rural amenity migration and land use changes has occurred, is provided as a comparison between different countries in terms of the management of rural landscapes.

This chapter concludes with a discussion of how this research fills gaps in the existing literature and reflects on the value of a qualitative research approach to agricultural landscape change.

2.1 Rural amenity landscapes: evolution and impacts

Landscapes, as recognisable spatial entities, exist at the nexus of the natural and human environments. Landscapes are much more than just ‘land use’, or ‘environment’, or ‘geographical location’. They deal with the cultural and natural interactions between
people and environment, thereby ‘evoking multi-sensory experiences, feelings, and thoughts’ (Park & Selman, 2011, p. 183). They are an intrinsic part of us as people. By providing tangible evidence of human aspirations applied in the natural world, landscapes encapsulate changing societal representations of geographical space (Mallarach, 2008). As such they are the consequence of interactions between the physical environment and human effort. Landscapes display the impacts of previous and current land uses, with this interaction occurring in both ‘material and imagined ways’, creating significant value (Mallarach, 2008, p. 11).

While the recognition of landscape is essentially visual, it is the ‘feelings, memories and associations they evoke’ that create the perceptions of landscape, thereby turning ‘land’ into landscape (Selman, 2006, p. 14). It is this cerebral notion of landscape and the values embodied in it which is intrinsic to the following discourse on amenity landscapes as a particular landscape type.

Beginning with an exploration of cultural expectations and social values attached to landscapes, this review goes on to analyse the attributes of amenity landscapes and their defining physical characteristics as shown in the literature. The various conceptual frameworks used in the description of agricultural landscapes are then portrayed to highlight the social, economic and environmental drivers in rural landscape change. How the ‘amenity landscape’ fits into these conceptual frameworks, as well as their trajectory in terms of land use change, is then discussed.

**Population movement creating rural amenity landscapes**

The movement of people from metropolitan areas to non-metropolitan areas has stimulated a plethora of applied and academic work by sociologists, geographers and demographers for well over thirty years. While there are varying interpretations of when the movement of urban residents to rural areas actually started, researchers began taking notice in the 1970s when small rural towns, (primarily in the United States), started showing positive growth, as opposed to an expected decline as a result of country people migrating to the cities (Berry, 1976). A change in rural demographics was also noted in the United Kingdom, with a distinct difference emerging between predictable urban fringe growth and a re-population being experienced in more remote rural regions (Gorton, White, & Chaston, 1998; Halfacree & Boyle, 1998).
In Australia, a similar trend appeared, with regional areas, including coastal and some inland locations, showing an increase in population (Burnley & Murphy, 2002). This population ‘turnaround’ and migration from cities to non-metropolitan areas became obvious in the mid-1970’s when the proportion of each State’s population actually contained in capital cities began to shrink (Champion, 1989; Murphy, 2002). Initially the focus of this ‘counter’ urbanisation movement was to the coastal fringe and adjacent valleys of eastern Australia, where living by the coast enabled people to ‘maximise their residential amenity’ (Burnley & Murphy, 2004, p. 47). Census statistics showed the fastest rate of growth by settlement category since the 1980s occurring in the smallest centres, particularly in accessible and densely settled areas such as ‘high access’, mixed farm and coastal areas (McGuirk & Argent, 2011).

Thus the term ‘sea-change’ was used to describe, in a metaphorical sense, people who are making a fundamental switch in their lifestyle by moving away from a metropolitan area in search of a quieter and better place to raise a family (Burnley & Murphy, 2004). The lure of the Australian beach culture and coastal landscapes had a significant influence on people wishing to escape the confines of the growing urban centres. From the 1980s onwards, the peri-urban fringe of the large metropolitan cities also began to receive a significant proportion of ex-urban migrants, reflecting similar desires, but in rural locations (Bunker & Houston, 2003; Costello, 2007). The migration to inland rural areas, where members of the baby boomer generation were purporting to be purchasing rural properties for retreats and eventual retirement, has been labelled ‘tree-change’, a term made popular by demographic commentator Bernard Salt and picked up in the media in 2004 (Ragusa, 2007; Salt, 2004; Willis, 2004). However, there have been few ‘definitive’ studies on the locations, and causal factors associated with tree-changers, and in much of the social geography literature, tree change has tended to be defined as ‘merely a geographical counterpoint to sea change’ (Connell & McManus, 2011, p. 36).

Overall, this growth in non-metropolitan population has spawned a considerable amount of research and debate addressing population dynamics, migration movements and regional settlement change in North America, the United Kingdom, Europe as well as Australia (Burnley & Murphy, 2004; Cocklin & Dibden, 2005; Connell & McManus, 2011; Gosnell & Abrams, 2011; Halfacree & Boyle, 1998; Hugo, 1994 among others).
Different countries and cultures, and therefore the associated literature, have viewed particular migration movements through different lenses, exacerbating the diffuse nature of the concept. ‘Ex-urban’ migration, ‘counterurbanisation’, ‘de-concentration’, ‘rural gentrification’ and a ‘rural renaissance’ are other terms often used to describe these movements, as well as the changing relationship, between metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas (Argent et al., 2009; Guimond & Simard, 2010; Gurran, 2008; Walmsley, Epps, & Duncan, 1998). The people involved in urban to rural migration are referred to as ‘lifestylers’ and ‘sea- or tree-changers’ in Australia (Aslin, 2006; Burnley & Murphy, 2004; Gurran & Blakely, 2007), ‘neo-rurals’ in parts of Canada (Guimond & Simard, 2010) and, in some instances, given the term ‘back-to-the-landers’ in the United Kingdom (Halfacree, 2006).

Understanding migration flows and the ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors of rural population dynamics has been a focus for many studies aimed at policy responses to the shifting demographics in rural areas. The fluctuations in migration patterns and the influences of environmental, social and economic forces have also been examined in particular locations, and from various perspectives including property turn-over (Mendham & Curtis, 2010), demographic change (Burnley & Murphy, 2004; Hugo, 2005), place marketing (Connell & McManus, 2011), rural land ownership (Halfacree & Rivera, 2012) and rural entrepreneurial success (McGranahan, Wojan, & Lambert, 2011).

One of the major ‘pull’ factors in urban to rural migration has been the draw of the rural countryside, to visit, to create a second home, and/or to eventually live permanently as a means to improve their ‘quality of life’ (Bunce, 1994; Burnley & Murphy, 2004; Halfacree & Boyle, 1998; Halfacree & Rivera, 2012). The term ‘amenity’ is used to encapsulate an attribute or attributes that enhances a location as a place of residence (McGranahan, 1999).

The population re-structuring movement that is based on the attraction of natural and/or cultural amenities is generally referred to as ‘amenity migration’ and includes a plethora of population movements occurring in diverse social, economic, cultural, political and spatial contexts (Buckley, Sander, Ollenburg, & Warnken, 2006; Burnley & Murphy, 2004; Gosnell & Abrams, 2011).

However, the breadth of issues that the phenomenon of amenity migration actually encompasses has meant that there is no academic consensus on what the term represents (Gosnell & Abrams, 2011). Indeed, questions have been posed as to whether concepts
applied to urban to rural migration in the more urbanised nations (namely the United States, Europe and Australia) are also relevant to other, less urbanised countries that are undergoing landscape changes such as northern Europe or Asia (Gosnell & Abrams, 2011; Halfacree, 2008). McCarthy (2008, p. 132) points out that while the phenomenon is strongly associated with westernised countries, it has truly become global:

‘low-density settlements of large, single-family houses reachable only by automobiles on networks of new roads, occupied exclusively by middle- and upper-class residents, and often gated and governed by restrictive covenants, are becoming commonplace in China, India, Indonesia, Nigeria, South Africa, Saudi Arabia and Lebanon, and throughout Latin America and the Caribbean.’

Connell and McManus (2011, p. 27) corroborate this perspective, noting that counterurbanisation ‘usually implies a relatively wealthy middle-class group withdrawing from urban settings to pursue a somewhat different lifestyle in a rural location’. Hugo (2005, p. 78) views counterurbanisation as a ‘new, diffuse form of urbanisation’ rather than a trend in its own right, and concludes that it could ‘scarcely’ be considered novel. Argent et al. (2011, p. 40) suggest that migration to rural areas is an extremely complex story, noting that ‘contemporary migration patterns in rural Australia appear to be linked as much to population redistribution as counterurbanisation.’

A common factor underlying amenity migration appears to be a desire on the part of the migrant to leave behind the ills of the urban environment in search of a simpler, idealistic life in the countryside. It is pointed out that the most relevant social driver in the movement from urban areas to rural, agrarian landscapes is the construction and importation of rural ideals or ‘idylls’ (Gorton et al., 1998; Halfacree & Boyle, 1998).

A brief overview of the literature addressing the concept of the rural idyll and the consequences of amenity migration on particular rural landscapes due to their attractiveness and ‘rurality’ is provided next. This creates the context for defining rural landscape values and potential drivers for change, both positive and negative.
The countryside ‘ideal’ or rural ‘idyll’

In an extensive historical and geographical analysis of why people are attracted to rural areas, Bunce (1994) explored the origins of countryside idealisation in literature, the arts and in socio-economic development in British and North American culture. The vague notion of ‘countryside’, which is both cultural and geographical, has evolved over three centuries to currently having a ‘symbolic status as the idyllic alternative to urban environments’ (Bunce, 1994, p. 206). By dissecting the different approaches to the ‘consumption of rurality’ on opposite sides of the Atlantic, Bunce exposes the clichés, marketing and cultural influences which drive the attraction to re-locate to rural landscapes. As a social phenomenon, this has had a profound effect on the receiving landscapes as well as their social structures. Noting that while the English ‘countryside’ has become a symbol of national identity and its preservation could be seen as a national obsession, Bunce is doubtful that a similar level of status will be achieved in North America. Recognising that the modern countryside ideal has influenced a rural ‘rival’ which in turn has seen the preservation of significant natural areas and cultural features, Bunce (1994, p. 211) also questions the sustainability of the emergent settlement patterns, warning that the ‘revitalisation’ process could threaten the ‘very amenities that countryside idealism seeks to enjoy’. The point is made that the enjoyment and protection of the countryside in a spirit consistent with its long-standing idealisation has become an important political issue. This politicisation of the countryside by the increasing number of exurbanites, recreational groups and environmentalists in rural areas is also raised in a number of more recent studies addressing the shifts in influence on rural management practices and decision making, discussed late in this chapter (for example Abrams, Gosnell, Gill, & Klepeis, 2012; Argent, 2011; R. E. Jones et al., 2003).

In the United Kingdom, the term ‘countryside’ is generally used to describe the aesthetic and amenity qualities of a universally domesticated, pastoral, rural landscape, and in particular the landscape of agricultural endeavour interspersed with green open spaces (Hine, Peacock, & Pretty, 2008). ‘Countryside’ is not only a ‘place’ but also represents a nostalgic symbol of English romantic idealism about nature, land and community. ‘A stroll in the country, a walk in the hills, a view of the coast seem to encapsulate the ‘Britain’ people once fought to defend and from which they can now claim to seek comfort in times of trouble’ (Jenkins, 2009, p. 48). The rural economy of
the ‘countryside’, including its amenity value, tourism potential and quality of life aspects, are inseparable from the practice of farming and its cultural contribution to creating attractive landscapes (Bills & Gross, 2005).

This high value placed on the ‘countryside’ in the United Kingdom and some other parts of Europe is also reflected in the management of changing uses of agricultural land whereby the national government supervises and controls planning policies and publishes regional guidance on rural land conversions or development. Local authorities grant permits which align with this overarching ‘public interest’ framework (Janssen-Jansen & Woltjer, 2010). The decision-making processes around land use have become an increasingly high profile issue in the United Kingdom due to concerns about the public health effects of agricultural pollution and unsustainable farming practices. Food safety issues have also been merged with long-established concerns about landscape change resulting from the intensification of agriculture and its effects on biodiversity, aesthetics and heritage, creating social, political and economic tensions (Dobbs & Pretty, 2004). However, Gorton et al. (1998) point out the lack of a clear and consistent historical tradition around the questions of what the English countryside should be, for whom and what rights should actually accrue to those living within and outside of it. The result is a ‘paradox of the rural idyll’ which refers to the public desire to preserve as well as re-create the countryside, but without a clear understanding of what should actually be preserved (Gorton et al., 1998, p. 231).

In North America, rural areas have a different image from that of the United Kingdom for numerous reasons, including a substantially different societal structure which influences land ownership and access to open spaces. The strong agrarian ideology that is found in the ‘New World’ tended to view the countryside as a ‘utilitarian landscape’ with resources to be exploited for economic and social gain (Bunce, 1994, p. 191). The farm and rural landscapes were valued as a desirable way of life with economic overtones, rather than just a picturesque ideal. Indeed, higher values, sometimes associated with the ‘picturesque’, were placed on non-agricultural settings or wilderness as opposed to farmland (Dobbs & Pretty, 2004).

Whether in search of a picturesque ideal or a working landscape, rural migration did occur from the 1970’s onwards in North America and, as economic and demographic factors allowed, wealthy, educated people left the cities and moved to small towns and rural settings for aesthetic and life-style reasons (McGranahan, 1999). The progression
from tourist to part-time resident then to home ownership is also more apparent in North America, where amenity migration also encompasses the move to wilderness areas or landscapes containing recreation amenities (Green, Deller, & Marcouiller, 2005).

The importation of rural ideals and the subsequent consequences on the existing or ‘receiving’ population and landscape are the subject of numerous studies in North America and elsewhere in the westernised world. These include a comprehensive review of the literature (Abrams et al., 2012; Gosnell & Abrams, 2011), an extensive annotated bibliography (Marcouiller, Clendenning, & Kedzior, 2002) and several books, including Green et al. (2005), Moss (2006) and Luck, Black, and Race (2011) which are discussed later in this Chapter.

The ‘idealisation’ of the rural landscape is much less apparent in Australia compared to either the United Kingdom or North America. Studies on the marketing of Australian landscapes and sea-scapes have shown that there has been greater emphasis on the social aspects of rural life such as mateship, social harmony and a sense of community than the ‘picturesque’ landscape itself (Waitt, 1997). Burnley and Murphy (2004) in their study of ex-urban migration, found that moving to a ‘better environment’ which included the desire for peace and quiet, security and less crime was more important for people moving to non-coastal regional areas than those who moved to coastal regions. They were also able to identify a growing interest in a ‘nostalgic re-identification with the inland/bush myth’ associated with a country lifestyle of fresh air, homesteads and open spaces. As a result, the authors predicted that inland rural localities will likely attract an increasing number of rural migrants over time. However, it was also noted that the growth of some regions in New South Wales away from the coast was primarily due to the economic attraction of inland regional centres rather than amenity migration per se (Burnley & Murphy, 2004, p. 48). The interest in inland rural areas by tree-changers could also be due to the rising housing and land prices in coastal areas and the more recent ‘slow growth’ policies being implemented by local governments in coastal areas. These policies are, in effect, the local socio-political response to the increasing influx of newcomers and are driven by protectionist attitudes of residents (Argent, 2011), and in some cases, abetted by concerns over the impact of development on fragile coastal habitat (Essex & Brown, 1997; Gurran, Squires, & Blakely, 2005).

In their review of the social science literature related to amenity migration, Gosnell and Abrams (2011) point out the disconnect between academic disciplines researching the
evolution of rural demographics (in terms of geographers, sociologists and
tourism/recreation scholars) but also the lack of comparisons between countries where
rural amenity migration is occurring. There are only a few comparative studies of rural
land use change between countries, for example the United States and the United
Kingdom (Bills & Gross, 2005), and Norway and Australia (Bjorkhaug & Richards,
2008). The dearth of information, particularly comparing Australia and the United
States is ‘lamentable given the similar geographies and ecological challenges
confronting the United States and Australia’ (Gosnell & Abrams, 2011). Exceptions are
the recent papers on changes in land use and agriculture in Australia (Millar & Roots,
2012) and the United States and Canada (Francis et al., 2012). Such comparisons could
possibly draw out the cultural drivers around values and expectations of lifestyles in
rural landscapes. Of interest here would be how these expectations are met and whether
or not they are sustainable, given demographic growth and environmental change and
what could be learned from other countries, given the similarities as well as contrasts
between nations. In addition, it would be interesting to note the differences between the
governing processes and the role of newcomers in influencing those processes.

This section has considered the phenomenon of amenity migration as a significant
driver of land use change in attractive rural landscapes. The next section addresses the
physical and spatial characteristics of amenity landscapes.

**Characteristics of amenity landscapes as drawcards for
migration**

While an anticipated improvement in ‘quality of life’ could be the driver for migration
to high amenity areas, there are particular cultural or personal interpretations of
landscape, nature and rural character which will make some areas more appealing to
migrants than others. Identifying those specific characteristics of places which
determine which rural areas are likely to become the destination of choice is of interest
to geographers and rural sociologists as having these assets can mean the difference
between ‘boom’ and ‘bust’ for rural towns (Barr, 2005).

A number of studies of amenity migration have focussed on the ‘appeal’ factors of the
‘receiving’ landscape. Understanding which elements of the landscape create an
‘amenity’ and therefore a desirable location for settlement and subsequent growth is a
necessary first step in defining what makes these landscapes worth acknowledging
If amenities are defined as the qualities which make a particular location an attractive place to live and work (Green et al., 2005), they will necessarily include both tangible and intangible assets. They can be described as ‘immobile, non-substitutable and providing direct and/or indirect benefits to people’ whilst they are also ‘potentially shaped, or even produced, through human action’ (Green et al., 2005, p. 2)

An early study undertaken for the United States Department of Agriculture (McGranahan, 1999) looked at population statistics across all counties in the United States and determined that those areas where growth occurred had a number of similarities. By characterising different biophysical landscape elements, it was possible to create an ‘amenity index’, three of which: a mild climate, varied topography and proximity to surface water appeared to have the most influence on the growth of an area. This study showed that areas where the amenity index was high, the non-metropolitan population tended to be on the increase, while areas which lacked these amenities were on the decline. Based entirely on easily definable natural amenities with physical attributes, this ‘amenity index’ did not include any of the cultural or sociological aspects, such as heritage buildings, which are known to also contribute to creating an attractive landscapes (Mitchell, 2004).

The concept of an ‘amenity index’ was then built upon to create an ‘amenity complex’ which used environmental and socio-economic variables to determine areas with significant in-migration in Australia (Argent et al., 2007). The factors which influenced the amenity of an area were: annual rainfall, terrain and altitude, remotesness, duration of settlement, irrigation water availability, employment in recreation related services, and distance to the beach. Using population statistics for the period 1976-1981 and 1996-2001, the study showed relatively strong statistical associations between areas with high amenity ratings and ex-urban migration population growth. However, Argent et al. (2007) also noted that these tangible amenity indicators are only a partial explanation of patterns of settlement or migration. Other factors such as ‘comparative peace and quiet, perceptions of lower crime and a harmonious community in which to live’ as well as life-cycle or employment factors, all influence individual choices and determine why people choose to live in particular landscapes (Argent et al., 2007, p. 231).

Another valuable contribution to conceptualising the spatial variability of landscape use and subsequent social value has been the work undertaken by Neil Barr from the Department of Primary Industries in Victoria over the past ten years. In 2003, Barr
created a conceptual model of future social landscapes in Australia, using a selection of agricultural and economic statistical indicators to show spatial variations between rural areas undergoing population transformation processes (Barr, 2003).

From the analysis of data on the agricultural value of production, family income, agricultural land use and employment in agriculture among other factors, Barr (2003) was able to spatially represent the interaction between the pressures of farm adjustment and the demand for land for non-farming purposes. Based on the relative importance of production versus consumption values, three different social landscapes for Victoria were discerned: traditional agricultural, amenity and small farm. Further refinement of this categorisation using regional variability resulted in four landscapes: production, rural amenity, rural transition and irrigation (Barr, 2005). Importantly, the definition of rural amenity landscapes focused on an ‘amenity premium’ which is a calculation of the ratio of land value to gross value of production per hectare. In rural amenity rich areas, this premium relating to the cost of land ‘entrenches the structure of undersized farms, enforcing part time farming’ (Barr, 2005, p. 26).

While this can be considered detrimental from an agricultural economics point of view, it could also be seen as the favourable outcome for those migrants seeking the rural experience and a rural lifestyle and could result in the maintenance or growth of rural communities. This desire for a bucolic lifestyle has been picked up in a number of case studies undertaken in Western Australia (Curry et al., 2001; Tonts & Grieve, 2002) which are discussed in more detail later in this chapter. The strong attraction of a ‘slower-paced lifestyle’ was also identified by Connell and McManus (2011) in their analysis of rural real estate advertising and marketing associated with the ‘Country Week’ Expos in New South Wales and Queensland.

Other difficult-to-quantify but tangible attributes of attractive landscapes which draw in-migration are considered to be:

- ‘attractive viewscapes which satisfy aesthetic needs’ (Barr, 2005, p. 23);
- places where the natural environment is perceived as ‘unique and truly rural’ (Esparza & Carruthers, 2000, p. 32);
- areas with good road or rail infrastructure;
- some resort/retirement areas;
- a few well-developed regional centres; and
• some relatively remote areas, especially those with growing mining activities or tourism infrastructure (Barr, 2009; Buckley et al., 2006; Hugo, 2005; Walmsley, 2003).

The multitude of influences and values which draw amenity migrants creates increasing rural community heterogeneity. This contrasts with the traditional trajectory of agricultural areas which are determined by economies of scale, increasing levels of production and increasing homogeneity. Thus the complexity and diversity of amenity landscapes is well recognised, as well as the subsequent challenges inherent in its governance and management. The next section examines the conceptualisation of rural landscapes as a result of agricultural land use, and how this intersects with the evolution of amenity landscapes and potential economic opportunities.

**Theoretical frameworks for rural landscape change**

Amenity migration is just one of a large number of factors influencing rural land use change in westernised countries. Agriculture and rural lands are currently being affected by a broad range of social, economic, demographic and technological trends. There are increasingly sophisticated methods of food and fibre production, a general decline in economic subsidies for agriculture, the introduction of various agri-environmental programs and the emergence of a more socially and culturally heterogeneous rural population (Lawrence, 2005). Much of the research and commentary on rural land use change has focussed on these trends, with a significant emphasis on the relatively recent shift away from purely production-oriented landscapes towards some other form of rural development and land use, responding to the transitional and dynamic nature of social and economic influences (Argent, 2002). The theoretical frameworks used to address the influences and future directions of agricultural landscapes have been debated for over three decades in the literature. The aim of the discussion here is to contextualise where ‘amenity landscapes’ fit within the discourse on current and future agricultural regimes. The terms generally used to describe these landscape concepts are ‘productivist’, ‘post-productivist’ and ‘multi-functional’.
Productivist agricultural landscapes

In simplistic terms, ‘productivist’ agriculture is both a policy and practice where the emphasis is placed on the maximisation of agricultural production, generally through expansion, intensification and industrialisation (Holmes, 2006). A productivist agricultural regime, focussing on increasing food production by applying more intensive farming techniques and biochemical inputs, was the aim of rural policy in the United Kingdom following World War II (Ilbery & Bowler, 1998). Often accompanied by a fundamentalist agricultural ideology which placed farmers as the best ‘protectors of the countryside’, productivism is also associated with farm subsidies, protectionist and interventionist policies which gave farmers a sense of financial security, limited regulation of agricultural practices and guaranteed security of property rights (Wilson, 2001, p. 79). The dominance of traditional agrarian institutions in social and political life was also apparent, especially in the United States (J. Williams & Martin, 2011). In Australia, the agricultural policy post-World War II overtly ‘linked growth in the farm sector to national monetary and fiscal policies to address balance of payment issues as well as potential food shortages’ (Argent, 2002, p. 102). Productivist policies and approaches enabled significant expansion of the farming sector, although this was not without its nuances (Argent, 2002).

Post-productivist agricultural landscapes

By the mid-1980’s, the productivist regime began to be questioned on ideological, environmental, economic and structural grounds primarily in the United Kingdom. The social and economic restructuring of the countryside due to counterurbanisation and the loss of the central position of agriculture in society combined with changing attitudes of a primarily urban public toward rural land use, concerns over environmental management and chronic farm surpluses resulted in agricultural production increasingly being seen as the ‘villain’ (Dobbs & Pretty, 2004; Wilson, 2001). These attitudes were attributed to changing media representations of ‘rural’ where there were fundamental changes to the notion of the countryside idyll as described earlier. In the United Kingdom, ‘the main threat to the rural values of the countryside was considered to be agriculture itself’, rather than other non-agricultural activities infringing upon it (Wilson, 2001, p. 82).
The ‘post-productivist’ agricultural regime label has been applied (by mainly British geographers) to a landscape that was emerging in response to consumer demands for diversification, and a need to address environmental concerns (Argent, 2002; Wilson, 2001). While there is debate about the temporal nature of post-productivism as a separate regime following productivism, there is some consensus that post-productivism is ‘marked by a declining concentration of farm ownership, growing heterogeneity in regional agricultural bases and increasing interest in small-scale, consumer- and environmentally-friendly agricultural practices.’ (Argent, 2002, p. 101)

As part of the transition process from productivist to post-productivist landscapes, the ‘rural’ becomes increasingly separated from agricultural practice, and there is an emergence of other values such as preservation of the ‘countryside’ as well as biodiversity values and the consumption of local agricultural products. This dilution of the productivist perspective, especially in Europe and the United Kingdom, has been accompanied by a weakening of the relationship between the farm lobby and agricultural ministries, as well as the incorporation of other actors such as ‘green’ groups, into discussion about rural and agricultural policies (Bjorkhaug & Richards, 2008). However, there is still considerable debate about the subjectivity of applying these terms, conceptually, sequentially or territorially, as most farms, landscapes and some agricultural policies can be found somewhere between ‘productivist’ and ‘post-productivist’ (Argent, 2002; Bjorkhaug & Richards, 2008; Holmes, 2006). It has also been pointed out that both regimes can occur at the same time, thus a third conceptual label was created.

**Multifunctional agricultural landscapes**

The term ‘multifunctional agriculture’, which encompasses a diversity of rural resource uses, not just those attributable to agriculture, was suggested to describe an agricultural regime or policy mindset that encapsulates the ‘territorialisation and multi-dimensional coexistence of productivist and post-productivist actions and thought’ (Wilson, 2001, p. 95). ‘Multifunctional’ also recognises the diversity, non-linearity and spatial heterogeneity in the roles and attributes of modern agriculture and rural society as they contribute to landscape form and function (Holmes, 2006).

Holmes (2006, p. 145) points out that multifunctionality is a characteristic of all rural holdings, even those ‘outwardly in pursuit of mono-functional production or
consumption goals’. In his analysis of the different interpretations of multifunctionality of rural areas, he uses the term ‘multifunctional rural transition’ to conceptualise the changes influencing rural landscapes, suggesting that this is a consequence of a re-ordering of the three basic purposes of rural space: production, consumption and protection (Holmes, 2006). The forces driving this transition are agricultural overcapacity (the production goal), the emergence of market-driven amenity uses (the consumption goal) and changing societal values (the protection goal).

‘Only over the last two or three decades have western, market-oriented modes of rural occupance revealed a marked trend towards overt recognition of multifunctionality, an inevitable outcome of the radical shift from the formerly dominant production goals towards a more complex, contested, variable mix of production, consumption and protection goals.’ (Holmes, 2006, p. 145)

The shifting emphasis between these forces and the value placed on them led Holmes to identify seven ‘modes of occupance’ of rural space including: productivist agriculture, rural amenity, small farm/pluriactive, peri-metropolitan, marginalised agriculture, conservation and Indigenous. The differentiation between the modes is based on the priority given to the dominant value, whether it is the production, consumption or protection goal. Holmes suggests the phrase ‘occupance mode’ as a reflection of the active role of humans in the habitation and modification of an area (Holmes, 2006).

Of particular interest in relation to rural amenity landscapes and farming is the way in which Holmes addresses the rural amenity and small farm/pluriactive modes. While these are aligned along a spectrum between production and consumption values, the role of rural landscape protection appears to have little influence on the suggested trajectory for development or resource use. However, later in his discussion of these modes, Holmes (2006, p. 154) notes that the protection of rural agricultural landscape values plays a significant role in some highly selective rural spaces. Holmes postulates that the concept of ‘commodified nature’ could potentially be differentiated from rural amenity if the protection values were focussed not on ‘pristine nature’ but on the manifestation of a rural idyll. Theoretically, this would be a cross-over into the small farm mode, albeit with quite a different trajectory which has yet to be defined.

Holmes also points out the lack of research directed at the trajectories associated with the amenity and pluriactive modes, recognising that these particular zones are susceptible to ‘rapid, unpredictable, divergent and dissonant change’, and suggests that
‘the complex dynamics of rural occupancy in these localities can only be understood by fine-grained research relating landscape dynamics to the individual domestic practices on each landholding’ (Holmes, 2006, p. 156).

Holmes’ primary contribution to the rural amenity landscape discourse is the characterisation and definition of the ‘transition towards multifunctionality’ as a particular stage in recognising the values and uses of rural space. This could be of value in developing a conceptual framework to guide policy and practice around the complex and dynamic geography of rural land use change (Holmes, 2006), although it is not apparent that it has been widely used in this context.

The concept of transition is also referred to by Mitchell and de Waal (2009) in their study of a heritage landscape in Ontario, Canada being transformed due to amenity migration and related economic growth. They found that landscapes undergoing counterurbanisation appealed to a broad range of consumers whose very presence may also contribute to the landscape transformation process, creating a feedback loop which can then become counterproductive. They introduce the term ‘neo-productivist’ landscape to describe a post-industrial landscape of accumulation that reflects the multifunctionality of rural space but which is driven more by economic profit rather than preservation or protection values (Mitchell & de Waal, 2009). Noting that this could be an unsustainable position within the mode of rural occupancy as proposed by Holmes (2006), they hypothesise that policy and governance arrangements could ensure that the essential amenity resources would not be lost completely, thereby creating a transition phase.

Wilson (2010) picks up the concept of transition phases and notes that rural researchers are recognising that there are different levels or qualities of multifunctionality. He suggests a multifunctionality ‘spectrum’ ranging from weak to strong which is dependent on the emphasis placed by rural communities on productivist or non-productivist agricultural commodities. Focussing on the concepts of resilience and vulnerability in relation to economic, social and environmental factors in rural areas, Wilson (2010) uses the notion of ‘multifunctional quality’ to determine positive rural pathways of change and rural development. A complex ‘geography of policy opportunities’ can be found where some rural areas will have more chances to implement multifunctional pathways than others. Scenically attractive rural areas generally find it easier to increase economic and environmental capital, and suggesting
that there will be more policy opportunities for raising such capital in peri-urban areas. This analysis highlights the importance of understanding the ‘geographies’ of agriculture and rural systems (Wilson, 2010).

Multifunctional agriculture has been well scrutinised in the literature, mainly because it has become the central tenet in European Union policy discussions about the future of agriculture, but also because it encompasses the production of a broad range of environmental, economic, social and cultural goods and services, some easier to define than others (Dibden, Potter, & Cocklin, 2009; Dobbs & Pretty, 2004; Holmes, 2006; Marsden & Sonnino, 2008; Wilson, 2008, 2010). It is argued that with regards to World Trade issues in agriculture, multifunctionality refers specifically to the ‘public good’ aspect of non-tradable concerns of agriculture and thus holds a strong paradigmatic position at the European Union policy level but has varying endorsement at national levels (Bjorkhaug & Richards, 2008).

At the practical level, Marsden and Sonnino (2008) argue that the concept of multifunctional agriculture will always be difficult to define, despite the wide recognition of the need to value a range of farm production outputs, including environmental amenities, agri-tourism, food, fibre and other commodities, and preservation of biodiversity. Suggesting that ‘real’ multifunctionality of agriculture will occur unevenly in the United Kingdom and will be closely tied to pre-existing rural development paradigms, Marsden and Sonnino (2008) see the concept struggling to gain a sustainable footing until fundamental governance arrangements change, including employment, resourcing, engagement and economic reform.

A ‘working landscape’

Another conceptual framework which closely parallels that of the multifunctional landscape is a ‘working landscape’. This has been suggested as an alternative to the somewhat polarised debates around ‘preservation versus production’ in natural resource management, especially in terms of landscape-scale or extensive productivist activities, such as forestry and pastoral land uses (Abrams & Bliss, 2012). A working landscape could also encompass the elements of a multifunctional landscape that has a mix of market and non-market benefits (C. Hall, McVittie, & Moran, 2004) but does not neatly fit into any single ‘mode of occupancy’ as defined by Holmes (2006).
The notion of working landscapes refers to ‘agricultural land characterised by a long standing balance between human and natural forces’ (Cannavo, 2007, p. 220) and is described as producing ‘food, fibre, and minerals that provide employment directly on the land and indirectly through supply, processing, and transportation businesses’ (Daniels, 2000, p. 261). Developing a distinctive character over time, but also responding to the changing needs of its residents, these landscapes are the ongoing, collective work of individuals and generations, and in particularly attractive and benign environments, are likely to be the foundation of rural amenity landscapes.

While Holmes (2006) did not use the term ‘working landscapes’, his descriptions of rural amenity landscapes containing a mix of production and consumption activities could lead down a similar path. However, Abrams and Bliss (2012) note that unlike ‘multi-functional’, the term ‘working landscape’ has acquired some traction amongst practitioners in the United States as well as with non-government organisations on both sides of the environmental debate because of its practical connotations. In Australia, the term has been applied to a ‘working river’ to denote the multiple benefits (including environmental, social, economic and cultural) accrued from a well managed River Murray (SEWP&C, 2011), but does not yet appear widely in the rural planning literature. To date, the term has not been acknowledged in literature in Europe or the United Kingdom, likely due to the fact that multifunctionality is more strongly embedded and defined in high level policy and trade agreements (Bjorkhaug & Richards, 2008; Wilson, 2007).

However, the concept of a working landscape has merit as a way of recognising the needs and challenges related to different landscape uses when it comes to planning. This is an important concept in rural amenity landscapes as there is a blurring of production, protection and consumption practices which create multiple uses and values from the same ‘capitals’ – social, natural, human, economic and environmental (Abrams & Bliss, 2012; Daniels, 2000; Tonts, 2005).

Cannavo (2007) sees working landscapes as maintaining a balance between the ‘founding’ or development aspect and the ‘preservation’ aspect of activities defining the landscape, which together create a sense of place and attachment, thus giving it intrinsic value. A key component of this concept is maintaining the ability for landowners to continue to realise a profit from the land. This means that, as part of planning and managing rural landscapes, a number of techniques are often required to make a
comprehensive yet flexible response to development pressures. The protection of working landscapes therefore can be conceptually a complex issue and needs to incorporate programs aimed at assisting landowners to withstand development pressure thereby sustaining a working landscape over time.

Daniels (2000, p. 264) identifies three needs with respect to planning for a working landscape: firstly, to maintain a critical mass of farmland to enable continuation of farming; secondly, to support businesses that add value to the agricultural activities; and thirdly to garner support from the general public and elected officials for the farming endeavours. These criteria illustrate the need for a much broader and vertically-integrated approach to land use planning as integral to rural development and community engagement. Thus, the notion of a working landscape encapsulates the notion of economic endeavour affecting landscapes and communities.

The application of these broad theoretical frameworks to Australian agricultural landscapes is presented next.

**Transition and change in Australian agricultural landscapes**

There remains much debate about which agricultural framework best describes the context of rural areas in Australia undergoing change and how best to encapsulate the multitude of drivers and outcomes found in contemporary rural landscapes and activities. Bjorkhaug and Richards (2008) question whether Australian agriculture has made the conceptual shift away from productivism, as argued by Argent (2002) and Smailes (2002), and whether the current agricultural regime can be justified as post-productivist or multifunctional. Argent (2002, p. 111) argued that productivism continues to have a ‘strong grip’ in Australia, and this is echoed ten years later by Lawrence et al. (2013) in their treatise on neo-liberalism and its endorsement of a current productivist mindset in Australia.

In a comparative analysis of the Norwegian and Australian agricultural contexts, Bjorkhaug and Richards (2008) conclude that in Australia, one of the key factors is that the notion of multifunctionality has not been embraced at the property and farmer level. They point out the importance of actively engaging farmers in positive change as being a hallmark of multifunctionality, rather than being just recipients of change. In
addition, the views of Australian landholders often do not synchronise with those of politicians and policy makers, mostly due to the ‘inherent contradictions of [the stance of] development versus conservation and a sense of betrayal and abandonment at the hands of government’ (Bjorkhaug & Richards, 2008, p. 106). They conclude that in Australia, agricultural multifunctionality exists ‘only weakly as an ideology or policy, and even less as a discourse or practice’. On the other hand it has ‘thrived within the more protectionist setting of Norwegian agriculture where it has the support of the public, the State and agricultural actors’ (Bjorkhaug & Richards, 2008, p. 109).

The theory of multifunctional landscapes as landscapes in transition is also discussed in a case study which assesses the social impacts of a changing population in a rural coastal area in South Australia (Smailes, 2002). Based on two surveys, undertaken 16 years apart, with data collected from randomly selected rural households, this study sought insights on rural population change, perceived community identity, shopping, business and communication patterns. The data showed that in-migration had more than doubled over the period, with part time or hobby farming emerging as a completely new phenomenon in the later data. Interestingly, there was no indication that the area would become ‘post-productive’. Rather, as broad acre farms continued to dominate the landscape despite the new coastal retirement and holiday subdivisions and a few small hobby farms, the use of the term multifunctional was ‘warranted’ to describe how the landscape had changed (Smailes, 2002, p. 93). New landowners’ sense of duty to support local businesses and to participate in formal social institutions had also remained strong over time, although the advent of modern communication such as the internet had the potential to affect or dilute the distinctiveness of the local rural culture. The study concluded that there were ‘grounds for optimism that the strong sense of community and local identity, which give Australian country life a particular quality and attraction for many of its residents, can survive the processes of rural dilution.’ (Smailes, 2002, p. 94)

As a tangent to the concept of rural multi-functionality, Merlan and Raftery (2009) dissect the various meanings of ‘rural’, noting that it is often used interchangeably as a spatial and a social adjective. They note that while people might occupy ‘conventionally defined’ rural spaces, the highly varied approaches to their living and working arrangements, including their access to technology and engagement with policy processes, have all helped to ‘define attitudes, expectations and aspirations’ which are markedly different from a traditional ‘rural’ definition (Merlan & Raftery, 2009, p. 5).
An example they expand upon is that it is no longer appropriate to view ‘non-farm income’ as if it were just a supplement to farming activities. The fact that farmers now engage in a complex mix of business and lifestyle activities and are ‘less accepting of isolated farm life’ means that niche and boutique agricultural production and other activities now blend into farming and is likely to ‘reshape quite substantially the demands on those who farm as one of their day-to-day activities’ (Merlan & Raftery, 2009, p. 5). What is key here is whether government planning and governance processes which make decisions based on data and statistical analysis are able to reflect the separation of ‘rural’ from ‘agricultural’ and recognise the growing diversity within a multifunctional landscape.

The interesting aspect of the discussion around conceptual frameworks, definitions and the different trajectories for agriculture, rural activities and landscapes is that there is little mention of how, or if, these frameworks are used in planning to assist in defining or contextualising the use of land, influencing issues of sustainability or approaches to the management of agricultural activities. This discourse around theoretical approaches is worthwhile as it exposes the paradigm shifts required to view landscapes through different lenses. Understanding the plethora of values and expectations of rural landscapes sets the scene for the following analysis of drivers and influences of land use change.

**Commodification, creative destruction and gentrification – defining moments in amenity landscapes**

Amenity landscapes, especially those that could be considered to encompass multifunctional agriculture and rural diversification, are often characterised by an intensity and complexity of competing land uses. For the most part, the competition and contestation for land in these landscapes is about the commodification of rurality or the consumption of goods and services that conform to an idealised ‘norm of rurality’ (Argent et al., 2009). This means that the traditional role of farmers and other long term residents to produce food, fibre and provide associated rural services now encompasses the presentation (and preservation) of idealised images of rural landscapes and country towns for newcomers and visitors (Mitchell, 1998). While there are obvious financial and social benefits from this situation, there is also the potential for conflicts as well as
‘over-development’ leading to the eventual destruction of the values that initiated the growth (Tonts & Grieve, 2002).

The term ‘creative destruction’ has been used to describe the process of creating and then over-using the elements of the landscape until they have disappeared or become out-dated. This concept is derived from urban planning and the theory of accumulation and rational landscapes (Harvey, 1985 in Mitchell, 1998). It has been applied to a number of case studies involving rural amenity landscapes as discussed below.

In a study of a small rural town on the outskirts of a large metropolitan area in southern Ontario, Mitchell (1998) applied her model of ‘creative destruction’ to the commodification of rural heritage, suggesting that entrepreneurial investment in businesses that ‘commoditised Mennonite heritage’ could lead to the destruction of the very environment they had intended to represent. The study, focussing primarily on the changes to a heritage village on the outskirts of a metropolitan area, proposed an explanation of the evolution and impact of overdevelopment and over-exploitation of the pre-existing landscape through six stages of development: 1) pre-commodification; 2) early commodification; 3) advanced commodification; 4) pre-destruction; 5) advanced destruction; and 6) post destruction (Mitchell, 1998).

The model was modified a decade later and the drivers of profit, protection and promotion further expanded upon (Mitchell & de Waal, 2009). Maintaining a balance between profit, promotion and preservation was seen as an important aspect of creating sustainability in the landscape (Mitchell & de Waal, 2009). As investment levels escalated, the balance shifted between businesses catering for locals to those catering for the needs of visitors. This resulted in sectors of the community not benefiting financially from the commodification, creating a perception of erosion of some community values, leading to the pre-destruction phase. It was suggested that an ‘advanced destruction’ phase could occur through the out-migration of locals and a subsequent disintegration of the sense of community and the rural idyll. However, the longitudinal study revealed a remarkable resilience in community values and the anticipated advanced destruction stage had not eventuated (Mitchell & de Waal, 2009).

In a case study of land use change in Bridgetown, Western Australia, Tonts and Greive (2002) reflected on the evolution of a rural agricultural landscape influenced by the commodification. They described the rise in ‘competing claims on a rural space’ as a result of newcomers who not only ‘consume the agricultural landscape’ but also
participate in an ‘idealised form of agrarian production and lifestyle’ (Tonts & Grieve, 2002, p. 61). Using Mitchell’s (1998) model of creative destruction, the researchers concluded that this traditional agricultural landscape was ‘gradually being destroyed by an accumulation strategy based on the commodification of rurality’ (Tonts & Grieve, 2002, p. 68). They questioned whether the ‘destruction’ phase of the cycle is inevitable due to competing desires to maximise growth and increase property values while minimising infrastructure costs. Consequently the balance between productive, aesthetic and ecological values associated with hobby farm and rural residential development appeared to be compromised. According to some participants in the study, the impact of overdevelopment was becoming evident in the aesthetics of the rural landscape. There was a need to adopt a planning strategy which included ‘an ethic of countryside preservation’, however, they also maintained the biggest problem was appeasing the ‘differing aspirations for the countryside amongst the people who live in it’ (Tonts & Grieve, 2002, p. 69).

Introducing the concept of ‘gentrification’ as the transformation of a neighbourhood through the arrival of middle class or wealthier residents who eventually replace the existing poorer residents, Guimond and Simard (2010) have added to the amenity landscape literature by applying this concept to land use in rural Quebec, Canada. They studied how long term residents and local decision makers viewed the changes associated with the gentrification of their landscapes. Comparing two rural municipalities undergoing different types of rural change, one which received primarily older and mostly retired migrants and located in a well known tourist and recreational area, while the other, a well developed industrial, commercial and agricultural area attracting younger and skilled migrants, they showed the complexity of the rural gentrification process, exposing significant differences in the impacts and manifestations of rural gentrification between all the actors in each area. While the arrival of wealthier and highly-educated newcomers contributed to the increase in land values and housing costs, it did not necessarily lead to a systematic displacement of the local population as is often the case in gentrification in urban environments.

Guimond and Simard (2010) also noted that the new migrants who were attracted by the positive attributes of the countryside were more likely to participate in the gentrification process, in this case, restoring old buildings, landscaping and reforestation, in comparison to those migrants who moved for family, economic or cultural reasons. Their final conclusion, based on their two case studies, was that there is no ‘single,
linear model’ of rural gentrification, therefore interpretations of the impacts of rural migration need to be adjusted according to local and regional contexts (Guimond & Simard, 2010).

Argent et al. (2011, p. 40) note the significant and inherent complexity and diversity in amenity-led migration, leading to ‘clear policy challenges’ regardless of the geographical location. A common denominator in all of these studies is the increasing heterogeneity of some local rural populations in terms of values, drivers and expectations. Importantly, Mitchell and de Waal (2009, p. 165) point out that ‘one cannot assume that all rural residents perceive the rural idyll’.

**Conflicts and land use change**

Research on the actual impacts or specific consequences of amenity migration and rural land use change on farming businesses, in Australia or elsewhere, is relatively sparse. Concerns about the increase in conflicts between farming and non-farming residents or ‘lifestyle’ landowners resulting from issues such as noise or smells from traditional agricultural operations are mentioned frequently but have not been explored in the literature to any significant extent (Condon, Mullini, Fallick, & Harcourt, 2010; Gibson, Dufty, & Drozdzewski, 2005). This could be due to the small scale and intensely local implications of these conflicts as discussed in Holmes (2006, p. 156).

One Australian study frequently referred to is an investigation of land use conflict between the chicken-meat industry and rural residents in peri-urban areas of Australia (Henderson, 2003a, 2003b). Focussing on the decision-making processes between the agriculture industry and government in the management of conflict, the study revealed the inherent challenges of regulatory systems which are grounded within competing and often contradictory rural and urban planning paradigms. This research analysed the management of externalities of agricultural production on the fringes of metropolitan areas through the lenses of the poultry industry and government regulators. In comparing the regulatory responses between three capital cities, the diversity and complexity in the social and political drivers regarding land use, residential expectations, local government responses and the needs of industrial agriculture were exposed. The findings concluded that a number of gaps remain between understanding property rights in relation to externalities such as odours and noise, that participation in regulatory processes can be problematic due to
uneven levels of technical information and that the role of local government in addressing these conflicts is increasingly challenging (Henderson, 2003a, 2003b).

In rural amenity landscapes, there are a few studies exploring the transformation processes underway in communities as they deal with social and physical change. In a case study assessing residents’ attitudes towards increased in-migration and tourism development, Smith and Krannich (2000) assessed the ‘gangplank’ and the ‘culture clash’ hypotheses of rural migration and attitudes towards change which threatens perceived landscape values. These two hypotheses assume that conflicts will occur between long standing residents and newcomers in communities experiencing amenity migration and subsequent growth and development. The ‘gangplank’ refers to the supposition that newcomers will be more opposed to population growth and development than long term residents because the newcomers are more likely to see the area ‘as a place of refuge’ from the negative impacts of growth and development experienced in their previous place of residence.

Consequently, newcomers are thought to be more willing to ‘pull up the gangplank’ on any new growth and development that might invade their ‘rural refuge’ (M. Smith & Krannich, 2000). Basing their study on three rural communities in the western United States, two of which were experiencing amenity-related growth and the third energy industry-related growth, they also found a variety of attitudes between newcomers and longstanding residents, emphasising the heterogeneity of local populations and their reactions to rural change including development and environmental values. According to the authors, these findings ran counter to the gang-plank hypothesis. They speculated that perhaps ‘growth and development may pose greater threats to long standing residents’ sense of personal and community identity, and that differences between newcomers and long standing residents tended to be exaggerated (M. Smith & Krannich, 2000).

This research concurred with a large quantitative study of the environmental values of newcomers and non-migrants (i.e. a potential ‘culture clash’) in 135 rural counties across seven States in the southern Appalachian region of the United States (R. E. Jones et al., 2003). The study concluded that environmental values may be gaining strength as a result of migration into rural areas for lifestyle reasons. The authors speculated that while some long term residents did feel threatened by rural population growth and may be facing economic pressure to sell their land for financial well-being and a secure
retirement, others may oppose this development as it threatens the cultural legacies and environmental qualities of their own communities. They point out that some newcomers may ‘side’ with longer term residents, but on other types of development, such as increasing the capacity and convenience of community services, they may not. The study concluded that rural areas with diversifying economies ‘should become even ‘greener’ in the future’ and that there was a potential for cooperation and deeper relationships to develop between rural people and the land, based on shared values (R. E. Jones et al., 2003, p. 235). This concurs with the findings of a study of a ranching and logging community undergoing similar infiltration of migrants seeking alternative lifestyles (Abrams & Bliss, 2012).

The opinions of residents on issues such as changing local land uses, the role of farmland and potential protection of prime farmland in the Northern Rivers region of New South Wales was undertaken in 2004 (Gibson et al., 2005). This quantitative survey found strong and consistent ‘pro-farmland’ and ‘pro-protection’ attitudes throughout the region and across social groups. The researchers acknowledged that their results were in contrast to their expectations of divisions within the community as to the appropriateness of farmland protection measures, finding that

‘overall, residents supported the role of farming in the region, acknowledged its place in the identity and heritage of the area and supported policy initiatives designed to prevent the best farmland being lost to urban development. There was also some evidence that hinted at an emergence of an ethos of ‘localism’ as an alternative to global capitalism – a sentiment behind the growth of farmers markets and community activities in the region.’ (Gibson et al., 2005, p. 382)

The study also assessed understanding of government policy towards farmland protection, with results showing that policy initiatives to protect farmland would likely meet greater-than-expected levels of community support. The authors suggested a wider interpretation of this may be that residents were increasingly cautious about rapid change in land uses in a booming property market, and wished to protect existing industries and uses (Gibson et al., 2005).

A similar conclusion was reached in a study focussing on the small rural Shire of Denmark in Western Australia (Selwood, Curry, & Jones, 1996). The researchers noted that the area’s ‘recent economic success and population growth has resulted in the emergence of such a diverse local population that opinions on whether a critical range
of elements of capacity had already been reached, or even exceeded, differ markedly’ (Selwood et al., 1996, p. 222). Despite its small population, a spectrum of opinions was revealed, ranging from ‘development-oriented timber and tourism interests to deep green environmentalists’ adding complexity to community engagement processes (Selwood et al., 1996, p. 222). However, the point was also made that there is an ‘articulate middle class of former city dwellers’ who have various levels of engagement with local economies who are likely to become an ‘increasingly powerful group’ in relation to decision making and governance processes (Selwood et al., 1996). This conclusion is similar to that reached by Essex and Brown (1997) in their study of two shires on the North Coast of New South Wales which were experiencing re-structuring due to increased in-migration. They concluded that the role of the media and influential citizens’ groups had the ability to significantly change the development trajectories of small towns (Essex & Brown, 1997).

These various studies all highlight the social and cultural complexity of these emerging rural communities. They note the capacity of the newcomers to influence patterns of rural development and refer to the lack of consensus amongst the values, attitudes and behaviours of the pre-existing rural residents. Some note that there are significant implications for governance arrangements and land use planning processes.

### Economic impacts of amenity migration

Understanding the economic impacts, both positive and negative, of amenity migration has proved to be challenging, partly because of the issues around definition, both spatially and demographically, but also due to the spectrum of land uses and measurement of financial returns.

Of primary concern to residents, landowners and planners in areas subject to amenity migration, is dealing with the increasing population along with the increase in housing and overall living costs. In a national level study comparing the economic impact of high population growth in rural amenity regions in the United States, it was found that long-term rural families residing in high amenity and recreation-focussed areas tended to have higher family incomes than their counterparts in non-amenity rich areas (Hunter, Boardman, & Saint Onge, 2005). Data showed that long term residents in amenity areas tended to experience fairly stable, even slightly increasing family
incomes and that traditional sector employment (i.e. agriculture and ranching) remained important in providing relatively stable levels of income to a substantial portion of long term residents. However, the authors speculated that the overall economic well-being may decline due to the potential ‘culture clash’ resulting from the influx of migrants although this was not evident at the time (Hunter et al., 2005).

Increase in housing prices are also considered a side effect of rural in-migration (Guimond & Simard, 2010; Tonts & Grieve, 2002). This phenomenon was explored by Costello (2007) in an assessment of the impact of ex-urban migration on a small town within commuting distance of Melbourne, Australia. Her case study involving qualitative research and analysis of the housing market over a ten year period contended that housing markets are important indicators of community well-being. The demographic change in the town’s population had meant that much of the affordable housing had been lost, affecting the housing options for existing residents and their families. This had implications for decision makers concerned about the impacts of exurban migration on pre-existing communities (Costello, 2007, 2009). This concern was also mirrored in a study of ranch owners in Nevada County, California where much of the county’s open space had already been rezoned for future residential development, so not only was it beyond the control of current residents and elected government officials, but the ‘anticipated financial gains were already well entrenched in the community’s consciousness’ (Walker, Marvin & Fortmann, 2003).

Assessing other economic costs associated with amenity migration has proved to be difficult. Gosnell and Abrams (2011) point out that much of the amenity migration literature frames the analysis of land use change as a transition from ‘resource (or landscape) exploitation’ to one of ‘preservation’ without consideration of the concept of a continued ‘working’ landscape where there is ‘active and informed management’ of land creating a multiplicity of outcomes or benefits, some of which would be economic. In rural, agriculturally-based amenity landscapes, an obvious economic outcome would be the production of food and fibre.

**Summary**

The extensive literature on amenity migration and the creation of amenity landscapes reveals the many facets of these landscapes and their particular physical and social characteristics. The genesis of amenity landscapes is complex and in turn, harbours
diverse values and land uses leading to an increasingly diversified community. The majority of the amenity landscape literature focuses on the vulnerable, dynamic and sometimes destructive nature of the land use change which occurs, with considerable emphasis on the role of new migrants. Missing from much of this discourse is the specific ‘voice’ of farmers, or references to the role of longer term residents and associated food production lifestyles in creating and maintaining a rural amenity landscape.

The theoretical concepts of productivist, post-productivist, multifunctional and working landscapes enable a framework on which to locate the social, cultural and economic drivers of landscape change. With continued exploration of the influences and tensions between production, consumption and protection in these landscapes, potential future trajectories can be hypothesised (Cannavo, 2007; Holmes, 2006). However, it is also pointed out that the increasing heterogeneity of communities and land uses has created unpredictability and therefore significant policy challenges for planners and government authorities tasked with landscape-scale responsibilities (Argent, 2011). Authors have highlighted the small number of case studies exploring individual decision-making and the broader landscape implications (Argent et al., 2011; Gosnell & Abrams, 2011; Holmes, 2006; Paquette & Domon, 2003). Therefore, a critical examination of the impacts of these land use changes on farming both as a land use as well as a landscape ‘creator’ is warranted. The role of agriculture and food systems in amenity landscapes also needs to be understood to inform the research; the next section addresses these issues.

2.2 The role of agriculture and food systems in amenity landscapes

Changes in Australian farming

Globalisation has altered the relationship between food and farming. In the past, farming and the production of food helped create globalisation, now globalisation is determining the conditions for on-farm production, ‘changing the structural characteristics of agriculture and rural society’ (Lawrence, 2005, p. 119). Global restructuring of agri-businesses, free trade and the continual search for greater
efficiency and productivity gains has created pressure to amalgamate farms. In Australia, there has been a decline in the number of farms from 145,082 in 1997 to 135,994 in 2009; a decline of just over 6% in 12 years (Australian Farm Institute, 2012). Despite this, agricultural production has increased, with the gross total of farm earnings rising from $27,795 million in 1997 to $38,548 million in 2009. There has also been a reduction in the total area of agriculture holdings, from 462 million hectares in 1997 down to 409 million hectares in 2009 (Australian Farm Institute, 2012). These statistics, along with concerns about population growth, foreign ownership, food insecurity and energy costs, have heightened awareness about the fate of agricultural land in Australia (Millar & Roots, 2012). In an analysis of land use change at a national scale, Millar and Roots (2012) show that the majority of identified agricultural land conversion over the past fifteen years has been to conservation purposes, albeit resulting in minimal impact on agricultural production as most of the properties converted to conservation were located in semi-arid to arid areas. There are also significant difficulties in undertaking an accurate assessment of change in land use away from agriculture due to the absence of national statistics (Millar & Roots, 2012). This is supported by Budge in his recommendations for the collection of consistent state and national data on land conversion and ownership (Australian Farm Institute, 2012).

The decline in overall agricultural area and farm numbers is suggestive of two trends: consolidation and increasing scale in response to market demands and technological efficiencies; and (conversely) land use conversion, especially on the urban fringe (Barr, 2009; Millar & Roots, 2012). The Australian Farm Institute summarises this situation as follows:

‘The changing structure of farm businesses over several decades has occurred in the context of a range of internal and external factors including diminishing terms of trade, technological shifts and the decline of agricultural employment, reductions in direct industry support and changing patterns of non-agricultural land use in rural areas – especially close to large urban centres and coastal areas. There is an evident geography of farm change and land use competition resulting from local and global factors’ (Australian Farm Institute, 2012, p. 14).

This new rural expression of farm change has created a two-tiered farming sector – a relatively small number of large industrial scale farms and a larger number of small to middle sized farms primarily run by families (Barr, 2003). In agricultural areas affected
by peri-urban (and amenity) migration, this ‘polarisation of scale’ in farm businesses has resulted in very divergent futures for arable land. The fewer large operations that exist are likely to be under increased pressure due to land use competition and population pressure (Henderson, 2003b). Small scale, and likely sub-commercial, farming activities now cover a greater portion of the landscape (Buxton & Low Choy, 2007).

Small farms, with an annual turnover of less than $100,000 comprise about 50% of all farms in Australia, although in peri-urban and rural amenity areas, this percentage is much higher (Barr, 2005). In addition, in particular landscapes including the majority of inland rural amenity landscapes and some peri-urban areas, the number of small farms is stable or increasing (Australian Farm Institute, 2012). What is clear is that farming, even at a small scale, is still an important part of many rural landscapes.

The contribution of amenity areas to agricultural production

Depending on one’s perspective, the growth in number of small scale ‘lifestyle’ or ‘hobby’ farms may mean that the overall agricultural output has declined as ‘at-scale’ operations are spatially marginalised and landowners don’t have to rely on agricultural income (Australian Farm Institute, 2012; Gill, Klepeis, & Chisholm, 2010). Alternatively, these small farms can be seen as continuing to contribute to agriculture at a small and local scale, reducing reliance on larger scale food production systems but also contributing significantly to community viability and wellbeing (Hollier & Reid, 2007).

Quantifying the agricultural contribution of rural areas undergoing transition, especially adjacent to metropolitan areas and large regional cities, is challenging due to the nature of Australian Bureau of Statistics Census data collection techniques (Houston, 2005). Just as the political focus in agriculture is generally geared toward the larger farms, the Census data collection is also focussed on regional-level data, often reflecting broad-acre industries and rarely collecting data on the small or intensive industries found in peri-urban environments (Houston, 2005). This situation can be extrapolated to include amenity landscapes which suffer from similar data collection bias.
While it is well known that the contribution of small properties to overall agricultural production is very low compared to large farms (Barr & Karunaratne, 2002), the role of these farms in providing a secure and acceptable source of local food is less understood. In a study of agricultural production in peri-urban areas in Australia, based on data from the 1996 Australian Bureau of Statistics Agricultural Census, it was found that the peri-urban regions of Australia which account for less than 3% of agricultural land are responsible for almost 25% of total gross value of agricultural production (Houston, 2005). However, as there are deficiencies in Census-level reporting as pointed out above, it is suggested that the agricultural production in these areas may well be significantly more than that recorded. The ABS agricultural census data can undercount production in sequential cropping for vegetables for example, and could miss some producers altogether as it relies on producer’s cooperation and volunteering of information (Houston, 2005).

In addition, it is likely that many producers in peri-urban, amenity or tourism-focussed areas operate in the cash economy, and products are retailed through Farmers’ Markets, less formal farm-gate sales, and opportunistically at local restaurants and therefore would not be counted in ABS data (Budge, 2008; Ecker et al., 2010; Houston, 2005). Understanding the extent to which peri-urban and amenity industries contribute to agricultural value-adding and employment generation in local rural economies, and their contribution to regional, national and export earnings could assist in raising the profile of agricultural production and related activities in these areas (Campbell, 2009).

There are also significant challenges to collecting spatial land use data in rural areas that are under the influence of urban property markets, such as peri-urban areas as well as landscapes that are subject to increasing rural residential housing, to even understand how much agricultural activity is actually occurring. In order to better understand the land use changes and the potential for agricultural sustainability of these regions, mapping the actual or anticipated conversion of farmland to non-farming uses is needed (Australian Farm Institute, 2012; Houston, 2005; Sinclair, 2012).

In a study addressing the differentiation of farming landscapes, Barr (2009) makes the point that the rural amenity landscape is occupied by 37% of Australian farmers but only produces 21% of the total value of Australian production, based on the ABS census. Pointing out that the average amenity landscape farm produces a little less that $100,000 worth of food and fibre per year, Barr (2009, p. 129) also states that
Australia’s small farms are less likely to be associated with low family incomes, due to the increase in off-farm employment and income from other sources.

In amenity landscapes, the options for farm expansion to increase productivity are extremely limited so farmers who wish to remain on their property tend to undertake improvements to the property such as grazing management or irrigation development. Barr (2009, p. 143) asserts that these choices ‘inexorably drive the path of farm adjustment towards an ageing farm population and a non-commercial agricultural future’ for these farms. He notes a ‘new’ type of farming which will likely continue:

‘There will remain an agriculture in Australia inhabiting a different space from the competitive world of international markets. It will be the world of the small farm on expensive land. It will fill niches and markets to those interested in food with values that cannot be captured by the world market….Those who choose a farming path beyond the global supply chain are creating an agriculture which fits in the spaces left for it.’ (Barr, 2009, p. 144)

This creates a rural space radically different from the traditional small farms of the past, or the production farms of the integrated food supply chain referred to in the studies by the Australian Farm Institute (2012) or the National Food Plan Green Paper (Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry, 2011).

There is also a new type of consumer who can take advantage of this situation. Society’s affluence has driven new demands for fresh food, local products, connections with food producers and an agricultural experience (Ecker et al., 2010). Rural amenity landscapes, especially those on the outskirts of regional cities or close to tourism destinations, are well placed to take advantage of these trends. These landscapes can literally also become areas of physical consumption, where their agricultural products are purchased and consumed locally. Combined with agri-tourism, they produce a significant amount of food, particularly higher value products such as fruit, vegetables and wine (Campbell, 2009; Ecker et al., 2010). It is this consumptive aspect of rural amenity landscapes which is discussed next.
Farm diversification and pluriactivity in amenity landscapes

Farming in amenity landscapes is very much a double-edged sword. While the increase in the cost of land due to the ‘amenity premium’ affects the ability of existing residents to expand their holdings, the growing population and diversity in social, environmental and economic values and drivers means that there are also potential opportunities to adapt and retain farm viability. These opportunities are generally regarded as pluriactivity and diversification. Pluriactivity refers to other activities undertaken by the farmer such as off-farm or non-farm work as an additional source of income (Ilbery & Bowler, 1998). Farm diversification, on the other hand, relates to the inclusion of activities supplemental to the main farming enterprise. Diversification can include value-adding, related tourism activities and adding new products to the farm business. There is an increasing focus on farm diversification as an entrepreneurial reaction to change rather than just as a means of reducing risk (Fleischer & Tchetchik, 2005; Haugen & Vik, 2008; Northcote & Alonso, 2011).

The majority of research on farm diversification is quantitative, investigating factors leading to diversification among those whom have already done so, highlighting the internal drivers (i.e. household decisions) and external drivers (i.e. the broader physical and socio-economic context of the area). This duality adds to the complexity of seeing, or using, diversification as a panacea to economic and social change in rural farming areas (McNally, 2001).

In a study of farm diversification in the United Kingdom, Ilbery et. al. (1998) found that farmers who were most willing to diversify were those who ran larger farm businesses, had a higher net income and higher levels of indebtedness than other farmers. They were also younger, had received formal agricultural training and had children wishing to continue the farm business. Their decision to diversify was based on the need to reduce uncertainty and risk, closely followed by an interest in growth and market services and enhancement of financial conditions (Ilbery, Bowler, Clark, Crockett, & Shaw, 1998). However, it must be pointed out that for any given opportunity ‘farmers will differ in their ability and incentive to engage in diversification activities’ (McNally (2001) p.248 in Northcote & Alonso, 2011)
Defining diversification is not straightforward either. In their study of diversification amongst ranchers in Texas, Barbieri and Mahoney (2009) identified multiple types of activities being introduced into more traditional farming practices including non-traditional crops or livestock, alternative marketing schemes, tourism and recreational activities, leasing and rental arrangements, value-adding processing, and environmental, education and consulting services. However, it was pointed out that of these, farm tourism and non-traditional or niche products tend to be the most widely known and researched (Barbieri & Mahoney, 2009).

**Farm Tourism**

Farm tourism or agri-tourism is one of the most common diversification activities pursued by farmers in peri-urban and amenity landscapes all over the world. While the primary motivation for this type of tourism is financial and is seen as a risk mitigation technique (see comments above), there are social reasons such as meeting people, the desire to influence or educate people about farming, which are also identified as important in numerous studies (Barbieri, 2010; Nickerson, Black, & McCool, 2001; Ollenburg & Buckley, 2007). Farm diversification into tourism is considered a viable strategy to survive, and can be influential on the future viability of the family farm. Many studies found that farm tourism entrepreneurs planned to continue traditional farming in combination with tourism activities as the farmers considered the combined use of resources as sustainable (Haugen & Vik, 2008). A key unifying factor in all farm tourism and agri-tourism enterprises is that they help farmers stay on the farm (Ecker et al., 2010).

However, many studies also recognised that farm diversification into tourism can be challenging for some farmers. Resolving issues around self and family identities, lifestyles and life choices are critical to the adoption of alternative and additional farming activities (Fleischer & Tchetchik, 2005; Haugen & Vik, 2008). The desire to maintain agricultural production can create dilemmas for some farmers in terms of their perception and experiences with authenticity and their ties with traditional farming. Diversification had sometimes been achieved to such an extent that the farm was retained only as a ‘projective theme’ underpinning a related activity, rather than continuing on as an actual working farm. These tenuous links created uncertainty about the ‘experiential authenticity’ or ‘true value’ of farm tourism in some situations, and
was seen as detrimental to the success of farm tourism (Di Domenico & Miller, 2012). There are interesting parallels here with the broader concept of creative destruction of landscapes and the commodification of experience, but this has not been covered in the literature.

Of interest from a spatial and landscape management perspective, however, are the drivers of decisions to participate in farm tourism. Based on studies done in Western Australia, the United Kingdom and Israel, the potential for financial rewards appeared to be highly dependent upon external infrastructure opportunities such as proximity to main tourism routes, other tourist attractions, availability of accommodation and attractive vistas (Alonso & Northcote, 2010; Di Domenico & Miller, 2012; Fleischer & Tchetchik, 2005). Therefore, successful farm tourism was often related to relevant regional infrastructure and social processes such as tourism promotion, both of which are within the purview of local government and planning.

**Niche Markets**

Another popular farm diversification activity is the pursuit of product-oriented food tourism or niche markets. Similar to farm tourism, niche markets are linked to institutional drivers which are external to, or larger than, the individual business. This could include collaboration within the industry and seeking marketing assistance, partnerships and promotions from local authorities and tourism bodies (Connell & McManus, 2011; Ecker et al., 2010). As an example, amongst olive oil entrepreneurs in Western Australia who were involved in on-site selling of their product, some altruistic tendencies were apparent (Northcote & Alonso, 2011). The producers considered their business contributing to attracting visitors to the area and felt they complemented other tourism/food/wine businesses, creating critical mass. The producers also saw that increased awareness and collaboration with other producers could enhance the sustainability of the industry overall, assist in developing a culinary identity and could ultimately help minimise threats of outside competition (in this case, cheap olive oil imports) thus reducing rural decline (Northcote & Alonso, 2011).

Diversification into niche agriculture can also have other benefits, such as revegetation of degraded landscapes through value-adding in sandalwood production in Western Australia (Tonts & Selwood, 2003), or increasing awareness of organic farming practices in Korea (Choo & Jamal, 2009). Cultural diversity resulting from in-
migration to rural areas has also created opportunities for niche agriculture, not only as producers but also as clients stimulating demand, embracing a healthy interest in ‘ethnic’ foods (Burnley & Murphy, 2004).

The increasing rural population in amenity areas provides a growing market for niche agricultural pursuits. This coincides with a growing interest and desire by some sectors of the population to shorten food chains (i.e. the distance and time between food actually being harvested or produced and being consumed by the customer) in response to concerns about food security, climate change, food quality and regional development (Campbell, 2008). Alternative strategies to increase the consumption of fresh, whole foods as well as support local producers and keep people in touch with where their food comes from and how it is grown are discussed below. While several authors make the point that locally grown food does not necessarily have a lower carbon footprint, and nor would it be sensible in a highly variable climate to totally rely on locally-grown foods, alternative food production and consumption strategies need to be considered as part of a resilient, healthy food system (Campbell, 2009; Cribb, 2010; Pretty, 2002).

**Local food systems in amenity landscapes**

Sometimes known as alternative food networks, ‘local food systems’ are aimed at offering an alternative to the currently dominant industrial, conventional and bulk systems of food production, distribution and consumption (Halweil, 2005). It is acknowledged that there is no consensus on the definition of ‘local’ or ‘local food systems’ in terms of the geographic distance between production and consumption, but concepts such as the ‘100-mile diet’ (A. Smith & MacKinnon, 2007) encapsulate the sentiment of short links between producer and consumer (Renting, Marsden, & Banks, 2003). The term ‘locavore’ or ‘localvore’ which was the Oxford Word of the Year in 2007, refers to consumers who aspire to eat food locally grown or produced (Oxford University Press, 2007).

The definition of ‘local’ varies with circumstance, recognising the challenges of geography and politics, and is often broadly interpreted when it comes to markets. In the United States, the 2008 Farm Act defines the total distance that a product can be transported and still be eligible for marketing as a ‘locally or regionally produced agricultural product’ as less than 400 miles from its origin, or the State in which it is
produced (USDA, 2010). Other attributable, but also debatable, benefits from local food consumption include reduction in energy use or greenhouse gas emissions, ecological sustainability and improved economic fortunes for the community (Campbell, 2008; Feagan, 2007; Keogh, 2012; USDA, 2010). Food localisation interest is also being driven by concerns about the resilience of local food supplies, especially in light of the twin challenges of climate change and peak oil (Larsen, Ryan, & Abraham, 2008).

Local food systems incorporate short supply chains which aim to shift food production out of the ‘industrial mode’ and break the long, complex globalisation chain within which a decreasing proportion of total added value is captured by primary producers, creating new and much needed links between agriculture and society, producers and consumers (Ilbery & Maye, 2005; Renting et al., 2003). They do this by ‘re-socialising’ or ‘re-spatialising’ food which can then enable the consumer to make ‘new value judgements about the relative desirability of foods on the basis of their own knowledge, experience or perceived imagery’ (Renting et al., 2003, p. 398).

The sparse agricultural statistical data available in Australia suggests that local food systems account for a small but increasing share of agricultural production. In the United States, it is estimated that local food market sales amount to approximately 1.9% of total gross farm sales, and in Australia, they account for between 1-2% of gross farm sales (Keogh, 2012). Obviously, for smaller farms, direct marketing to consumers accounts for a higher percentage of their sales than for larger farms.

Local food systems or networks can incorporate a range of types of production and delivery, including Farmers’ Markets, farm gate sales, ‘pick-your-own’, internet/mail-order sales, local restaurant menus, community supported agriculture/‘box’ schemes, etc. There are also numerous retail/food service options relating to local products including direct sales by farmers to restaurants, retail stores and institutions, local labelling and ‘provenance’ marketing, etc (USDA, 2010). While it is beyond the scope of this study to explore the relevance of all of these options to agricultural pursuits in amenity landscapes, the two most common local food systems - Farmers’ Markets and community supported agriculture - are discussed below in terms of their contribution towards engendering a relationship between farmers and the local community.

The growth and success of Farmers’ Markets and retailing of local products reflects a public desire to reconnect with food, food-producing landscapes and rural communities.
(Caldwell, Collett, Ludlow, Sinclair, & Whitehead, 2011; Coster & Kennon, 2005). This could play a part in enhancing societal attitudes and understanding of food production, a component of ensuring food adequacy (PMSEIC, 2010), and ultimately to valuing agricultural land for its outputs.

Research findings are mixed on the impact of local food systems on local economic development, community wellbeing and better nutrition levels among consumers. The assumption that ‘local is good’ is contested by several authors who deplore the simple binary thinking that localisation provides an antidote to globalisation (Born & Purcell, 2006; Delind, 2011; Hinrichs, 2003; Little, Maye, & Ilbery, 2010). It is pointed out that scale (as in the local scale) is not an end goal in itself; rather it is strategy that may help to achieve any number of goals: ‘Localising food systems does not lead inherently to greater sustainability or to any other goal, it leads wherever those it empowers want it to lead’ (Born & Purcell, 2006, p. 196). Delind (2011, p. 279) sees local food as part of a ‘regenerative agri-food system which is also about restoring a public culture of democracy and engaging in the continual creation, negotiation and re-creation of identity, memory and meaning’. This is the stance taken by the Victorian Eco-Innovation Laboratory in their study of food systems in Victoria. They point out that alternative and local food strategies are an essential part of an overall resilient, healthy food system where, through good planning and design (for example locating Farmers’ Markets at public transport hubs) these strategies generally do reduce the environmental footprint of the food chain, do engage consumers more directly with their food production, do promote fresh whole foods, and do return a greater share of the consumer dollar to the producers (Larsen et al., 2008).

Much of the discourse on local food, short supply chains and food networks assumes that the social interaction between producer and consumer, along with knowledge of the product’s place of origin will have beneficial outcomes for the food system (including agriculture) as a whole. Critics of these assumptions point out that these efforts rely upon romanticised visions of the countryside (the rural idyll), defensive forms of localism or positional acts of consumption, especially applicable to high value goods such as locally produced quality foods and organic foods that cater to niche-oriented retail markets (Guthman, 2007; Hinrichs, 2000; Little et al., 2010).

There is no doubt that a complex mix of motivations fuel the growth of local food systems. The inclusion of additional socio-environmental and economic expectations
about local food systems are central to individual and societal decision-making processes that go beyond purely price-based choices about food (Little et al., 2010). There is also no doubt that local food systems can play an increasingly important role in the viability of rural amenity landscapes.

**Farmers’ Markets**

A Farmers’ Market is predominantly a fresh food market that operates regularly within a community, providing a suitable environment for farmers and food producers to sell farm-origin and associated value-added processed food products directly to customers (Australian Farmers' Market Association, 2007). Farmers’ Markets, similar to roadside food stalls and pick-your-own enterprises, are another way of increasing the economic return of farm production to the producer. All together, these alternative food outlets are reported to represent about 7% of the fresh food market in Australia (DAFF, 2012).

As of late 2012, the Victorian Farmers’ Market Association (VFMA) had 69 Farmers’ Markets listed, with an estimated 2000 farmers selling produce directly to consumers each month (VFMA, 2012). In May 2011, the Victorian government reaffirmed its commitment to regional food production and the Farmers’ Market sector with a $2 million grant to the VFMA and Farmers’ Markets across the State.

The environmental, social and economic benefits of Farmers’ Markets was the focus of a comprehensive study undertaken by the Australian Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation in 2005 (Coster & Kennon, 2005). This study and others have found the benefits of Farmers’ Markets include complementing existing businesses with regard to food sales, showcasing local produce and educating the public about local food systems, providing opportunities and alternative marketing strategies for local producers, acting as a low-cost ‘test market’ for new farm products, as well as improving access to local food, and contributing to community life and local culture by bringing people together on a regular basis (Coster & Kennon, 2005; Pretty, 2002).

According to the Australian Farmers’ Markets Association (AFMA), some of the aims of Farmers’ Markets include the preservation of farm land and sustainable agriculture as well as contribute to the economic, social and health capital of the host community (AFMA, 2007). However, there is little reference anywhere in the literature which identifies a practical connection between the local produce market and the actual preservation of farmland or increasing the viability of local farms. In addition, the less
tangible benefits of shopping at the Farmers’ Markets, such as the opportunity to learn about seasonality, quality and sustainable production methods are not well studied in terms of whether this actually affects consumer behaviour (Larsen et al., 2008, p. 109). It is also unclear whether participating in a Farmers’ Market and the perceived expectations of the consumer results in more sustainable production practices on the farm. Understanding these links would help strengthen the role of local food production as a contributor to sustainable rural landscapes and communities.

Another strategy to engage consumers in local agricultural production is through community supported agriculture which is discussed below.

**Community Supported Agriculture**

Community supported agriculture (CSA) was established in Massachusetts, USA, in 1985 and has grown as a movement around the developed world (USDA, 2010). The basic model is simple: consumers pay growers for a share of the total farm produce, and growers provide a weekly share of the food they produce, generally with guarantees of quality and quantity (Pretty, 2002; USDA, 2010). Consumers pay at the start of the year, which means that they share the risks as well as the ‘windfalls’ of farming, theoretically creating an increased connection with the production of their food.

The CSA movement generally promotes the health and environmental benefits of buying local produce, engendering social responsibility, and encouraging the increase in diversity of crops being grown in direct response to consumer demand, thereby protecting local genetic diversity as well as reducing dependence on food shipped in from elsewhere. The central principle is that the farms produce what people want, rather than concentrating on crops that will give the greatest return. In addition to receiving a weekly share of produce, CSA members often take part in life on the farm through ‘workdays’. Sixty percent of CSA farmers say the most successful aspect of their operations is the strengthened bond with food consumers (USDA, 2010).

However, in the literature, the ‘success’ of CSA is open for debate. It appears that while CSA does fulfil the niche of providing local produce to be consumed (relatively) locally, the ‘sense of community’ cultivated between farmers and consumers is still uncertain. A recent quantitative study of CSA members in New York State concluded that CSA membership did not provide members with a greater sense of community, and that membership was neither emblematic of ‘community’ nor was it a vehicle that
fostered ‘community’ (Pole & Gray, 2012). This study did point out that these results were also indicative of the shift in the nature of CSA over the past decade or more as farms involved moved away from being truly ‘community supported’ investment schemes to using the concept as an alternative vehicle for the provision of high quality produce direct to the consumer. Indeed, securing fresh, local seasonal produce was the primary reason given by consumers for joining local CSA schemes. However, Pole and Gray (2012) do note that eating local produce can be considered an important element of the concept of ‘community’, even if the respondents in their survey did not necessarily articulate the link between these two concepts.

A smaller case study of a community supporting economically threatened farmers through the purchase of locally grown farm products in the Sierra Nevada, California, found that the success of the program was largely due to the connections between local farmers, local grocery stores and institutions such as hospitals and restaurants and therefore did not necessarily result in a stronger sense of community (P. A. Walker, 2006).

CSA is an emerging concept in Australia and currently takes a variety of forms, ranging from over 1,500 boxes per week being prepared in Brisbane to a 28-box local food project in Hobart (Krabbe, 2013). One hypothesis is that this may be due to the overall lower ‘rural to urban’ ratio of population (compared to the United States where the schemes are very popular), and the concentration of the urban population in very large cities, making local distribution less attractive (Larsen et al., 2008). However, it could also be that the concept is still in its infancy in Australia and has yet to adapt and transform into a concept that meets the cultural and climatic expectations of Australians, either in cities or regional areas.

**Summary**

Amenity landscapes are an interesting area of study from an agricultural perspective as they fall outside the dominant paradigms of agricultural activity and agri-business research. The loss of smaller farms in these areas is often considered an emotive issue, with public concern expressed in terms of cultural values and sometimes nostalgia. Yet, some studies show that the number of smaller farms in particular peri-urban areas and amenity landscapes is stable or marginally increasing, although their overall contribution to agricultural output is considered low (Barr, 2009). However, the
literature also reveals that there is considerable uncertainty around determining the social and environmental significance of rural land use change (Buxton et al., 2007), the actual loss of farm land (Australian Farm Institute, 2012; Millar & Roots, 2012) and the quantification of the contribution of agricultural production in peri-urban and amenity areas (Houston, 2005). This uncertainty arises from inconsistencies in the recording and gathering of land use data, and the challenges of accounting for small scale food production using current agricultural statistical methods.

The rise of agri-tourism and the ‘consumption’ of attractive rural landscapes rely to some extent on diversification of agricultural production, both in methods and products. Farm diversification also plays an important role in the social and economic viability of small farms (Ecker et al., 2010). Niche markets for locally grown food is another emerging area of research where there are interesting questions around the motivations for consumption of local foods, the environmental implications of local markets, and the social or community benefits of creating links between consumers and producers. This nutritional ‘consumption’ of the landscape has not been widely considered in light of rural landscape values and influencing land use, although it is beginning to emerge tangentially in the form of increasing support for Farmers’ Markets by local government. Local food production and consumption are not yet considered influential factors in the creation of amenity landscapes, although increasing concerns about the resilience of local food supplies and the long term implications of climate change and peak oil could hasten the rise of this issue. Therefore, exploring the role of farming in these dynamic landscapes could reveal new pathways and opportunities for maintaining local food production whilst also contributing to export income. Planning policies and systems play an important role in influencing land uses, including creating opportunities for agricultural expansion, diversification or intensification. The next section reviews literature on planning as an ideology, practice and process.

2.3 Planning as ideology, practice and process

‘Planning’ as defined by the Planning Institute of Australia, is ‘the process of making decisions to guide future action’ (Planning Institute of Australia, 2012). Land use planning is not an end in itself, but rather the integration of considerations regarding physical and socio-economic land uses in the quest to build and maintain sustainable
environments for everyone (Thompson & Maginn, 2012). As Thompson (2007, p. 7) states:

‘At its best, planning is respectful of the built and natural environments, encompassing people and the interactions they have with these surroundings,… facilitating appropriate and good development ensuring that economic, social and cultural prosperity is in balance with environmental protection….and recognises that ultimately, everyone has a connection to the places they inhabit and use every day.’

While sometimes being typecast as a futuristic activity, planning is very much a ‘product of its time’ (Freestone, 2007, p. 67), aimed at serving the public interest and therefore having to continually respond to new challenges. Some practitioners point out that planning is not about predicting the future, but rather being prepared for it (Sinclair, 2012). This definition also exposes the critical aspect of planning as needing to be responsive to local diversity and equity, environmental needs and community expectations. It is the concept of being prepared for future opportunity whilst reflecting current social movements that makes planning as a discipline so challenging (Gleeson, 2000). In addition, the planning system encompasses the competing ideologies of ‘protecting private property, promoting the public interest, whilst also engaging the public in decision making’ (Peel & Lloyd, 2007, p. 401), which makes it a complex and challenging arena in which to work.

The planning system as a whole embodies a range of attitudes and values – to private ownership, individual rights in land, public participation, and to balancing the needs of the present and the aspirations of the future. There are numerous types of planning including strategic (or forward) planning, statutory planning, urban planning, metropolitan planning, land use planning, rural planning, landscape planning, regional planning, and environmental planning. These concepts overlap and there are commonalities between all of these different types of planning, with many terms often being used interchangeably. An attempt is made here to outline and describe those that relate to rural landscapes. The descriptions below help to frame the ensuing discussion about rural landscapes and planning.

- **Land use planning** is a complex multi-faceted policy approach which seeks to influence land use changes and rural development through a variety of policy and planning tools. Land use is regulated by a set of laws, plans and policies that
together form a planning system or framework (Department of Planning and Community Development, 2009a). These regulations govern the way land may be developed and land use may be changed and generally apply to both rural and urban areas. Many of the policies and tools used in land use planning have been developed for use in urban areas and are then adapted to peri-urban and rural situations. Indeed, the increasing complexity of land uses in peri-urban areas and rural amenity landscapes has challenged the status quo of the planning systems in the last two decades (Buxton & Low Choy, 2007). This is discussed in greater detail below.

- **Rural planning** is often seen as a continuation of metropolitan decentralisation and has evolved out of the design and management of urban issues, mainly around the placement of residences (Esparza & Carruthers, 2000; Nelson, 1999). Planners often view rural areas as the spatial extension of the urban realm, partly because of the demographic (in many cases, ex-urban populations) that creates the need for more planning decisions, thus making rural development ‘urban by design and considered rural only because of its location’ (Esparza & Carruthers, 2000, p. 24). In addition, the creation of new planning tools, and hence planning education, has tended to occur foremost in response to urban planning issues rather than those found in rural situations which has added weight to the urban leanings (Buxton et al., 2006). However, there is an increasing realisation that applying urban land use planning techniques into rural areas without an understanding of the underlying social and economic implications ‘actually serves to exacerbate the progressive exurbanisation process’ (Marcouiller et al., 2002, p. 518), further diluting the notion of rural planning as being a separate field of planning. Some people have questioned whether rural planning should really be considered a ‘field’ or not due to the enormous complexity and diversity of rural issues being addressed in rural landscapes. Rather, it is suggested that it could be more akin to policy ‘bargaining’ (McDonald, 1989, p. 325) as the process is often reduced to making socially acceptable trade-offs.

- **Landscape planning** has primarily been a concept used in Europe to manage traditional cultural landscapes and is defined by the European Landscape Convention as a ‘forward-looking action to enhance, restore or create landscapes’ (Council of Europe, 2000 in Selman, 2006). Planning at a landscape scale is challenging to define as it depends on the issues being considered. Landscape
planning can address spatial issues in terms of the integration of development activities within the context of particular localities, and can also consider issues of scale, implying that landscapes ‘divide the earth’s surface into spaces and linkages that have meaning for both human and natural systems’ (Selman, 2006, p. 2). The landscape-scale is slowly gaining recognition as a possible approach to addressing sustainability issues (Moore-Colyer & Scott, 2005; Peterson & Liu, 2008), with landscapes being seen as a conceptual framework within which the analysis and implementation of sustainable land use can occur (Selman, 2006). In addition, landscapes are mainly considered in relation to aesthetics and natural values, including attractive physical features, and thus can be an important element for consideration in land use planning and development (Buxton et al., 2006).

- **Regional planning** attempts to integrate social, economic and environmental objectives for regions that are larger than local government areas but smaller than States (Regional Managers Forum, 2009). Regional planning is considered ‘an elastic concept’ with considerable debate and variation in practice and application (Collits, 2007). A key argument for regional planning is the principle of ‘subsidiarity’ which denotes decision making to the smallest or least centralised authority capable of addressing the matter effectively, i.e. that people who live in regions should be able to control what happens in their regions (Gray, 2004 in Collits, 2007). It is a concept used more commonly in Europe where spatial planning is used to address regional economic development issues, extending land use management to encapsulate the ‘liveability’ of regions. The arguments for regional planning often orbit around broader environmental, resource or population issues and therefore pick up many elements of sustainability (discussed further below). However, just as there is no consensus about what sustainable or liveable communities might look like, there is no agreed framework for regional spatial planning (Gleeson & Low, 2000). Despite this, in the last five years, regional planning in Australia, and Victoria in particular, has been gaining a foothold, with effort being spent on regional strategies and potential spatial planning frameworks (Regional Managers Forum, 2009). Collits (2007) makes the point that spatial planning at regional scales can enable planners to move beyond just land use planning and planning for growth, and actually consider the ‘liveability’ of places. Planning at this scale also means that the connections between economic, social, and environmental concerns can be addressed more fully (Collits, 2007).
The above discussion of definitions highlights the overlap of practice and process within the field of planning. In the context of this research, this is a strength as well as a challenge, as it illustrates the complexity of the ideological influences on decision making processes in changing rural landscapes. A discussion of the evolution of the Victorian planning system is presented later in this chapter, along with a comparison of the United Kingdom, Canadian and American planning systems.

**Conceptualising land use planning in rural amenity landscapes**

The loss of agricultural land to other uses is a primary concern in rural land use planning. While it is not known precisely how much productive agricultural land is taken out of production (Millar & Roots, 2012), peri-urban areas and rural amenity landscapes are obvious areas where conversion of farmland as a consequence of urban expansion and amenity migration occurs. Agricultural land on the outskirts of metropolitan areas and regional cities is often known as ‘land-in-waiting’ (Sinclair & Bunker, 2007) in expectation of the relentless outward expansion of urban development. This is no different in amenity areas where the expectations that residential development will occur in response to the demand for rural housing, almost pre-determined by the cycle of land conversion (as shown in Figure 1 in Chapter 1). The inevitability of this is because the market value of land becomes considerably higher than its agricultural production potential (Barr, 2005). Thus the dynamic and complex nature of rural amenity landscapes due to rural migration creates significant challenges for land use planning. Bunker and Houston (2003) contend that historically, land use planning for the rural-urban interface was undertaken in a relatively simplistic manner. However, with increased concerns about the environment and natural resources such as water availability, biodiversity protection and bushfires, the complexity has increased beyond most rural planning capabilities (Buxton et al., 2007). The multifunctional nature of rural land use, changes in lifestyle, increased need for housing, nature conservation, water management and the declining role of farming as a central activity in many rural areas have all conspired to create challenging dilemmas for decision makers. The ‘breaking of the traditional nexus’ between agricultural activity, jobs and population
growth has meant that the minimalist planning that had traditionally been applied to rural areas is no longer sufficient (Buxton et al., 2006).

In Australia, the protection of agricultural land, and especially of highly productive agricultural land, is a story of tentative measures by State governments with varying levels of success (McKenzie, 1997). The lack of national oversight or interest in the conversion of agricultural land is evident in the absence of accurate data on the amount of arable land currently in production in Australia (Australian Farm Institute, 2012; Millar & Roots, 2012).

Rural land use planning has often been equated with ‘planning for development’, reflecting the ‘tug of war’ between different levels of government and their associated ideologies regarding how best to address the myriad of problems that stem from accelerated population growth into rural farmland, countryside and open space (Daniels & Lapping, 2005; Glover, Stewart, & Gladdys, 2008; Gray, 2007). There is a need for a paradigm shift which views rural landscapes as areas that are thriving and are socially and environmentally stable, producing economically in their own right. In essence, the landscape needs to work for the community that lives in it, not a future use. We are not there yet.

This section has provided a very brief oversight into the complexity of issues facing rural land use planning. A key message from this is that rural areas and amenity landscapes in particular are unique and challenging spaces for planning, and so far the current governance arrangements are poorly equipped to handle them into the long term.

**Sustainability and governance in planning**

The concept of sustainability is increasingly being considered in the realms of local government, representing an important shift in thinking by addressing the links between economic, social and ecological systems when formulating and implementing rural policy, especially in reference to land use change (Brunckhorst, 2004; Tonts, 2005). In the planning literature, there is an interesting debate about the role of sustainable development as an overarching guide to planning, postulating that planning could again be visionary and large scale, with the concept of ‘sustainability’ lifting the gambit of current procedural and design approaches (Berke, 2002; Gleeson, Darbas, & Lawson, 2004; Green, 2001; Selman & Knight, 2006; Wilkin, 1996).
Berke (2002, p. 22) argues that sustainability as a concept offers an ‘amplified multi-generational vision of community building that is green, profitable and equitable.’ Bengston, Fletcher and Nelson (2004) point out that public policies for managing growth and protecting open space are at the heart of sustainable development, regardless of the governmental level from which they are applied. Gleeson et. al. (2004) pick up the theme ‘integration’ as being fundamental to both ‘sustainability’ and ‘governance’ discourses and which they see as key to overcoming the fragmented approaches found in land use planning.

Powell, Selman and Wragg (2002) explore the concept of multiple types of ‘capital’ which comprise the sustainability assets of an area: ecological capital, human capital, social capital, organisational capital and manufactured capital. They suggest that the task of the planner is to minimise the damage to the capital reserve in any particular landscape, ensuring that losses are compensated and use by the next generation is not compromised (Powell et al., 2002). Tonts (2005, p. 211) also refers to the concepts of natural, social, human and institutional capitals in his discussion of rural governance and sustainability, noting that there is increasing recognition among ‘bureaucrats and politicians that current policies are often undermining the social and economic sustainability of rural areas’ and ‘that current patterns of development are ecologically unsustainable.’

The Local Government Declaration to the World Summit on Sustainable Development outlines four interconnected principles for local government that underpin the concept of sustainability: the integration of economic, social, cultural and environmental issues; effective democratic decentralisation; good governance; and cooperation and solidarity to enable exchange of good practice (Anon-WSSD, 2002). Gleeson and Low (2000) note that in planning, sustainability and good governance have two key aspects in common: they are both a goal and a process, and that in parallel to these tenets, improved public participation, with an emphasis on open, deliberative approaches to decision making, is required.

However, protecting rural land on the basis of its agricultural value alone is not necessarily a convincing or sustainable management strategy (Paul & Haslam McKenzie, 2009). Rather, there is a need for processes which engage ‘civil’ society in the promotion of the values of the countryside and farmland (Bunce, 1998; Daniels & Lapping, 2005). These processes which have the potential to influence decision making
structures, mechanisms and systems of administration, collectively contribute to better governance (P. Williams, 2007).

Governance includes ‘the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority and the mechanics and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences’ (Hyden, 1998, p.2 in Gurran, Squires, & Blakely, 2006).

Governance is seen as both a ‘method’ and a ‘system’ of governing, influenced by particular practices, standards and relationships between government and non-government entities, in the management of community affairs (O'Toole & Burdess, 2004). Importantly, governance encompasses much more than just government and organisational structures; it focuses on outcomes and involves a myriad of processes, procedures and systems required for planning, management and decision-making. In rural landscapes, governance can include alliances, dialogue, multiple negotiation, partnership agreements, public participation, consensus and trust building, as well as adaptation and flexibility with and between farmers, other landowners, local government, natural resource management agencies, state government and industry groups (Paul & Haslam McKenzie, 2009, p. 147). In essence, governance is intrinsic to good planning practice.

A key role of local government is to promote greater participation in the processes of local governance. Sproats (1997) suggests local government could achieve better local governance by:

- treating constituents as citizens with a broad stake in local affairs as well as being customers or clients of particular services;
- exercising local community leadership, bringing people together for common good and tackling difficult challenges, rather than retreating to a narrow managerial style focussing on a limited role;
- fostering sound public judgement through informed and thoughtful debate within the community, rather than responding to often ephemeral public opinion; and
- building the human and social capital of communities as well as managing financial and physical assets.
There is no doubt that public participation is an essential part of planning processes. However, given the increasing heterogeneity of some rural areas, engaging with the public and undertaking adequate public participation processes can be a real challenge. Often planners and decision-makers have difficulty recognising the diversity of societal demands in rural landscapes. In turn, these increasingly diverse communities can find it difficult to vocalise their preferences, therefore creating and implementing participative approaches has become an important part of planning strategies (Mann & Jeanneaux, 2009).

In a review of citizen participation in planning, Lane (2005) describes the almost universal replacement of ‘government’ with ‘governance’ and notes the creation of decision-making relationships between government and civil society which are occurring across temporal as well as spatial scales. He identifies three characteristics found in the evolution of public participation in planning: a recognition of the political nature of planning and the consequent requirement for active citizen involvement; the emergence of a more pluralistic view of society; and the acceptance of citizen involvement as a fundamental characteristic of the planning process (Lane, 2005, p. 296).

Public involvement in planning has arguably become one of the most significant and debated elements in the planning process (Zehner & Marshall, 2007), with numerous studies in the literature covering various aspects of community involvement, from community-based planning (Glover et al., 2008), rural protests as a social movement (Woods, 2003); collective action and participative processes (Mann & Jeanneaux, 2009), eco-civic governance regions (Brunckhorst, Coop, & Reeve, 2006) to ‘crowd-sourcing’ and social media as participatory processes (Seltzer & Mahmoudi, 2012). In their extensive review of planning policy instruments to protect open space, Bengston, Fletcher and Nelson (2004) concluded that meaningful, grassroots participation from the outset of the planning process and throughout implementation of plans is needed if community goals and concerns are to be incorporated and local land-use plans are to have legitimacy.

However, governance is much broader than public participation. There has been much criticism of the governance arrangements set up within agencies to address the integration of planning decisions with natural resource management, including water and environmental policies (Bunker, Houston, & Hutchings, 2007; Buxton & Low
Choy, 2007; Gurran et al., 2006; Low Choy, Sutherland, Gleeson, Dodson, & Sipe, 2008). Henderson (2003b) in his study on intensive agricultural industries in peri-urban areas, shows the lack of governance arrangements that deal with changing uses and values of a landscape. In addition, the responsibilities for policy development and resource management have been fragmented between State and local government, with little input from regional catchment groups or other resource management interests such as water management or ecological sustainability (Buxton et al., 2006, p. 219).

Gleeson, Darbas and Lawson (2004) point out the need for more negotiation and deliberative policy making in planning, with government being more accountable in light of escalating citizen scepticism and disengagement, calling for a renewal and redesign of institutional arrangements for formulation and implementation of planning policies and programs. They identify three primary threads to the governance and planning debate; firstly, that governance provides governments with the imperative to integrate internal policy, regulatory and administrative functions; secondly, external governance requires an ongoing, cooperative and fluid relationship between government and society through the formation of partnerships and capitalising on non-government energy and expertise; thirdly, more innovative and collaborative processes are required due to fiscal conservatism (Gleeson et al., 2004, p. 363).

In his call for a landscape approach to planning, Selman (2006, p. 66) suggests that a key role of governance in landscape planning also requires three elements: 1) recognition of the role of local communities in managing sustainable landscapes, 2) strengthening the links between landscape quality and the economic and social capital of an area; and 3) the presence of a textured and flexible governance infrastructure that can find creative and innovative ways of delivering policies relevant to local situations. It is perhaps this last point which is the most challenging. New forms of governance and institutional arrangements that are designed to allow for multi-functional uses and which involve a multitude of regional and local stakeholders in these processes are now needed.

An important part of the governance process is the development and implementation of mechanisms that can manage landscape change while also enhancing productive agricultural lands. These are described further below.
Rural land use planning mechanisms

Rural land use planning is a complex and multi-faceted policy approach which seeks to influence land use change and rural development through a variety of responses ranging from regulatory tools to market-based mechanisms through to voluntary measures and community engagement (Buxton et al., 2006; Sinclair & Bunker, 2007). While planning policy and regulation have been the main mechanisms for controlling (or encouraging) development, they are a means, not an end (McKenzie, 1997). The need for an integrated and holistic approach which includes public participation (i.e. education, capacity building, engagement processes, monitoring and assessment), spatial planning and its associated policies and regulations as well as incentives (both positive and negative) is increasingly been recognised as an important part of managing land use and development, although a holistic approach is rarely implemented (Bunker & Houston, 2003). Referring to Daniels and Daniels (2003), Sinclair and Bunker (2007, p. 167) present a conceptual model showing the need to include all three significantly different policy approaches in order to make effective decisions about rural landscape change (see Figure 3). The fact that these policy approaches are undertaken by different levels of government and also involve the community adds to the complexity of implementing rural planning. This is a graphic illustration of why rural planning is seldom a smooth or holistic process.

Figure 3: Interconnectedness of policy approaches to rural planning

(adapted from Sinclair & Bunker, 2007)
These different but complementary approaches to rural land use planning each incorporate a number of policy mechanisms or instruments which facilitate the balancing of social, economic and environmental values in rural landscapes. These are also aimed at minimising the undesirable impacts of development in agricultural areas. Table 1 shows the variety of planning policies, processes and tools that are available to assist in promoting sustainability in rural areas. Encompassing a mixture of regulatory and voluntary mechanisms, the table shows the variety of tools as well as the diversity of drivers and outcomes in relation to supporting agricultural production in rural areas.

Table 1: Planning mechanisms for rural areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mechanisms</th>
<th>Regulatory</th>
<th>Voluntary</th>
<th>Preserve farmland/assist farming activities</th>
<th>Manage/control development</th>
<th>Preserve rural amenity/views</th>
<th>Limit non-farm uses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Land use zoning, including urban growth boundaries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master/Strategic Plans</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clustering (residential dwellings)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Growth Boundaries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development Rights</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development ‘point schemes’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right-to-Farm legislation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land Trusts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preferential tax treatment, subsidies, rebates, etc</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Densities, bonuses, offsets &amp; set-asides</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incentives, stewardship payments (biodiversity, etc)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outright purchase of agricultural land</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic development &amp; support programs (business clusters, local branding)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Sources: McKenzie, 1997; Millar, 2009)
Regulatory Mechanisms

Zoning, permits and legislation

The most common form of land use control in Australia and North America is zoning, a development control tool whereby land is designated for a principal use or uses. Uses which are considered incompatible with the designated use are prohibited. Importantly, zoning is a type of public regulation over private property; once a private party complies with the rules of the zone, planning approval is generally guaranteed (Hirt, 2012). Zoning determines types of land use which are permitted and/or prohibited, sets land use objectives and can place conditions or performance criteria to be met by those using the land (McKenzie, 1996). In addition, some particular uses are allowed upon application if they satisfy a set of published assessment criteria. These criteria, the definition and description of the zones and the associated land use regulations are all contained in legal documentation pertinent to each local government area (Municipal Association of Victoria, 2006).

Zoning regulations include the local standards of development control, the main one being the minimum allowable lot size for house dwellings, also known as subdivision. The use of minimum lot sizes, or conversely, requiring large lots to be maintained in production-oriented landscapes, is controversial, but few alternatives have been proposed (Buxton & Low Choy, 2007; Olson, 2005; Sinclair, 2002). Minimum lot sizes aim to render ‘farming lucrative and [residential] development difficult’ (Alterman, 1997, p. 222). However, the main issue of contention is defining what constitutes a minimum lot size that deters housing. Indeed, some critics contend that larger lots may shape the socio-economic make-up of the incoming residents due to the higher prices (Olson, 2005). Other critics note that the one-size-fits-all approach does not take into consideration the evolving nature of farming and the increasingly diverse types of production, such as high value crops which require significantly less land, for example vanilla or cut-flowers (Bohnet & Moore, 2011). Minimum lot sizes can limit the total number of dwellings allowed in a particular area, but it is a very blunt instrument and does not achieve the goal of protecting agricultural land (Sinclair, 2003).
Master planning

Comprehensive planning or master planning provides for holistic planning decisions as the development potential, infrastructure needs, environmental and other resource attributes of the landscape can be considered within a broader strategic context. While commonly used in the development of new sites, the process can also facilitate a holistic approach to conservation and settlement planning at landscape scales (Bohnet & Moore, 2011; Gurran et al., 2006). Potentially this concept could be used at a landscape scale (such as a valley) to determine values and align expectations. Thus, master planning could be considered a type of strategic planning.

Clustering and density bonuses

Where the existing pattern of rural subdivision contains large lots which are desirable for agriculture or open space reasons, then the ‘clustering’ or grouping of certain compatible development, such as rural residential dwellings, on one part of the property may be desirable. Clustering is seen as a potential way to minimise land use conflicts and maximise use of low intensity agricultural land (Gurran et al., 2006). As part of micro-scale planning, density bonuses are applied to a rural residential use so that the majority of the land can be retained for farming and the allowable residential use density is increased to compensate for the farm land. This creates a clustering of housing/residential allocation on part of the property while the remainder of the property is set aside for low-intensity agriculture such as grazing or keeping of horses. This is not appropriate for some forms of intensive agriculture due to the potential for conflicts. There could also be issues around aesthetics and concentrations of industry, depending on the business. Daniels and Bowers (1997, p. 314) suggest that clustering often ends up being an open-space protection tool rather than a farmland protection tool.

Urban growth boundaries and land reserves

Urban growth boundaries can limit the urban ‘footprint’ of a community by designating land available for future development. However, pressure for development, especially on rural land can erode these boundaries over time (Gurran et al., 2006). In addition, land designated for urban development has been traditionally defined in relation to the forecasted development need, rather than the potential ‘carrying capacity’ of a settlement in the particular area. In some areas, these boundaries reflect a permanent
limit on urban expansion, for example the town of Banff in Alberta, Canada, and the Surf Coast Shire in Victoria (Gurran et al., 2006). Green belts and agricultural land reserves are often used to define boundaries, with these areas being used for open space and/or conservation purposes, as in Boulder, Colorado (Boulder County, 1999), or as productive farmland in Vancouver, British Columbia (Agricultural Land Commission, n.d.) as well as for recreational activities, including golf courses, tourism and heritage protection (Buxton et al., 2006). Bunker and Houston (2003) point out the failure of Australian metropolitan processes to protect their greenbelts that were created with ‘vision’ in the 1940’s and dismantled by ‘pragmatism’ in the 1970s.

A good example of land being set aside for farming is the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) program set up in the 1950s by the provincial government to conserve farm land and enhance agriculture throughout British Columbia, Canada (Agricultural Land Commission, n.d.). Since the 1970s, the ALR in the Vancouver metropolitan area has been viewed as a ‘de facto urban growth boundary’, creating urban areas that are significantly more compact than most in North America (Condon et al., 2010). However, due to various pressures, prime ALR designated land has been swapped for lesser quality lands elsewhere, resulting in ‘no net-loss of farmland’ but creating a fragmented and difficult to manage landscape on the urban fringe. The interface between the industrial agricultural activities and the adjoining urban lands creates a plethora of issues succinctly summarised by Condon et al. (2010, p. 108): ‘The strategy of relying exclusively on this regulatory tool to ensure land is available for food production and to provide a buffer between agricultural and urban lands has significant limitations, is politically polarising, and fails to advance regional food security or food sovereignty.’

**Development rights (including their transfer or purchase)**

Development rights are one of several rights which are part of private land ownership in North America and Australia. This right can be perceived (the expectation of a development approval) or can be actual (an existing but unutilised development approval) and may be sold or donated separately from other rights (Pruetz & Standridge, 2009). If the development right is removed from a property, the use of land is typically limited to farming or open space/conservation (Daniels & Bowers, 1997). The transfer or sale of development rights usually involves the voluntary sale of rights,
with the sale price determined by an appraisal. The purchaser or receiver is generally a
government agency or a Land Trust. In Australia, the transfer or sale of development
rights is more complicated as development is conditional on planning consent which
may lapse if it is not acted upon (McKenzie, 1997). However, transfer schemes were
introduced into the Adelaide Hills in South Australia to limit further residential
development (South Australian Government, 1993 in McKenzie, 1997) but the outcome
was ultimately unsuccessful (Sinclair & Bunker, 2007). Transfer of development rights
(TDR) schemes have been applied to heritage building preservation and an increase in
floor space in Sydney and Brisbane central business districts (P. Williams, 2011), and
the concept is also used in biodiversity preservation through the Bio-banking scheme in
New South Wales (Department of Environment and Climate Change, 2007).
Wollongong City Council had proposed the use of transferable development rights in
‘core escarpment areas’ to protect scenically significant parts of the Illawarra
Escarpment but has been stymied by an expression of doubt by the NSW Land
Environment Court about the legality of TDR schemes (Gurran et al., 2006; P.
Williams, 2011). It remains to be seen whether this mechanism will be useful in land
use management, and in particular, the protection of agricultural lands. An important
corollary to its legitimacy is certainty of future land development opportunities which
are sometimes a challenge due to political intervention in planning processes.

**Right to Farm legislation**

Legislation that provides support for a ‘social licence’ to undertake agricultural
activities is referred to as the ‘right to farm’ or ‘protection of agricultural operations
from nuisance suits’ laws (Centner, 2006 in Becker & Kennedy, 2011). The legislative
purpose of these laws is to ‘conserve, protect and encourage the development and
improvement of agricultural land’ and to reduce the loss of agricultural resources by
limiting the circumstances under which relevant activities can be the subject of nuisance
suits’ (Becker & Kennedy, 2011, p. 96).

Despite the use of the term ‘Right to Farm’, the statutes do not grant an absolute right to
engage in farming practices, only conditional protection. While laws enacting this
legislation are common in the United States, they are less used in Australia, and often
referred to as a ‘principle’ (Department of Planning and Community Development,
2009b). Currently Tasmania is the only State to have Right to Farm policies legislated.
The *Primary Industry Activities Protection Act 1995*, prevents common law ‘nuisance’ actions being taken against farmers for noise or other pollution caused by their activities. While they may limit complaints and conflict, they may also extend the lifetimes of some farms (Government of Tasmania, 1995). In general, Right to Farm laws are considered to be relatively ineffective as a tool to prevent farmland conversion as they do not deter conversions once farmers feel it is lucrative to sell (Alterman, 1997).

**Points schemes**

These schemes require proponents of new developments to attain a minimum number of points to receive a building permit. Points are accumulated for actions that relate to sustainability goals. The City of Boulder ‘Green points’ program involves residential building applicants to comply for any new or remodelling projects over a certain size. The points relate to activities such as the use of insulation, water saving devices and using recycled building products (City of Boulder, 2005 in Gurran et al., 2006). Theoretically, these could be expanded to include agricultural or landscape-derived values and aspirations as well.

**Voluntary mechanisms**

**Farmland preservation and Land Trusts**

Land Trusts are the main vehicle for non-government land preservation efforts in North America. Land Trusts are non-government organisations which protect land through ownership or other formal legal agreements, with a goal of private land protection for public benefit (Watkins, Hiltz, & Brockie, 2003). Land Trusts may receive donations of property, development rights, easements or money and may also purchase property and development rights. In some cases, Land Trusts purchase property and transfer it to government (Daniels & Bowers, 1997). The protection of agricultural land through Land Trusts is much more common in the United States than Canada, although both countries, as well as Australia, have Land Trusts which protect land for conservation purposes. In Victoria, Trust for Nature, a non-profit conservation organisation, created its first landscape covenant which involved a large portion of a working farm. The
protective covenant is aimed at ensuring the agricultural landscape is retained in perpetuity for cultural, aesthetic and environmental reasons (Trust for Nature, 2009).

**Tax benefits**

Cash inducements and/or tax benefits, as well as the purchase of development rights are becoming more commonplace, especially as land use regulations become more defensive, both legally and politically. A criticism of private land preservation, including financial transactions for preserving land use, is that it is voluntary and somewhat random, happening one parcel at a time, rather than encompassing whole landscapes. This would be applicable to farmland in agricultural landscapes, and therefore, have only a marginal benefit for the collective value of agricultural land. Currently, a number of local governments do offer reduced property rates for farms over a certain size in the farming zones. As this does have the potential to affect the overall revenue for local government, without ancillary support and a strategic focus, rate reductions can be seen as a public cost for a private gain. The ideal balance combines regulations, public support and financial incentives in a region-wide package (Daniels & Lapping, 2005; Pruetz & Standridge, 2009)

**Stewardship payments and incentives**

Primarily associated with the protection of conservation values, incentive programs are established mechanisms to voluntarily protect private land, usually through a formal agreement or covenant which is attached to the title of the land. Conservation covenants are widely used across all States in Australia, and the Trust of Nature in Victoria is just beginning to become involved in landscape covenants as mentioned above, which also include agricultural land and farming practices, albeit with a conservation focus. Some local governments do provide rate rebates or grants to landholders involved in these schemes.

In their analysis of the Victorian Land Stewardship project, Cocklin, Dibden and Mautner (2006, p. 204) suggest land stewardship approaches, such as paying farmers to undertake works to benefit the environment, could lead to some farmers staying on the land and help ‘maintain rural social and community vitality’. However, similar to other schemes such as tax benefits and covenants, the value can be diluted somewhat due to their voluntary nature and inability to address property use change at a landscape scale.
Summary of planning mechanisms for rural land

In many respects all of the above mechanisms are imperfect ‘control’ tools in the face of residential pressures on farm land because they are unlikely to change people’s behaviour and preferences for either moving to rural areas or affect the desire to sell existing farmland for higher value residential purposes (McKenzie, 1997). Experience in rural Victoria and Queensland has shown that the existing statutory planning attempts are not sufficient to prevent the fragmentation of the landscape due to the sale and split up of multi-titled farms in peri-urban and amenity landscapes (Bohnet & Moore, 2011; Buxton & Low Choy, 2007). Ultimately planners still need policy and program options that can ‘capture the serendipitous balance between economic need, emotional attachment and ecological dynamics’ of rural landscapes (Selman, 2006, p. 15). This is likely to be a combination of top-down and bottom up rural planning policies and strategies that respond to local requirements, community expectations and long term goals. Therefore, a brief overview of rural planning in Victoria is provided next.

The rural planning system in Victoria

In Victoria, land use planning and natural resource management, including agriculture, are governed by separate legislative and administrative arrangements. This has led to separate planning, policy and management processes for land use, water management, agriculture, catchment management and environmental protection. State-wide planning controls – the Victoria Planning Provisions – were introduced in 1996 replacing all local Council planning schemes. One of the features of the Victorian system is that the policy requirements are embedded within all planning schemes through the State Planning Policy Framework (Department of Planning and Community Development, 2009a). This framework explicitly contains Ministerial Directions on rural residential development, aimed at controlling the proliferation of rural-residential subdivision and protecting productive agricultural land. In 2006, a new set of rural zones was introduced as described in the Table 2.
Table 2: Description of the rural zones – Victorian Planning Provisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zone</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Farming Zone</td>
<td>To provide for the use of land for agriculture. To encourage the retention of productive agricultural land. To ensure that non-agricultural uses, particularly dwellings, do not adversely affect the use of land for agriculture. To encourage use and development of land based on comprehensive and sustainable land management practices and infrastructure provision. To protect and enhance natural resources and the biodiversity of the area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Activity Zone</td>
<td>To provide for the use of land for agriculture. To provide for other uses and development, in appropriate locations, which are compatible with agriculture and the environmental and landscape characteristics of the area. To ensure that use and development does not adversely affect surrounding land uses. To protect and enhance natural resources and the biodiversity of the area. To encourage use and development of land based on comprehensive and sustainable land management practices and infrastructure provision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Conservation Zone</td>
<td>To provide for agricultural use consistent with the conservation of environmental and landscape values of the area. To protect and enhance the natural environment and natural processes for their historic, archaeological and scientific interest, landscape, faunal habitat and cultural values. To conserve and enhance the cultural significance and character of open rural and scenic non urban landscapes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Living Zone</td>
<td>To provide for agricultural uses which do not adversely affect the amenity of surrounding land uses. To provide for residential use in a rural environment. To protect and enhance the natural resources, biodiversity and landscape and heritage values of the area. To encourage use and development of land based on comprehensive and sustainable land management practices and infrastructure provision.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (Department of Sustainability and Environment, 2007)

Victoria’s statutory planning process is perhaps the most inflexible and centralised of any planning system in Australia (P. Williams, 2007). Planning schemes must incorporate strategic planning principles and policies, making them highly prescriptive and standardised, with little room for local variation. The desirability of centralised, prescribed plan making is open to debate and has been criticised by Buxton, Goodman and Budge (2005). They note that while the Victorian Planning Provisions were intended to be a ‘comprehensive departure’ from the past systems of local government
planning schemes, the implementation has failed to live up to the expectations, resulting in a system that is worse than before (Buxton et al., 2005, p. 52). In an evaluation of the State planning system, the effectiveness of the existing planning provisions was measured against the government objectives set for the scheme. The research found that the new schemes failed to meet the objectives and, in most cases, the outcomes were closer to the opposite of those intended. Their conclusion was the need for a ‘fundamental structural change’ of the system (Buxton et al., 2005, p. 58).

However, in late 2012, changes to the Planning and Environment Act 1987, have been proposed which are aimed at supporting agricultural activity, allowing more farm tourism-related uses and supporting population retention in rural communities through changes in rural residential allowances (Department of Planning and Community Development, 2012a).

**Planning and farming in Victoria**

The loss of food producing landscapes, especially on the fringes of the coastal metropolitan centres where highly productive land is often found, has been a concern to planners for many years (Buxton & Low Choy, 2007). Recognition of the agricultural output of peri-urban areas have failed to shift urban growth policies or increase the profile of agricultural output as a valued land use (Bunker & Houston, 2003; Houston, 2005). However, the recent increase in interest in food security has provided much needed impetus to building links and raising awareness of the role of planning in food production. Research undertaken by the Victorian Local Government Association showed that generally the links between land use planning and food production, including agricultural activities, were poorly understood (Budge & Slade, 2009). This reflected the findings of a much earlier survey undertaken in the United States, assessing the involvement of planners in food system issues (Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 2000). This study found that while only 12% of the planning schools had a rural planning specialisation, there was no special focus on food systems and ‘food’ as an issue had been ‘virtually ignored by planners’ (Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 2000, p. 120). However, with the increasing interest in food-sensitive planning (Donovan, Larsen, & McWhinnie, 2011), and the 2012 review of the *Victorian Planning and Environment Act* 1987, there may be an opportunity to incorporate food production and agricultural
activities, especially those close to urban areas, into local planning schemes (Campbell, 2009, p. 26).

In their report on improving rural land use, the Victorian Future Farming Rural Planning Group’s independent report to the State Minister note the changing nature of agriculture, the increasing pressures on rural land from non-farming uses, the loss of agricultural land and the need to protect the capacity to produce food (Future Farming Rural Planning Group, 2009). They note that the concept of food security is not being addressed as a policy issue at the State level and other major issues affecting the future of farming, such as climate change, drought, water management and carbon management could benefit from policy direction. They also point out that ‘the community’s confidence in the planning system and its credibility depend upon clearly articulated and justified policies strongly influencing consistent decision-making. These expectations of the system are not being met.’ (Future Farming Rural Planning Group, 2009, p. 42)

There is, however, increasing recognition and awareness of the links and relationships between land use planning and food production (Farmar-Bowers, Higgins, & Millar, 2013). Although often poorly expressed, efforts are still being made to retain highly productive land. What is less obvious are the creation and maintenance of other social, economic and physical support systems including infrastructure, incentives and policies to support food production at a variety of scales, from local to regional to State-wide. There is a need to overtly link food production and food security issues to land use planning for all the reasons mentioned already.

The evolution of planning in Australia

In order to understand the current influences on planning in Australia, it is worthwhile looking overseas to the situation in Europe and North America. Planning in Australia is significantly different from European countries, including the United Kingdom. There, strong traditions of government intervention and physical planning processes have prevented the spread of cities and have protected various aspects of the countryside encompassing social, amenity and environmental values (Buxton et al., 2006). The British regional planning model emphasises regulation and encompasses the containment of established urban areas, maintaining green belts and creating satellite
towns, all of which ensure the orderly growth and protection of key assets (Freestone, 2007). While this model was influential, Australian planners developed their own solutions, borrowing some concepts (such as green belts) but not others (such as satellite towns) (Buxton et al., 2006, p. 47). Since the 1980’s, however, other economic and legal mechanisms complementary to the regulatory approach, have been borrowed from the American system of financial and planning incentives (Freestone, 2007). These aim to provide more flexibility to the Australian planning system through the use of market-based mechanisms and financial incentives, planning bonuses, rights associated with the acquisition and development of land and traditional common law mechanisms such as covenants and easements (P. Williams, 2007).

In addition, the definition and use of private property and property rights as legal entities is very different between the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia. In the United States and to some extent Australia, there is a social expectation of individual freedom and free-enterprise which can strongly influence the ability to interfere with landowner rights. This is in contrast to the situation in the United Kingdom where it is more commonly assumed that land is community property, perhaps in indefinite custodial control of an owner, but subject to significant restrictions over land use (McDonald, 1989).

It is instructive to revisit the evolution of planning in Australia to gain a deeper understanding of its influence on the current status and future directions of land use. While the planning that occurred during the colonial era and the first part of the twentieth century did much to shape Australian cities and the growth of the country as a whole (Freestone, 2007), it is not an intrinsic part of the issues being focused on in this research. Instead, the post- World War II history of planning in Australia will be briefly outlined here. It is a history largely viewed through the lens of urban planning, reflecting the emphasis and roots of the profession, with minimal reference to rural or regional planning until very recently. While Gleeson et. al. (2004, p. 352) propose a ‘three-part chronicle of epochal change’ in the paradigms that underpin the post-war planning regimes in Australia, Freestone (2007) sees four phases of evolution in policy and implementation. An amalgamation is provided here. It is a history largely viewed through the lens of urban planning, reflecting the emphasis and roots of the profession, with minimal reference to rural or regional planning until very recently. While Gleeson et. al. (2004, p. 352) propose a ‘three-part chronicle of epochal change’ in the paradigms that underpin the post-war planning regimes in Australia, Freestone (2007) sees four phases of evolution in policy and implementation. An amalgamation is provided here.

1) Post–war reconstruction and the long (economic) boom (1940s – 1960s). Town and country planning dominated this era of reconstruction as planning became a function of state governments with the new planning laws modelled on British town
and country planning legislation (Freestone, 2007). Local statutory planning was developed to guide ‘the orderly development of land and service provision’ in response to the steady increase in urban populations and the ‘rational facilitations of suburbanisation’ (Gleeson, 2000, p. 127). Early modelling techniques used in planning enabled a rational, technocratic view of the world, creating ‘certainty as to the future desired’, which meant that primarily urban policy and regulatory systems could be designed to anticipate and adapt to changing socio-economic conditions (Gleeson et al., 2004, p. 352).

2) Market conditioning and neo-liberalisation (1970s – 1980s). By the 1970s, the ‘excessively rational’ techniques, and the aspirations and outcomes of planning began to be widely questioned (Freestone, 2007). The exclusion of broad democratic and non-technical, especially environmental, values began to be rejected and participatory environmental planning statutes, environmental impact assessment and environmental protection agencies were created. However, the economic shocks of the mid 1970s meant these participatory and environmentally sensitive processes struggled against a declining fiscal resource base and demands for economic liberalisation. Planning became a ‘regulator’ of urban change that was sometimes used to ‘keep democracy in check’ (Gleeson, 2000, p. 130) deferring to market forces. As a result, the ‘strategic intent of metropolitan frameworks was reduced to the management of small scale, incremental urban expansion’ (Gleeson et al., 2004, p. 352). By many accounts, this was an era when planning as an ideology was at its lowest. For commentators across the world, the planning system of the 1970s onwards has generally failed, causing statements such as ‘the effective subordination of planning to the [free] market has given America truly world-class sprawl.’ (Daniels & Lapping, 1996, p. 287) This was true in Australia as well (Gleeson et al., 2004).

3) Integrated planning and the rise of environmental planning (1990s – Present). From the early 1990s, planning was increasingly being used to facilitate rather than shape economic development due to the deregulation of development control systems, reflecting the political conservatism of State governments (Freestone, 2007). The development industry lobbied for the deregulation and harmonisation of State and territory planning systems resulting in the role of planning shifting from trying to shape ‘the broad courses of change’ to one of managing externalities at a ‘micro-level’ (Gleeson et al., 2004, p. 353). However, this tide of ‘deregulatory
conservatism’ (Gleeson et al., 2004) was countered by the emergence of the global sustainability discourse arising from the World Commission on Environment and Development’s 1987 report, Our Common Future (Brundtland, 1987), the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit of 1992’s Agenda 21 (the Action Plan for Sustainable Development) and the increase in concerns about global warming (Freestone, 2012). There were also urban social movements which exercised frustration at the ills of urban consolidation (Lewis, 1999 in Gleeson et al., 2004). The political response to this was a shift towards the spatial integration of policy and regulatory functions (i.e. place management) with the potential to enhance local outcomes and accountability, as well as integrate planning policy, based on sustainability principles such as triple bottom line accounting (Gleeson et al., 2004, p. 353). The increasing sophistication of environmental and ‘locality pressure’ groups has meant segments of the public are now playing an ‘integral’ role in the planning system (Freestone, 2007, p. 94), and have the power to stop or significantly remodel development objectives (Argent, 2011).

In his quest for a ‘re-enlightenment’ of planning in Australia, Gleeson (2000) suggests that the case for planning as a discipline to become a ‘modernising, enlightening force’ in today’s society, as it was over 100 years ago, is still clear despite the ‘resurgence of free-market radicalism’ and ‘excessive rationalisation’ displayed in the closing decades of the twentieth century (Gleeson, 2000, p. 132). Increasing scarcity of resources and environmental degradation, the social issues of health, wellbeing and food security and the imperatives of climate change have all conspired to make the discipline of planning more complex and relevant than ever (Thompson & Maginn, 2012).

**International perspectives on planning in rural amenity landscapes**

Land use change and the decision making processes regarding the future of agricultural land varies considerably in trends and drivers between countries due to internal and external influences (Australian Farm Institute, 2012). While the internal drivers – location, productivity potential, ownership patterns and demographics – are unique to each region and country, the external drivers of the urbanisation process, socio-economic conditions and government policies can be viewed through a comparative
lens, focussing on how these drivers are dealt with in different countries. Amenity landscapes and rural planning issues are subject to significant scrutiny in many westernised countries and many case studies have been alluded to earlier. Making comparisons between planning approaches at a national level is challenging due to the significant complexities and nuances of national policies, cultural expectation and different legal systems. Indeed, Alterman’s six nation (Canada, US, Britain, France, Germany and Israel) comparison of farmland preservation efforts is one of the only studies of its kind seeking to elucidate lessons from westernised and industrialised countries (Alterman, 1997). The findings of that study point to the importance of containing urban growth as well as recognising that countryside preservation needs to be a goal in its own right, rather than relying on agriculture as a means of protecting farming landscapes. However, it is worthwhile providing a brief overview of the different rural planning and approaches to farmland preservation between those countries which have most influenced the Australian approach to rural land use planning.

**United States**

The last 30 years has seen a dramatic increase in concern about the environmental and social costs of urban growth and loss of ‘open space’, a term which is generally used in reference to productive farmland, wilderness areas, wetlands and wildlife corridors as well as other landscapes such as scenic or historic sites, and recreation areas (Bengston et al., 2004; Daniels & Lapping, 1996). This interest in the impacts of urban sprawl as well as slowing the conversion of farmland to other uses is evident in the large number of state and local referenda on ‘Smart growth’ and open space preservation policies (Gray, 2007).

In general, the United States planning policies are characterised by great variety and inventiveness, along with a capacity for experimentation (Alterman, 1997). The fragmentation of local and State government responsibilities has meant that most policies are locally developed, and then go through a ‘Darwinistic process’ until the successful ones are eventually recognised and shared more broadly (Alterman, 1997; Buxton et al., 2006). Planning policies and zoning controls are not generally considered to have been successful in the face of urban sprawl, with the exception of agricultural zoning in Hawaii and Oregon (Daniels & Lapping, 1996; Gosnell, Kline, Chrostek, &
The planning tools which do seem to be successful are those that influence the economics of farmland conversion, such as property or tax relief programs (Alterman, Neil, Smelser, & Baltes, 2001).

**Canada**

The governmental structure of the provinces has meant that politics plays a much larger role in land use planning, with provincial governments having more control than their counterparts in the United States. Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia are provinces where the majority of agricultural land conversions take place, and thus have developed more sophisticated land use regulations (Alterman, 1997). Ontario has a less-centralised structure, thereby allowing more freedom and discretion to local government, however, farmland protection is considered a ‘matter of provincial interest’; controlling urban sprawl and saving farmland for food production and environmental reasons is a high priority (Watkins et al., 2003). Saskatchewan, with a stronger socialist-leaning political tradition, instituted a public land banking program to buy up farmland – not to prevent farmland conversion but to lease land to farmers who lacked the capital to purchase their first farms (Bray, 1995 in Alterman, 1997). Quebec, on the other hand, with its nationalistic and often separatist leanings, has a highly interventionist program supported by local rural groups who are motivated by the possible need for self-sufficiency should Quebec be successful in secession from Canada (Reid and Yeates, 1991 in Alterman, 1997; Paquette & Domon, 2001). In Quebec, subdivisions are provincially controlled and there is a special commission which is empowered to designate zones, including ones exclusively for agricultural uses (Glenn, 1985 in Alterman, 1997; Paquette & Domon, 2003).

**The United Kingdom**

The United Kingdom has a national approach to the conversion of agricultural land to non-farming uses, as laid out in the National Planning Policy Framework within which local councils produce their own local and neighbourhood plans, reflecting the needs and priorities of their communities. Specifically, planning policies are aimed at promoting a strong rural economy, including the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses. The economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land is taken into account by planning authorities.
and, where significant development of agricultural land is necessary, areas of poorer quality should be used in preference to that of higher quality (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2012). The United Kingdom has a global reputation of preserving the countryside, despite years of conservative policies, largely due to the prevailing normative view of the desirable relationship between urban areas and their surrounding countryside ‘which are shared by dispersed actors in a finely balanced system of planning policies’ (Alterman, 1997, p. 227).

British planners have been guided by policies that place ‘less emphasis on agricultural productivity and more emphasis on the environmental value of agricultural land’ and to consider the protection of the countryside for its own sake rather than primarily for the productive value of the land (Grant, 1990, p101 in Alterman, 1997; Pretty, 2002). This concurs with studies undertaken in the High Weald (Bohnet, Potter, & Simmons, 2003) and Devon (Selfa, Fish, & Winter, 2010) which both showed that the majority of farmers placed a high value on the amenity of the landscape, were appreciative of their surroundings and recognised their contribution to the character of the countryside.

Alterman (1997) concludes that protection or preservation of farmland doesn’t result from a particular type of planning system, rather, it stems from the ‘overt redefinition of farmland preservation as countryside preservation’ (her emphasis, p237). Secondly, she notes that these national policies are planning-driven, applied effectively at local and regional levels. Thirdly, the main focus is on containing urban growth, and fourthly, and most crucial in her view, preservation policies enjoy wide and diffused support (Alterman, 1997). The principal lesson to learn from the United Kingdom is ‘the need to honestly recognise that agricultural economics may be good for agricultural production, but not for countryside preservation’ (Alterman, 1997, p. 238). Countryside preservation must be a goal in its own right to be effective. It does not happen by default.

**Summary**

This section has delved into the history of planning in Australia and the conceptualisation of rural land use planning as a separate field of planning worthy of special attention. Analyses of current land use planning processes reflect on the scalar issues of strategic planning and policy directions. However, a policy relationship between farming and planning issues barely exists at the State level in Australia despite
these issues being intertwined at the local level creating significant challenges for local and regional government authorities (Buxton & Low Choy, 2007; Sinclair & Bunker, 2007). Nevertheless, there has also been extensive commentary of the inherent complexity of planning processes, as well as some concerns expressed as to the ability of existing planning ideologies to address the needs of maintaining productive farm lands in light of the emerging issues of food production, food security, and environmental health. Despite the relatively wide variety of rural land use planning tools available or proposed, few offer satisfactory gains in terms of protection or maintenance of farming landscapes, with none providing easy solutions to the tractable challenges. In addition, planning processes are evolving and now recognise the role of public engagement in decision making. With this comes a host of new challenges for planners (Lane, 2005; Mann & Jeanneaux, 2009) which could require new skills and resourcing.

What became clear from this review of the literature around rural planning, processes and tools in Australia as well as the experiences in other countries was that farming as legitimate land use for either food production, amenity value or cultural necessity is barely on the planning ‘radar’. Farm land protection and providing certainty for farmers regarding land use is generally seen as a settlement control issue, focussing on urban and residential growth and control. It appears that changing public perceptions of the intrinsic value of farm land whilst maintaining growth limits in urban areas will help protect farm land far more than ‘tinkering’ with minimum lot sizes, providing taxation incentives, or enacting Right-to-Farm laws. In light of this, gaining an understanding of how planning processes affect farming activities and the future of farming landscapes became a central theme of this research.

**Conclusion**

This review of literature has shown that in general, rural amenity landscapes are a well studied and international phenomenon, attracting academic, political and popular interest because of their visibility as well as the immediate social, economic, cultural and environmental conundrums they encapsulate. This review has exposed 1) a lack of research exploring the perspectives of long term farmers who remain and aspire to continue farming these landscapes; 2) little discussion of the linkages between the perspectives of rural planning and agriculture; and 3) the marked absence of integration
of land use planning literature and the emerging field of food security and local food production and consumption. In addition, the above issues of rural planning and food security have barely appeared in the amenity landscape literature, despite the rise in agri-tourism and interest in local food consumption.

Many of the studies of rural land use and agricultural activities in general rely on census data, demographic and economic statistics. However, this data generally does not reflect the scale of small farm production, local food sales and individual rural property land use change. Research at smaller spatial scales fills an important gap and can validate some of the broader trends observed, as well as add depth and new dimensions to the generalised assumptions in this widely-acknowledged as complex and heterogenous field. Further, the dearth of qualitative social science studies exploring the experiences and perspectives of the existing farming communities in these changing landscapes is also apparent. These obvious gaps in the literature helped determine the research questions as discussed in Chapter 1 as well as the methodology and research approach which is discussed in the next chapter.
“Into my heart on air that kills
From yon far country blows:
What are those blue remembered hills
What spires, what farms are those?
That is the land of lost content,
I see it shining plain,
The happy highways where I went
and cannot come again.”

A.E. Housman (1896)

Chapter 3 – Methodology

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to explain the research design including choice of research methodology, data collection process, method of analysis and my role as the researcher. The rationale for the case study approach is discussed here, however, the details and description of the case study are provided in Chapter 4. The research data was derived from a variety of sources, including interviews with local residents and agency representatives, participation in and observation of public meetings and workshops, field observations, opportunistic encounters and review and analysis of secondary documents such as government reports and legislation.

My research problem and subsequent questions focused on exploring the different perspectives about the future of farming, with the intent to synthesise the views and knowledge of some of the people directly involved in shaping this landscape to gain a better understanding of the drivers and consequences of land use changes. Therefore a research approach was required that enabled the nuances and complexity of spatial and temporal attributes and personal reactions and experiences to be revealed. To obtain insight into the myriad of influences working within this landscape and to understand the relationship between the different actors and their social, political and physical realities, a constructivist approach, grounded in a case study or a particular group of players (Yin, 2010) was selected as the most appropriate research method to follow.
There was already a significant amount of statistical data available about demographics, general agricultural production and natural resource management in the region, which provides important historical and contextual information about land use and societal change (Barr, 2005, 2012; Barr & Karunaratne, 2002; Minato, Curtis, & Allan, 2010). What was lacking is an understanding of the individual perceptions, circumstances and aspirations of farmers and local government actors who are intrinsic to landscape-scale changes. An approach was needed that enabled the particular stories and the voices of people living in this amenity landscape to be told, then analysed and considered through the lens of agriculture and planning decisions and potential subsequent impacts on future community sustainability.

While the bulk of the data analysis was based on interviews, document analysis and observation of public forums were also used to add to the depth, validity and breadth to my understanding of the relationship between farming, land use planning and landscape change. The analysis of the qualitative data derived from the interviews followed an inductive, interpretive approach. This required using a systematic process of coding and categorising the data according to emerging topics and themes. Potential frameworks were then constructed and assessed against existing theoretical frameworks and secondary data to arrive at my theoretical constructs of the role of farming and its future in amenity landscapes. The research process undertaken is depicted in Figure 4.

**Philosophical foundations**

As a geographer, rural land owner, natural resource manager, local activist and mature-aged student, my worldview has had a profound influence on the research questions and my methodological choices in this study. The desire to understand the changes which were driving and affecting the perspectives and decisions of farmers, local government and state government stems from a holistic and pluralistic view of the human-land relationship, intrinsic to the discipline of rural geography. Thus my ontological approach (my understanding of reality) comes from a grounding in the human response to nature, recognising that multiple and intangible realities exist. This approach has influenced the overall paradigm or interpretive framework of this study, guiding ‘a set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 13). My role as a researcher and the effect of ‘self” in the research process is described later in this chapter.
My epistemological position (my way of knowing) in relation to the research ‘problem’ also influenced the choice of methodological approaches. This research was aimed at creating a deeper understanding of the perspectives, influences and reactions of farmers as creators and custodians of a landscape undergoing change. An important driver for this study was to bring out the voices and experiences of the farming community in relation to their landscape, community and the governance processes of which they are a part. I also wanted to compare and contrast these perspectives with those in positions of power and influence, as well as those who interacted with farmers on a regular basis about landscape and farm management issues.

**Figure 4: The Research Process**

![Diagram of the research process](image)
The epistemological perspective taken in this research was based on a belief that knowledge about the role of individuals in landscape change is a product of the interactions and relationships between people engaged in, and making decisions about, land uses. As a geographer, my beliefs stem from the connection between people as individuals and their surrounding landscape as a physical collective, and the awareness that everyone approaches and values this relationship differently. There is no clear cut objectivity and there are multiple realities. This made the choice of an interpretivist-constructivist approach to the issue a natural one. This approach takes the view that the world is constructed, interpreted and experienced by people in their interactions with each other and the world around them (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). The methodology followed in this research is described in the next section. The relationship between epistemology and methodology and how this builds knowledge is shown in Figure 5.

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 5: Relationship between Epistemology, Methodology and Method**

(adapted from Carter & Little, 2007)
Qualitative research

As in any research, it is important that the research objectives inform the structuring of the methodology. This research study explored the perspectives and experiences of a broad array of people to gain a better understanding of rural land use and is concerned with questions of ‘how’ and ‘why’ rather than ‘how often’ or ‘how much’. The intent of this research was also to draw realistic conclusions, so a naturalistic approach was needed rather than one which was manipulative, obtrusive or controlling (Neuman, 2006). Thus, qualitative research techniques which incorporate a constructivist paradigm and emphasise the meanings that individual actors give to social interactions were followed (Walter, 2006).

Constructivism offers researchers ‘an opportunity to examine in detail the labyrinth of human experience as people live and interact within their social worlds.’ (Appleton & King, 2002, p. 642) A constructivist approach acknowledges plurality and allows flexibility in the research process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This is seen as important when researching responses to social, economic, environmental and personal change from individual perspectives (Appleton & King, 2002). By understanding the variety of constructions of people’s lives and attempting to achieve some consensus of meaning, a constructivist paradigm enables new explanations to emerge, benefiting from experience and the increase in information gained over time (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

This research was aimed at understanding various individuals’ motives and interpretations of their world – their farm businesses, their landscapes and their responsibilities with regard to agricultural production, aspirations for future generations and the community, which could give meaning to reality, events and phenomena through sustained and ‘complex processes of social interaction’ (Schwandt, 2007, p. 13)

Taking this approach made it possible to create multiple perspectives from the same data, ‘multiple knowledges’, and a range of views on the issues (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 113).

Constructivism has grown out of the debate about the philosophical paradigms that underpin the nature of research inquiry (Appleton & King, 1997). It supports a relativist ontology with a view that ‘beliefs and principles, particularly evaluative ones, have no universal or timeless validity but are valid only for the age in which, or the social group or individual person by which, they are held’ (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.
Constructivists recognize that it may be impossible to achieve a single explanation for complex phenomena. Therefore, an attempt is made to illustrate each substantial viewpoint separately, recognising that others may hold very different beliefs from the researcher's own. It is the articulation of these differences, as well as a description of the breadth and depth of the data, which increases the rigour and validity of the study. This is discussed further at the end of this chapter.

Epistemologically, the constructivist researcher must take a subjective approach in the examination of the phenomena under investigation and this will involve a close interaction between the researcher and the participant so that ‘the findings are literally created’ (Appleton & King, 2002, p. 644). Unlike the positivist and post-positivist paradigms, ontology and epistemology are interwoven as constructivists believe that it is impossible to consider one without the other (Appleton & King, 1997). This means that the researcher must interact with study participants throughout the research process to access the multiple views of reality that may exist.

Since the constructivist paradigm embraces the interaction between the researcher and the participants and a multiplicity of viewpoints, the role of the researcher is fundamental to the methodology as well as the research methods. This aspect is discussed next.

The role of the researcher

One of the challenges in interpretive styles of research is ensuring preservation of the participant’s meanings while being aware of personal and professional influences that could permeate the handling of the research questions, data collection and analysis (Sword, 1999).

I am acutely aware that my own experiences and perceptions of this landscape which I consider my home have shaped my epistemological stance and my role as a researcher. This research dealt with issues that were an intrinsic part of my social and professional interactions and geographical fabric. This not only gave me a priori familiarity with relevant issues but also enhanced my ability to make sense of the data. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990, pp. 41-42), this ‘theoretical sensitivity’ is important for gaining insights into the subtleties of the meaning of data and is essential for the development of a theory that is ‘grounded, conceptually dense and well integrated’.
However, it is also noted that prior experience and knowledge can block attempts to think imaginatively about interpretive theories that may underlay the situation being studied (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Being aware of this and establishing a process to limit this from occurring is an important part of ensuring rigour in the research and is discussed at the end of this chapter.

As I was building theory through the collection of data from a variety of sources and incorporating it into my construction, my data collection and overall research approach could be said to encapsulate the technique of ‘bricolage’ or quilt maker. The concept of bricolage refers to improvising by drawing on diverse materials and using them to accomplish a pragmatic task (Neuman, 2006). The issues in this study were local and topical, being debated and discussed in my everyday world, in newspapers, on the radio, in community meetings, at community gatherings and in coffee shops. This created multiple pieces of cloth consisting of opinions, ideas and perspectives which I was able to stitch together with the threads of my research, creating a complex quilt of ideas, facts, experiences and concepts which make up this study.

This demanded a level of research self-consciousness and awareness of the numerous contexts in which I was operating. Taking the stance of a ‘bricoleur’ allowed me to embrace the complexity, ‘combining old things in new ways, including alternative and emergent forms of data collection, transformed observer-observed relations, and reframed interviewer-interviewee interconnections’ (Patton, 2002, p. 402). Therefore, I was able to take a far more active role in shaping the ‘realities’ emerging in my research and exploring the narratives that represent them. This approach rejects deterministic views of social reality, and acts on the concept that theory is not an explanation of nature but an explanation of our relationship to nature (Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011, p. 168).

As a result of taking a more active role in the research process, I became aware of the impact of my presence. Strauss and Corbin (1998) state that the researcher must take appropriate measures to minimise the intrusion of subjectivity into analysis; however, Lincoln et al. (2011, p. 103) propose that, as researchers, ‘we must participate in the research process with our subjects to ensure we are producing knowledge that is reflective of their reality’. Hall and Callery (2001) propose that the solution is to acknowledge the inter-subjective construction of data through reflexivity. This aspect of my research is discussed later in the chapter.
Suitability of the case study

One of the advantages of the constructivist approach is the recognition of the value of the uniqueness of the setting or context being studied. It is the context-specific actions and inter-relationships that influence people’s interpretations and gives the research data its meaning (Neuman, 2006). Using the methodological approach described earlier, a case study approach was chosen to explore the social realities of a known landscape. Being able to provide detailed descriptions of local particulars was a necessary part of the validation of my interpretation in a constructivist approach. A case study enabled a complete and appropriate description, stimulated rival theories and provided the foundation to support generalisations (Flyvbjerg, 2011).

The selection of a particular case is based on a number of considerations. A common justification is that a particular case represents a typical instance, and therefore being similar to other instances, the findings can be generalised to other areas or situations. Alternatively, a unique or atypical case can expose contrasts to the norm, while other cases could be selected to test or build theory (G. Jones, 2006). For this research, the particular case study is justified as it contains significant elements typical of rural amenity landscapes (attractive landscapes, increasing rural population, growing tourist economy) while also encompassing other attributes which make it unique (stable/slightly increasing number of farms, very broad range of agricultural products, no major urban area, diverse topography and small size). Chapter 4 provides a detailed description of the case study area.

The aim of case studies is to focus on relationships and processes in a natural setting to discover inter-relationships and connections. A case study provides the opportunity to find out more than just what the outcomes are; it provides the opportunity to explain why certain outcomes might occur (G. Jones, 2006). In essence, a case study approach enables the concept of ‘sense-making’, or understanding the manner in which people make sense of the situation they are in. This includes how they frame what they see and hear, how they perceive and interpret this information and how they interpret their own actions, go about solving problems and interacting with others (Berg, 2007, p. 285). Therefore, utilising a case study that focuses on holistic description and explanation can expose the nuances of individual experiences and perspectives of a particular place (Yin, 1994).
There is debate about whether utilising a case study as a focus for the research is considered an approach or a method (Patton, 2002). There is no doubt that case studies themselves utilise various methods such as interviews, observations and field studies. The goal of this study was to reconstruct and analyse a particular geographical area from a sociological perspective. This involved the systematic gathering of enough information to permit an effective understanding of how the area operates or functions, therefore making the process align more with a method than just an approach (Yin, 1994).

The search for in-depth meaning and a desire to ‘illuminate the general by looking at the particular’ (Denscombe, 1998 in; G. Jones, 2006, p. 315) also influenced the decision to only pursue a single case, as opposed to multiple cases. The aim of the research was to uncover the relationships and interactions between the significant factors which characterise a particular situation. In this research, the complexity and paradoxes between farming as a business with personal and economic implications, and farming as a land use influencing the creation of landscapes with broad social, political and environmental implications necessitated a spatially defined study. It is sincerely hoped that the depth and richness of this study will enable others to discover in the findings elements of similarity which fit their own experiences.

There is some debate whether case studies should embrace a theory-before-research model or whether they generate theory in their own right. Yin (2003) endorses a theory-before-research model, explaining that the theory can assist in the selection of the case study, helping to specify what is being explored. However, others argue the point that case studies can be used to generate theory, thereby grounding the theory. Berg (2007, p. 285) cites Eisenhardt (1989, pp. 546-547) regarding the three major strengths of using case study data to build theory:

1. The ‘juxtaposition of contradictory or paradoxical evidence’ can generate creative insights, unfreeze thinking and produce ‘theory with less research bias than theory built from incremental studies’;

2. Because of the close connection between theory and data, it is likely that the emergent theory can be further tested and expanded by subsequent studies; and

3. The resultant theory is likely ‘to be empirically valid’ because a level of validation is performed implicitly by constant comparison, questioning the data
from the start of the process. ‘This closeness can lead to an intimate sense of things… that often produces theory which closely mirrors reality’.

In this way, theory is uncovered and informed as a consequence of the data collection and interpretation throughout the research, thereby assisting in the construction of theory (Berg, 2007). This research aimed to develop theory from the perspective and experiences of stakeholders of the landscape; therefore the case study was used to build a theory of the role of farming as a critical link in the development and maintenance of a rural amenity landscape.

**Data collection**

As this was interpretive and constructivist research, the data collection methods required accessing several different data sources. While the main source of data was through qualitative data derived from participant interviews (discussed in more detail in the next section), other data sources in terms of participation and observation of public forums and analysis of documentation were also important in developing and furthering my understanding of relationships and insight into the drivers of change in these landscapes.

Gathering the perspectives of farmers and planners through semi-structured interviews regarding farming and land use change was the central purpose of the data collection process and this occurred over a period of time during the evolution of the study. A timeline of the research process, including data collection is provided in Table 3.

There were two types of field observations; the first was participation in Public Workshops organised by the Indigo Shire as part of the community engagement process around the development of the Draft Rural Land Use Strategy. The second type of field observation included participation in community events such as Farmers’ Markets, general Council meetings held on a regular basis in local towns, Landcare events involving farmers, and my driving and cycling through various parts of the Shire observing landscape change. The field observations are discussed in more detail below and are shown in Table 5.
### Table 3: Timeline of Research Process

Items in **bold** denote activities pertaining to this research project  
Items in *italics* denote activities organised by Indigo Shire Council (ISC)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td><strong>September</strong> – Rural Landscapes Steering Committee established (ISC &amp; community)**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 2008 | **February** – Rural Landscapes Steering Committee meets**  
**May** – Rural Landscapes Steering Committee runs bus trip through Shire for Councillors – complexity of issues is discussed**  
**July** – PhD study commences  
**September** – Rural Land Use Strategy – Options and Opportunities discussion paper released  
**October** – Rural Land Use Strategy Workshops: Tangambalanga, Rutherglen, Beechworth** |
| 2009 | **April** – Rural Land Use Strategy Workshops: Barnawartha, Yackandandah, Wahgunyah**  
**June** – Rural Landscapes Steering Committee meets & provides input to PhD research project  
**July** – Ethics approval received for data collection  
**August** – Interviews: Farmers (dairy & horticulture)  
**September** – Interviews: Farmers (dairy & horticulture)  
**October** – Initial coding and conceptualising commences** |
| 2010 | **January** – Rural Land Use Strategy Workshops: Chiltern, Wooragee, Kiewa, Stanley**  
**January** – Synthesis of initial codes and categories to refine directions & identify gaps, additional  
**February** – Interviews: Farmers (broad-acre, viticulture)  
**March** – Interviews: Farmers (broad-acre, dairy, viticulture)  
**October & November** – Interviews: Agency staff, Shire staff, Councillors** |
| 2011 | **January** – Code & re-categorise data based on reflection of initial synthesis & subsequent data  
**March** – *draft Rural Land Use Strategy approved in principle by ISC*  
**April** – Shire staff interviews completed  
**November** – Complete initial draft of results** |
| 2012 | **March** – Complete chapter for book: Food Security in Australia based on research results  
**June** – Present paper on planning issues in amenity landscapes to ISSRM annual conference  
**November** – Present conclusions and recommendations from research to public forum on Food Security (includes local government and State government representatives)** |
Secondary data included multidisciplinary literature about planning, agriculture, food and landscape values, at both strategic and implementation levels. This included documents from local government such as Council approved documents, draft strategies, Council Meeting agenda papers and Minutes, community surveys, land use planning documents and strategies, legislation, information on the Council website and consultancy reports. Documentation from state government agencies relevant to rural planning, agricultural production in North East Victoria, rural and regional community growth, and future farming and land use issues was accessed and contributed to my understanding of the political context of the issues. I attended planning workshops and seminars related to rural land use change, future of farming, food production and community development and collected anecdotal information and informal opinions from local politicians and community members through community meetings, workshops, conferences and the local media (newspapers, newsletters, internet sources). This information was collected during and following the interview phase as some of the local government planning issues were being debated concurrently and provided additional insights and perspectives to the emerging themes of my analysis. In addition, some of these issues (such as land ownership, the future of farms and food production) were being publicly debated at State and federal levels, so were a significant part of the discussion with the study participants. Therefore, both general and specific documentary material was collected throughout this research to gain insight into the complexity of the land use change issues relating to the study. Table 4 provides a list of the published documentation directly relevant to the study of land use change in Indigo Shire. Further background information about the Shire is presented in Chapter 4.
Table 4: Published secondary data directly related to the case study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local government land use planning documents:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Draft Rural Land Use Strategy – Issues and Opportunities paper (October 2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigo Shire Planning Scheme Review (2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipal Strategic Statement – Indigo Shire Planning Scheme (2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classified National Trust Landscapes Report (1998)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other Local Government documents:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indigo Shire Council Plan 2012-2016 (2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigo Shire Rating Strategy (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigo Shire Environment Strategy (2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Plan - Beechworth Farmer’s Market (2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding Climate Change Impacts – North East Victoria (2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigo Shire Community Profile (2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigo Informer - Quarterly Community Newsletter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State government and other state-wide agency documents:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Climate Change in North East Victoria – Socio-economic resilience plan (February 2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North East Regional Catchment Strategy (2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ready for Tomorrow - Regional Blueprint for Regional and Rural Victoria (2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State-wide Guide to property values (2010)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Field observations – Targeted public workshops

In 2008, Indigo Shire Council began the process of developing a Rural Land Use Strategy (RLUS) to address rural planning issues in Indigo Shire (see Chapter 4 for further details). A key component of the development of the Strategy was public consultation and engagement. Three community workshops were held in early September, 2008 to ‘ascertain the issues confronting rural land and opportunities for rural land’ (Indigo Shire Council, 2008c). I attended each of the sessions in Tangambalanga, Rutherglen and Beechworth. Facilitated by the consulting group undertaking the development of the RLUS on behalf of the Council, they were aimed at
collecting ideas and issues and identifying ‘hot spots’ or trigger points in rural land use planning. As an observer, I made written notes of the issues raised by the participants in the Workshops. As these Workshops occurred during the early stages of my research project, it was a good opportunity to obtain a glimpse of the breadth of issues that were of concern to the different communities. I then typed up these notes and provided a copy of them to the consultants and the Shire planning staff who were at the Workshops. This was done to maintain the sense of validity of the notes as being my perception of the discussion, but available on the public record as part of the community consultation process.

In April 2009, a further three Public Workshops were held in Wahgunyah, Yackandandah and Barnawartha to explain the draft Rural Land Use Strategy that had been prepared and ‘to offer community members an opportunity to provide input into the Strategy.’ (Indigo Shire Council, 2009) I also attended each of these workshops and again took notes which I shared with the Council planning staff for the same purpose as before.

The Shire held four more workshops in Chiltern, Wooragee, Stanley and Kiewa in late January and early February 2010 to present the final draft Strategy and to seek further public submissions on the Phase 4 Report. I attended two of these workshops and again took notes. These last two rounds of workshops provided the opportunity for me to seek additional participants to interview or to catch up with people I had already interviewed.

These notes were then used to corroborate or refute the conclusions I was drawing as I analysed my data. When taking notes at the meetings, I attempted to capture the tone and sense of agreement or otherwise with the comments made. This assisted me in my analysis to better understand what issues or viewpoints were common and which stood as outliers.

**General field observations**

Being a resident of the Shire and having worked on projects involving local landholders, I had a relatively good knowledge of the geography and social characteristics of the Shire. However, at the commencement of the research, I began to see the landscape in a different light, noticing where farming properties had changed hands or were changing enterprises or where land appeared to be switching from
farming to residential use. I became much more aware of the plethora of ‘For Sale’ signs along roadsides.

My ongoing volunteer community involvement meant that I was interacting with a wide spectrum of rural land managers, including full time and part time farmers, rural businessmen, rural ‘lifestyle’ residents as well as Councillors and local and state government staff involved in land management issues. This meant I had numerous opportunities to discuss and debate the issues of rural land use change and the future of farming. While these conversations were not formally analysed, they provided interesting and continual insights that helped me to conceptualise the themes arising from my analysis. This was particularly applicable to the issues about ageing farmers, superannuation and the sale-ability of land. Many locals were aware of my research, were interested in my findings and keen to share their own opinions about the issues.

Table 5: Field observations – My participation in public/community activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bus tour of the Shire conducted by the Council’s planning officers for new Councillors and the Rural Landscapes Steering Committee</td>
<td>May 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scoping Workshops for draft Indigo Shire Rural Land Use Strategy (8)</td>
<td>2008 - 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigo Shire Rural Landscapes Steering Committee meetings (2)</td>
<td>2008 &amp; 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Farms Task Force Workshop (DPCD) Wangaratta</td>
<td>May 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural Futures Workshop (DPI) Glenrowan</td>
<td>May 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Rural Planning Conference (DPCD) Shepparton &amp; Ballarat</td>
<td>2009 &amp; 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Regimes and Food Security (ASSA) Canberra</td>
<td>December 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Farmers’ Markets and Farm Field Days (Soil Health, Carbon farming, Grazing hillsides, Natural Sequence farming, etc)</td>
<td>2008 – 2010</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interviews

The main form of data collection for this research came from qualitative semi-structured interviews conducted between 2009 and 2011 with farmers, local and State government staff, Councillors and private agri-business advisors as shown in Table 6. Study participants were identified through purposive sampling and snowball sampling. It was not intended that the participants chosen would be representative of the population,
rather that as a stratified sample I was able to select a particular coverage of industries and locations, as discussed below, to achieve a diversity of perspectives according to my criteria. The purpose was to obtain a deeper understanding of particular activities and situations (Neuman, 2006). Snowball sampling was undertaken once the data collection process had started and following preliminary data analysis to obtain additional perspectives and participants with a variety of experiences.

In most cases, people were very open about their own views on the future of farming and the views of people to whom they directed me. Again, because of the local public discourse about land use change and farming occurring concurrently with my research, people did not hesitate to communicate their views to me. As the interviews were conducted over a period of many months, I was able to assess the perspectives of the participants and adjust decisions about whom to interview next to obtain a balance of perspectives. This approach is acceptable in exploratory research where the aim is to investigate ‘how’ and ‘why’ perspectives are formed and what influences them, rather than how many perspectives exist and how many people hold those perspectives (Berg, 2007; Walter, 2006). Therefore, the farmers interviewed were not representative of all the farmers of Indigo Shire, but they did represent a spectrum of food and fibre producers concerned with the future of their industry and local land use planning issues.

I deliberately selected individuals who were active, full time commercial farmers currently producing food and fibre in the Shire, as well as local government officials, Councillors, State government agency staff and external advisors directly involved in agricultural and planning issues. I also deliberately excluded people whom had made their views clearly known in the media, or were the most vocal at the public workshops I attended. I also chose not to include obvious part-time or hobby farmers in this study, even though it is recognised that they contribute to the food and fibre production in the Shire and certainly contribute to landscape aesthetics. My decision was based on a desire to contain the study parameters to a particular ‘type’ of farming practice, i.e. the traditional full time farmer who had been on the property a considerable length of time. I considered these farmers to have contributed to the creation of the rural agricultural landscape and could be the most potentially affected by recent land use changes. In addition, it appeared that this sector of the rural community had been largely neglected in the literature on amenity migration and landscape scale change. Finally, I wanted to respond to the catch-cry that ‘the farmer’s voice is never heard’ in the din of rural
lifestyle property issues. This study was a chance to give the farmers a voice. Details about the interview process are provided in the following section.

**Selection of interviewees**

Two main groups of people are involved in farming and rural land use change in Indigo Shire: the private local food and fibre producers (farmers) and those people working in local government, State government and as farm business advisors in the Shire. Table 6 summarises these two groups.

**Table 6: Interviewees by Sector**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Number of people interviewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Farmers</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dairy</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horticulture (including wine grapes and beekeeping)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broad acre / cropping</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grazing (beef and sheep/lamb)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total farmers</strong></td>
<td><strong>35</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agency</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Councillors</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planners (Local and State government)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other local government senior staff</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agri-business consultants</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total agency</strong></td>
<td><strong>13</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>48</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Farmers**

Farmers selected for interviewing were primary producers, actively involved in a food or fibre business based on their property, located in Indigo Shire. While most considered themselves full time farmers, some were also involved in other businesses, both on and off the farm. In order to obtain a balanced approach, I sought farmers who had been actively engaged in rural land use issues as well as those who had not but who were known to other farmers as having ideas and opinions about land use change. This
latter group, identified through snowball sampling, comprised just under a third of the total individuals interviewed. I also made a point of interviewing farmers from a cross-section of the agricultural industries in the Shire. The geography and climate of Indigo Shire enables a wide variety of agricultural activities to take place, with the main farming sectors including grazing (sheep, cattle and pigs), dairy, viticulture, horticulture (fruit, legumes, nuts, olives), beekeeping and cropping. (Refer to Table 15 in Chapter 4 for a list of agricultural products in the Shire). An additional criterion was that the farms were located across the geographical spread of the Shire, even though specific industries tended to be clustered in particular geographical areas as shown in Table 7. I was also seeking to involve a mixture of age groups, recognising that farmers in the area demonstrated similar demographic characteristics of the farming population across Victoria (Barr, 2012).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Number interviewed</th>
<th>dairy</th>
<th>grazing</th>
<th>horticulture</th>
<th>cropping</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kiewa Valley (east)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chiltern &amp; Rutherglen (north)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wooragee &amp; Yackandandah (central)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beechworth &amp; Stanley (south)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I obtained the names of potential interviewees through existing personal and professional networks and forums such as the Agri-Business Forum, the Indigo Shire Environmental Advisory Committee, the North East Community Reference Liaison Group and the Indigo Shire Rural Landscapes Steering Committee. I sent letters explaining the research project and seeking contacts to members of these committees as well as to government agency staff (North East Catchment Management Authority, Department of Sustainability and Environment and Department of Primary Industry) involved in rural land stewardship projects. A copy of the letter is included in Appendix 1. I also contacted the Regional Landcare Facilitators and sought their advice on farmers actively involved in rural land use issues. As described above, I attended the
initial public meetings of the Draft Indigo Shire Rural Land Use Strategy held in different communities across the Shire. At the conclusion of each of these meetings, I approached people who I thought might be interested in participating in the study. Finally, at the end of each personal interview, I asked the participant if there was anyone else they thought I should talk to, given the issues and direction of the conversation we had just completed. In this sense, the ‘snowball’ method of selecting contacts was used; however, it was not my main source of locating participants.

I was very conscious of the need to ensure that my selection of participants was not biased towards any one group, location or perspective. This was avoided by briefly explaining the purpose of my study and my interest in obtaining a range of perspectives and experiences with each potential interviewee prior to the decision being made about undertaking an interview. I sent people information about the research so they could consider whether or not they wanted to be involved before I contacted them by telephone about participating in an interview (see discussion below about conducting the interviews for further explanation). I was also acutely aware of the seasonal availability of farmers and adjusted my contact with them accordingly.

**Agency staff and Councillors**

The main groups of people who were interviewed to obtain the governance-oriented perspective on land use planning and agricultural issues in the Shire included Councillors, local and State government agency staff and agri-business advisors. In addition to contacting relevant people, I was interested in obtaining a chronological perspective, as I considered knowledge of ‘corporate history’ to be important in some of the issues around governance and community relations. The numbers of participants and their length of ‘tenure’ in the Shire are shown in Table 8.
Table 8: Local Tenure of Agency staff, Councillors and Agri-business Advisors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Length of time in current position</th>
<th>Number interviewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&lt;5 years</td>
<td>5 – 10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Councillors</td>
<td>✓✓✓✓</td>
<td>✓✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planners (Local and State government)</td>
<td>✓✓✓✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other local government senior staff</td>
<td>✓✓✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agri-business consultants</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The four Councillors selected for interviewing were chosen due to their identified interest in rural planning and farming issues, as well as obtaining a geographical spread across the Shire. Indigo Shire Councillors are not elected through a ward-based voting system, however, I was interested in gaining perspectives from the different regions of the Shire and the connections and experiences of Councillors due to their affiliation with these different regions. None of the Councillors had a strong farming background, although one was a hobby farmer, and another lived on a semi-rural property. Two of the Councillors were in their first term in office.

Indigo Shire Council has a very small planning department with only three planners and a manager, which is typical of many rural Shire offices. While there had been a Strategic Planner in place when the research started, this person moved to another job shortly afterwards and the position remained empty for the duration. The State government planners worked within the Victorian Department for Planning and Community Development and generally were responsible for planning issues across a number of local government areas but were intimately familiar with Indigo Shire.

Senior staff members with the Indigo Shire Council were selected based on their substantive roles within local government. While the majority of those interviewed had only been with the Shire a short period of time, all of them had a much longer history in local government organisations in general and were familiar with issues around governance and the rural communities.

The two agri-business consultants were included in the study towards the end of the interviewing phase to provide a third viewpoint on strategic issues. These two
individuals were chosen specifically because of work they had initiated or perspectives they had expressed around farming activities in the Shire. Both consultants were no longer working in the Shire or directly involved in those activities and spoke freely about their concerns about governance and agricultural issues.

**Initial contact, location and duration of the interview**

Potential participants were initially sent a personalised letter in which I introduced myself and provided a brief synopsis of the research (see Appendix 1). I stated that I would be making a follow up phone call to seek their involvement in the research. A few days after posting the letter, I telephoned the individual and discussed their involvement. If they agreed to participate, we arranged a time and place for the interview at this stage. Only two individuals declined to be involved, one of whom was intending to travel overseas and the other stated that they told me that they had “already had their say, and that was enough.”

Each participant was asked to determine the location of the interview because it was important that they be comfortable and that it was convenient for them. Most of the interviews with farmers took place in their own homes. One farmer was in the midst of sowing crops when I contacted him, but was very keen to be involved. As he was very busy, the interview took place in the cab of his large, fully automated tractor while sowing soybeans late one evening!

Some of the interviews with Councillors, senior staff and planners were held in the Shire offices, while others were conducted in personal residences or in coffee shops. The interviews with the agribusiness consultants were held in a local coffee shop and in a borrowed office.

The majority of interviews lasted at least an hour and in some cases extended beyond two hours as shown in Table 9. One interview went over 2.5 hours and I suggested the interview conclude as it was becoming impractical. In four cases, additional family members entered the room where the interview was taking place and became involved informally in the interview for a few minutes or up to more than half an hour. When this occurred, introductions were carried out and the purpose of the interview re-
iterated. Consent was obtained to record their comments as part of the research, with their confidentiality assured. There were no objections. The challenge in these instances was to refrain from going back over questions already covered as some the initial context was missing. However, in most cases, the unexpected voices of spouses, children, farm workers, neighbours and elderly parents provided further depth and often substantiated the perspectives of the primary participant. All but one of the interviews were digitally recorded. For the one interview that was not recorded, extensive notes were taken in short-hand, and as the participant was also running the shop-front, there were several short interruptions which allowed me to catch up and fill in my notes. I briefly went over the notes with the participant at the end of the end of the interview to make sure I had not misquoted or misconstrued any comments.

Table 9: Number and Length of Interviews per Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Completed in less than 1 hour</th>
<th>Completed in between 1 – 1 ½ hours</th>
<th>Completed in more than 1 ½ hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Farmers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Councillors</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency staff</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agribusiness advisors</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Human ethics approval process**

Social science research has an ethical-moral dimension, although different methodologies in science address the concerns differently (Neuman, 2006). The researcher has a moral and professional obligation to be ethical, and needs to consider this dimension in addition to the practical and methodological decisions of conducting research (Patton, 2002). The ethical issues involving research participants require balancing the value of advancing knowledge against the value of non-interference in the lives of others (Neuman, 2006). While there are some general codes of ethics and laws which recognise clear prohibitions in research, Charles Sturt University requires that all research involving human participants be conducted in accordance with the National Statement on the Ethical Conduct in Human Research which is issued by the National
Health and Medical Research Council. The University’s Human Research Ethics Committee requires that all research that involves human participants be approved prior to the research commencing. As part of the approval process, the purpose of the research was explained, copies of all correspondence with participants were provided and the proposed questions for the semi-structured interviews were also provided. Approval for the use of human participants was given by the Human Research Ethics Committee in March 2009: Protocol # 2009/178. A copy of the Approval Letter is provided at Appendix 2.

Interviewing can be a very powerful research tool but it can also be fraught with issues such as privacy, anonymity and informed consent (Neuman, 2006; Patton, 2002). Under the promise of confidentiality, an interview may also become a confession which is why anticipating the ethical implications of the research process is essential (Patton, 2002). Therefore it is important that the researcher adhere to some basic principles of ethical social research. Neuman (2006, p. 142) provides a list which I used as a guide in my interviewing process:

- ethical responsibility rests with the individual researcher;
- participants are not exploited for personal gain;
- informed consent is required;
- guarantees of privacy, confidentiality and anonymity are honoured;
- participants are not coerced or humiliated;
- the research method is appropriate to the topic;
- the repercussions of the research or publication of the results are anticipated;
- the sponsor who funded the research is identified;
- the details of the study design are released with the results;
- interpretations of results is consistent with the data; and
- highly methodological standards are used and accuracy is strived for.

In addition to adhering to these basic principles which incorporate the more general principles recommended by the CSU Human Research Ethics Committee, I was primarily concerned with protecting the privacy of the participants and ensuring informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality. These issues are discussed below.

The issues being investigated in this research involved local people, their properties and local events. Much of the data collected from the interviews were personal perspectives
and opinions. In some cases, there were emotionally charged opinions, or descriptions of situations which involved financial or personal losses or gains, and could be considered controversial. Indigo Shire is not a very big place and it is likely that other people would know who was involved in particular issues or carried particular opinions. In addition, local and state government staff were concerned that some of their comments might be used against them or used out of context. Anonymity and assured confidentiality therefore were very important to the data collection procedure.

**Anonymity**

Anonymity is an important part of ensuring the participant’s privacy is protected. Anonymity was achieved through replacing the names and addresses of participants with specifically coded numbers immediately after the interview was completed. The relationship between the codes and the identification of the individual was kept confidential. Careful editing of transcripts was also undertaken to remove any potentially identifiable terms or names, places or references to particular and identifiable events. When agency staff provided factual information about planning or economic development, it was substantiated with the appropriate documents and credited to the relevant organisation. I was careful not to mention who else I had interviewed when participants asked, and I did not discuss the interview process or list of interviewees in any detail with anyone other than my research supervisors.

**Confidentiality**

Confidentiality was protected in the same way as anonymity, through ensuring that information was presented in a way that participants could not be linked to specific responses. Theoretically, because the farming community in Indigo Shire is relatively small, and there are only a small number of Councillors, it may be possible to link some specific comments to particular people who are well-known for their opinions; however, every attempt was made to avoid this situation. No identifying information is provided with any of the direct quotations used, apart from the generic identification according to their role – such as farmer, Councillor, etc.

Because of the contentious nature of some land use planning situations, including financial and social hardship as a result of legislation and past political decisions, it was reiterated to each of the participants before the interview began that all personal
information and responses would be kept confidential, and that they could end the
discussion or their involvement in the research at any time with no risk or penalty.
Participants could also ask to have anything they said removed from the record of the
interview if they decided later in the interview that they do not wish to have particular
information used.

**Informed consent**

In addition to the processes outlined above, ensuring informed consent involves a
statement, usually written, which explains the purpose of the study and seeks the
voluntary agreement from participants prior to the interview process. A Consent form
was provided to each participant and the participant was asked to sign a copy of the
Consent form to acknowledge their understanding of the research process. A copy of
the Consent form is provided at Appendix 3. The information on the Consent form
adheres to the University’s Human Research Ethics Committee requirements. A
duplicate of the Consent form was given to each participant so they could follow up
with any concerns regarding their participation.

**Potential overuse of study participants and ‘engagement’
burn out**

One of the issues raised by the CSU Human Research Ethics Committee was that this
particular population of farmers could be affected by being ‘over studied’ due to several
other studies having been undertaken in the area in recent years. It was pointed out that,
because of these other research projects, some of the participants might have pre-
determined views about such research and there could be a risk of negative connotations
towards the University’s research activities. Therefore, I was prepared to describe:

- the outcomes of my research: a locally-oriented community report or story
  about land use issues from the perspective of current farmers, my thesis and
  at least one academic paper;
- how I would be sharing my results in terms of providing a report to them
  and others, including local government; and
- the degree of anonymity with which the information would be presented: no
  names or identifying remarks would be included in any publications.
As discussed earlier, I also ensured that I did not put the individuals ‘on the spot’ when making the decision to be part of the research. I believed it was easier for them to decline the offer to participate over the phone than in person. In addition, I avoided a particular small part of the Shire (Indigo Valley) where I knew farmers had recently been involved in another research project.

**Recording the interviews**

All except one interview were digitally recorded. Participants were asked at the beginning of the interview if they objected to being recorded. In the one case where the participant did not wish to be recorded, detailed notes were taken. As mentioned previously, additional notes were taken, primarily as a reminder of key points made or to identify potential issues to explore later in the interview. I also made note of any particular emotions, reactions, significant interruptions, or tangential ideas which were elicited during the conversation which later assisted in the analysis to situate the findings. These notes were also used as back up insurance in the event that the recorder broke down or background noise made it difficult to understand what was being said. This was particularly important in one interview where the participant’s husband and their farm hand came in and participated in the interview for a few minutes but their voices were not picked up clearly by the recorder, yet the context of some responses by the participant was altered significantly due to the different perspective being provided. These notes were also useful when doing the quality assurance review of those transcripts which were typed by someone unfamiliar with the local vernacular.

There were two advantages to recording the interviews. The first was that the presence of the recorder was soon forgotten and the conversation flowed quite easily and much more fluidly than it would have if I was taking notes. In the one interview which was not recorded, there were several opportune interruptions which meant I could do a quick revision and expansion of my shorthand notes, while the conversation was still fresh in my mind, before the interview resumed again. That particular interview, which lasted for an hour and a half, resulted in 26 pages of handwritten notes.

The second advantage of recording was that it enabled an absolutely accurate capture of the words and the intonations of the participant. This was important because of the relationship between the participant and the interviewer. The issue of closeness and
distance in interviewing needs to be considered in terms of methodological ideology (Yin, 2010). I knew several of the participants through previous work or in social situations. This history of personal connection could have affected my ability to be objective about the data they were providing to me. The ability to create a verbatim transcript ensured that all the detail was captured in its entirety. It also ensured that the information from these individuals was not considered more important or differently than the information received from other participants.

All interview recordings were transcribed into Microsoft Word. Less than one third of the interviews were transcribed by someone other than me, however, all were checked by me for accuracy, quality assurance and anonymity clearances. Transcripts were reviewed in conjunction with listening to the recorded interview to ensure accuracy and clarify any unusual words. My handwritten notes taken during the interview helped in this regard.

An additional advantage of transcribing the majority of the recordings myself, in parallel with the interview process, was to be able to critically evaluate my interviewing technique. As I was new to the interviewing process, listening to myself asking questions and probing was instructive and enabled my technique to improve over time.

**Interview techniques**

I undertook three interviews as part of a pilot process to test my interview guide and to practice my interviewing skills. These interviews enabled me to refine the order of the questions as I found that the answers to some questions naturally flowed into others which initially were later in the order I had listed. I also made personal notes immediately after the interview about what could be improved, both from a technical perspective as well as a self-critical one. I listened to the recordings of these pilot interviews and reflected on my interview technique before continuing with further interviews. This resulted in a slight change in order and a ‘grouping’ of questions in the interview guide, and made me much more alert to my interview style and role. In particular, I allowed more ‘silence’ time before asking the next question and encouraged further explanations or more detail in response to certain questions.

The interviews were all semi-structured, loosely following an interview guide which contained key questions and prompts around the main themes of the research. A
slightly different interview guide was used for each group of participants (farmers, Councillors, planners, senior staff and the agri-business consultants). There were minor differences in questions as some issues were not relevant to all groups. A copy of each of the interview guides is provided at Appendix 4.

The interview guide helped standardise the interview to the extent that I began with a brief introduction of my role, the purpose of the interview, how it would be carried out and the details of the confidentiality assurances. Interviews began with asking the participants about their farm, or their role in the organisation, and their background relationship with the area. The interview guide was helpful to scan as the interview progressed to ensure that major issues were covered, even though they rarely were asked and answered in the same order as printed in the guide.

The interview guides did change slightly over time as it became apparent that some questions were too general or too specific or did not elicit an insightful or new perspective. I was mindful about asking questions in a slightly different way depending on the preceding discussion. I also developed awareness over time as to which questions needed additional prompting to reveal details which could add depth and context to the discussion.

**Conducting the interview and clarifying my position**

I had conducted numerous one-on-one discussions, assessments, surveys and conversations with landholders in the past through various roles as a land management project officer, and therefore felt that I was relatively comfortable with the process of creating a constructive interview for all involved. I opened each interview in a similar manner and used the interview guide when needed as a prompt as well as to ‘formalise’ the questions or to get ‘back on track’ in the event that it appeared that the conversation was veering into less relevant areas.

However, I found it challenging at times to introduce myself and my epistemological position in the research process. This was due to the fact that I was acquainted with a few of the participants through different community activities or previous professional roles. In addition, my stance as a local landholder from a particular geographic area,
being a relatively new resident as well as having a Canadian accent, all had the potential to affect the context and direction of the conversation. Despite being upfront about my role as a student researcher, some participants still saw me as working for government, or as being a ‘greenie’ due to my background in community Landcare activities. A few participants asked me questions about government programs and Landcare activities which were un-related to the study. However, on one occasion, I found it challenging to extricate myself from the discussion about the failure of a government land management policy which was not only un-related to the research discussion but which I had not been involved in, although I was familiar with it. As this discussion occurred toward the very end of that interview, it did not have an effect on the relevant data collected from that farmer.

In some instances, I became acutely aware of the resentment and antagonism between different areas of the Shire and perceived advantages given to particular towns or areas in terms of attention from local government. Identifying myself as an owner of a mid-size farming property near the town of Chiltern helped to clarify that I had a distinctly rural perspective, although I made it clear I was not a full-time farmer.

The interview data

The interview data are actually drawn from three sources: the transcripts of the interviews, notes taken during the interviews and my own reflections directly following each interview. Analyses of the first two sources are described in greater detail below. The third source, my own reflections and observations of the interview, proved to be very useful from both a process and methodological point of view, as well as recording any strong impressions, unusual non-verbal signals or other feelings expressed by the participant which would not necessarily be reflected in the interview recording. These notes, usually done in the car a few minutes after leaving the interview, initially assisted me in reflecting on my own skills as an interviewer and where I felt I needed to improve. I typed these notes up and then referred to them during the initial analysis of the data as they provided additional context for the interpretation of some data sets. These notes were also useful in the quality checking of the transcripts as they helped remind me of particular aspects of the interview and enabled me to re-submerge myself in the interview. This process also helped in the triangulation between interviews by
separation of the data from my impressions about the data collection process (Berg, 2007; Patton, 2002).

**Data analysis**

Analysis of the interview transcripts was undertaken in light of the suggested guidelines for identifying core consistencies and groups of meanings in qualitative data (Patton, 2002). Using a thematic interpretive approach was consistent with the interpretivist/constructivist approach and development of grounded theory as it involved creating an inductive explanatory framework for the issues emerging from the data (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The data analysis took a two-staged approach, with many iterations and feedback loops being incorporated. The approach is outlined in Table 10 and utilised a systematic process of coding involving NVivo© software (QSR International, 2006) and categorising to de-contextualise and re-contextualise the data according to themes and topics.

**Table 10: The Mechanics of Coding Data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>De-contextualisation</th>
<th>Re-contextualisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• identify text segments or paragraphs</td>
<td>• review each theme data set for sub-sets of themes and further refine if necessary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• recording main themes or topics of text segment</td>
<td>• interpret the meaning of themes and sub-themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• create a master list of all themes which emerged from each data set (i.e. each interview transcript)</td>
<td>• compare between themes to ensure consistency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• refine master list into main themes and sub themes to create a manageable list</td>
<td>• create new thematic data sets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• link text segments from all transcripts to appropriate themes to create a data set for each issue</td>
<td>• compare with research questions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In reality, the process of coding the data was far from straightforward. The initial data analysis was undertaken following the completion of eight interviews and their transcription. Each text segment with each transcription was identified as relating to a theme. A list of 78 different themes emerged from this first analysis and this list is provided in Appendix 5. Text segments were then assembled into the themes, recognising that many of the themes overlapped, or were subtle variations of themes and sub-themes. There were no hard or rigid boundaries for the themes, and the “fuzzy” approach to thematic grouping paralleled the qualitative research philosophy of a more creative and flexible approach to understanding the relationship between people, their landscape and the future of farming.

An initial analysis of the thematic data sets was then undertaken to reveal the depth and breadth of issues being addressed. The results were encouraging in terms of the range of perceptions, as well as similarities and contrasts contained within this relatively small number of participants. Major and minor issues and relationships began to emerge, and natural groupings of issues became apparent.

This preliminary analysis of the first eight farmer interviews provided a brief insight into the issues emerging from the data and gave me confidence to continue with the interview process and guide. The rest of the farmer interviews were then undertaken, transcribed and coded. A new list of themes emerged as more interviews were completed and additional themes and sub-themes were added or combined. A similar process was applied to the interviews with agency staff and Councillors. The complete list of themes is provided in Appendix 6.

The advantages of using the NVivo © software to code and categorise data were significant. There were no limitations on the number of themes and it was easy to assign multiple themes to a particularly complex segment of text. Whole paragraphs or complete responses were used rather than segments of a response to ensure the context of the discussion was not lost. Memos within NVivo © which were coded to key text segments were used to highlight key themes emerging in each thematic data set, to capture significant relationships or overlaps with other themes, or my own reflections on the data at the time of coding. In addition, the observations/field notes from the public workshops which formed part of the consultation process of the draft Rural Land Use Strategy were also coded to relate to themes in both the ‘farmer’ list and the ‘agency’ list.
Finally, each transcript was reviewed and assessed against the assigned thematic categories to ensure that these themes were aligned with the overall ‘spirit and intent’ of the conversation of the interview as well as my recollections of it through my notes and reflections. This final triangulation provided an opportunity for me to visualise the contribution of the individual to the overall data collection process, and ensure the process respected this input as accurately as possible.

**Theory construction**

The thematic categories developed through the data analysis enabled me to organise the data so that I could retrieve and clump text relating to a particular theme, question or concept. This slow amalgamation of data set the stage for the analysis of the themes, creating the framework for theory construction. However, it is also important to acknowledge that the issue of rural land use change and the question of the future of farming is not an issue bereft of theories or conceptual frameworks. Therefore, the research questions, my initial propositions, key concepts and analysis of the literature undertaken in the early stages of the research project also influenced the generation of my thematic categories. Thus the analysis and results are grounded in the data derived from the interviews as described above.

I was aware of the influences of prior theories, in particular the influences of counterurbanisation on rural landholdings and the almost pre-deterministic ‘cycle of conversion’ (Daniels & Bowers, 1997). However, I made the conscious effort to define my themes prior to interpreting them. Developing the themes and the thematic data sets was the foundation of the theory construction phase of the research. The initial categories identified in the original data became abstract themes which developed over time to become potential theoretical concepts. The connections between themes and sub-themes also became important fields to explore, and the major groupings of conceptual themes outlined in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 arose from the analysis of the relationships between themes.
Reflexivity

Reflexivity, which addresses the influence of investigator-participant interactions on the research process, has the potential to increase the validity of the findings in grounded theory and constructivist studies (W. Hall & Callery, 2001). As a process of critical self-reflection of biases and theoretical dispositions (Sword, 1999), reflexivity helped me understand my approach to the entire research process, including the choice of methods and the interpretation of the data. Incorporating reflexivity into my methodology was an important aspect of establishing the context to assist others in understanding my interpretation of the data. I was wary that the nature of this research could be criticised as “nothing more than a self-serving ideology” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 261).

The knowledge that I have collected and constructed through my research will be different than what another researcher conducting the same study might find. I have been an ‘active creator’ in my search for knowledge about this landscape and therefore it was important for me to constantly reflect on my role in the research (Carter & Little, 2007). Being part of the ‘setting, context and social phenomenon’ that I was studying due to my connections to the community as well as to the landscape, made reflexivity an important part of my methodology ‘toolkit’ (Schwandt, 2007). I kept a journal of my observations and reflections which I wrote in following each interview. In addition, while I was coding and re-coding the data, I used NVivo© Memos and other hand notes to capture tangential thoughts and inferences which arose. These were referred to during the conceptual construction and eventual analysis of the data.

Judgements about the significance of the findings are inevitably connected to the researcher’s credibility, competence, thoroughness and integrity (Patton, 2002), and thus the validity of the research (see discussion at the end of the chapter). The sensitivity of the researcher to these issues and transparency in the influence they may have had is an important factor in interpreting the findings arising from the data. In this study, clarifying and understanding the relationship between the participants in the study and my own involvement in the issues was vitally important as we were all ‘social actors’ within the research setting (Yin, 2010).

By self-questioning and seeking self-understanding of my role in the research, it was necessary to be attentive and conscious of my cultural, political, social and ideological
perspectives as well as the voices of the participants and those to whom I would be sharing the results of my research. This created a ‘reflexive triangulation’ (Patton, 2002, p. 66) which helped me to both look outwards and inwards in understanding my role and the context of the research as illustrated in Figure 6. This shows the ‘others’ in the research equation – the participants in my study and the audience – in this case the broader community and specifically local decision makers such as local government and regional agencies. I was acutely conscious of the lens through which I perceived ‘others’ as well as how I could be viewed by the ‘others’.

![Figure 6: My Reflexive Triangulation](image)

Source: adapted from Patton (2002)

There are numerous influences on the reflexive lens of the researcher, including the purpose and expectations of the research itself. Gubrium and Holstein (1998) suggest that cultural orientation, physical attributes, motivation and prior interests, social and political networks all add context to the relationship between the data and the circumstances of the data collection. This was especially true in this situation as the research ‘problem’ was intimately related to my landscape and community.

I have held numerous professional and volunteer roles in the region, as well as being a rural landholder, so was very familiar with the issues around local landscape change,
local community engagement and local government. As a result, the data, my observations and perceptions are attributable to a large number of sources and contexts. I took a creative approach to this research, attempting to ensure it was situationally responsive and appropriate. I was also conscious that it needed to be credible to potential users in the event that the research could open up new understandings of the complexity of landscape change and the role of individual choices in landscape change.

**Credibility and rigour**

Establishing credibility is an important aspect of undertaking qualitative research. This is dependent upon three distinct but related elements: utilising rigorous methods, the credibility of the researcher and the philosophical belief in the value of qualitative inquiry (Patton, 2002, p. 552). These are discussed below.

There are divergent viewpoints about the criteria for rigour between the constructivist paradigm and the more traditional grounded theory approaches. In constructivism, issues of trustworthiness and credibility are paramount, and could be considered to replace the post-positivist criteria of validity, reliability and objectivity which are seen by some researchers as acquiescing to a quantitative paradigm and not pertinent to qualitative inquiry (Morse, Barrett, Maria, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). Guba and Lincoln (1982) suggest using ‘credibility’, ‘dependability’, ‘confirmability’ and ‘transferability’ as aspects of trustworthiness. These are discussed below.

Ultimately, research is only as good as the investigator (Morse et al., 2002). It is the researcher’s creativity, sensitivity, flexibility and skill that determines the reliability and validity of the research as it is developed. Credibility in this research comes from an open and honest description of my own role in this research as well as a thorough explanation of the research method. No two researchers will code or categorise the data in the same way and produce the same result. In addition, credibility is an important issue in data analysis, and drawing valid conclusions from the data is vital.

As in all qualitative research, differences in philosophical stances and individual styles will lead them to perceive and present the phenomenon each in their own way (Patton, 2002, p. 562). The research approach outlined in detail in this chapter is also an indicator of credibility and research rigour.
Dependability can be ascertained by examining the methodology and analytical decisions that were made during the data collection and interpretation process. This requires clarifying that the interpretations and recommendations are actually supported by the data. A systematic and complete documentation of the outcomes of the data analysis is provided (Chapters 5, 6 and 7), and the Discussion (Chapter 8) refers directly to conclusions reached in the data analysis. Due to issues of confidentiality, it is not possible to include the interview transcripts; however, care has been taken to use actual quotes from the transcripts in the text wherever possible as examples of findings. All quotes are clearly identified and could easily be tracked back to the relevant transcript if required.

Confirmability can encompass the use of triangulation, which in this study involved the triangulation of data sources. Comparing and cross-checking the consistency of information included comparing observations (such as in the public forums and community workshops) with interviews; comparing what was said in public (at community meetings, Council meetings and in the media) with the data collected; comparing the perspectives of people from different sectors, in different agencies, or different roles; and comparing interpretations and conclusions with other studies, such as the public submissions to the Future Farms Taskforce (Department of Planning and Community Development, 2009b).

Transferability deals with the degree of congruence between the research outcomes in question and their applicability to another context. One of the challenges of a constructivist approach is the ability to reconcile ‘relativism’ (as discussed above) with the desire to apply findings to other similar groups, situations or case studies. The range of views that can emerge may not be easily funnelled into an explanatory theory and applied to other groups. Guba and Lincoln (1981), however, suggest that this can be overcome when practitioners in other contexts decide the findings of a study really fit their own experiences. Case studies are particularly challenging in this regard, unless they depict some characteristics which are common enough to be transferable. Patton (2002, p. 584) refers to this as the ability to extrapolate findings to other situations, suggesting that extrapolations are ‘logical, thoughtful, case derived, and problem-oriented rather than statistical and probabilistic’.

This research has involved information-rich sampling, aiming to produce relevant information that is targeted to specific concerns about the present as well as the future.
The outcomes of this research can inform our understanding of the opportunities and challenges facing agricultural producers in rural amenity landscapes. In particular, this research has gone beyond the studies of small farms as well as the investigations of amenity migration, and looked at the integration of agriculture, planning and amenity landscapes in the context of managing the future of these landscapes.

Summary

This chapter has explained the philosophical foundations of my research approach, my choice of methodology and has described my research methods. By ‘unpacking’ the theoretical underpinnings of my research, I have attempted to provide a clear and honest explanation of what, why and how I undertook this research. It is acknowledged that assuring rigour and credibility in qualitative research is important, not only to the individual research project but to the credibility of qualitative research processes in general (Patton, 2002). This chapter has also provided me, the researcher, with an opportunity to situate myself within this research and be transparent about how I am involved in and have influenced the research process.

The next chapter addresses the case study site of Indigo Shire. While this description could have been included within the discussion of the research methodology, due to the need to explain a number of influences and changes occurring in the Shire which are important to the context and the findings of this study, a separate chapter has been created.
“One of the pleasantest of provincial towns. Almost surrounded by small ranges of hills, it presents some unique and pretty bits of landscape ... in winter it would be difficult to find a plesanter retreat for a week’s holiday”.

J. L. Irving, describing Chiltern, North East Victoria in 1898

Chapter 4 – Case Study: Indigo Shire

Introduction

This chapter describes the case study area, its demographics, economy and land tenure. Indigo Shire was chosen as the case study of an amenity landscapes for a number of reasons that are outlined in Chapter 1. These are expanded upon here. Of primary importance in using a particular area to investigate the challenges and opportunities related to farming in an amenity landscape, is the need to ensure the experiences and perspectives can be applied universally, and are relevant to other situations. Through the descriptions provided in this chapter, it is shown that Indigo Shire can be considered a typical example of a traditional agrarian amenity landscape undergoing change due to increasing population pressures. By limiting the study to a single rural Shire (or study site), it is possible to simplify the context-specific jurisdictional issues mentioned in Chapter 3. Some background information is also presented on the predicted effects of climate change on the region as this has the potential to impact on the future options for land use.

This overview of the social history, current economic circumstances, farming activities and land ownership patterns provides the necessary physical and social context for the presentation of data in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, and enables the interpretation of the data in Chapter 8 to be grounded in a geographical and political landscape.
Physical geography

Indigo Shire is a small rural shire located in North East Victoria, approximately 270 kilometres north east of Melbourne and 500 kilometres south west of Sydney. It encompasses an area of 2,044 km$^2$ (204,400 hectares), stretching from the inland slopes of the Great Dividing Range to the Murray River floodplain and includes parts of the Kiewa and Mitta Mitta River valleys (Indigo Shire Council, 2008b). The Shire adjoins the municipalities of Wodonga, Towong, Alpine, Wangaratta and Moira and also has a substantial border with New South Wales along the Murray River. The Hume Highway which connects Melbourne to Sydney traverses the Shire as do the associated rail connections.

The Shire has a temperate Mediterranean-style climate with long, hot summers and relatively short, cold winters (Indigo Shire Council, 2011b). Warm temperatures and low rainfall can create difficult conditions for farming and horticulture in some areas, but are attractive for tourism and an outdoor lifestyle. Figure 7 and Figure 8 show the variation in rainfall and temperature across North East Victoria (Marsden Jacob Associates, 2012). A significant portion of the northern region of the Shire (Rutherglen and district) is in the hotter and drier part of the region.

The Shire also has a varied topography and associated weather patterns, with the township of Stanley, just south of Beechworth, at an elevation of 734m above sea level and Rutherglen at 169m above sea level (Indigo Shire Council, 2011b). The physical geography of the Shire includes highly contrasting landscapes, from flat sand and clay plains to dry granitic foothills to the rich loamy river valley soils to steep and thick eucalypt forests (refer to Appendix 7 – Soil and Landforms of Indigo Shire). Three major landforms intersect within the Shire: the foothills of the Great Dividing Range, the Western Plains and the Murray River floodplain. This combination of geological and hydrological settings creates particularly diverse flora and fauna assemblages, as well as a wealth of environmental niches, much of which has been protected in national parks (Parks Victoria, 2008). The diversity in topography, climate and vegetation also adds significantly to the overall attractiveness of the landscape.
nb: this map shows the lowest rainfall occurring in the northwestern area of the map and the highest rainfall in the central south. Indigo Shire is outlined.

Figure 7: Average Annual Rainfall, North East Victoria

Source: CSIRO, 2008 in Marsden Jacob Associates (2012)

nb: this map shows the hottest temperatures occurring in the northwestern area of the map and the coolest temperatures in the central south area. Indigo Shire is outlined.

Figure 8: Average Daily Temperature, North East Victoria

Source: CSIRO, 2008 in Marsden Jacob Associates (2012)
Just over 30% of the Shire is Crown land, which includes the Chiltern – Mt Pilot National Park, Beechworth Historic Park, State forests, Scenic Reserves and other government or Council owned properties. These public lands support important recreational, biodiversity protection and aesthetic values and contribute significantly to the attractiveness of the landscapes of the Shire. However, these large expanses of native vegetation are also vulnerable to bushfires.

In addition, the overall attractiveness of the landscape and the social value placed on it is reflected in the annual ‘Community Satisfaction’ surveys undertaken by the Shire. Begun in 2009, this survey canvasses opinions of citizens regarding the Shire’s performance, communication and management of various public assets. The opening question was ‘What do you like most about living in Indigo Shire?’ (Indigo Shire Council, 2011a). Over the four years of the survey, respondents consistently ranked the ‘natural environment and the attractiveness of the local landscape’ the highest among the things they liked most about the Shire, followed by the ‘sense of community’, as shown in Table 11.

**Table 11: Response to question about what residents liked most about living in Indigo Shire**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top 3 Values</th>
<th>2012 (n 946)</th>
<th>2011 (n 673)</th>
<th>2010 (n 286)</th>
<th>2009 (n 930)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Natural environment and landscape</td>
<td>Equal highest*</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community spirit and the people</td>
<td>Equal highest*</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural lifestyle and size of the community</td>
<td>Not asked</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>Not asked</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*In 2012, the survey was undertaken differently and overall numerical preferences not identified

Source: Indigo Shire Council – Community Satisfaction surveys 2009, 2010 & 2011
Demographics

Indigo Shire has seen boom and bust cycles for over 150 years. The gold rush in north east Victoria began in 1852, with gold discovered in the hills close to Beechworth. In the years following, gold camps were established across the landscape, with some growing large and permanent enough to become the small towns of the Shire today – Yackandandah, Chiltern and Rutherglen, while other towns such as Stanley, Barnawartha and Tangambalanga grew as agricultural centres and service towns catering to the ebb and flow of miners and farmers. Mining has all but disappeared from the Shire, however the agricultural base has remained, with agriculture and related processing now contributing the largest portion of economic returns to the Shire. The population remained relatively stable during the twentieth century until the 1980s when agricultural returns increased along with rural migration trends. The population has increased steadily from the mid 1990s and is projected to grow moderately although below the State average but well above many other local government areas in regional Victoria, as depicted in Table 12 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012). This growth rate is higher than average for regional Victoria and reflects the dual drawcards of being on the periphery of two growing regional centres as well as having an attractive landscape.

In 2012, Indigo Shire had an estimated residential population of 15,575 (Profile id, 2012), and had experienced a year on year growth rate averaging 0.09% per annum between 2001 and 2012 (Department of Planning and Community Development, 2011, 2012b). The Shire is nestled between the regional centres of Wodonga and Wangaratta, both growing at an annual rate of 1.9% and 0.9% respectively (Department of Planning and Community Development, 2011). In early 2012, Wodonga was ranked as the fastest growing regional city in Victoria, and was ranked the 14th fastest growing local government area in Victoria, including metropolitan areas (City of Wodonga, 2012).
Table 12: Estimated Residential Population Growth of Indigo Shire, 2001-2012

By 2026, it is forecast that the Shire will see moderate reductions in the numbers of people aged less than 50 years and large increases in those aged 60 years and over, rising from 20% of the population in 2006 to 35% in 2026 as shown in Table 13 (Department of Planning and Community Development, 2008b). While these statistics reflect an increasing population over 50, some of these will be migrants to the area but there will also be retirees in the Shire who will be remaining in the area due to the amenity factors.
Table 13: Projected population change by age group, 2006-2026

The population distribution of the Shire is not overly concentrated in any particular area as shown in Table 14, with approximately three out of every five people living in one of the seven minor towns: Beechworth, Rutherglen, Chiltern, Yackandandah, Barnawartha, Kiewa and Tangambalanga (Indigo Shire Council, 2011b). While the towns within the Shire are growing, Indigo is unusual in Victoria in that its rural growth rates between 1996 and 2006 were higher than its town growth rates (McKenzie & Frieden, 2010), indicating the opposite of the ‘sponge city’ phenomenon often correlated to rural towns, and exemplifying the attraction of the rural countryside.
Table 14: Estimated Residential Population per District

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>2012 population</th>
<th>Land area (ha)</th>
<th>Population density</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rutherglen &amp; Wahgunyah &amp; district</td>
<td>3,770</td>
<td>48,060</td>
<td>0.08 persons/ha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chiltern &amp; Barnawartha &amp; district</td>
<td>3,013</td>
<td>45,440</td>
<td>0.08 persons/ha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beechworth &amp; district</td>
<td>4,304</td>
<td>37,598</td>
<td>0.11 persons/ha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yackandandah &amp; district</td>
<td>2,670</td>
<td>32,907</td>
<td>0.08 persons/ha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tangambalanga, Kiewa &amp; district</td>
<td>1,818</td>
<td>40,375</td>
<td>0.05 persons/ha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>15,575</strong></td>
<td><strong>204,381</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.07 persons/ha average</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Profile id (2012)

The economy

While the population of Indigo Shire has been growing steadily over the past decade, in the four years between 2008 and 2012, unemployment also rose from 3.4% in December 2008 to 4.1% in December 2012 (Indigo Shire Council, 2013). This rate has been considerably below the average for the rest of Victoria over the same period. The Shire also has a higher average income than many others regional Shires in Victoria, with over 10% of the households earning over $2,000 per week in 2006 (Indigo Shire Council, 2008a). Total employment in managerial and professional sectors has grown steadily between 2001 and 2011, while the number of people employed in the rural sector, not including the manufacturing sector, has declined steadily over the same period.

The relatively modest population and lack of a major urban centre tends to conceal the level of economic activity in the Shire. Indigo Shire has relied on its traditional industries (agriculture and manufacturing related to ‘value-added’ agricultural products) to provide the majority of employment. In 2011-2012, the gross regional product generated by businesses and organisations within Indigo Shire was $596 million (Indigo Shire Council, 2008a, 2013).
In 2011 there were 600 people employed in agricultural activities, representing 13% of the Shire’s workforce, slightly higher than the average for regional Victoria, and a further 900 employed in agriculture-related manufacturing and value-adding (Indigo Shire Council, 2012a). Despite agriculture employing marginally fewer people than the retail sector, it contributes almost double the revenue (Indigo Shire Council, 2008a).

The Shire encompasses two wine regions. The Rutherglen area has a long history of producing fine wine and is world-renowned for its production of premium fortified wines, directly employing 127 people. The Beechworth region, while a newer area with the majority of plantings undertaken in the last decade, is characterised by small growers of unique varietals and quality wines, and incorporates more than 160 hectares of grapes, generating 78 full-time equivalent jobs (Indigo Shire Council, 2008a). The Stanley area has Victoria’s only red soil found at high altitudes, which enables the production of high quality apples, berries and nuts. The Shire also plays a limited role in providing timber with plantations around the Stanley/Beechworth area (Indigo Shire Council, 2011b).

Tourism is also important to the Shire’s economic viability, with 417 people employed full time and in-direct tourism activities accounting for a further 1,500 jobs most of which are part-time (Indigo Shire Council, 2008a). The North East region of Victoria (which includes Indigo Shire) attracts 1.3 million domestic overnight visitors per annum, which in 2006 contributed $361 million to the area (Indigo Shire Council, 2011b). Major attractions for tourists are the Shire’s 1,500 heritage buildings and the historic townships of Beechworth, Chiltern and Yackandandah, the wine-producing areas, access to the National Parks, State forests, River Murray and Lake Hume for outdoor recreation, as well as the scenic views, especially in autumn (Indigo Shire Council, 2011b).

The small towns, diverse agricultural base, tourism and recreational opportunities are all valuable attributes recognised by the Indigo Shire Council. There is also recognition of the need to create and maintain a strong local economy that is not solely reliant on the neighbouring larger centres for job creation (Indigo Shire Council, 2008b).
Farming in Indigo Shire

What makes farming in Indigo Shire slightly different from many other areas in Victoria is the dominance of small farms. Barr (2005) suggests that the large number of small farms found in North East Victoria is a legacy of dairy farming in addition to the settlement patterns resulting from the gold mining era. In the 1970s when a large number of dairy farms switched to beef farming due to major restructuring in the dairy industry, many farmers remained on the farm, despite the relatively low profit margins. This was a viable option due to the opportunities for part-time or off-farm work arising from the increasing population and proximity to the regional cities of Wangaratta and Albury/Wodonga. However, this proximity also brought with it an increase in the value of the land, creating the dilemmas discussed later in this chapter.

In Indigo Shire, farms with an estimated value of agricultural operation of less than $100,000 account for 70% of all farms and occupy almost 40% of the farming area (Barr, 2011). The rural areas of the Shire contain large numbers of individual lots, but a relatively small number of large properties. Only 13.4% of all properties in the Shire are greater than 40 hectares in size (Indigo Shire Council, 2008b). In 2011, there were over 600 farms and farm-related businesses, operating on the 133,454 hectares of the arable land (65%) in the Shire. Of this land, almost 90% is used for livestock grazing (beef and dairy), while the majority of the remainder is used for broad acre cropping.
Horticultural production, while significant, uses a comparatively smaller proportion of land (Indigo Shire Council, 2011b). In 2013, the agricultural sector in Indigo Shire had a Gross Value Added of $50.5 million, growing a wide variety of products as shown in Figure 15 (Indigo Shire Council, 2013). Having a diversified employment base, an increasing population, small farms and higher house and rural land prices are all factors which point toward Indigo Shire fitting squarely into the rural amenity landscape described in Chapter 2 and mapped by Barr (2005) as such.

Table 15: Agricultural production of selected commodities in Indigo Shire 2010-2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agricultural Product</th>
<th>Total Production</th>
<th>Agricultural Product</th>
<th>Total Production</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wheat (tonnes)</td>
<td>25,701</td>
<td>Apples (kg)</td>
<td>1,751,107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oats (tonnes)</td>
<td>2,746</td>
<td>Olives (kg)</td>
<td>71,139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wine grapes (tonnes)</td>
<td>2,554</td>
<td>Pears (kg)</td>
<td>55,292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut Flowers (Ha)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Lettuce (kg)</td>
<td>84,307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuts (total trees)</td>
<td>51,119</td>
<td>Mushrooms (kg)</td>
<td>110,013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beef cattle (no.)</td>
<td>54,327</td>
<td>Cherries (kg)</td>
<td>49,824</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dairy cattle (no.)</td>
<td>13,157</td>
<td>Green Peas (kg)</td>
<td>2,329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheep (no.)</td>
<td>77,289</td>
<td>Strawberries (kg)</td>
<td>74,172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-merino lambs (no.)</td>
<td>35,892</td>
<td>Raspberries (kg)</td>
<td>10,235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merino lambs (no.)</td>
<td>3,033</td>
<td>Blueberries (kg)</td>
<td>2,116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Other berries (kg)</td>
<td>3,173</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Indigo Shire Council (2013)

Despite the diversity of products and the marginal growth in the number of farms, the fortunes of the primary industries in the region have been variable. Figure 9 shows the dramatic decline and recent rise in the agricultural value of grain and cereal production (the majority of regional production occurs in Indigo Shire), as well as recent high beef prices. The decline in horticultural production (not including wine grapes) has also been a concern for the Shire.
According to Indigo Shire’s Economic Development Strategy 2012-2017, there has been recent ‘growth in manufacturing, agriculture, viticulture and tourism’, the main industries in the Shire. However, their figures for 2008 and 2012 show a slight decline in value for agriculture and related manufacturing as shown in Table 16. These statistics are based on the ABS State Gross Product and were provided by the Shire, and show the change over the period during which this research was conducted and likely reflect the effects of a strong Australian dollar and the global slow-down.

Table 16: Output and Value-added by Industry sector - Indigo Shire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry / Forestry sector</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$M</td>
<td>$M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing output</td>
<td>874.06</td>
<td>861.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing Value-added</td>
<td>205.75</td>
<td>173.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture / Forestry output</td>
<td>120.42</td>
<td>121.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture / Forestry value-added</td>
<td>66.76</td>
<td>50.53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Indigo Shire Council (2012b)
Figure 10 provides an overview of the number of farms or count of establishments across the whole North East amenity region over the last 23 years. This shows the rise and subsequent slight decline in the number of horticulture businesses.

Barr (2012, p. 67) notes that the contraction in number of businesses, mainly at the smaller end of the farms scale, may also include the response to low wine grape prices. The number of beef farms increased steadily after 1991, while sheep farms dropped dramatically at the same time. The number of grain producers rose during the 1980s, then dropped by about 50% by 1992 and subsequently recovered slightly to maintain their numbers (Barr, 2012). As the majority of grain farms in the North East are in Indigo Shire, and the overall production value hasn’t changed significantly, these statistics might also reflect the amalgamation of grain and other crop farms, rather than a decrease in area being farmed.

What these statistics are not able to show is the change in actual farm activity. Intensification or participating in alternative, niche production especially for the traditional broad-acre industries of cropping, beef and sheep tends to be very low. For
the horticultural sector, specialty crops, different marketing techniques and responding
to customers’ needs are much more common as a way of adapting to change and
minimising risk (Barr, 2012).

In the dairy industry, the higher milk prices since 2009 has created optimism amongst
farmers, many of whom have succession plans in place. The advantages of dairy
farming, such as the regular cash flow and a contracted product meant that the structure
of the industry is conducive to employing outside labour as well as ‘second career’
farmers who are able to afford to buy into the industry later in life.

The positive future of dairy farming is corroborated by a study undertaken for the
Alpine Valleys Agri-business Forum which found that dairy farming in North East
Victoria is viable and could expand (Mulvany, 2010). However, the report also pointed
out that potential expansion, especially by larger businesses (as opposed to family
farms) was hindered by the risk profile of dairying which included the variability of
season, milk prices and input prices, the lack of positive publicity about the financial
potential of dairying and lifestyle issues around the labour and time requirements of
dairy farming. Broad-acre farming has shown a mixed response to the rise in value of
land, and this is also reflected in the varied fortunes of beef, sheep and crops – the
traditional staples. Barr (2012, p. 64) contends that the beef industry is ‘the growth
segment of the north east agriculture’ and this is reflected in the number of farmers
growing steadily between 1996 and 2006. He points out that due to off-farm income,
the industry is highly resilient and is likely to be ‘there for the long term’.

Local food production and consumption

Indigo Shire does not have a Local Food Plan or Food Policy nor any specific statistics
on local food production and consumption. However, a feasibility study was
undertaken for the Beechworth Farmers’ Market in 2010 which listed 39 potential stall
holders or food producers residing in the Shire as well as strong general support for a
monthly market in the Beechworth area (The Regional Development Company, 2010).
The Shire does not have any major supermarkets (i.e. Coles or Safeway/Woolworths)
and is serviced by the two independent supermarkets: IGA and Foodworks. There are
no food franchises in the Shire other than the Beechworth Bakery. All the towns have
retail food stores (butcher, bakeries etc) including specialist food stores which sell local
produce, fresh food and value-added, as well as local wines. However, there is no tally of the total food outlets, including restaurants in the Shire, although given the established tourist trade, it is likely to be quite high. As of 2012, there are monthly Farmers’ markets in Rutherglen and Beechworth, a monthly produce swap and craft market in Yackandandah, a produce swap in Stanley and a large Autumn Harvest Festival celebrating local produce in May each year.

Plate 4. Beechworth Farmers’ Market

Land ownership

The cadastral structure and tenure of land in the Shire contributes to its value as a ‘liveable’ landscape. The land alienation policies of the post Gold Rush era of the 1860s resulted in a multitude of small land blocks, with only 7% of all lots in the Shire being greater than 40 hectares in size as shown in Table 17 and is also depicted in spatial form in Appendix 8 – Map of Lot Sizes by Hectare Range (Indigo Shire Council, 2008b). Only 13.47% of all properties in the Shire are over 40ha, and of these, over half comprise two or more allotments, a clear indication of the already fragmented nature of the landscape (CPG Australia Pty Ltd, 2009).
A large supply of small blocks facilitates rural lifestyles without creating the onerous land management responsibilities of larger properties. It also creates a much more dense settlement pattern, resulting in a marketable ‘social amenity’ with smaller blocks immediately adjacent to the existing townships, a characteristic which would be unavailable in the more production-oriented agricultural landscapes (Barr, 2012, p. 9).

Table 17: Indigo Shire lot sizes and property sizes by hectare range

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size (hectares)</th>
<th>Number of lots</th>
<th>Percentage of total lots</th>
<th>Percentage of total properties*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 to 0.4</td>
<td>7565</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.4 to 8</td>
<td>6404</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 to 40</td>
<td>3182</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 to 80</td>
<td>865</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80 to 100,000</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* properties means land under one ownership but may comprise of multiple lots

Source: Indigo Shire Council (2008b)

The cadastral structure combined with the influence of the Hume Highway corridor and the attractive landscape has resulted in land values which are about three times higher than the agricultural production potential of the land (Barr, 2005). This situation has created the significant dilemma which is at the heart of the debate over the future of rural land use – fragmentation and conversion of agricultural land. Where rural land is valued higher than its agricultural value, investing in the future of the business through expansion to maintain relative income becomes much more difficult.

The issues of fragmentation and conversion are quite different but are related and provide an interesting insight into the machinations of property transactions. Fragmentation, or the dividing up and selling of portions of a property, often results from the retirement of a farmer. It generally means that the landowner retains at least one parcel. The other parcels may be sold to other farmers, family members or to non-farmers. In landscapes where rural property is valued as potential residential lots, fragmentation is often the precursor to farmland going out of farming. Conversion is considered to happen when the property is ‘converted’ to another use and represented statistically as the original owner not retaining any land in the immediate area or the
Shire. These two concepts and their potential outcomes can create some diabolical dilemmas for farmers as shown in Figure 11.

**Figure 11: Diagram of Diabolical Decisions**

Source: the author

There has been considerable interest and research in the ‘churn’ of rural land ownership in terms of implications on natural resource management (Bohnet, 2008; Mendham & Curtis, 2010; Mendham, Curtis, & Millar, 2012), affects on land management practices (Klepeis et al., 2009) and the loss of agricultural land to other uses (Australian Farm Institute, 2012; Millar & Roots, 2012).

However, a recent national research project undertaken by Pritchard, Neave, Hickey and Troy (2012) investigating the changes in rural land ownership sheds some light on these issues at a local scale and compares local situations to State and national trends. Using statistics gained from the Valuer General, this work shows how land is ‘being re-bundled to suit new demands’ at a local government area scale (Pritchard et al., 2012, p. 16). By analysing the change in ownership of rural properties greater than 4 ha in size in each Statistical Local Area, the locational attributes of the ‘buyer’ and the ‘seller’ were determined (Neave, Pritchard, Hickey, & Troy, 2012). The nature of the exchange was identified as either ‘fragmentation’, ‘conversion’ or ‘aggregation’, creating a
picture of changing rural property ownership based on the transaction characteristics of parcels of land at a local government area scale. For their purposes, ‘fragmentation’ occurred when a parcel of land was sold to a new (i.e. not a local) buyer and the original local owner still retained ownership of land in the local area; ‘conversion’ was where at least one parcel was sold to a new, non-local buyer and the original owner no longer owned any land in the local area; and ‘aggregation’ was considered to be the selling of a parcel of land to a buyer who already owns land in the same local government area. The statistics for Indigo Shire are provided in Table 18 and Table 19.

Of the total area of Indigo Shire (204,400 ha), approximately 112,800 ha was considered as non-urban for this particular analysis. This excluded Crown land and land obviously owned or held in the public interest by government or community groups, and any parcels under 4 ha in size. It is important to note that the statistics do not necessarily represent only agricultural land, i.e. the data sets used do not distinguish between agricultural and non-agricultural uses, so uses such as golf courses or mining activity are also included. However, what the statistics do show is the actual activity of land changing hands, an indicator of ‘churn’ and change within rural landscapes.

The figures of property ownership change over the period 2004-2008 for Indigo are skewed somewhat by the 2006-07 year when a significantly smaller total area of land exchanged hands (see Table 18). This was in the middle of the drought when rainfall totals were less than 50% of the ‘average’ in the northern and eastern parts of the Shire. Over the four years between 2004 and 2008, on average 4.1% of the non-urban land changed hands which was slightly below the State average (4.7%) and the Hume regional average (4.7%), although for most other years, the rate was similar (Neave et al., 2012, p. 98).
Table 18: Details of non-urban land ownership change in Indigo Shire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Area (Ha)*</th>
<th>% of total area</th>
<th>No. of parcels</th>
<th>% of total parcels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004-05</td>
<td>4294</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-06</td>
<td>5328</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-07</td>
<td>3141</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td>5819</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total 2004-08</td>
<td>18,582</td>
<td></td>
<td>763</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*includes all parcels with a land area greater than 4ha and excludes parcels with incomplete ownership information.

Source: Neave et al. (2012)

The actual variation in property exchanges over time is quite interesting when considered in the local context and environmental and economic conditions as shown in Table 19. The years from 2004 to 2006 were the middle years of the drought and the majority of land ownership changes resulted in an aggregation of holdings. While conversion was significant in 2005-06, it dominated in 2006-07 and 2007-08, which were also all low rainfall years. The locations of the transactions showed that the majority of aggregations occurred in the northern part of the Shire (cropping and grazing country) and conversions were predominantly in the higher rainfall, rural living and mixed farming areas of the central and southern parts of the Shire. In the dairying country on the east, aggregation and conversion were the most common, with some fragmentation. The process of fragmentation averaged only 19% each year over the period, less than half of either of the other processes (Neave et al., 2012).
Table 19: Typology of the non-urban land area that has changed hands in Indigo Shire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Existing landowner in the Shire</th>
<th>New landowner in the Shire</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aggregation(^1) (%)</td>
<td>Fragmentation(^2) (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-05</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-06</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-07</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mean 2004-08</strong></td>
<td><strong>41</strong></td>
<td><strong>19</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Where a land parcel is sold to a buyer who is an existing landowner in the Shire
2. Where a land parcel is sold to a buyer with no prior ownership of land in the Shire, and the original owner still retains ownership of other land in the Shire
3. Where a land parcel is sold to a buyer with no prior ownership of land in the Shire, and the original owner does not retain ownership of any land in the Shire

Source: Neave et al. (2012)

This summary concurs with a related analysis undertaken by Barr (2005, p. 25) which looked at the balance of local and non-local purchasers of rural land in each local government area, using data from 1991-2001. In Indigo Shire, the ratio of non-local to local purchasers during that time frame was in the order of 0.5-1, indicating that ‘outsiders’ were common purchasers of land. However, the majority of these purchasers were from within the regional area which includes the cities of Wodonga and Wangaratta (Barr, 2010). This makes Indigo Shire, as an amenity landscape, quite different from a number of other amenity landscapes in Australia which have been studied as the new migrants are not necessarily ex-urbanites or undertaking counterurbanisation (Argent et al., 2011). This local rural/regional migration movement, along with the demographic statistics referred to earlier, could reflect an older, wealthier and professional migrant seeking a rural lifestyle within commuting distance of a regional city. Familiarity with the area may also result in higher tolerance and understanding of local farming practices and more engagement with local government processes.
The Indigo Shire Rural Land Use Strategy

In response to increasing public concerns around the unplanned, permanent loss of agricultural land and significant changes occurring in rural areas, the Victorian government encouraged rural Councils to undertake strategic planning exercises following the announcement of new rural zones in 2005. In 2008, Indigo Shire Council obtained funding from the Victorian Department of Planning and Community Development to develop a Rural Land Use Strategy (RLUS). This project was to investigate rural planning issues in Indigo Shire and to make recommendations for changes to the Planning Scheme.

A consultant was appointed to carry out the bulk of the work which was divided into a number of phases, including collecting data on existing rural land uses, identifying issues, developing broad objectives from agreed visions and formulating a strategy which would include recommendations for Planning Scheme amendment. In October 2008, an Issues and Opportunities paper identified a large number of issues including the following: urban sprawl, a changing rural demographic, impacts on scenic quality, dwellings on small rural allotments, Right to Farm concerns, conflicting land uses, fragmentation of land, the need to protect high quality agricultural land, diversification within the agricultural sector, rural housing pressures, threats to rural character and the need to incorporate tourism into rural areas (Indigo Shire Council, 2008b).

Unfortunately, following the production and dissemination of this Issues Paper, the consulting company appointed to the project underwent a major re-structure including staff and ownership change, interrupting the continuity and cohesion of the project management and direction. In addition, the principal staff members of Indigo Shire Council assigned to this project resigned at this critical stage. Thus developing an agreed vision was never undertaken and much of the momentum gained from the initial stages of the project was lost. The alternative development scenarios were not explored further nor were the issues taken beyond the initial identification level.

However, the project did involve significant community engagement. In total, ten workshops were held over two years, covering the majority of communities in the Shire. Planning staff held face to face meetings with at least five interested groups or individuals and disseminated the project reports and maps as they became available to
all interested parties. The main public comments arising from the consultation process included the following:

- concerns regarding the appropriateness of the Rural Activity Zone in Stanley;
- concerns regarding the 40 hectare limit on subdivision and default dwelling provisions in the Planning Scheme. These concerns were in both directions: some were concerned that the area of 40 hectares was too large and others felt it was too small;
- the need to protect significant ridgelines;
- fragmentation of farming land by selling off existing Crown allotments;
- land tenement provisions and the need to reintroduce tenement controls; and
- concerns regarding the proposed Rural Living Zone location at Rutherglen.

(CPG Australia Pty Ltd, 2009)

In 2009, a Phase 4 Report of the Draft Rural Land Use Strategy was produced by new consultants. This document provided an overview of the existing planning scheme, a review of the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal decisions relating to rural land decisions, and rural land development trends, including tourism activities. It also provided some recommendations and objectives for each of the 12 land use precincts identified in the report. The division of the Shire into precincts allowed more detailed assessment of the current land use and capability, leading toward more appropriate and specific recommendations related to zone control (CPG Australia Pty Ltd, 2009).

In addition, the Phase 4 Report contained a number of high level statements relating to environmental, economic and settlement objectives. However, these were not elaborated upon as to how they could be implemented within the Shire’s Planning Scheme. Between 2009 and 2011, the draft Report was left untouched due to resourcing reasons. In 2011, a new consultant was hired to revisit the 2009 report and provide further recommendations to Council which involved the following:

- the introduction of the Rural Activity Zone to some limited areas;
- a new, small Rural Living Zone at Rutherglen;
- new and amended planning policies with the Planning Scheme to ensure development is consistent with the individual zone purposes;
- introduction of new overlays to protect natural assets and remnant vegetation;
• alterations to the existing schedules in the Farming Zone to increase the minimum lot size and default lot size for a dwelling from 40 hectares to 80 hectares in some areas;
• in some small areas, reduction of the lot size to 20 hectares where the specified land use is intensive agriculture, and
• application of a Wildfire Management Overlay as appropriate.

In August 2011, the Indigo Shire Council noted the latest consultant’s report and noted an implementation program over the years 2011-2014 for some of the recommendations (Indigo Shire Council, 2011c). In recommending that the project be wrapped up and that some specific recommendations be implemented, it was noted that ‘the [initial] project brief was overly ambitious in that it attempted to require detailed and precise answers to all rural planning problems in the Shire of Indigo. This is simply not possible and while credit is due for the brave attempt, it leads to expectations that cannot realistically be achieved’ (Indigo Shire Council, 2011c, p. 7). Other than Minutes from the relevant Council Meetings, there has been no further documentation of the process.

To date, Indigo Shire does not have an official Rural Land Use Strategy. While some of the directions which emanated from the investigation process have been adopted by Council, by not having a written document explaining the vision and direction of rural planning, an important communication link does not currently exist. The lack of completion of the report and a wrapping-up of the community engagement process has likely added to the frustration and disappointment in rural planning processes as perceived by the wider rural community. In addition, the process which the Shire has gone through highlights many of the challenges and complexities of rural planning which underpin this study.

**Climate change and water availability**

Climate change will have a significant impact on North East Victoria, with Indigo Shire likely to see the greatest impacts in terms of increased temperatures, more very hot days and less rainfall in comparison to many other parts of the State. This is based on information collated by CSIRO incorporating results from the Fourth Assessment
Climate change will have both positive and negative impacts on the types of crops grown and the productivity of farming properties. While higher levels of atmospheric carbon dioxide could enhance plant growth and water-use efficiency, the predicted changes in temperature and rainfall are likely to offset these benefits. By 2030, average annual temperatures will be around 0.9°C warmer with the smallest increases in winter (0.7°C). The number of hot days (days over 30°C) is also expected to rise. Reductions in the total average annual rainfall of around 3% are expected, with the greatest reductions occurring in spring (7%). Increases in potential evaporation and reductions in relative humidity are expected to contribute to drier conditions. The average annual runoff in the Upper Murray and Kiewa Rivers is expected to decrease by up to 20% by 2030.

The reduction in rainfall will place most farms under stress, particularly when linked to higher temperatures. It has been identified that there will be:

- increased heat stress on dairy cattle, reducing milk production unless management measures such as shade sheds and sprinklers are adopted;
- reductions in soil moisture available for dryland cropping;
- inadequate winter chilling for some fruit trees, which may reduce fruit yield and quality, however, higher temperatures are likely to reduce the risk of damaging winter frosts for other crops; and
- in viticulture, higher temperatures are likely to reduce grape quality, but there may be opportunities to shift production to varieties better adapted to warmer conditions.

Other climate change impacts such as heavy rains and winds from storm events will also contribute to crop damage and soil erosion. Indirect impacts due to changes in weeds, pests and international markets may also place farms under stress (Department of Sustainability and Environment, 2008).
Summary

Indigo Shire is within easy travel to major metropolitan areas and within commuting distance to two regional centres which contain a regional airport and hospitals. There is good communication coverage in most areas and the small historic towns offer a range of goods and services. New residents are ‘not only coming for the things that the tourists enjoy – nice places to stay, historic buildings, good food and wine – but for something more intrinsic: space, beauty and for a crack at the good…well, healthy, life’ (Mott, 2010, p. 18).

These physical and cultural attributes create the unmistakeable impression that Indigo is an attractive place to visit, live and work. However, it is this third aspect that warrants deeper inspection and is often overlooked in discussions of ‘preservation’ in the amenity landscape literature (Abrams & Gosnell, 2012; Hunter et al., 2005; R. E. Jones et al., 2003; Tonts & Grieve, 2002). A sustainable future for Indigo Shire will need to embrace more than just preservation of its amenity. The rural landscapes of the future are multifunctional and encompass the concept of a ‘living and working’ countryside (McDonagh, 2012). The future sustainability of this landscape will by necessity include the farmers, not only because they have the land, but because the productivity of these small farms are tied to the viability of the local communities.

This chapter has shown that the landscapes of Indigo Shire are very much shaped by both human and natural forces – the diversity of landforms and climate has created a rich and varied economic base for agriculture, tourism and retirement. Climate change has the potential to affect this picture as does national and international agricultural policy and local planning decisions. How the farmers of Indigo Shire are responding to these challenges is discussed next.
Chapter 5 – Changes in farming landscapes: impacts and adaptations

Introduction

This chapter addresses the first research question: ‘How are land use changes affecting farming in amenity landscapes?’ The responses to this question are divided into three sections which describe the social, economic and environmental changes observed and experienced in the rural areas of Indigo Shire from the perspectives of food and fibre producers, local government employees and industry advisors.
Social Changes

More people in the landscape – overall views

When asked what differences they had noticed in recent years, all the farmers interviewed stated that the most noticeable change in the landscapes was an increase in rural population, manifested in an increasing number of houses, increased traffic, and more people in the small rural towns of the Shire.

*There are more people here than have been here since 1960. We had little farms and a subsistence type farming then, now we have all of these people who commute to town for their work and it’s quite different.* (FR04)

Some farmers with long connections to the area said that it was not so much ‘more people’ in the landscape, but a case of people now doing different things in different places. They mentioned that fifty years ago in some areas there were ‘just as many people’ because each farm had more people employed or working on it.

*So the population of the district is not changing so much….we used to have a school here in the corner. Well you can imagine the population must have been great at one time to warrant a school in the corner.* (FR10)

However, all agreed that in general the rural population in their area had been increasing steadily over the last ten or so years. While an increase in the number of residents created some practical and difficult issues for farmers such as moving stock and machinery across increasingly busy roads, they also spoke of the benefits of a growing population such as more community activities and, in some cases, more accessible services.

For local government staff and Councillors, there were concerns about how the current and anticipated population increase would be accommodated and serviced in the future. Local and State government staff members referred to the Victorian State government’s projected increase of 100,000 people moving into the Hume Region in the next thirty years. They contemplated the consequences in terms of housing, transport and social infrastructure, and where the ‘hot spots’ might be. Some people noted that the Shire had been growing at a rate higher than the regional average for the State, although there was a perception that it had slowed down in the last year or so, likely due to the global financial instability. Councillors and local government staff also referred to the increase
in the urban growth of Albury-Wodonga and Wangaratta, which resulted in Indigo Shire essentially becoming a rural suburb for these cities, creating a feeling of being ‘squeezed’ between the two growing regional centres.

We’re sort of sandwiched in between those two fairly hefty shires that are looking at significant growth in this whole area; the Hume region is destined for significant growth within the next fifty years so it’s just about trying to protect what we have. [Councillor 02]

Two Councillors questioned the need for continual growth and suggested that the question ‘how much is enough’ should be asked more often. They recognised that this was a difficult question and could be interpreted as ‘now that I’m here, let’s close the door and not allow anyone else in’, but also felt that the area had limited resources so a balance was needed between resource availability and the rate of consumption or growth.

The increase in population was also creating the demand for ‘lifestyle’ properties in the range of 4 – 10 hectares where ‘they don’t want to make a living out of it, and they don’t want to be tied to the land to maintain it, but they want to have the visual capacity and the lifestyle that a large block of land provides.’ [Councillor 04]

While some Councillors felt that the Shire could be viewed as a ‘dormitory’ for the cities of Wodonga and Wangaratta, they also noted that these ‘newcomers’ from the cities tended to bring with them aspirations for the facilities of larger centres which created challenges for local government’s ability to deliver.

They want to also have more space, they enjoy the landscape and the rural atmosphere that we have got, but they still want the basic advantages, the standards that are the norm in those other places, so that drives [the Shire] pretty hard to try to achieve those aspirations. [Councillor 04]

The next section explores the consequences of more people moving into farming areas.

**The impact of dogs and increased traffic**

The physical presence of houses in rural areas affected farmers in at least two different ways. The first, mentioned by sheep graziers, was that the activity around a residential house, which often included dogs and other noises, caused disruptions to farming.
Once you put houses in [where there weren’t any before] you’re starting to bugger it up. Like the livestock; cattle are alright, cattle will graze up close and around the house, sheep won’t go anywhere near the house, even though the house is on the other side of the road, because she’s got dogs and whatever there. As soon as there is a little bit of movement, the sheep are pissed off, but the cattle they’re inquisitive. They’ll go up to the bloody fence and have a look and see what’s going on, but the sheep won’t. So if you’ve got sheep and you’ve got development around you’re restricting their grazing straight away. (FR26)

For some farmers, this meant some paddocks were unusable for particular animals, or that fences required upgrading to ensure stock management in different configurations. There was no mention of buffer areas around new houses which might mitigate impacts. Several farmers mentioned domestic dog attacks as being more common as people moved into farming areas and had pets which wandered off their property during the day. One farmer mentioned that these ‘town’ dogs came and mauled sheep ‘quite regularly’. He noted that sensitivity was sometimes required to deal with the offending dog owners, if you knew to whom the dogs belonged.

Even some of the neighbour’s dogs came across and that’s really hard to deal with because what do you do? Every time you see him he is half way across the paddock back to their place and you can’t shoot them when they are that close. (FR24)

In this case, the farmer felt that he had been ‘lucky’ there weren’t more problems and that there hadn’t been a serious conflict so far. Government planners were also aware of the problem of dogs and stock, mentioning that in ‘some areas around Melbourne it has caused all sheep farming to be completely lost and even calves and horses [are affected], so the more people you get in an area, the less ability there is to efficiently manage land.’ (State government employee 02)

Farmers also noted the difference between domestic dogs that wandered and wild dogs. Wild dogs were an issue in some parts of the Kiewa Valley and it was pointed out that wild dogs were also a concern to newer rural residents as domestic pets were also vulnerable to attack.

Overall, the impact which was most commonly cited by farmers as a result of having more people in the landscape, regardless of where they lived, was increased traffic on roads. This was noticeable on a number of different levels. With some larger farms
going out of agriculture, the surrounding farmers often purchased blocks of the available farm land, some of which were not contiguous to their own land. This meant that individual agricultural holdings were becoming more spread out, requiring the movement of stock or machinery across and along roads, perhaps more than previously was the case. The general increase in the amount of traffic, as a result of more rural residents, made it more difficult, and often dangerous, to do this.

Also, I have cattle on the property on the other side of the road, which means that I have to work myself up into a fit state to be able to get the cattle across the road, and if a truck hits one of those, then we will be blamed, despite the fact that we have got signs, and we wear fluorescent clothing. But [the increased traffic] does impact on how we operate that land effectively – we are restricted. In other words, I don’t put cattle over there unless I have to. (FR05)

I try to keep them off the edge of the road because I want to keep the road as vehicle friendly as I can while I’ve got the cows on purely because I don’t want any trouble from anyone contacting Council complaining about cattle on the road and spreading manure all over the road and everything else … and that’s purely because there’s more people around now and a greater proportion of those people don’t have any clue about cows on the road, they haven’t lived here long enough to know that’s part of the landscape. (FR35)

Two farmers said that they deliberately sold paddocks because of their concerns about being able to move stock safely across roads.

[We] would be moving stock from here to here to here and it became a nightmare because people would come out and they’d have dogs in the back of their utes and you had cows going everywhere and we were afraid of our life that we would cause an accident so we said let’s get rid of a lot of this rubbishy stuff and keep [only] these two parcels. (FR07)

Three farmers spoke of accidents and very near accidents between stock and vehicles, and all of the farmers who have to walk their stock across roads mentioned how much it worried them. They felt that there was not a very high level of awareness amongst other residents regarding how stock reacted to vehicles, and in some instances, they felt there was impatience and outright aggression towards the people moving stock along the road.
Most of the people are really respectful but sometimes people just go through flat out like it’s their right, even though there are flashing lights and signs to give way, they just like hardly even slow down. (FR14)

We fought to have that [Vic Roads sign] put up so that people are aware that this is a farming area and there will be stock and livestock on the road, but we also have our own signs which we put up. We’ve tried everything, I’ve gone with lights. I actually stand in the middle of the road with signs, waving, so that people will slow down. So it is a bit dangerous really but we haven’t had any incidents at this stage but there could be. (FR35)

While the dairy farmers in particular were aware that moving their cows daily along or across the road was an issue, in their particular situation it was not so significant or so difficult that it warranted the construction of an underpass, as there wasn’t enough traffic, yet. However, Council staff mentioned that there had been a few incidents in the past and the Shire had been involved in ‘coming to agreements about constructing cattle underpasses and those sorts of things.’

It was pointed out that an underpass had been put in on one dairy property but that it had been poorly designed and was not working all that well as it was too narrow and took too long to get the cattle through. Another underpass had been installed on a farm that had since been sold, so the neighbouring farmer said that it had been a ‘waste of funds’, even though the cost had been shared by the farmer and the tax payer.

[They] spent big money building a new rotary dairy and put a big underpass down the road and then he sold the farm two years later and the person bought the top side and another the bottom side so all that money he put in the underpass with the grants and the thing is sitting there doing nothing. (FR12)

At a Kergunyah workshop (in a dairying area) discussing rural land use, people made the point that many of the rural roads had not been designed for a lot of traffic, as many only have a single lane of bitumen, and this was a big problem when cattle were being moved along the road.

Another aspect of the increasing amount of traffic associated with a growing rural population was the impact of traffic noise on the amenity of farmers. This was mentioned in the context of what the farmer ‘valued’ in the landscape or where they lived. Almost all of the farmers mentioned how much they appreciated the beauty and
‘serenity’ of their farm. The issue of traffic noise was raised primarily in the Rutherglen area where the older farm houses are located quite close to roads, initially for convenience, but now that the road has become a major thoroughfare, the noise could be considerable. In addition, the town of Rutherglen had just gone through a community process to determine the route of a highway by-pass around the town which was very likely to impact a number of existing farms, so heavy vehicle and commuter traffic was a current topic of conversation.

*The only real bug bear which is not a major thing, but it’s grown steadily over the years is the [noise of the] highway. You can hear them going continually. So you can imagine moving sheep and cattle and machinery at the present time, it isn’t good.* (FR10)

*The noise and the amount of traffic on the road is difficult, to say the least, so much so that visitors, as late as last week mentioned it, and my children, who grew up here, couldn’t get over the traffic noise.* (FR05)

**Conflicts between farming and non-farming residents**

One of the most obvious consequences of the increase in the rural residential population mentioned was conflict resulting from clashing values and attitudes between farming and non-farming residents. Analysis of the farmers’ comments showed that while this interaction could lead to a ‘negative’ impact on the farmer in some situations, it was largely a difference of values or perspectives on land management between farmers and non-farmers who had now become neighbours.

From an agency perspective, there was a variety of opinions about the significance of the conflicts between land uses which had been brought to the Council’s attention. Some Shire staff said that they rarely received formal complaints, but when they occurred they tended to take quite a bit of time to resolve. Another staff member said they believed it would be a growing issue as more people move onto small acreages ‘that they just want to ‘enjoy’ as opposed to farm it and that tends to butt up against ‘proper farms’ somewhere along the line. When that occurs, that can create tension; there’s a lot of people looking for that five to ten and more acre sort of lifestyle property and we do seem to be getting more of that resulting conflict.’ (Shire staff 01)
The majority of Councillors, who in some cases would hear about minor issues which may not come to the attention of the Shire staff, said they thought the number of conflicts between farmers and rural residents was decreasing:

I don’t think that is a major issue now, I think people understand that maybe there are farmers that look to get along, although there has been one notable situation with a family living next to an orchard, but its not a broad issue.
(Councillor 04)

While almost all of the farmers mentioned that they had minor conflicts or had differences of some kind with neighbours, the number of actual confrontations or serious conflicts with non-farming neighbours was relatively small, with most farmers relaying experiences that have happened to ‘other’ people. Many farmers said they thought that the newcomers were often ill-informed about the activities related to farming and that many of the situations or confrontations arose out of ignorance, and therefore were salvageable.

Because the more dense the population and the more removed from farming practices the population becomes, the more likely you are to have problems.
(FR04)

One farmer said she thought that it was usually not the people who built the new house in a farming area but the second owners who tended to complain or voice concerns as they had generally purchased the property based on the way it looked at present, not knowing what the landscape used to look like, and therefore these new residents were not as aware of the surrounding land uses and day-to-day activities of farming.

However, whether it was through hearsay or firsthand ‘near misses’, the majority of farmers did feel that their ability to carry out their activities could be impacted by neighbours voicing concerns about various aspects of their farming practices to Council.

I do know that on that subdivision down there, the neighbour was stopped from pressing hay one night. The police came out and stopped him pressing hay because his tractor lights were shining on somebody’s window and the noise was getting to them. Well, I’m sorry, but you have to press your hay at night because lucerne, you have to press it at night, there are no choices. (FR24)

Overall, there was an assumption that the farmer would lose out and have to stop the activity if there were too many complaints from neighbours. A few farmers mentioned
that more awareness or education of new residents was needed, while others felt that the only solution was legislation, even though they were sceptical it would be effective in the long run. Some farmers said it was the responsibility of Council to ensure that farming practices are allowed to continue and the ‘grandfathering’ of farming rules and the ‘right to farm’ were mentioned as important concepts.

They [Council] say it’s an agricultural shire and their planning says well you can’t do this because it impacts on agriculture, but that’s as far as they seem to go. I think they probably could say when people buy land in the farming zone, look you can buy this but do you understand there may be a tractor or next door there may be sheep or cattle? You know, so there’s an understanding. (FR27)

This approach was echoed by some Shire staff who said that their response to complaints in many cases was to make people aware of the rules and regulations and particularly the Planning and Environment Act which specifies allowable uses in the farming zone.

Well it is a farming zone, so farming is allowed. In those cases... it’s a bit of a ‘buyer beware’ when you move into the area. (Shire staff 03)

Complaints from non-farmers about smells and noises related to farming activities was often mentioned, although very few farmers actually said that this had been an issue which affected them directly, or had an impact on their activities. In fact, most people raised the issue in the context of just ‘being neighbours’ and said that these sorts of issues were just as likely to occur between two farming neighbours as with a non-farming neighbour.

The lady from that house with the green roof came up here and asked me ‘did we have pigs not cows here?’ so they could obviously smell our dairy from there. But they actually sold out to someone else, so they’ve gone. (FR14)

I have 15 neighbours and we all get along okay but I know they also complain a bit about the smell and the manure and cows on the road. (Kergunyah workshop participant)

An issue which did affect some farmers directly and had caused considerable concern within the local community was the use of scare guns to protect crops from bird predation. This issue was raised in a number of places in the Shire where there are horticultural activities, and there were varying responses to resolving the issue.
Councillors and Shire staff were also aware of the difficulties around managing farm noises, and everyone referred to a well-known incident in Stanley where, as a result of a ‘neighbourly dispute’, a public meeting had been held to review the Shire’s policy on audible bird scaring devices and it had been a very difficult meeting. Some farmers said they thought that the Shire had been bullied at the meeting by those farmers who use the scare devices and, as a result, the policy of ‘letting the farmer do whatever is needed to farm’ was upheld. In their opinion, the policy was, in essence, condoning poor farm management practices which also contributed to a general angst towards farmers in the community.

None of the farmers interviewed actually used audible scare devices, mentioning that they preferred to use other, less intrusive methods.

Scare guns bother other people across Indigo Shire, and some vigneron used them, and a couple of people here use them with apple orchards but they use them with some discrimination. But they are noisy. (FR20)

There were complaints [because] the gun was going off at the wrong time – like 6.30 in the morning when they aren’t allowed until 7am. But the owners didn’t live on the property so they didn’t know. I called them up and they were glad that someone had told them – before it blew up into something. It was just about being neighbourly. (FR31)

The majority of farmers and Councillors pointed out that conflicts have always existed between different land uses and between neighbours including farmers; it is part of living in the country.

Conflicts already exist, even between agricultural businesses but we work it out. That is the way businesses and community works. (Ruterglen workshop participant)

“Sticky beaking” and trespassing

A few farmers mentioned that as a result of more people around, neighbours or strangers sometimes provided opinions or commented on land or stock management which they found a bit disconcerting. While some farmers tolerated this as part of neighbourly and community interaction, others felt offended by it. Two farmers mentioned that animal welfare was sometimes an issue raised by neighbours who were
‘looking over the fence’ and that in some situations, dealing with the neighbour could be more difficult than dealing with the animal!

_They are not tolerant of smell or a dead animal. My beef paddock is on the bend of the highway and it’s a long narrow paddock so it is obvious. Now if I lose a cow for whatever reason, 150 people commuting to work tomorrow morning will know that I have a cow in the paddock and somebody will ring me up but until I can get up there and remove that beast, it is obscene from the point of view of the people commuting to work because they don’t understand that cows do die for whatever reason._ (FR03)

_It has sometimes been helpful to us. You know when there has been a cow or a calf in trouble up right at the top that we haven’t noticed or something, they will come and say something. You know, so it has been good like that._ (FR16)

Other farmers raised the issue of trespassing, by neighbours or the public, becoming more common as there were more people around. This created concern on the part of the farmer who felt threatened that there could be liability issues.

_We have lifestyle people living on hobby blocks next to our farm out there and they think it’s their right to walk their dog through our land and they think it’s their right to just walk in and go swimming in our dams._ (FR23)

_The onus of responsibility and liability comes back onto the farmer and not on the person who may have walked in and eaten mushrooms for instance._ (FR27)

A few farmers mentioned that managing feral animals could cause problems with neighbours who felt that the control methods were ‘barbaric’.

_We’ve always had to control rabbits and foxes and those sorts of things otherwise, the place literally would have been eaten out. And to go spotlighting down there now is an absolute nightmare. You feel like you’re a redneck. You know you used to be able to just go about [and do your thing] and the neighbours who were genuine farmers would understand that process, and they would be doing that. But people who have moved into areas of adjoining farms and might be quite happy for their two horses and rabbits to run on their land, they just don’t understand. They don’t like that aspect of living in the country._ (FR33)
Managing the threat of bushfires

Several farmers also mentioned that as many of the new residents commuted to work, these landowners were not on their own properties during the day to respond to bushfires if the need arose. A number of farmers said that they now had ‘evenings and weekends off’ from fire fighting because they were around during the day to protect assets, so the newcomers could do the evening and weekend shifts.

*In the end the voluntary sector of the community still boils down to the farming people who are here .... Now the people that commute to Albury-Wodonga are happy to come and fight a fire after 4pm in the afternoon. Some of them have permission from their bosses to be called out at any time. Don’t get me wrong about the Fire Brigade, but what I am saying is, in the end, your community resources rely on, and the turn out of your fire truck relies on, the people on the spot and very, very often they are the farming people.* (FR08)

Some farmers expressed concern that the bigger picture of more houses in the landscape was not being addressed in relation to fire management along with recognising an increasing dependence on the small local (largely rural) fire brigades to deal with more infrastructure fires.

Government agency staff also mentioned wildfire management and the increased risk as a result of more people being in rural areas, as potential instigators as well as more people and infrastructure being affected by bushfires.

*The more people you get in an area, the higher the fire risk there is both for the people and for the starting a fire, the more people you have in an area the more difficult it is to manage.* [State government employee 02]

Benefits of an increasing rural population

Having more people moving into rural areas did bring some social and economic benefits according to the majority of farmers. The most commonly mentioned advantages were participation by newcomers in community activities, from revived tennis clubs and schools to various community functions and Country Fire Authority activities. A few farmers also mentioned that more small businesses were now servicing the area.
We now have plumbers, electricians and earth movers operating their own businesses earning a living from the district. The plus from this larger population has been these services have come to us. (FR03)

I reckon we’re in an ideal area you know. We’ve got a local little fire brigade and there’s six new young families moved into the district in the last four or five years, yeah a couple of them have kids, and our district has just become vibrant in the last couple of years. (FR10)

There was genuine enthusiasm for the sense of community that had been created in recent years in some areas, and this was echoed by the Councillors and local government staff who mentioned that with the changing demographic of the Shire, there was also a diversity of views and aspirations.

While some farmers were sceptical of the ideas brought in by the newcomers to the area, they did note that there was certainly more awareness and activity around sustainability issues such as energy conservation and biodiversity protection. A few farmers noted concern about Council’s response to these influences, stating that many of these initiatives were town-focussed and unrealistic to apply on rural properties, while other farmers supported the perceived ‘growing’ environmentally-friendly attitude toward development in the Shire.

I think there should be more regulation regarding types of buildings in rural landscapes that includes the water, passive solar, that sort of stuff, and managing for the future. And some of that stuff is coming in, and it will come in more as the people move out here. I am a big fan of it, I reckon it is a great thing. (FR06)

Environmental changes

Visual amenity, trees and weeds

One of the most common references to landscape change was the visual impact of more houses scattered across the land. While some farmers voiced a note of regret at the change, many were philosophical, accepting that this was the ‘price of progress’ and needed to be tolerated.
Just because I think it is annoying having to pass extra houses on the way home, it doesn’t matter, as long as they aren’t damaging the environment, the physical environment, its okay. (FR02)

People also commented on the fact that the increasing population was similar to the ‘old days’ when there were many more houses in the landscape where farm workers and extended family members lived. While many of these buildings had burnt down or fallen into disrepair over the years, some of these old cottages had now become valuable, and had been ‘fixed up’, making the place look respectable again.

[There was] a string of about three properties with broken down, old miners cottages, and now people are taking a lot of pride in making those acceptable properties again, visually. So that is a plus. (FR05)

There were a lot of fallen-down poorly looked-after farms. Now I look at some of the houses and think it’s just so fantastic that someone has actually had the money, and the money has come from working jobs outside of farming, to actually give this place the look that it has today, which is like opening a magazine and what you would dream of, but that wasn’t the case you know twenty five years ago, it just wasn’t. (FR33)

The majority of farmers (broad acre and dairy) noted that there was an increase in number of trees in the landscape and many farmers specifically mentioned where and how many trees they had planted on their properties, proud of the visual landscape change they had instigated. As to the general increase in trees across the landscape as a whole, farmers were split in their opinions as to whom the increase was attributable, with some saying that it was farmers who had done the majority of work, while others contended that new residents brought a new energy and interest to the landscape.

I certainly have to say if trees hadn’t been planted over there we would have a much worse opinion of all the houses that have grown up around here. (FR14)

I don’t think people who buy these blocks do plant more trees. They might plant a few around the house but in terms of planting thousands of tree plantations like the people who have been the commercial farmers – it just doesn’t happen because they don’t have the time because they are earning their money in town. (FR04)
Those smaller five and ten acre blocks ... with a relatively new house are quite often retired professional people or whatever else, they have done the landscape a lot of value actually, I mean they have planted a lot of other trees and shrubs. (FR32)

Many of the same farmers who were appreciative of the extra trees in the landscape also commented on the capacity of newcomers to the area to manage their rural properties. The majority of farmers spoke quite negatively about the management of rural land by non-farmers, citing weed and pest animal issues as the most common cause of angst between neighbours. The risk of bushfires was also raised by many farmers as most of them had recently been involved in fire-fighting. For the most part, their concerns were not about directly adjacent properties or neighbours, but more broadly about poorly managed land observed elsewhere in the district. In general, these farmers attributed the poor land management to a lack of knowledge on the part of the new resident and the lack of time for them to adequately manage their land.

I have no problem with the variety and the people who’ve moved in, they’ve mostly contributed to the area, but they need some knowledge of bushfires and how to look after their land. I’m not saying they do it badly, most of them do it probably better than farmers but they need to have some local knowledge. They treat [the land] as a dormitory, they come out to sleep and go in to work. (FR16)

The biggest trap is that they haven’t got the equipment or the time. Realistically compared to thirty years ago, the place is not as tidy and neat as it was, and there’s more chance of fires burning the place out than not. Whereas in the old days the guys used to clean everything up and mow everything, they were very religious, very good farmers. (FR30)

However, there were a few farmers who were more positive and said that they felt some of these people were trying and were keen to get on top of the weed issue.

So [the new neighbour] called in here yesterday to get us to identify another two weeds that he found. So he is actually asking and trying to become part of the community and they understand, well they don’t understand, but what they don’t understand, they ask. So we’re very lucky. (FR22)
Interestingly, there was quite a different viewpoint regarding weed management from the apiarists as some weeds are important sources of protein for bees. These farmers noted that the change in land management also could have an impact on bee hive health. Of particular note was the proliferation of Paterson’s curse which often occurred after a farmer sold his paddocks to non-farming use but before the new property owners decided what to do with the paddocks. The proliferation of ‘useful’ weeds (to an apiarist) such as Paterson’s curse was also dependent on market prices, and it was noted that with higher prices for crops as compared to beef or lamb, there were less ‘Curse’ paddocks.

*Well I suppose the one that springs to mind is that a lot of our Paterson’s curse country used to be on Albury Wodonga Development Corporation land and a lot of that’s been taken up with housing now. There’s still farming land there but in the last perhaps three or four years, they’ve religiously sprayed those paddocks and I’m not quite sure why. So that’s taken away a lot of what was really quite good curse country for us.* (FR22)

Pest plant and animal management was seen as a ubiquitous issue, regardless of property size, and most of the people interviewed noted that it was really about having people who are ‘stewards’ of the land and managing it properly.

*If you’ve got seven acres of weeds it can be as much a pain as a hundred acres of weeds, it doesn’t matter how big your block of land is you still have to manage it properly and a lot of people move from the city have no idea. Seven acres sounds like a very nice buffer away from your neighbour, but if you haven’t got a clue what’s going on, there’s all sorts of potential problems.*

[Councillor 02]

**Neighbouring land management – organic farming and fuel reduction burning**

A number of farmers raised the point that with organic farming becoming more prevalent, they had to be more careful when and if they used chemical sprays on their crops or paddocks. In the grape-growing areas of the Shire, raising awareness of the impacts of chemical spray drift has been an important part of community education.
The organic winery down the road is an issue for us because we were here first but we can no longer spray, we can no longer use chemical sprays. So we can’t do anything at all within certain hundreds of meters. And technically we can’t spray the roadside that we’re supposed to keep clean because they’re organic you’re not supposed to do anything. (FR23)

[A neighbouring winery] is really good about putting notices in the paper about the stage the vines are at and when they are vulnerable [to sprays], so that the other farmers know. It works really well. (FR31)

On the other hand, several farmers were encouraged by the increase in organic farms and noted that they added value and diversity to the landscape, although they were sceptical about the overall economic viability of some enterprises. Only three of the farmers actually referred to their businesses as operating using organic or biological farming principles, and none of them had been officially certified as organic.

The problems emanating from surrounding land uses didn’t always come from private landholders. The State government owns and manages a considerable amount of land in the Shire and their management activities can impact on farmers. While feral pest animals and weeds emanating from Crown land were mentioned by a few landholders as issues which were of concern amongst farmers in their area, none had direct experience or contact with Crown land management agencies regarding these issues. However, because the Shire has significant blocks of national park and State forest, prescribed burning as part of fuel reduction and fire protection and the associated “smoke taint” was raised as an issue amongst vigneron in particular.

The [Department of Sustainability and Environment] are doing lots of burn-offs now. The wine industry is supposed to be consulted, it is in the protocols or whatever, but it doesn’t always happen. They are supposed to be mindful of the effects of their smoke, but it doesn’t always happen... We had some smoke tainted grapes this year – it makes it hard. (FR31)

Drought and water management on farms

All the farmers had been affected in some way by the drought, and many stated that things were starting to get really tough as their otherwise dependable sources of water were drying up. Over half of the farmers said that it was only in the last year or so that
the creek or their dams had gone dry, requiring them to either cart water or pump from another source. For the most part, the drought was considered as severe as they could remember, and while all of them had stories about dry periods, many thought that this was quite severe, mostly because it seemed to ‘teeter on the edge’ a number of times. It was pointed out that the nature of this drought had caught people off guard and in the first two or three years there was an attitude of ‘she’ll be right and then she’ll be over’, but then the drought went on for seven years, then ten years, and if steps hadn’t been taken five years earlier, then one couldn’t survive those last few years.

*People have really sharpened up, trying to beat the drought. That is why they are so sick of the drought. We – most of us – have spent a bloody lot of money the last few years just to be ready to come away running when times come good again. And they don’t bloody come good.* (FR02)

Councillors and local government staff were also keenly aware of the effects of the drought on the community and recognised that it was challenging the viability of the agricultural industry in the region.

*I think anyone who relies on the land for a living is going to have to think about what that means to them in the long term. You know we’ve just been through twelve, thirteen years of drought so there are a lot of people starting to question whether the style of agriculture and the use of their land is going to be a long term viable option if the water scarcity continues.* (Shire staff 03)

The impact of the drought on the psyche of farmers was also mentioned by a few staff, although they noted that, for the most part, the farmers were optimistic about the future. Also, the Shire had undertaken a number of social programs to assist farmers during the drought, although these were not necessarily focussed on developing agricultural skills or specific land management. Rather, these programs related to health, training for off-farm employment and financial management.

For some farmers, especially those involved in cropping, the lack of rainfall, combined with the increase in temperature required them to diversify and experiment with other crops, or become more efficient. Farmers were also affected by the responses of other local industries to the drought, highlighting the inter-connectedness and synergies of local businesses.
With the dairy industry having a significant down turn with lack of water and their prices down, they have had to rationalise a lot, so they have become a lot smarter in how they produce their grain and fodder; they are now using a lot of other materials which we are competing against, which isn’t necessarily a bad thing. Drought has taught us a lot about how to gain efficiencies within our businesses, but I am hopeful that the dairy industry will become buoyant again. And once it becomes buoyant again that really does have quite a large impact on the grains sector in this area in particular. (FR32)

However, the sense of lessons learned from the drought was not universally shared, nor was there a strong consensus about climate change. One agricultural business advisor said that a lot of the farmers he talked to referred to the drought as “just a blip and things will get back to normal.”

A lot of [farmers] are prepared to farm with the season that they’re actually getting. So if it is bad, then they’ll cut back but perhaps as many as half of them aren’t and they would stick with what they were going to do and buy in feed and really do a lot of damage to their animal health, their land health, their own health in the process and in a way it’s a great pity that we’ve had the end of the drought [because] some of the lessons hadn’t been fully learned. (Agri-business advisor 02)

This sentiment was echoed by local government staff and Councillors who, after the drought had broken, and with the value of hindsight, noted that it had been an opportunity to think about the implications of a future drier climate.

In a very broad sense, there is a shrinking amount of land available that is arable, and when you add the shrinking amount of water available, then there is an issue there, and for me climate change is a big factor there. (Councillor 02)

The last ten dry years was actually, for the ones that have changed their mind, was very, very powerful because they saw the land when they had a few summer storms they saw it just wash and fill up dams with silt and people who would never ever have thought about sub dividing paddocks or maintaining ground cover suddenly for the first time were actually coming along to Landcare and they were saying ‘what can we do, what assistance can we get?’ and that was fantastic. (Agri-business advisor 02)
Councillors and local government staff noted that climate change and water availability was something that could be anticipated and planned for in terms of agricultural production, but needed far more attention than was currently being given by farmers or government at any level. It was recognised that water planning, allocation and regulation was the responsibility of the Water Authorities. However, local government was concerned about how information was shared and acted upon between agencies as well as responsibility for the cumulative impact of land use change on water resources. This concern about cumulative impacts was also acknowledged by farmers who said there was a need for a more holistic and integrated approach to water management decisions in rural areas. The effect of more residential development, a purported increase in the number of private dams for fire risk management or for stock and domestic use, and the implications of a future drier climate created concern and uncertainty for many farmers.

_The rural residents are tapping into underground springs for fire dams and tanks and it is lowering the water table for everybody, taking it away from farmers. (Kergunyah workshop participant)_

A few farmers raised concerns about the requirements for water for fire-fighting purposes and were unsure how that was expressed in planning legislation. The majority of farmers also expressed discontent with the restrictions on building farm dams and the potential of being taxed on the water that falls on your property.

_I think this water business – that’s a real issue – goodness me, you buy a farm here you expect to get 32 inch rainfall and you pay x-amount because of that and then they say ‘you can have that little dam there but you can’t save any run off, you have to pay for that’ …I mean they are not going to make much difference to the Hume are they with their little dams. Gosh, yet it helps drought proof your farm._ (FR13)

_One of the big issues... is farm dams, particularly around the subdivision issue. They are significantly influencing flows to the river and on unregulated streams, it’s going to be really damaging, but on the unregulated streams who cares?_ [Agri-business advisor 01]

Indigo Shire staff mentioned that the transfer of water licences was challenging the planning system by separating land and water property rights. While this definitely affected the current and potential use of the land, there were also implications for other
water users. The Shire had joined with a number of other councils in seeking clarification and input to the Murray-Darling Basin Authority’s Basin Plan as they were concerned with community and region-wide impacts from changes to water allocation.

“There are always water issues and there’s also the other side to water and farming and that’s irrigation licences and people selling their water rights. So it’s an issue that needs to be looked at but I don’t know if it’s being looked into at that strategic level. (State government employee 02)

At the moment we’ve got a bit of space to move, but if the water allocation stuff, you know the Murray Darling stuff, gets cut, or just the fact that we’re not going to get enough rain, maybe the landholdings do need to shrink to become a bit more intensive and a bit more creative and how we handle the pressure around the food security thing, I think it’s something that we haven’t probably explored enough. [Shire staff 01]

While none of these farmers were completely dependent upon irrigation, the consequences of the combination of lack of rainfall, subsequent drying up of creeks and more people in the landscape meant there was greater demand on dwindling surface water resources, affecting their use of water. The use of water then became an issue of priorities and financial value.

“As soon as the creek goes below a certain level, I have to stop irrigating [from the Creek] and I have to start pumping from my dam. And what is happening is that there are more and more people pumping out of the creek and so when it gets below that flow, it is getting earlier. And maybe it is because of the hot conditions. Goulburn Murray Water tells me it is because there are more people pumping out of it. These are really big issues for people like me because there is only so much water and you know, someone really has to think about what is the water for, whether there is value in what I do, or whether we should all be allowed to pump out for whatever reason. (FR06).

All of the farmers recognised that they were much better off than other farmers either lower in the catchment or elsewhere in the Murray-Darling Basin as they saw themselves as ‘closer to the source’ and in a higher rainfall area, even though it hadn’t been raining. Councillors and agri-business advisors also saw that the high rainfall and potentially more secure water than other places could bring more industry or agricultural business to the area. Some were also sceptical as to whether there really
was an issue around water availability for agriculture in the catchment; it was an economic issue, not an environmental one

*We thought the Kiewa Valley was drought proof. It’s not as bad as some other places and I realize that, but it hasn’t been good. (FR14)*

*This is a water rich part of the catchment… we produce thirty seven percent of the water that flows through the Murray Darling Basin, then we turn around and say we’re water limited? Where there’s a water market, there’s water, that’s the bottom line." (Agri-business advisor 01)*

**Economic changes**

The economic consequences of land use and population changes in rural areas was perhaps the most difficult for people to describe, as the ‘causes’ and ‘effects’ appeared to be closely intertwined, the influences or drivers of economic circumstances widely divergent and the implications for farmers often dependent upon personal circumstances. The increasing population in the Shire has meant an increased demand for land for residential purposes creating a corresponding increase in its value, alongside a growing market for some local agricultural products as well as a growth in local tourism.

**Land as a commodity and capital gains**

It was broadly acknowledged that the value of land had increased significantly in recent years. This has created both positive and negative outcomes for farmers, depending on the industry and how they viewed their future. The majority of dairy and broad-acre farmers were still interested in purchasing more land, even if the cost was high. Many of them mentioned that it was ‘just part of being a farmer’, regardless of the current financial or climatic situation.

*So [with the consequences of the drought], and with land prices inflating, it has been hard. But we have bought land over the last couple of years. Only because we see a future in agriculture and we love living in this area and we will more than likely continue to invest. (FR32)*
Yes we would buy more land. People would say ‘why would you want to buy more land at your age?’ but as commercial farmers that is part of development, especially if it’s neighbouring land. If you don’t look at the future and think that far ahead, then you will go backwards. (FR03)

However, there also seemed to be a threshold in terms of those farms that were significantly profitable or large enough in scale to enable the purchase of more land, especially if it was large enough to permit a dwelling. This was particularly true in parts of the Kiewa Valley where a number of dairy farms had closed down and been subdivided into separate blocks. These were now on the market as residential lots, and priced out-of-reach of some dairy farmers who could have benefited from expansion.

Well [residential interest has] put the price of land up and it’s stopped us from being able to just grow our business to keep up with the costs. I guess economically we are too small and we haven’t been able to expand and we needed to really because we’re not big enough to employ anybody and there’s no future for our kids here. (FR14)

Some dairy farmers said that the larger blocks tended to sell quickly, although many farmers believed that the really good quality farming properties in the Kiewa Valley were so tightly held, that there were few whole farms for sale at any rate.

I mean good land in sizeable lumps very rarely comes on the market. There have been about 3 or 4 farms in the last 5 years that have sold and they have sold very quickly. But contrary to that, a lot of the land that comes up for sale are in these small blocks and their value is so high, even if they square a farm off if you like, [farmers] are not going to pay $8,000 an acre for 30 acres next door especially if you have already borrowed to that level and you don’t want to go over the edge and that’s what is happening. (FR04)

This was markedly different from the cropping and broad acre land in the Rutherglen area where a number of farmers said it was quite difficult to sell land and that it appeared that ‘all the land between Rutherglen and the Murray was for sale’.

It’s usually that the place is being split up and you’ll end up buying a hundred acres and another neighbour would end up buying a hundred acres and doing something like that whereas the place will never get sold as a big hit in one go. (FR10)
With the price of land pushed above its agricultural productivity potential, many people saw land itself as a commodity, rather than a resource to be managed to produce food or fibre. As a commodity, it is generally considered that the higher the price, the smaller the unit into which it can be broken. However, in this instance, the ability to use land for farming is actually diminished every time it is divided into smaller units. This is at the centre of the debate about the right to subdivide farming land.

The issue of maintaining or protecting the ‘technical integrity’ or efficiency of a farm was a concern expressed by planners, at both a State government level as well as a local government level.

*The land needs to be maintained in certain sized units that can still be somewhat managed technically efficiently so that it’s worthwhile to get a truck to come in and get a load of stock on and off the farm. You don’t want it so that the property only has thirty sheep and half a dozen cattle, in that instance it’s almost impossible to make it technically efficient.* [State government employee 02]

Planners and local government staff recognised that this ‘technical efficiency’ aspect was quite different from ‘economic efficiency’ which was dependent upon external drivers such as markets, climate and the effectiveness of the manager.

**Rural rates and financial support**

All the farmers recognised that the value of their own land was increasing, and to some, the anticipated return on capital was their justification to continue farming, especially after a string of poor market prices and dry years. However, while the rising value of their land was beneficial from an investment point of view, it also meant that their rates were increasing which was of concern and quite a few people complained about this economic burden imposed by local government.

*Last week the rates notice came and [this place was] $190,000 more in value than the year before. And it gradually creeps up and up. Now if it was going down by the same amount every year, I would be the first one complaining wouldn’t I. Well I would be worrying about the value of my land but we have never, no one in the Kiewa Valley has ever, had to worry about the value of their land because it is a socially acceptable place to live.* (FR04)
Inside every vealer there’s twenty dollars worth of shire rates, and three dollars fifty inside every lamb that goes away. (FR10)

Rural rates and land valuation was an important issue for Councillors and local government staff as well. When asked how local government was supporting farmers, most of the Councillors and Shire employees said they were reducing the rural rates. They pointed out that while farmers contributed to nearly half of the rate base, there was a belief that farmers only received minimal services in return as they tend to “live on unsealed roads, may not get garbage collection and there is probably not a lot of street lighting in a lot of agricultural areas”. However, it was also strongly argued by Shire staff that there are other services delivered to farmers by Council which went far beyond roads, rubbish and lights. They admitted that this was a “perennial argument that could go around for ever” as it was based on farmer’s perceptions, but given the proclivity to support farmers where possible, the Shire had accepted the farmers’ viewpoint.

There’s always that inequality [felt by farmers] that the people in the towns get a far better deal out of the rates than they do, but you know someone with five or six hundred acres might be paying about nine thousand dollars rates a year, whereas someone who’s got a house in the town might be paying a thousand dollars rates so there is a large inequity. (Councillor 04)

A slightly different perspective was provided by an agri-business advisor who commented that adjusting rural rates was not an issue of any economic consequence for most farmers, but it did send the right message from local government.

I don’t think a rate rebate will be a circuit breaker, it won’t really make that much difference. I believe it would send a nice signal that [local government] thinks it’s important, but I think when people sit down and do the sums, it’s not going to be big enough. (Agri-business advisor 02)

However, it was also mentioned that other activities undertaken by the Shire could also support agriculture, although they haven’t been labelled as such.

If agriculture is to remain a strong industry, there are a range of related activities that we can help encourage, to come and be active in the Shire, which would support that sort of activity. Through our economic development staff we can encourage industry and manufacturing... But that hasn’t been specifically targeted [around] businesses to support agriculture, it’s been more based on
general demand for industrial land for light industrial sort of activities, some of which will probably support agriculture but that’s not been a deliberate strategy of ours. (Shire staff 04)

Shire staff also pointed out their support for a number of programs to assist farmers during the drought and other difficult times. These involved helping farmers gain accreditation for skills such as welding so that they could find employment off-farm at certain times of the year or even during the day.

We had interactions with probably several hundred farmers I suppose over a couple of years through that program and I think that was pretty well received; we had pretty good take-up of that. [It] actually meant that they could go and earn a genuine wage during the times when they were quiet on the farm or someone in their family could go and earn a wage, so I think that was a good project in terms of connecting a bit more with some of the rural people. (Shire staff 03)

However, this particular program did not necessarily support the continuation of farming as an activity in the landscape. Many farmers made the point that the best way to keep farming a viable option and therefore contributing to an agricultural landscape was to keep farmers actively participating in agriculture.

Many farmers commented that the increased value of their property meant that the next generation was well set up, even if they were not interested in running the farm.

But we are sitting here on a gold mine and we are quite conscious of that. Even though we both want to be farmers we, well I certainly recognise now having belted my head against a brick wall about land use for the last 35 years that I am going to die quite rich and my kids will get the benefit of those riches because of the value of the land that we own in the Kiewa Valley. (FR03)

Superannuation funds, retirement and succession planning

Many of the farmers spoke of their land being their superannuation fund and they were well aware of changes in value over time. This was especially true where the farms were located in areas that had already undergone a significant shift away from traditional agricultural land uses and there was little interest from the next generation in
maintaining the farm. In these cases, the farmers ‘saw the writing on the wall’ and were interested in getting the most they could from the sale of their asset.

\[ I \text{ see [our farm] as our superannuation basically. I think anybody else would see it as the potential to break up the farm more than to keep the farm as it is. I think that, if it is going to happen, I might as well do it.} \] (FR16)

Quite a number of farmers mentioned that there was a dilemma for many of the older generation of farmers who required money for their retirement but did not have sufficient funds in superannuation or savings and were therefore relying on the sale of their farm to fund their retirement. There were two problems which arose from this scenario; the first was the need to fund retirement costs through the sale of parts of the farm at the highest possible price. Shire staff recognised the challenge, expressing concern for the welfare of the retiring farmers as well.

\[ \text{Poor old Bill says ‘I need to sell that paddock off because I need to go into the retirement home and that will cost me three hundred thousand or four hundred thousand dollars’, so he’s got to sell off a block... so that then puts a house in the middle of a farming place.} \] (FR26)

\[ \text{We get a lot of farmers who want to hive off a bit here and there as their superannuation and it’s just trying to make sure that you protect the really good agricultural land and see that the farmer has a reasonably good deal as well.} \] (Councillor 02)

The second dilemma arises when a family member is interested in taking over the farm as a whole but is unable to purchase it outright because of its high value.

\[ \text{It’s a fact that the parents can get too much [money] out of the land when they sell it, so the children and the parents talk and the parents can’t get the sort of an income that they need for their retirement when the son or daughter is running the farm, so it just gets sold.} \] (FR35)

While this scenario was not mentioned as a common occurrence, succession planning was mentioned by almost all of the farmers. More than half of the farmers had family members working on the farm in some capacity, and the farmers themselves expressed strong desires to stay on the farm as long as possible, because that was ‘home’ and they valued the attributes of the landscape and its location in terms of proximity to towns.
They did acknowledge that there were likely to be issues around the high opportunity cost of the land.

*But what we are faced with is the possibility, not by choice but by circumstances, this farm may become untenable in the future simply because the land will be too valuable.* (FR04)

**Leasing and share-farming**

Another way of getting around the high price of land was to lease farmland, although the majority of farmers noted that this was fraught with problems as well, mainly because of the expectations around the value of land.

Farmers pointed out that addressing the cost associated with leasing farm land was a difficult issue, as the rent expected by the owner was often high, given the high value of the property. For grazing country, when beef or lamb prices were high and input costs low, this was often less of an issue. However, for farmers wishing to grow crops, the rising costs of putting in a crop, added to rent and the general uncertainty of the grain market, meant leasing was rarely worthwhile except where the land could be leased very cheaply.

*I see a lot of people who would be very happy to agist and lease land and so on but the expectation of the person leasing it is too high, because they’re basing it on the purchase price of that land or what they think its value is... if it came down from five thousand to two thousand [dollars per hectare] and you based your lease on that, then leasing would jump up tremendously, especially as people get older.* (Agri-business advisor 02)

From the lessor’s perspective, it also has to be economically worthwhile. Only a few farmers mentioned that they were leasing land out to other farmers, and in most cases were leasing it to family members as part of their succession planning. There were challenges with these arrangements and the majority of farmers who were doing this noted that it took a particular ‘mind set’ to make it work smoothly.

*Leasing [to young people] I thought was a brilliant idea, but I suppose you get back to when I first took this over from my father, some young person comes along and starts farming the land that you’ve farmed all your life and looking at all the things that you’ve been doing and changing them. Would that make you*
feel comfortable? I don’t know, it would have to be a pretty forward thinking farmer I think or ex-farmer, to lease his land and feel comfortable. (FR29)

However, the advantage of having a regular income from the lease was noted by lessors. I suppose I could say that the leased land brings in a guaranteed income every year and it would be enough to cover costs etc. You see the owner has got to get a good income. You’ve got to get a viable return. And the lessee also has to get a good return too you know. The margins have got to be there. (FR27)

Economies of scale for cropping made a big difference, with larger machinery and spending less time ‘on-the-ground’ being important considerations.

*We have another about 400 hectares which we lease. We are a little spread out but we have focussed on having plant machinery that is fairly versatile and easy to move… We wouldn’t have the machinery we use if we didn’t have the acres. I think the way we farm today we really are looking at farming in an economically and ergonomically friendly way. As far as minimal till, it is fantastic, we don’t mistreat the soil near as much, I mean we are going across the paddock once now where we would have three times – once with a disc, then a set of harrows, then with the seeded. Now it gets one, so with that comes economy. (FR32)*

In the Rutherglen area, leasing of land for cropping or grazing was much more common, with a number of farmers saying that they leased up to a third of their cropping land. There were also various informal arrangements between neighbours, especially with the decline in the grape production, several farmers had been grazing land that had been taken out of grapes but which the owner still wanted to retain. In one instance, this was a handshake agreement because the farmer did not want to ‘burden his sons’ with any formal leasing commitment. Leasing was far less common in dairying country, although it was mentioned frequently in terms of succession or utilising adjacent paddocks opportunistically in short term contracts.

Several farmers said that they were leasing from non-farmers, and in most cases, there were benefits on both sides. Due to the minimum lot size for a permit to build a house, there were an increasing number of properties of 40 hectares or more owned by people not interested or capable of farming it.
Because we can just see with these people, that get these forty hectares, I finish up with thirty of them. Somehow or another like they’ll sell it off later on or they want to rent it to you, or share farm it, because they just can’t handle it. (FR10)

This situation has also helped to create some very positive relationships within the community, with new residents becoming engaged in the agricultural activity surrounding them.

I have just signed a new lease with a young couple, who have bought a property which is about 40 hectares and I am leasing the paddock off them. They have obviously lived in the city for the majority of their lives and are just embracing the whole way of life out here. They are really keen to know what is going on, they are excited when I come over and sow their paddock. He comes and jumps onto the tractor with me to have a yarn, he is very interested in planting trees, he is interested in the soil health, he is really taking an interest in what is going on and I just think it is marvellous, I really do. That scenario, I mean for him, they are going to keep about 15 acres themselves and they are going to farm that themselves, just because they have the time, it isn’t a job to them, its a hobby, they are going to have the time to plant trees. (FR32)

**Finding farm labour in rural areas**

In discussing the viability of their business, the availability of farm labour was mentioned by many farmers, although their responses to it were quite different. For dairy farmers, this was often an on-going problem, especially if family members were not working on the farm. Generally, because of early morning milking shifts, labour needed to be sourced locally. The higher land costs meant there are fewer properties available for rent or suitable for lower wage earners. This had resulted in a few dairy farmers seeking approval for multiple dwellings on their property, generally on different titles, to provide housing for workers. However, this had been a very difficult process for them due to the restrictions on housing permits in the Farm Zone (see further discussion in Chapter 6).

The proximity to Albury-Wodonga was mentioned as creating competition for labour as did the general mineral resources development boom happening across Australia.
Its harder to get people to milk cows now isn’t it? We certainly had trouble getting people in our last few years...I think that just reflects the change [in demographics]. In the Goulburn valley or some of the places in Gippsland you’ve got small centres that have got people. So here its the case of people living here but working in town and not really interested in working [in the dairy]. (FR28)

Many farmers were keen to talk about the fact that they were hiring locals, and in many cases, from local family farms.

They are in fact all farming families that we use, bar one. But one of them is a lifestyle person, or a member of a family that is there for lifestyle, but the others are actually members of local farming families that we are using as our labour force. Absolutely local. (FR18)

A value-added farm business believed that employing locals was also part of contributing to the community and ensuring that farming knowledge stays in the area.

The other side was we thought that we wanted to do something in the community and that if we were going to get to the stage of employing people, it would be nice to employ locals and actually build a skills base and in fact that’s what’s happened. And that’s really quite gratifying. (FR29)

In broad acre farming, the sporadic nature of the farm work suited contracting and it also meant that as a small operator, there was less need to invest in machinery.

When I was a kid, farmers had eight hundred or a thousand acres and they always had one or two full time working men [who] lived somewhere in the district, whereas now you can quite comfortably run a couple of thousand acres on your own as long as you’ve got access to contractors or whatever. It’s just a matter of having a mobile phone and doing some ringing. You know you can get someone to help you pretty quickly. We’ve got a chap that does all of the crop spraying now...And then we have a fellow for contract mowing for two or three farms here now and he mows and conditions and we just give him so much an acre. You build those names up over a period of years and most of the time they’re sort of farmers that have got out of their own business for one reason or another and they’re quite happy to come and do it and it’s a good way of not having to buy extra machines. (FR10)
A similar situation was noted by an agri-business advisor where the ageing farmer population was searching for farm managers who could come in and ‘run the place for them’. However, the fact that those businesses or farm managers weren’t available was likely because it wasn’t an economically efficient business model and the margins are not there to make it viable.

**Farm ownership and business management**

The majority of farmers still believed that the family-owned farm was the best form of business unit for farming. A few farmers knew of instances where large companies had purchased farms, but not in Indigo Shire. The scenario of multi-national owned farms was viewed by those farmers as one way to keep ‘farms’ in the landscape, but they felt it wasn’t a great model to follow.

_I think in the future [farms] will still be a family-based. It doesn’t have to be moulded on business-owned farms, and they employ managers. People see farming as a business. It is not just a way of life. The attitude of “I can’t be bothered to do anything else, I’ll just go back to the family farm and swing along with what they have been doing for the last 150 – 200 years” isn’t really there anymore, so the process of people managing their places, their farms as businesses, is great. (FR18)_

_Still some of the most successful partnerships are where the husband and wife or the partners work together because they will tighten their belt when times get tough. (FR02)_

However, many of the farmers said they were members of either industry or regional networks and were very positive about the advantages of having local connections to help with everything from crop advice to financial management. In a few cases, the farm was very much an extended family business so managing expectations and finances was critical, and in these cases, having outside advice was seen as beneficial. All of the farmers agreed that good management was what created and maintained a successful farm, and some pointed out that while “management is the biggest single issue in success, a lot of learning comes from fellow farmers and that is the key to successful farming too I think.” (FR18)
Underlying the observations about the future of the family farm was a strong sense of successful farms also being successful businesses. Many of the farmers considered themselves ‘businessmen’ or ‘land managers running a business’ where the sense of economic viability and profitability were paramount.

_Farming is a business; otherwise I wouldn’t be in it. To be a land manager, you need to have a business._ (FR05)

_The younger generation that are coming into the dairy farming are actually running it in a totally different way, they’re running it as a business, they employ staff, they still take their holidays and because of the return on investment, it’s actually quite profitable._ (Shire staff 04)

**Value-adding and diversification**

Value-adding to the existing product or diversifying activities on the farm was generally seen as a way to help overcome the rising operating costs of agricultural business. On the whole, value-adding was not widespread, although quite a few farms did have on-the-side or diversification activities, such as fattening vealers, a small specialty beef herd or selling eggs locally, which brought in some extra money. The majority of the value-adding was in the horticulture and viticulture sectors.

Several farmers mentioned that there were now more restrictions and associated paperwork with farm gate sales, and while this did not completely deter them, it was an additional burden and required them to be ‘on their toes’ and aware of changes in legislation. A few farmers mentioned the challenges around occupational health and safety regulations and the bureaucratic processes involved when dealing with different jurisdictions. This was particularly onerous if they attended more than one Farmers’ Market or sold produce in other States.

The majority of farmers who were involved in value-adding were capitalising on the image of ecologically sensitive land management, organic practices and healthy, local food.

_This approach is a combination of personal beliefs and establishing or responding to our customers and the market. I think they care about what they buy, they think about what they buy, and it makes them feel good that there is_
some effort going in to do things ecologically friendly. So it adds to the whole picture – our niche is a little bit different. (FR29)

But for some businesses, the lack of critical mass to create a local market demand and the ability to complement existing products was of concern. One producer said that obtaining organic fruit locally to add to their product was sometimes a problem because there were so few suppliers, and this hindered their production. However, this was also tempered by the fact that with new, ‘boutique style’ industries coming into the area there were increasing opportunities to diversify the product, and build synergies between different industries.

Historical and personal connections to the land were also part of the marketing of local produce, which seemed to work really well when combined with a traditional, simple approach. It was recognised that having a historical connection with the area and its produce was a valuable marketing strategy.

Our selling points are that we are an unirrigated winery, with old vines – our oldest is 110 years old – and we practice craftsmanship. We aspire to be organic but we aren’t there yet. (FR31)

Only a small number of farmers said they were diversifying their business significantly as a way to remain competitive or were contemplating it for the future. A few farmers were already engaged in the tourism business, and had some form of commercial accommodation available. Another farmer was interested in expanding his business to attract tourists interested in horticulture, however, the core business would not change significantly.

I want to diversify and what the plan is, is to turn it into pick your own fruit and start growing berries inside, as well as strawberries and we are talking in I think three years we will build a new beaut sales area, I mean mud brick, timber and that will be aimed more at the tourist type market. (FR06)

Another farm was embarking on a completely new product which would complement the existing beef and lamb business, but which they were hoping would also become a separate enterprise. They viewed the development and establishment of a new product as a significant challenge as it was extra work with an uncertain outcome, even though they were taking advantage of outside funding for agricultural diversification.
We looked long and hard at all sorts of things, it took me two or three years really to find a suitable alternative because we looked at green tea and it was too windy, saffron was climatically okay but a lot of work and we would have lost it in the drought. We looked at all sorts of things... (FR24)

The success of this business venture was still unclear a year later.

**Summary**

The results presented in this chapter show that the changes being experienced by the farming community as a result of an increasing number of non-farming residents in rural areas were certainly not all negative. For the most part, there was optimism expressed by farmers and local government officials that with careful management, the effects of a growing rural population could be beneficial, environmentally as well as economically and socially. Although some conflicts between farming and non-farming neighbours related to differences in personal attitudes and behaviours and therefore were never likely to be resolved, there were also several examples of new relationships being forged as non-farming residents became engaged with the rural agricultural activity happening around them. The majority of farmers as well as Shire staff and Councillors saw the increasing rural population as beneficial for many facets of the community, from increased support for rural activities such as the fire brigade to the availability of local farm labour. This ‘ability to get along’ is of particular interest as it is rarely reflected in the literature on rural land use change. The majority of literature focussing on the impacts and conflicts of changing agricultural land uses has mainly been undertaken in peri-urban areas (Buxton et al., 2007; Condon et al., 2010; Henderson, 2003b) as discussed in Chapter 2. However, the results presented here do parallel some of the findings from two studies; one done in northern New South Wales (Gibson et al., 2005) and another undertaken in grazing country in Oregon, USA (Abrams & Gosnell, 2012) where some common aims between farming and non-farming households were identified. In addition, being able to maintain community diversity without conflict is seen as a good foundation upon which to build social and economic resilience (Ragusa, 2011; B. Walker, Abel, Anderies, & Ryan, 2009).

From an environmental perspective, farmers noted that the increasing rural population could affect overall water availability, especially during the drought. The issues around
water planning, including cumulative impacts on resource availability and water licensing were raised by farmers and local government staff as currently causing some concerns. It was noted that jurisdictional responsibilities between levels of government meant that these issues were notoriously difficult to address (Department of Planning and Community Development, 2009a). However, the drought had focussed attention on the hydrological attributes of the location of the Shire in relation to the rest of the Murray-Darling Basin, and some Councillors and agri-business advisors saw the potential to attract more agricultural businesses to the area. This desire to develop ‘rain-fed’ agriculture was reflected in a study on the future viability of the dairy industry in the region (Mulvany, 2010) as well as a regional business prospectus (Australian Alpine Valley Agribusiness Forum, 2008). Council’s main form of support for farmers was to provide a reduction in rural rates on farm properties and, although this may not provide a significant financial advantage to some farmers, it was felt that it ‘sent the right message’ that farmers were valued in the Shire. Shire staff noted that there were no particular policies to attract agriculture-related businesses to the Shire, even though there was a focus on the expansion of industrial land within the Shire. This emerging disconnect is explored further in the next Chapter from a local government and planning perspective but has not been discussed to any degree in the literature.

The main disadvantage, and the primary cause of concern over the influx of new residents, was the rising cost of farm land in particular areas which could make the land ‘too valuable to farm’ and housing too expensive for local farm labour to use. In general, the farmers did not blame the incoming residents or purchasers, but saw this as a fault of the broader system that appeared to be unable to ‘protect’ good farm land, or recognise and support the practical needs of farmers, such as accommodation for labourers. These are widespread sentiments and have been the instigation for reports and investigations such as the Future Farms Task Force in Victoria (Future Farming Rural Planning Group, 2009) and have been highlighted in the discourse around rural planning (Budge & Slade, 2009; Sinclair & Bunker, 2007).

While some farmers were continuing to purchase land to complement their current holdings, other farmers were unable to afford to do so. There was a marked difference in the ‘sale-ability’ of farming properties across the Shire, with large farms generally being ‘sold in one hit’ and quite quickly in the Kiewa Valley, and similar-sized properties taking much longer to sell and generally being broken up and sold as separate lots in the Rutherglen area. These geographical differences reveal the challenges and
complexity in rural planning, where a one-size-fits-all approach is rarely useful or easily applicable. Leasing and share-farming as responses to land use change and farms being subdivided was much more common in the Rutherglen area where the predominant use was broad acre cropping. Some leasing took place in the dairy country, but this was often leased to family members. There were issues around financial expectations from leasing arrangements which sometimes made this a difficult pathway to expanding farm enterprises, but many farmers saw this as a potentially positive future option. This data concurs with the conclusions reached in a study on farm leasing arrangements in Australia which showed that leasing is far less prevalent here compared with either the United Kingdom or the United States (Ashby & Ashby, 2011), but is worth pursuing further.

The next chapter explores the issues around planning and local governance in rural landscapes.
Chapter 6 – Impact of land use planning processes

Introduction

This chapter addresses the second research question regarding the impact on farming activities from land use planning and related processes, aiming to understand how these processes influence the role and activities of farming in amenity landscapes.

The chapter is divided into three sections: the first section deals with issues around the relationships between local government and farmers. It recognises that while some processes encompass high level strategic policy setting, other processes relate to the implementation of planning decisions at a property or individual rate-payer level. The perspectives of farmers, Councillors and government agency staff with respect to community engagement, communications and decision making are also explored.

The second section focuses on responses from farmers to questions about their knowledge of, and interaction with, land use planning. Councillors and local government staff were also asked about their perspectives on how planning processes
address rural land use and farming activities. This section concludes with an exploration of the ways in which ‘productive’ agricultural land is currently defined and how this affects planning.

The final section deals with the fundamental concern in the discourse about the future of farm lands: the fragmentation of existing farm land as a result of land use change.

**Relationship between local government and agriculture**

**Council support for agriculture**

There were differing opinions about the capability of local government to actually make decisions about the future of agricultural land and keep farming productive. Some farmers talked about local government not being able to make difficult or ‘hard-nosed’ decisions because they were too close to the community. Agri-business advisors said Councillors may be too interested in self-preservation and their role as Councillors to make the difficult, hard line decisions and stick to them.

> We have found local government is pretty soft at putting hard decisions in place so you go back to the next level which is State government which really finds it very difficult to relate to how or what landscape is worth preserving. (FR04)

> If you’re a Councillor you’ve got to be seen to be doing something for the community if you want to be re-elected, and doing something might be destroying the very long term asset that they have. So I’m not very optimistic about local government [protecting agricultural land]. (Agri-business advisor 02)

Some people felt that farmers were not being supported in general as businesses in their own right or as a separate sector within the community with particular ties to the land.

> I don’t really know what Council does to support farmers in the Shire. It’s hard to tell because we farmers tend to wear so many hats. I feel the Shire is quite Beechworth and town-centric; so we are left on the outer a bit. The primary production they talk about seems very peripheral unless it is production up there. (FR31)
I don’t think they [Council] do anything… they do everything to make it difficult to have a stall on the side of the road, the regulation, the signage and all those sorts of things are sometimes really difficult for people. No, I don’t think the Shire does anything really for farmers. Well, they haven’t for us, that has been our experience here for a long time. (FR33)

However, other farmers acknowledged Council’s approach to supporting farmers financially, especially with respect to rate subsidies.

In terms of government encouraging farming in this area, from a local government level, rates and rating charges is something that they need to keep in check and I think we are pretty lucky with the Council that we have. They seem to be quite understanding of the farming economy, which is great. (FR32)

A lot of farmers expressed their views on the ability of Council staff and Councillors to understand agricultural activities. For an agricultural-based Shire, many farmers felt that farming took a ‘back-seat’ to other activities, especially tourism. A number of farmers also noted that the composition of Councillors had changed over the years with far fewer farmers actually running for Council and fewer Council staff having experience with agriculture. While they agreed this was likely a reflection of broader demographic change, comments were made regarding the way farming as a land use was regarded in the Shire:

So I am not sure that the priority thinking of the Council as such focuses at all on agricultural areas. I don’t think that is any different in areas such as Chiltern or Rutherglen. There has been no thought at all apart from whether they can satisfy a group of people by updating a building or a sporting facility or something like that. So, if I see that in terms of what impact that has on farming or agriculture, I don’t think there has been any focus at all [on farming]. Councillors respond to where the people are and we don’t have the same impact in these country zones. I don’t think the Shire really understands that we [farmers] are here. (FR19)

Several of the farmers had actually been Councillors prior to the amalgamation of Shires and noted how difficult the job was, with a lot of competing interests and less ability to influence change than they had originally thought. Quite a few farmers expressed their opinion that Councils were not as independent from State government
process as they should be, and that was why it was so difficult to get independent people, like farmers, to run for Council.

And I’m not critical of Councillors, I’ve had a go at it and I found out that you don’t have as much power as what you think you have. (FR11)

Some farmers were aware that the job demands of Council and local government in general were changing and that it would be difficult to be a full time farmer as well as a Councillor. There was wide recognition that it was not an easy job. A few farmers saw the role of Councillors from very different perspectives, highlighting the diversity in expectations of Councillors.

Twenty years ago I would have given it a go but you know... besides the role has changed. Twenty years ago you represented the people but you don’t any more. You are a mouth piece for the State Government and are told by bureaucrats what to do and that’s quite different to what Shire Councils used to be like. (FR03)

I think that the roles of being on things like Councils, and this is why I think local Council is really difficult, is actually to be strategic and I think the problem is because they’re voted by constituents, they see themselves as being representative and I think you get the mix up between the representative sort of model and the sort of strategic model and I think they don’t mix and so you get a lot of parochial thinking on Council and that’s how a lot of the [negative] stuff happens but that is how a lot of the decisions are made. (FR28)

It was pointed out that rural Councillors had traditionally been farmers as they were the ones that had the time to attend day-time meetings, so there had been a strong and obvious link between Council and farming issues. However, with the move to larger Councils, evening meetings and a changing demographic within the community, there has been less direct involvement by farmers. This was seen as contributing to a ‘disconnect’ with the farming community. It was noted by some farmers that the current Councillors had a very vague affiliation with the farming community, as one was a part-time farmer, another had lived in an agricultural community all his life and another had a very small rural tourism business. However, it was also pointed out that this likely reflected the changing demographic of the Shire as a whole. There were no full-time or retired full-time farmers on Council.
The current Council had a Councillor from the eastern part of the Shire, and while it was acknowledged that the Councillors weren’t representative of a particular area or ward anymore, it was felt that the ‘the full Shire is now getting much more of a look in’ as there was someone ‘from that side’ (FR35). The amalgamation of four Shires into one larger, albeit very diverse, Shire also meant that it was difficult for Councillors to be across all the finer nuances of the farming districts. Some people also noted that the larger population also meant that the Councillors needed to take a broader perspective on issues and therefore could be less parochial.

[Decisions] can be a reaction to immediate vote gathering. Having a bigger population means [Councillors] are buffered from individual pressures; there’s a broader population supporting the broader strategic values and the community triple bottom line, rather than the individual triple bottom line. (State government employee 02)

**Ability to implement planning processes**

Shire staff and State government planners were concerned with the processing of planning requests and the actual implementation of the few tools available to make difficult decisions. They mentioned that they are so caught up in responding to current issues and addressing the ‘day to day grunt work around statutory planning applications’, in addition to having been short-staffed for quite awhile, that there were limited resources to embrace forward thinking and to actually ‘do’ strategic planning, yet this would be of considerable assistance to them in their work.

It was pointed out that this was a perennial problem with small regional Shires, and wasn’t limited to just the land use planning section within Council. Some staff members discussed the difficulties in attracting employees, especially planners, because of the work load, lack of resources and ‘intensity’ of the issues in terms of dealing with the public. It was noted that Indigo Shire had been without a Senior Strategic Planner for almost a year. The ‘politicisation’ of planning and complicated natural resource management issues were also noted as creating a sometimes ‘difficult work environment’ for local government staff. In particular, the way that particular issues were characterised in the local media was seen as creating challenges regarding the broader perceptions of planning decisions.
Up here the media taps into a lot of planning decisions. In a metropolitan area, there are more things for the media to be interested in, so planning issues don’t get a lot of attention, but here they get a higher profile. The role of the media is a really interesting component of planning in regional Victoria; they are another tool [that influences Council decisions]. (Shire staff 01)

The capability of planning staff to deal with issues in the farming zone was also mentioned as something which impacted upon decision making. In many cases, the local planners are not well equipped to make informed decisions about agricultural land use and dwellings. They often didn’t have training specifically in rural issues nor the ability to assess land capability and farm viability. Planners noted that the current planning system does not provide sufficient guidance to make a clear cut decision on rural land use. For example, in the farming zone, particular development permits can be considered if they relate to the agricultural activity described in a farm management plan. Most planners are not farming experts and in many cases, there is not a lot of time to seek additional input and advice with regards to the functionality or practicality of a farm management plan, yet this is a prerequisite to a decision to allow subdivision or a permit for a dwelling.

In my opinion, the applications that should be the simplest applications in the planning system turned out to be the most difficult ones to handle and those are generally dwellings in rural areas specifically in a farming zone. There are so many aspects that you as a planner are required to look at and certainly wouldn’t be an expert in any of them including land capability and whether this place is going to be farmed, and whether it’s even viable to farm it – you know there are all kinds of arguments that come into play. (State government employee 01)

A Councillor pointed out that many of the planning rules and regulations developed by the State government were difficult to grasp at the best of times, yet local government was expected to translate these directives so that the community could understand them.

Lots of people think that local government controls [planning], but we have little say in it, it is State government. What we can do, or what we should be doing, is amplifying what the State government says in such a fashion so that the local people can understand what the rules are. So they know what is ‘as-of-right’. But not too many people understand that, and that is because of the way it is
written. We need to have a clearer understanding and a planning scheme which supports the statements of authority and explains how it is applied within your local area, so that the average Joe Blow can pick it up and understand it.
(Councillor 04)

Public engagement and consultation processes

Farmers as well as local government staff commented on the change of attitude and focus of the current Council with respect to public communication, noting that the Council was now much more open, engaging the community frequently, and seeking feedback on many issues. There was mention of the community consultation associated with developing major strategies such as the Council Plan and the draft Rural Land Use Strategy (RLUS).

There were also concerns raised about risks of involving the community in developing strategies, the challenge of managing the ‘local-benefit’ expectations created through that process, and ensuring that the broader strategic outcome is also attained.

The drafting and public consultation process associated with the development of the RLUS was a point of concern to several Councillors who said that the prolonged process had let the public down. The time that had passed since the initial consultation meant that the momentum and interest of the community may have been lost and engaging them again on a positive footing would be difficult. There were two quite different perceptions expressed by Councillors in their recollections regarding the overall ‘tenor’ of the RLUS public meetings, and some concern that the consultation process had not canvassed the full spectrum of feelings from the community.

We had meetings all over the Shire and I listened to the various views of residential and rural community members and the diversity between each of those groups was immense, but the diversity internally between the farmers and the residential people was diverse as well…. I don’t think we had comprehensive feedback from the community on the RLUS. (Councillor 04)

I am just trying to reflect back now to the meetings around the rural land use strategy; they just seemed as cordial and civil as ones where we might have worked with people in a town around it. I don’t have any sense that there is any disconnect if you like. (Councillor 03)
It was also pointed out that the drafting of the RLUS was only the beginning, as once it was approved by Council, it had to go through the State bureaucracy, then get approved by the Minister, then the changes to the Municipal Strategic Statement had to be made, and then approved again. There was recognition that the RLUS was just the start of a long process to justify the development, or not, of rural lands, so there would be considerable additional work required to support the actual implementation of the Strategy through changes in the Planning Scheme. A key driver for the RLUS was the opportunity to introduce other tools, such as zones and overlays, into the planning scheme to be able to respond to different circumstances. This was seen as especially important in Indigo Shire given its diversity of land uses and landscapes.

_I think most rural land use strategies that councils are doing across Victoria aim to introduce a range of tools to make decision making better and also to recognise the uniqueness of specific areas. It doesn’t make sense to apply the same rule or tools to all of those areas so I think it’s really key that councils complete their rural land use strategies or undertake land use strategies in the first place and use those tools that are available._ (State government employee 01)

About half of the farmers interviewed had participated in the public consultation process around the ‘rural land strategy’, with some attending workshops, others providing submissions and others participating in one-on-one, site specific meetings. These farmers were able to voice their opinions about the meetings and the issues which were raised. Most of the comments were positive; not only with how the meeting was run, but also that the Council had actively sought opinions from the community, recognising that not all community perspectives could be presented at the public meetings.

_I went to a meeting down in Kergunyah a few weeks ago I thought it was actually quite interesting because I had a completely different view to everyone else in the room I think. None of them wanted their land cut up into little bits and I said well, maybe one day if you wanted to sell, you might think differently. I didn’t speak it out aloud because I knew there would be a lot of people that wouldn’t like to hear that sort of thing._ (FR28)

_I thought the meeting was reasonable. I thought the Council staff were a bit under siege which happens at any forum here. But I thought they took on board what people were saying and they kept summarising the discussion and saying_
that basically, the consensus is that people basically don’t mind a bit more development, and they also pointed out that there were only two farmers there. (FR21)

I must admit I haven’t been involved too much in these sorts of things. ...We had the meeting in Kergunyah the other night because when I saw the way this was being done, I just thought it was frustrating and we needed to make the community more aware of what was happening. (FR18)

Yes, I went to the other meetings, to try to find out what plans they had for the area and what other people were thinking and whether it would be possible for us to do what we wanted to do, but we didn’t get the answers we were looking for. (FR17)

A number of farmers had not attended the workshops because they felt that they did not have a need to go or had not heard about them. Others were ambivalent about the public consultation process.

I’m aware that the Shire has had planning meetings but I haven’t bothered to get involved, I reckon I had my say. (FR08)

I think that you will find that no one is really interested [in attending the public forums]. You should ask them how many people they get to those. And the answer will be that people have no faith in Council doing this for the benefit of the district, they are doing it to keep locals off their backs. (FR05)

**Relationship between farmers and local government**

There was an indication that the relationship between farmers and local government was not very strong, for a number of reasons. People attributed this to the independence of farmers, the general lack of interest in Council business until there was an issue that affected people personally or economically, and a focus on the ‘urban’ issues in the Shire. As referred to earlier, the fact that there were no fulltime or ex-farmers on Council also contributed to a lack of affinity between farmers and Council decisions.

However, it was acknowledged that there was very little if any specific communication or interaction between local government and farmers as a unique sector. Some Councillors and local government employees indicated that Council could be seen as
‘over-consulting’, and that there were plenty of opportunities for farmers – and any other members of the public – to participate in Shire decisions.

_I suppose my comment is I don’t think we engage all that well specifically about farming issues, talking about transport links or water issues or sit down with them… I’m guessing, and this is probably my observation I don’t think there’s anyone in Council that has a real understanding of what the farmers are thinking other than snippets of information that we might get… in the community forums._ (Shire staff 01)

_We don’t do a lot of consulting only with farmers, I don’t think we do any… perhaps if we’re saying that they’re one of our largest bringers of money into the Shire, then we probably don’t take enough notice of them._ (Councillor 02)

It was also recognised that the peak representative group for farming in the State, the Victorian Farmer’s Federation, had not really been engaged with Council recently, nor had they made representations on any strategic issues such as the draft Rural Land Use Strategy.

_I think the relationship between the Shire and farmers is a bit more remote than perhaps farmers would like to see. But it is in the same category as business per se. The officers don’t spend time with VFF or at the agricultural shows or whatever it happens to be. So that relationship has moved away and … it is more for the organisations to come in and say we have a problem rather than the council going out and asking do you have a problem._ (Councillor 04)

The diversity of land uses and types of farming, as well as the diversity of landscapes and communities was recognised as creating challenges for communicating with farmers generally. While many people said that having the monthly Council Meetings held in different locations throughout the Shire, followed by the Community Forums, meant that Councillors and senior staff were exposed to local issues, it was also noted by Councillors and Shire staff that the people who regularly attended or raised issues were the ‘townsfolk’ and not the people who lived ‘in-between the towns’, meaning, perhaps, the farmers. While the vastly different identities and perspectives of each of the towns in the Shire was shared through the process of meeting in different places, and Councillors commented on how diverse and strong the sense of community was in each town, the people who were ‘in-between’ were likely being left out of the picture.
All the different communities have different views and values, they are all having different conversations, they all have different wants and needs and desires but there doesn’t seem to be much in between connecting them. I don’t know if that is just symptomatic of rural Victoria and where the populations are...here they are really different, really defined. (Shire staff 01)

The Shire has tried over a number of years with various tactics to get closer cooperation between the major centres of Indigo Shire, but we are still very much separate entities. And the communities are proud and they should be proud. They have separate identities that they need to keep alive but we are part of an entity and we are stronger as a group than we are as individuals.

[Councillor 04]

Despite the challenges to communication, the diversity of identities and landscapes across the Shire was seen as something to be treasured and celebrated, adding strength and interest to local values. There was also a keen interest in defining the ‘Shire’ as a whole to underpin strategic planning.

Indigo has a real chance to embrace and move forward... what people always tell me is that this community is different from that community and what all that tells me is that we should be defining Indigo more: What is Indigo and how does that influence the Council Planning and the Municipal Strategic Statement and the projects that fall from that? That is where I think Indigo is at the moment. We are doing an Indigo Vision 2020 or 2030 at the moment...so the ducks are lining up for Indigo. (Shire staff 01)

Changing perspectives within the Shire

A few people noted that there was also a diversity of views and aspirations due to the changing demographic composition of the Shire. While there were indications of interest and awareness amongst residents regarding environmental and sustainability issues, whether this was actually having an impact on Council decisions was unclear. It was pointed out that a lot of Council activities and decisions were mandated by the State government, so ultimately Council’s ability to adopt radically new ideas was quite limited.

You also have people moving in with green ideas that will come through in
various forums and ways of thinking. So, I think that Council can have a role in this area, because it is concerned about the future economic viability of its area, it wants its area to be sustainable, it wants the quality of life of its people to be maintained and enhanced, so I think there is a role. But its not a big mover and shaker, it can’t dictate agricultural policy, it can’t dictate economic conditions in which businesses operate, it can only do its bit. (Councillor 03)

However, some of the Shire employees noted that there were subtle shifts in community values as the population moves away from traditional farming and rural pursuits.

There seems to be a lot of people who are really interested in preserving visual landscapes and visual amenities versus you know much fewer people who are saying let’s carve it all up and sell it off for our superannuation.... so I guess you’ve got to kind of go with the weight of numbers and try and find some obvious common ground amongst some of what’s coming out. (Shire staff 04)

I think so many of the people who are part time farmers also want to maintain the flora, fauna, you know maintenance of an ecosystem; they have a fair ethic to maintain those types of uses, those types of ecosystems. (State government employee 02)

Relationships between big business agriculture and local government

There was universal acknowledgement that the two big agriculture-based companies – Nestlé’s Uncle Tobys factory in Wahgunyah and the Murray-Goulburn Co-operative Dairy in Tangambalanga – were important contributors to the economic vitality of the Shire. People recognised that beyond being major employers, they contributed socially and financially to their local communities. However, it was also noted that there had not been a lot of interaction between the Shire and these businesses albeit there were quite different perspectives of the relationship.

When Nestlé first took over... I looked forward to a strong relationship with them, but that hasn’t eventuated. There is not a close relationship that I am aware of, between their organisation and the Shire and we should try to encourage that. We had good relationships with Murray-Goulburn... and still have good relationships, but we don’t live in each other’s pockets. (Councillor
We sort of have a bit of a visitation schedule [with Murray-Goulburn] where a few of us will go out periodically and just sit down with them and talk about their current issues and our current issues and try and help them with any problems they might be having. So I guess that’s kind of a good neighbour, business to business sort of discussion. (Shire staff 03)

A few people mentioned that these large businesses do operate somewhat separately from the Shire, as their products are sold nationally or internationally, not necessarily locally. However, it was pointed out that while there was some local contribution to sports clubs and festivals, etc, and there was some shared understanding and agreements around environmental issues, there was not a lot of interaction with Council. It was mentioned that the reason the town of Tangambalanga had natural gas was due to the Murray-Goulburn factory, but ‘how widely is it recognised?’ Concern was expressed by some people that these industries could also be vulnerable to take-overs and closing down.

So Bega [Cheese] has just announced that it’s going to list on the stock exchange, then you’d be expecting there would be a signal to Murray Goulburn looking for some growth and capitalising on that opportunity. [Is the Shire] going to help them protect that position and encourage an opportunity to keep jobs locally? (Agri-business advisor 01)

It was also noted that there were ‘no organisations which promote agricultural businesses in towns, but there are tourism associations.’ (Councillor 01)

**Influence of State planning processes on local planning**

The majority of farmers spoke of local government being ‘just an extension of State government’ and carrying out State-wide policy without real consideration of local circumstances. For some farmers, this tempered their criticism of the Shire’s actions and decisions, but frustration with the process remained.

*I can be critical of [the Shire’s] strategies and their policies but the Shire genuinely tries to involve people in the decision making and it does it in many ways and it does it on many issues. It’s the outcomes I am not so sure about…and I firmly believe it isn’t necessarily the Shire at fault. I believe it’s the
overriding State issues, the State policies which impinge on the Local Government and say to these people ‘this is what we want and you will implement it’ and so the bureaucrats that are advising our Shire and saying to our Council ‘this is what you have to do because it’s government policy’ and I said that openly at a public meeting on one occasion: ‘that really Local Government is no longer representative of the people, it’s simply another arm of the State Government’, and they got shocked, the bureaucrats, they never thought of themselves like that and I said ‘stop and look at what you spend most of your time doing’. (FR04)

A number of local and state government staff mentioned that the relationship between local and State governments was changing when it came to issues around rural land use and planning. They noted that the State government was putting more responsibility on local government to deliver planning outcomes even though many of the planning tools available were not able to deal with the complexity of the current issues.

What about issues like food scarcity and climate change and how can we deal with that within the current suite of planning controls or the current framework that has been provided to us by the State government? I don’t believe that planning has embraced some of these issues yet. (Shire staff 04)

Planning is changing, and the community is changing, and I just don’t know if planning schemes are equipped to deal with that change, based on the time it takes to make that change and the resources that Councils have available to deal with them. (Shire staff 01)

Frustration was expressed at the current timeframes required when processing planning issues. While it was recognised that to some extent the bureaucratic checks and balances were necessary, a number of people expressed concern that it was very difficult to maintain impetus on decision making when the process felt ‘extremely slow and conservative and was just very difficult to get outcomes’ (Shire staff 04). On the other hand, representatives from State government said that they were keen to help local Councils and felt that they could provide more guidance earlier in the planning process, but that maintaining relationships with Council staff was sometimes problematic because of high staff turnover and lack of time on the part of Council staff.

There’s a strong effort from our part to try and create relationships with Council planners to say ‘look, use us as a resource. Use us early in the process,
make sure you include us even when you do your structure plan or your framework plan, don’t wait until you do your planning scheme amendment and then just give us the paperwork’. I think we’ve had a measure of success with that, but there’s still some way to go. (State government employee 01)

It was pointed out that the State planning legislation was also under review and that new frameworks were being introduced which dealt with regional planning issues as a result of the (previous) State government’s Regional Blueprint initiative. In addition, the State government’s review of rural land issues, as part of the Future Farming initiative, also meant that the review and approval processes were not as clear as they could be.

I do think there is a specific effort from State government to look at aspects that have an impact onto rural land use and rural planning into the future such as the Future Farms [initiative], such as the support of Councils in producing rural land use strategies. So I think there’s a bit going on. I think more could be done I suppose, generally, to provide resources to plan strategically. (State government employee 01)

Councillors and staff were all aware of the Hume Regional Strategy and the majority of people viewed it as a very positive initiative by the State government, however, there was some uncertainty as to how the new State government was going to deal with it. This was because it was an initiative of the previous Labor government which had carried over but had a considerable amount of ‘history’ and engagement with Councils and other regional bodies. The Shire felt that the Regional Strategy represented an opportunity to work together with other Shires and create synergies that perhaps weren’t there before. It was also recognised that it would require more ‘buy in’ from agencies and organisations other than local government.

I think we would have found that the key priorities identified in the Hume Strategy would have had a pretty good chance of being funded and implemented because they had placed a pretty high degree of credibility on that process I would hope that the new government sees it in a similar light. (Shire staff 04)

The Hume Strategy is a fantastic opportunity…but it needs a commitment to the words that are in the Hume Strategy, and it is people who deliver the Hume Strategy, not government, and if people can’t see beyond their patch or they have the baggage of internal competition [it won’t happen]. (Agri-business advisor 01)
Perceptions of land use planning processes and impacts on farming

Negative experiences

Upon listening to farmers relate their experiences with planning processes, it became apparent that ‘planning’ was interpreted as including a wide range of activities, from rates notices to decisions about farm dams to restrictions on housing development. All of the farmers viewed planning as influencing financial opportunities in terms of future enterprises and infrastructure development, and generally having a negative effect or restricting their ability to sell their own property, either as an agricultural enterprise or to some other use.

All but a very few farmers had been personally involved in land use planning in some way. In the few instances where people had not had to deal with planning issues, the comments were tinged with relief, expressing a desire to ‘stay away from them’ (FR08). For the other farmers, interaction with planning ranged from actively seeking planning permits for doing something on the property such as upgrading infrastructure, applying for subdivision approval or building permits, to participating in public forums on land use issues.

For those farmers that had been personally involved in planning issues, their experiences had been resoundingly negative, with the most common complaints being that the process had been unwieldy, frustrating and prolonged. In some cases, it was suggested that the difficulty had occurred due to a lack of understanding or acknowledgement by the Shire’s planning officers of the particular local circumstances (for example, the installation of new infrastructure). After closer scrutiny and involvement on the part of Shire staff, the situation had been rectified. In another case, the proposal had been just too difficult to pursue further, so it had been abandoned. The farmer’s disappointment with the whole planning process was palpable.

Planning has to be friendly if there’s to be that sort of take-up and unfortunately I don’t think we’ve ever really been a ‘can do’ shire. I think it’s a ‘can’t do’ shire. Some shires are ‘can do’, they’ve got their planning guidelines and if someone comes to them with an exciting idea they don’t say ‘sorry you can’t,’ they’ll say ‘let’s have a look at it’. (FR27)
Farmers, Councillors, local government staff and State government planners all noted that the nature of decision-making around planning was problematic in terms of public perception. It was acknowledged that planning was analytical and based on the State Planning Policy Framework, which was becoming outdated. The current planning tools were blunt and the policy framework seen as quite rigid although there was some room for interpretation, which made understanding the system from the ‘outside’ quite difficult for Councillors as well as the public.

A few people mentioned incidents where there had been inconsistency in applying planning rules and the fallout in public perception around planning processes had created substantial problems for Council. So while there was room for flexibility and interpretation, how the decisions were handled publicly was really important. This challenge of managing community expectations of planning decisions was pointed out by farmers as well as Councillors.

*With planning we are dealing with people’s dreams, and when somebody comes in and says “I want to do this”, and the planner looks up and says “No”, you aren’t just saying that about the plan, you are saying that about their dream, whether it is a house or a business. It is very easy to get them off side.* (Councillor 04)

*You create resistance as soon as you tell someone you can’t do something. You get people very annoyed and you get some pretty sad stories too. You get people who have bought a block a land, assuming they are going to be able to do something with it and then the rules change and all of a sudden they have lost a large amount of capital because they can’t do that anymore. If you give in to that person, then [someone else will] say “Well you have already made an anomaly in the thing because they were allowed, why shouldn’t I [be allowed]?.” So it’s very, very tricky to bring in appropriate laws that fit every circumstances because, at the moment, you have to prove that the house you wish to build needs to be built so that enterprise can survive. Well, I can’t prove that. I can’t prove that with 500 acres let alone with 50 acres so I think the present methodology for actually getting approval for subdivision is flawed. But ‘open go’ to everybody is most likely equally as bad.* (FR03)

The majority of farmers expressed confusion at the planning decisions taken by Council relating to other properties, saying that the planning process was difficult to understand.
and ‘pretty ad hoc. I can’t work out why I have a house next door to me on five acres’ (FR06).

This confusion on the part of land owners was also recognised by planners who said there were big challenges in dealing with public perceptions and understanding of planning processes. One planner said that changing the public’s perception was a matter of time, and having the appropriate strategic documents explaining the overall vision, such as the Rural Land Use Strategy, would help, although as planning decisions were so context-specific, communication would always be tricky.

_Over time the community will understand [the land use planning] that is in place and what the rules are. I do think there is a lot of confusion… because people talk to each other and say ‘I’m not allowed to subdivide my land because it’s smaller than forty hectares’ and then somebody else says ‘I wasn’t allowed to develop my property because it’s smaller than eight hectares’ that’s because [they are] two totally different situations, but there’s this misconception that there’s a set of rules and it gets applied consistently across the board. It doesn’t happen like that. Every application gets considered on its merits and I don’t know if there’s an understanding in the communities… that that actually occurs._ (State government employee 01)

It was pointed out that the changes to the State planning framework over the past ten years, combined with the amalgamation of the smaller local Councils with their different approaches to development approvals, the current pressures on rural lands, and now the push for community engagement in the strategy development was all combining to create a general climate of uncertainty and negativity. This mistrust of the planning process was also very apparent in the public meetings held for the development of the Rural Land Use Strategy. Comments included:

_Council keeps changing its mind about what is being allowed where. What fixes those decisions in concrete? Can it all fall apart again next year?_ (Kergunyah Workshop participant)

_There have been lots of contradictory decisions and a lack of consistency in the decisions made by Council. It seems like some of the decisions are fairly arbitrary based on the ‘colours of council’ on a certain day._ (Yackandandah Workshop participant)
This mistrust of government processes was echoed by a state government planner:

*My experience was the moment you mention planning, people are generally already a bit negative so it’s always an uphill battle right from the start... they come to meetings for instance being a little bit negative already, and then you start telling them we should have a vision for the future and we should decide how the land should be used into the future, and they then start to think how does that affect me as an individual, I won’t be allowed to sub divide, so I’m going to object. (State government employee 01)*

A few farmers noted that, in their individual situations, Shire staff had taken a particular interpretation of the planning rules, especially in regard to the farmer’s efforts to maintain viable farming land, in one case by increasing the size of his farm.

*We had a young bloke who was really keen, he was a farmer’s son and he come to us before the sale and said “If you’re interested in the ground, I want to buy the house.” Well I just thought because there was a hundred and twelve acres there, we’d be able to subdivide ten or twelve acres in the corner for him and we’d agreed on a price. But that just didn’t work at all. As soon as we fronted the Shire, they said you can’t do that because you’re creating two titles where there was one title. Because we own over across the road, I says, “Right’o, why not whack it onto our place then?” They said you can’t do that because it’s on the other side of the road. (FR10)*

The outcome in this circumstance was the Shire’s decision was ‘just not logical’ according to the farmer, and in the end that he ‘got up and walked away’ in frustration with the whole discussion.

In another instance where a neighbour had proposed a zone boundary change, farmers said they had just wanted to ‘have a say’ in the process because they cared, even though they recognised that the decision was likely to go against their wishes. In this case, despite the inevitability of the outcome, the farmers felt they had at least voiced their concern.

*The (zone boundary) used to be on the other side, and we wrote in an objection to that, which might have held it up three or four months. But it went through eventually. We argued to keep the boundary where it was – as more of a buffer*
along the road. We just wrote in, saying it was good farming land and shouldn’t be re-zoned. (FR17)

Another example of participating in a permit application process was provided by a dairy farmer who was considerably frustrated with the process allowing a subdivision next door. In this particular case, the property had been subdivided and the new owner was seeking approval for a building permit. It was an emotive issue as the farmer would have significantly benefited from expanding his holdings but the price for the property was ‘just too high’. There was a strong undercurrent of disappointment with the Shire for allowing the property to be considered as a residential block in the first place and a lack of confidence in the Shire’s understanding of agricultural land issues and farming needs. Even though the situation had not been resolved, the inevitability of approval being granted was acknowledged by the farmer.

(Farmer): We got a letter asking if we objected so we decided that we did and we’ve been through a meeting with the Shire and we had to write out our objections and we had a few letters etc. So that’s all we’ve ever had to do with planning.

(Interviewer): Was it useful? Do you think it was a good process?

(Farmer): Oh no, even though the shire has their rules, he will be able to override it. The rules are a joke. I don’t know why they have them because he’s going to get the building permit. (FR14)

While most farmers talked about the planning processes and outcomes that they didn’t agree with, there was some sympathy expressed by a few farmers regarding the difficulties faced by Council in making those planning decisions.

It can’t be a good thing, if you have a planning scheme and the planning department doesn’t approve something because it falls outside of the planning scheme, and so then the landowner goes to VCAT [the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal], and VCAT approves it, there is a problem somewhere. My understanding of it now is that it must be very frustrating. I’m not sure why those cases turn out like that. (FR06)

I think if you really want to be frustrated, get involved in planning issues. (FR05)
Market forces vs. controlled planning

Farmers were divided in their attitude toward the actual role of planning in determining land use and the impact of planning decisions on the viability of farms and agricultural production.

For about half of the farmers, there was a belief that planning could play a legitimate role in controlling land use, although it was a difficult process to implement. While there was concern that these decisions would be tough and might have a negative impact on some people, those decisions had to be made for the greater good.

*I had a bloke wanting to buy 5 acres off me a couple of years ago and I said no, on principle I couldn’t and it’s hard to argue... they say some people are going to get hurt but it’s only going to be in that initial [period]. Somebody might lose initially but you have to make a stand, like, you are looking at the future of food production.* (FR13)

For these farmers, the way in which people were engaged in the process was an important part of the acceptance of the decision and legitimising the role of planning. Ensuring that planning decisions were objective and not politicised or succumbing to vested interests were also mentioned as reasons for having a stronger and more formal planning process. There was an underlying current amongst this group that farm land should be protected for farming.

*You need to have the strategy or controls from above but certainly there’s no question about the fact planning is the most difficult thing that anyone could ever deal with, I think... Maybe it is people’s attitudes that need to change to accept planning more, to accept the principles.* (FR08)

*I think that we need to preserve our fertile land for primary production. Once it is gone, there is no going back. I applaud the council on the ideology on preserving farm land, I think it is important. It is coming up with the formula and making it acceptable to everybody which will be the challenge. I don’t think it is impossible, but it will be a challenge.* (FR32)

*I guess one of the challenges is that in fact a lot of people will sit on their little farms and think about their own vested interest and whatever which is just natural. But I can’t help thinking that if we had better [planning] processes when it’s imposed they’ll at least know why, that it’s not personal.* (FR28)
There was a contrasting viewpoint provided by a small number of farmers who thought that the current style of land use planning utilising zoning and restrictions on certain activities was almost irrelevant because they felt that the ‘market’ should, and would, ultimately decide the use of the land. The ‘market’ referred to in this sense was associated with the ‘consumption’ value of the land rather than its ‘production’ value. These farmers were from different sectors as well as different parts of the Shire, indicating a ‘personal philosophy’ rather than a context specific attribute. For one dairy farmer, the solution to managing the escalating cost of farm land was for the government to purchase the land and lease it back to farmers.

The problem I have is that we live in a free country. If a bloke wants to sell his farm, he should be able to. But that goes against things if you want to keep it as farming. If the government wants to keep farm land as farm land, then they might have to buy it all and lease it back to the people that want to farm it, or have a cooperative type of arrangement, as long as the people working it could make a decent living out of it. (FR16)

The inevitability of the external forces of an ageing farming population and declining terms of trade made another broad acre farmer generally pessimistic about the value of land use planning. There was a sense of futility and finality in his perspective on planning processes.

As far as trying to keep any big areas as nothing but farming, it’s going to change whether anybody likes it or not. These big areas that look like big viable farming areas are naturally going to be split up... One member of some of them families, or two members, they’re not going to keep them as farms. So the planning issues can be there and they think they can keep on farming, but it’s just not going to go that way. (FR10)

Only a very few farmers were ambivalent about planning and its role in the farm land debate, commenting that these issues were ‘cyclical’ in terms of political timeframes, and they were resigned to seeing planning as a process without much of an outcome that really ‘stuck’. In one particular instance, a farmer was very pessimistic about the development of the Shire’s Rural Land Use Strategy and the associated public consultation process.

Some of us have a longer term view. These [rural planning issues] have a tendency to roll out every five to ten years with a change of councillors and
whatever. And I guess that the bit that is really frustrating in all of this is because it is a process that people have to go through. We will go through it, it will take two years to get the process done, then in another five years time things will change again and you go through the whole process and there is this constant change. So no matter what the decisions that are made now, they are likely to be invalid in the next ten years. That is really what happens. (FR18)

Influence of politics

The relevance of local land use planning controls in light of increasing pressure being applied by developers and their ability to challenge local planning decisions was also mentioned by many farmers, some of whom had been involved in decisions about new developments. These people alluded to planning as being ‘a moveable feast’ and the final decisions generally dependent upon political connections and money. Some expressed considerable cynicism over the Shire’s ability to defend its position at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal in the face of well-healed consultants and developers.

The dichotomy of the situation is that, in the end, the people that feel disposed or alienated [by a planning decision] will go to the Tribunal, or they will go to mediation and they will win every time. The Shire has been absolutely overrun by these people who have made submissions after the decision [by Council] and who have gone on to win their case. I think [the Shire] is genuinely trying to protect agricultural land but they are losing the battle. (FR03)

It has been very hard to actually bring in hard and fast planning decisions through the Planning Act [because] if you have enough money you can most likely beat the [Victoria] Planning Provisions. (FR04)

One Councillor said that the perception that the Shire was influenced by particular interests, or favoured particular outcomes, did not stand up in their experience.

I think there’s always going to be inequities. There’s no way you can please everyone all the time. I went into Council thinking I’ll do as much as I can, but actually there are very good frameworks in place and while they are going to advantage some people and disadvantage others, you need to look at the greater
good. I think that Council does that reasonably well to a degree. We’re always going to end up not pleasing everyone. (Councillor 02)

One State government employee commented that often small rural Shire Councillors suffered from a narrow perspective on land development which could influence decisions. This was attributed to the background and experience of Councillors who had traditionally been members and representatives of a farming community. With the changing demographics of Indigo Shire, Councillors were increasingly likely not to have a farming background, thus were able to view farm land and farming activities quite differently.

From what I’ve seen, in areas of greater population, the Councillors tend to be more professional than those that you find in lesser populated areas. I’ve found in the past that the elected representatives [in smaller areas], bearing in mind a lot of them have come from traditional farming backgrounds, they see land as a commodity not as a resource. And in some cases, the councillors are too close [to the community]; they aren’t strategic enough. (State government employee 02)

It is interesting to note the assumption made in the above statement about land being viewed as a commodity. This could be a reflection of the type of farmer who has the time or interest to become a Councillor and deal with land development and planning issues and is perhaps looking at the next stage for his own farm. This was discussed in Chapter 5.

It was also noted that smaller Shires with a smaller population often have difficulties maintaining a strategic direction and taking a holistic view of Shire issues. This was in relation to the role of the Municipal Strategic Statement providing an overall structure and a broader strategic view as it required local input.

What we see in local government is localisation and by definition that’s what they are, they don’t necessarily look strategically or holistically... Some local governments are really outward looking and do a lot and are looking to achieve a lot... Indigo in my view is the historic Shire and really proud of that and something that they should be proud of, but historic Shires don’t develop. (Agri-business advisor 01)
Defining ‘productive’ agricultural land

All of the farmers spoke of the role and contribution of agricultural land: to food production, to the community and, in some cases, to a healthy environment; all values which they saw should be considered in rural land use planning. Identifying the productive capability of the land was seen as a critical part of valuing land, thereby determining its highest value or best use.

In discussions about protecting or maintaining productive land, farmers were asked how they would determine productive land in the Shire. There was an almost unanimous response that the productivity of the land was as much about land management as it was about the physical attributes of the land.

Many landholders pointed out that some areas of the Shire were more ‘productive’ than others, noting that the river valleys, areas of high rainfall and the presence of good soils were all important contributors to ‘productive’ land.

We said this is prime agricultural land. But it all depends what it is used for. Just because it is under lucerne, doesn’t necessarily mean it is prime agricultural land. It could be under marijuana or anything. (FR05)

A lot of the country in this valley is highly productive land, particularly in the upper reaches, from Kiewa, Tangam through to the Shire boundary. There is a lot of highly productive country there. But the failure on a lot of it has been the way it has been managed in the last while. (FR18)

If people are just going to live on it as a lifestyle, it’s not more productive. But if people are going to live on it and intensively farm it for some particular reason whether it’s growing garlic or carrots or green tea or whatever, then yeah, its productive. (FR28)

A few farmers said they saw the land becoming more productive, with existing farms getting bigger, and with fewer people involved. Others mentioned that changed management regimes, either soil treatments or stock management, meant greater productivity on their own land.

[We are] feeding the cows a lot better than we did. Growing a lot more grass, giving them a lot more food from outside. The farm is a lot more productive,
whether the land is, I don’t know. Maybe in a good season, the land is more productive than it was, yeah. (FR15)

Many farmers pointed out that soil capability was often used to spatially determine prime farming country. They noted there were faults with this process as soils were so variable, even across paddocks, creating difficulties in making a universal judgement as to what land was going to be good quality by just looking at maps. Some farmers said that there needed to be much more effort put into defining areas of good agricultural land, including rainfall variations, vegetation condition and using ground-truthing.

The Albury Wodonga Development Corporation did a lot of work on soil capability and what we found here in the valley there is huge variation in the soils. There are no thousands of acres of a particular soil type. There is huge change within and [mapping] is fraught with danger. Every time you put a boundary around high quality land, somebody would say ‘that wouldn’t grow a sparrow; that land up there is better than that land down there’. (FR03)

Obviously there needs to be some planning regulation but what worries me is if you look at a shire like the Shire of Indigo, it is so diverse and what is viable in one area from a productive perspective is completely unviable in another area. I mean the property that we have is just rocks and rabbits you know and yet the same [size] area at Rutherglen... you could certainly generate a whole lot more income. So I would like to see perhaps some sort of modelling of what is viable [farm land] and what is not viable. (FR33)

It was suggested that ‘unproductive’ land be replanted with native vegetation. Other farmers acknowledged that some land would require considerable work to make it productive, and that extra effort was not economically viable.

I’d really like to see some of our land that was cleared, that should never have been cleared, because it’s not productive farming land, actually returned to native vegetation. In my view one of the criteria, or one of the conditions, for splitting up land where you know seriously if the forty acres cannot generate an income, if you know that there isn’t the water there to sustain the horticultural trees that they’re going to plant, and in the first five years they’ll be dead or whatever, then I think that there needs to be a certain amount of native vegetation replanted on some of these areas of land that just are not very productive. (FR33)
On the whole, Councillors and local government staff were in agreement about the need to ‘fine-tune’ the mapping of high quality agricultural land to reflect its value and the need to preserve it.

As far as rural planning, it is about clearly defining what ought to be farm land and seeking to preserve it. That’s my bottom line. And then identify where the land does not have arable value and we can look at having different zoning for that. I think that is aligning with State government policy around agriculture and to try to ensure that it doesn’t get broken up because I think in the long term that would be a negative thing. (Councillor 03)

**Fragmentation and conversion of farmland**

Subdivision of farmland and allocation of residential housing permits were the main foci of all the conversations about the future of farming and thus were part of a much bigger discussion about future landscapes of Indigo Shire. Farmers had mixed views regarding the Shire’s overall interest in protecting agricultural land. Quite a few farmers expressed a lack of confidence in the Shire’s ability to protect farmland into the future.

The majority of farmers expressed strong feelings about the fracturing of productive land into less-than-productive allotments, generally for the purposes of residential development. The ‘as-of-right’ ability to gain a dwelling permit on land greater than 40 hectares meant that this became the ‘minimum default size’ for subdivisions.

One of the things I find very difficult, putting value aside, is the principle of encouraging people to subdivide very good agriculture land into 40 hectare useless-to-some-degree blocks. It doesn’t make any sense to me and I am not saying that on the basis of the value of the land, all I am saying is ‘why do we subdivide really good agricultural land into 40 hectare lots which then become not a viable use in the future? (FR18)

I don’t think the 40 hectare size limit makes any sense – no one can live off that, it should be bigger or a lot smaller. The Council needs to encourage true primary production, not hobby farming. (FR31)
Everyone interviewed saw the subdivision of farmland as a major planning issue, with many mentioning that it was both a ‘cause’ and an ‘effect’ of numerous other issues in rural areas. Fragmentation caused by sub-dividing farms to either create housing allotments for family members or to make money (due to declining farm profits) had a ripple effect on nearby farmers, who were often unable to purchase the land for farming purposes and therefore had to deal with the impacts created by non-farming neighbours, and as a result often contemplated subdivision themselves. As discussed in Chapter 5, increasing the number of rural residents was not always considered a bad outcome as there were obvious and appreciated benefits of having more people in rural areas. However, there were divergent views regarding subdivisions and how this affected the contribution of farming to the Shire.

Quite a few farmers noted there was a contradiction in their own views about the future of farming and the role of planning, with many people recognising there was also a diversity of views within the farming community as well as across the Shire.

*The [Shire’s] Land Use Statement has tried to say ‘we want to keep high quality agricultural land’ but whenever they tried to do something like that, the very people that they are trying to protect are their own worst enemies. [It’s] the magic age of 57 – over 57 people want to be able to subdivide so they can get the maximum value for their retirement. Under 57 you want to be able to buy land at agricultural prices so you can maximize the use of land for farming.* (FR03)

These contradictions were well known to local government staff and local planners who noted that this dilemma added to the difficulties in public acceptance of planning decisions.

*Most or many farmers have this view around ‘it’s my land and I should be able to do whatever I want with it. I want the right to farm it in the way that I want to for as long as I want to, but then as soon as I decide I’ve had enough and the family doesn’t want it, I also want the right to carve it up and sell it off as my superannuation’. So it’s very hard to provide, from a strategy or policy perspective, anything that’s going to make them terribly happy around that because our plan will always look further than the current owner.* (Shire staff 04)
Councillors and staff felt that rural subdivisions were one of the most difficult issues confronting local governments because it was also connected to a myriad of other issues, such as dealing with an ageing farmer population and access to rural services, to concerns over water availability, wildfire protection and future food security, many of which were far beyond the jurisdiction of local government.

*Houses in the farming zone... goes to the heart of whether or not we want to maintain this agricultural shire that people talk about. I suppose that is a pretty important question - do we want to maintain it, and because we've got these [development] pressures from either side, so are we going to break it or are we really going to hold the line? (Shire staff 03)*

There was also pressure for rural housing, and it was recognised that there were differing reasons for the desire to move into rural areas.

*So another pressure locally is people wanting to come to this area and have a lifestyle that relates to living in a beautiful environment but they want to take some of the land but they don’t necessarily want to farm, or do farming in any significant way and so you have a bit of a clash of intentions around how to use the land. [Councillor 01]*

Subdivision restrictions based on the size of the property in the farming zone was an issue of contention for everyone interviewed. While the rule stating the minimum sized lot of 40 hectares for an ‘as-of-right’ housing permit in the Farming Zone was originally set to limit the amount of farm land being broken up for housing allotments, this had not been the outcome in Indigo Shire where the land value was already high. The geographical and agricultural diversity of the Shire exacerbated the issue.

All of the farmers expressed concern for the ‘blanket’ style approach of the minimum lot size requirement, with the same restrictions applying to all Farming zones across the Shire. Farmers recognised that productivity and land uses were radically different in various parts of the Shire and questioned why the same restrictive conditions were applied everywhere.

*The [40 hectare] rule doesn’t make any sense in Stanley. It doesn’t reflect the pattern of land ownership that already exists here, and what will actually grow here, intensively. So it is just another example of this broad brush approach to planning in the Shire that doesn’t work. (FR20)*
I’d like to think that it was economically and environmentally sustainable enough that all families could continue to have good lifestyles here really. And I’d guess I’d like to sort of think that the planning regulation would take into account the available water and all those sorts of things, as opposed to just a simple formula of how many acres you had when determining whether or not to sub-divide. (FR33)

Farmers also said that because of the 40 hectare minimum lot size ruling, agricultural land prices were beyond reach of those farmers wishing to expand to stay productive.

There’s a hundred and forty acres right next door to us for sale but at a price that is not sustainable as a dairy farmer. We could buy it but it’s not going to pay for itself and we’re not going to cut our throats to pay for it. That [land] would make a huge difference to this place but they want a million dollars for it, they’re after six and seven thousand dollars an acre. (FR14)

However, there were some farmers who thought that rural residential lots could be accommodated alongside existing productive farms. They saw this as requiring strategic planning and a much more targeted approach, with possibly more investigation into appropriate agricultural industries or alternate ownership arrangements.

It’s pretty country, it’s really lovely around here and we’ve already got small blocks but whether or not people should be given the opportunity to develop the smaller blocks into other alternative agricultural industries is what it would come back to. (FR27)

I am strongly interested in the idea of a co-op style venture to lease land and I would like to see the idea further advanced [as it could mean that] we would have people living on the land and still getting the use out of it. I see that as the real benefit. (Councillor 04)

Local government staff and Councillors raised concerns about houses being ‘scattered across the countryside’ as there were costs associated with maintaining and building additional infrastructure for an increased and dispersed rural population. It was pointed out that the whole community ended up paying for road upkeep and rubbish collection and that these were often hidden costs, difficult to quantify.

A key issue raised by Councillors was the importance of managing the location of subdivisions for rural residences to limit incursions into farming areas, ‘if you are going
Councillors on the whole expressed confidence in the ability of the planning system to address some of the key rural land use issues, including rural residential development and protection of farm land, but recognised that there was still strategic work to be done. They were cognisant of the ‘angst’ that planning decisions currently caused individuals and they noted the need for an overall strategy to articulate the landscape vision for each local rural area, so that individual actions could be placed in a landscape context.

It was pointed out that under the previous Planning Scheme, Indigo Shire Council had decided not to set a 40 hectare minimum size for subdivision in the Rural Zone (a precursor to the Farming Zone) and was the only municipality in Victoria to follow this path. Instead, the Shire opted to allow for some flexibility due to the number of small tenements, a leftover from the gold-mining era. However, it was noted by some of the Councillors and staff that this pathway had not been particularly satisfactory because it had not been documented clearly enough and as a result, Council decisions ‘were being challenged all over the place and the inconsistencies of VCAT in allowing or disallowing development made the whole thing sort of very difficult to manage.’ (Councillor 04)

The situation was exacerbated by the ‘blanket replacement’ of the Rural Zone with the Farming Zone in 2006 which created more confusion. This was the situation into which the development of the Rural Land Use Strategy had been introduced. It was hoped by Council staff and Councillors that the RLUS would provide some clarity and direction for the public with respect to the development of agricultural land.

There were high expectations expressed by Councillors and staff about the Shire’s RLUS as it had incorporated quite a lot of consultation. Some people were hoping it would clearly define where the high quality agricultural land was and then ‘preserve or protect it from being developed’ or help prevent farmland from being priced out of productive agricultural use. There were lots of concerns expressed about ‘where lines would be drawn’ on the maps and how that decision making process could be equitable. Local government staff and Councillors were cautiously optimistic that the RLUS would at least begin the process of looking at the landscape on a precinct basis, and provide some background justification for decisions.
One of the outcomes that we want from the Rural Land Use Strategy is to try and work out in which areas we really want to provide some certainty and protection for that sort of broad acre farming versus other areas where it might make more sense to enable smaller stuff to occur... whether that translates on the ground, I don’t know. (Shire staff 04)

I think [the RLUS] goes a fair way to protecting what we’ve got here but whether it will ultimately deliver what Indigo needs I don’t know. (Councillor 02)

Summary

The results presented here show that the relationship between planning and farming is as varied and colourful as the rural landscape itself. What became abundantly clear in this case study was the diversity of opinions on the role of land use planning which underscored the feeling shared by farmers and Councillors alike that land use planning was one of the most difficult aspects of local government’s engagement with the community. Planning as an administrative process implemented by local government was perceived by the majority of farmers in primarily a negative light, regardless of the context of their experience. Not surprisingly, Councillors, local government staff and farmers all noted that planning processes created confusion and frustration. This is acknowledged more widely of course, through special publications such as the Councillors’ Guide to Land Use Planning in Victoria (Municipal Association of Victoria, 2006) and the increasing focus on community engagement in planning processes (Zehner & Marshall, 2007).

The absence of agricultural expertise within Council or even amongst Shire staff was pointed out by some as contributing to the poor communication and lack of confidence between the Shire and the farming sector. This lack of understanding was also apparent in the varied perceptions of the Shire’s support for agricultural activities. The lack of an economic strategy that dealt with the future of agriculture and acknowledgement of food production as contributing to the well being of the Shire was also apparent. This was a common theme noted in the reviews of rural land use planning and food production (Budge & Slade, 2009; Municipal Association of Victoria, 2010)). Some farmers and Councillors noted that tourism had a higher profile than farming, despite agriculture
being a bigger economic contributor, reflecting the shifting emphasis between production and consumption evident in many amenity landscapes in transition (Holmes, 2006) and pointed toward the need for strategic planning.

The data also revealed that while Councillors expressed confidence that the future landscapes could accommodate a mix of uses and still be productive in terms of agriculture, concern was expressed by the majority of farmers about the need to identify and protect agriculturally productive land before it was lost to non-farm use. This showed the recognition of the inevitability of the ‘cycle of conversion’ (Daniels & Bowers, 1997) as well as a strong desire to maintain a working landscape (Cannavo, 2007).

Councillors and Council staff viewed the development and implementation of the Rural Land Use Strategy as the start of the process of long term strategic planning for rural lands and appeared to have considerable confidence in the process. State government planners also saw this as an important step for the Council in terms of focussing on the issues in rural planning. However, they also recognised the difficulties of undertaking such a process, and the limitations of local Councils to fully implement such strategies due to staff resourcing and other issues. These challenges and the increasing complexity of rural planning is discussed in Chapter 2, and is a common issue raised by small rural Shires facing demographic and land use changes (Municipal Association of Victoria, 2010).

The fragmentation of farm land was a key concern regarding the future of farming in the Shire. The application of a ‘universal planning approach’ also exposed the differences between types of farming; i.e. horticulture or dairying or cropping, each of which has very different spatial needs and therefore values land quite differently. This is a stark reality in a small Shire which encompasses all types of farming activity and produces a very wide selection of agricultural products as shown in Figure 15 of Chapter 4, and points to the need for refinement and fine-tuning of land use planning. This ‘lack of fit’ and the dearth of alternative ‘tools’ actually being used to refine planning decisions has been pointed out numerous times (Buxton et al., 2005; Future Farming Rural Planning Group, 2009), yet remains unchanged in Victoria, primarily for political reasons (Sinclair & Bunker, 2007).

The next chapter explores how farming is perceived as a land use to gain an understanding of how it can contribute to a sustainable landscape.
Chapter 7 – Perceptions on the role of farming in amenity landscapes

Introduction

This chapter addresses the third research question: ‘What are the perceptions of the role of farming as a viable and sustainable land use in an amenity landscape?’ The first part of this chapter presents an overall view of the challenges and opportunities facing the various agricultural sectors in the Shire from the perspective of farmers. The second part explores how people see agriculture contributing to the social and economic currency of the Shire, and then goes on to provide a variety of perspectives on the contribution of local food to the production and consumption aspects of this amenity landscape. The final section looks at agriculture as a land use contributing to the amenity values of the landscape.
Farmers’ adaptation to changes and the role of farming

While all farmers were asked the same questions, it quickly became apparent that there were stark differences between the adaptation strategies and responses to the changes noticed and being experienced by the different agricultural sectors. Primarily this was due to the myriad of external influences affecting farms and family businesses, however, there were also differences due to the target markets and the ‘stage of life’ of the farmer. Following are the responses to questions around how their business was affected by the recent changes in their landscape and their future expectations, both near term (as the drought was still in effect) and in the longer term.

Grazing and cropping (broad acre farming)

The farmers engaged in broad-acre farming were generally the most flexible and adaptable to the changes brought about by having a more populous landscape. As a group, these farmers also seemed to be more resilient to these local influences, as well as adapting to external influences such as commodity prices and the drought. Having the ability to take advantage of current circumstances and adapt to market swings or water availability was seen as the ticket to survival for people in this sector. Many of these farmers referred to the flexibility of their industry in terms of spatial needs or being able to plant different crops or focus on different stages in beef production. For a few farmers, the traditional three ‘staples’ of farming – ‘the sheep, the crop and the cattle’ – provided security and not a lot of risk, even though the prices fluctuated. These farmers were generally older and had family members involved on a part-time basis on the farm. For other farmers, who owned and leased larger properties, diversity was essential to their profitability and longevity in the area.

_We have the ability to grow a wide range of crops, reasonably successfully and I think that is a key in our risk management. We grow beans, lupins, field peas, chick peas, several different kinds of wheat, canola, monola, we are growing juncea canola this year, so that itself gives this area a reasonable amount of the diversity, coupled with a livestock program or some other value-adding to our farming operation. That diversity is the key to sustainability in agriculture._

_(FR32)_
However, the years of drought were having a big impact on cropping and there was concern that the continued low commodity prices and high Australian dollar might just be the thing that would ‘break the camel’s back’ and force some farmers out. Some would possibly just hang on, but in reality they were only getting deeper into debt.

*We’ve had such a run of crops that haven’t given any return and the financial holes are getting deeper and the trend is not getting better. We’ve had a wet February but that’s about it. Where’s the incentive to keep going? I guess the hole gets to a certain stage and you think ‘it’s so deep I can’t get out of it anyway, I might as well stay on the land’, and it probably takes a bit of pressure off to some extent but it’s a bit sad for the next generation because they’re going to have to sell the property to make ends meet. (FR22)*

All of these broad-acre farmers were very wary of over-capitalising in terms of purchasing bigger machinery but also spoke of the economies of scale in doing so and how tough it was to find a balance. Some farmers said they believed that bigger and more efficient machinery was the way of the future, especially if there were fewer but larger farms. This was a likely scenario in places where farmers had sold out to rural residential development and there were single dwellings being built on large blocks of land due to minimum lot sizes for building permits in the farming zone. These new land owners could be willing to have someone crop the ‘leftover’ land once the house was built. If this eventuated, adjacent farmers felt that this would mean that there could be agricultural activity in the area in the future, irrespective of who actually owned the land. It was also recognised that this was currently more ‘luck than anything’ as it took the right people to make it work.

*[The broad acre farmers] can just take the fences between the paddocks out and do [cropping] on a broad acre scale. They can do it using the economies of scale sort of thing where they use big seeders and the paddocks will just get bigger. It makes it a lot easier for them because it’s just as easy to operate a thing thats three times as wide as it is now. (FR10)*

Most broad-acre farmers said they always had ‘their eye out’ for land to purchase as they saw it as an investment, but a few farmers said they were not interested in land that didn’t have good water access for stock or potential future agricultural options.

Several farmers said that they had sold or were in the process of selling off land that was either too small to access for cropping, or too awkward to utilise for grazing due to
traffic, neighbours or infrastructure. In general they seemed to be satisfied with the selling prices of these properties although they expressed frustration at the bureaucratic processes involved in selling land. However, it was pointed out that land in some parts of the Shire was taking a long time to sell, because of the combination of location and cost. For instance, the comment was made that there were a lot of farms for sale due to the number of retiring farmers who owned large properties made up of multiple lots. In many cases, these smaller lots were of a size which allowed a building permit, making them potentially attractive as housing lots and therefore out of reach for most of the neighbouring farmers. During the drought, many land owners in this area were either not interested or were not financially capable of expanding their existing holdings. However, there were farming businesses which were expanding and were optimistic about the future.

*Our business is definitely going to expand in the future. From our perspective, the business is ideally situated. We are not far off the main route between Sydney and Melbourne, into the two biggest logistical hubs on the east coast, so that gives us an advantage to freight our products all over Australia... and this area is a high rainfall area, it really is an ideal area for grain production. There could even be an argument for more intensive farming to go in the area and there could be potentially room for that.* (FR32)

Farmers whose primary interest was beef cattle were less optimistic. They pointed out that beef farming was struggling and that the general decline in beef prices was affecting the future of the industry.

*I think one of the challenges to agriculture in this region and probably to the wider region at this time is beef farming. We haven’t seen the transition in family farms that there has been in dairy, where there has been sufficient financial resources to enable the balance of the family to participate in the business. For a long period of time now we have seen a decline in the return on investment in beef and we have a very aged [farmer] population in the beef industry and unless we get some conversions from that industry into more profitable enterprises, and we could say go from beef into wine, we are hitting a brick wall in that industry and we are going to transition back into lamb and wool.* (FR18)
However, the majority of farmers in all sectors, including viticulture, owned at least some cattle, likely for land management reasons as much as profitability.

Overall, the majority of the farmers involved in broad-acre and cropping businesses were optimistic about the future of their industry in Indigo Shire for a number of reasons. All the farmers mentioned proximity to markets was a key aspect of the future profitability of their business. Being close to the Wodonga sale yards, abattoirs, the local markets of Albury/Wodonga and Corowa, the dairy cooperative in the Kiewa as well as easy access to the Hume transportation corridor were all cited as advantages of doing business in the area. While on-site value-adding and selling products locally were not practicable options for most of these farmers, many of them referred to good soil management and animal husbandry as being essential to creating efficiencies and long term value in the business. For a few other farmers, the future involved managing their farm differently to create a marketing advantage while also practising sustainable farming. While some farmers had already instigated various forms of quality assurance in their business, none had fully embarked on any particular quality assurance program, suggesting that it ‘just wasn’t worth it yet’, given the extra effort and cost when the demand wasn’t there.

I’m personally moving towards biological farming because I want to, because it fits in with my ethic if you like and I think the day will come when, because I’m doing that and I’m producing in that way I will be able to sell my beef as being different and worthy of a little bit more money but I’m not holding my breath.

(FR07)

Horticulture and small scale viticulture

All the farmers engaged with fruit production were optimistic that the market for fresh fruit would grow and that their own businesses would be viable into the near future at any rate, but they cautioned that it was a lot of work which would make the industry less attractive to newcomers. They recognised that the increase in the rural population meant that there was more demand for their product. However, they also noted that keeping up with production was a struggle at times due to climatic conditions – drought and water availability, heat waves, hail, predation by birds and increases in pest infestations. Whether these were related to climate change was a moot point for many
of the producers. They saw these issues as one of the risks to be managed but which also seemed to ‘scare’ a few people, especially the next generation.

You have to be passionate and have a lot of drive to make this work – like any small business. To be a successful small business, you have to be focussed and that isn’t everyone’s cup of tea. And it changes between people, between generations. (FR31)

Farming is mainly for the ones that want to be the farmers. They are the ones that are basically addicted to it; if they’re here to get a big payout, they’re only kidding themselves really. I’m not saying they can’t make a go out of it, but if anybody comes home who hasn’t been used to that, well, it takes handling in a lot of people. (FR30)

For horticulturalists and wine makers, the majority believed that the location and marketing image of their product was an essential part of their current success and they felt that this aspect would continue to be important into the future. The combination of agriculture and tourism appeared to suit these industries well and these producers were able to take advantage of it. Farm gate sales, local markets and potential of ‘pick-your-own fruit’ enterprises were seen as viable options that benefited from the tourism trade and more local customers.

Close to 80 % of our business was farm-gate last year, and that has grown enormously. So I think there is huge potential there. And in this valley there is huge potential for people to do more of that. I think there is potential for more combinations of tourism and agriculture. (FR06)

So the berries we are involved with, and we’ve found them successful because I can sell directly, you know straight away. Like I can pick them and have them with somebody in half an hour if they’re just close and they love nothing more than that. You say ‘I only picked these an hour ago, or they were picked yesterday evening’ and they can’t believe it. And in turn you see the response on people’s faces, or they come back and say ‘these are fantastic why can’t I get them in Melbourne’ but they don’t realise that other foodstuffs might spend a week or more sitting in a distribution centre somewhere. (FR30)
Farmers who were growing niche horticultural crops noted that the scale of their businesses was such that they could make a good living, or maintain a lifestyle, without having to over-extend themselves because of the unique nature of their crop.

*We don’t want to get into employment. We want to maintain control and quality…It is about a sustainable lifestyle. And bigger is not necessarily better.* (FR21)

In the wine industry, the global glut of grapes was being felt acutely at the local level with quite a few grape growers without contracts for their grapes. Because of the initial investment to establish a vineyard and now the potential expense of removing the infrastructure to use the land for something else, there was concern that a few vineyard owners would leave the industry and perhaps the district.

*The future of the vineyard is dependent on sales and at the moment, sales are very poor. To such an extent that you can’t keep your labour force on to prune it, to such an extent that you can’t go any further. It is just as expensive to pull out a vineyard as it is to put one in, pulling out the fences and the posts, burning off the dead vines, then wire that has to be rolled up, the drip irrigation that has to be wound up.* (FR05)

However, there was also optimism that the quality of the grapes and the reputation of the area for fine wine, along with the skills of existing winemakers would ensure the survival of the industry, although there might be some cut-backs in size of operation. As one winemaker said ‘*It will shake down eventually to the good operators who are responsive to markets and have the passion to make wine for their customers.’* (FR31)

**Dairy farming**

Dairy farmers were the most optimistic about their future, with many saying that there was still enough profit in dairy to retain farming families. The few downturns in recent years and the drought would be offset by the majority of good years.

*The long term future for dairy is good. It’s a good way of producing protein. It has long term international prospects. However, because such a small proportion is traded on the international market we tend to go into this gloom and bust syndrome very rapidly. This is where we are in at the moment, one of the worst down turns we have seen for quite a few years.* (FR03)
Most dairy farms are struggling financially, like ours in the last six months, but over the last many years, quite a few years, we’ve made farm management deposits which have held us in good stead in times that aren’t so good. So effectively it evens out our ride, but you’ve got to be able to make farm management deposits when times are good. (FR35)

Many people thought that the actual farms were being managed better than ever before, and that once a certain size in milk production was reached, it was a viable and profitable business. However, the cost of land was preventing some farmers from expanding and taking advantage of the economies of scale.

[Success] depends on scale to some degree. But in this area we have some very efficient and effective farmers and most of them are trading quite profitably I would suggest. There are a couple of them that are at a smaller scale that find it more difficult because the payment systems in general favour... well, there are more incentives for the bigger producer, put it that way. (FR18)

We’ve always been below the average size for Victoria, no matter how much we try and build our numbers up and try and make our land more profitable we just can’t even get to average, it just keeps creeping up in front of us, as to what would be average for a husband and wife team. (FR14)

One of the advantages of dairy production over other types of farming was the regular cash flow. This was mentioned by a few farmers as one of the advantages of the sector and which often attracted new dairy farmers, especially ‘second career’ farmers, if they could afford to buy into the industry. Everyone acknowledged that it was an expensive industry to ‘break into’.

We have seen in our industry reasonable consistency. We have been through the hard times. We had the highest return ever a few years ago then hit a financial crisis with very low returns but the industry still has the ability to function and employ people and that enables families to grow their businesses. We are not seeing that in too many other agricultural pursuits. (FR19)

Everyone recognised that there were issues about succession planning and the next generation of farmers. More than half of the dairy farmers said that they knew their children or other members of the family would be taking over the farm and were currently involved in the industry. In quite a few of these families, the next generation
was already actively involved either in a role on their family’s farm or leasing and share-farming other land in the area. Several of these farmers commented on the challenges of having the next generation come on board in the business, and noted that there were much better support systems in place now to manage the transition than there had been when ‘they took over from their parents’.

Four of the dairy farmers said they thought their businesses would not continue into the future. One of these farmers said that the property was just too small and the work had been too tough so the children were not that interested.

They’re not really interested, not in dairy farming. Because we haven’t employed [anyone to help out], it means we’ve worked seven days a week forever and that’s what our kids see as dairy farming. (FR15)

However, this farmer also said that he would ‘love to stay on the land and probably go into beef’ which was noted by many dairy farmers as a common dairy farm exit pathway.

Another dairy farmer commented that the challenges of managing the farm combined with lack of interest expressed by the next generation meant their dairy farm would not be transferred to their children.

I think once we are finished, that will be the end of the dairy in here. None of our children are interested in farming. They are doing other things. And none of them are doing anything vaguely related to farming. And I can’t see anyone else being interested in buying it as a dairy farm, because of the water, which is an issue. There is a bit of work to do to keep the water up to the cattle during the summers. (FR16)

In this particular instance, much of the surrounding land had already been zoned as Rural Living, and combined with the water issue, the future of the farm was very likely to be a rural residential subdivision.

The economic value of agriculture

When questioned about the long term relevance of agriculture to the economy and social fabric of the Shire, there were markedly different responses between local government staff and the Councillors.
There was clear agreement amongst the staff that agriculture was important: they were aware that agriculture was a major employer in the Shire, albeit not the biggest, but recognised it as the predominant rural land use, and the biggest overall economic contributor to the outputs of the Shire. However, Councillors were less clear on these points, and their understanding of the position of agriculture in Shire affairs was more likely related to their own interests and connection with farming activities. The prominence of tourism and emphasis on historical sites in the day-to-day activities of the Shire was reflected in the responses from Councillors.

To be honest I don’t see it as an agricultural shire because of the domination of tourism and heritage and history and all that sort of stuff and wine. My thinking of agriculture is more to do with farming and growing wheat and all that sort of thing. (Councillor 01)

I think a lot of people would think [the Shire] would be more tourism-driven but we have had some fairly recent statistics about that…. basically the main income driver in the Council area is agriculture. (Councillor 02)

It was also noted that it was difficult to separate agricultural activities from some tourism activities such as cellar door sales, farmers’ markets and touring through attractive scenery, and that all those activities contributed to and created employment in the Shire.

We have our citizens working in these places so I think there is a real appreciation [on the part of Council] that agriculture is absolutely fundamental to the future of the Shire. (Councillor 03)

Councillors and Shire staff said that while some well known brands and high quality produce originated in the Shire, there were no direct links between the product and the Shire as a distinct jurisdiction or geographical place. A few Councillors and some staff saw this as a lost opportunity to promote the Shire and its agricultural attributes, which meant that the connection between the value of the product and the Shire as a location was missed.

We have a good reputation, not Indigo Shire as such but, for example, Rutherglen has a good reputation for specific types of wines. We need to build on that, and we need to build on it so that it reflects Rutherglen in Indigo Shire, rather than Rutherglen as a stand alone. (Councillor 04)
Councillors in particular saw the great diversity of agricultural activities in the Shire as a valuable asset, however, they expressed concern that the diversity of products could narrow over time, due to factors such as climate, water availability, rising operating costs and a decrease in the farming population, unless there were incentives or mechanisms in place to encourage businesses to stay. There was mention of recent storm events which had affected some orchards, resulting in less product being available, which meant the local fruit cold store facility had reduced its operation.

Significantly, it was also noted that the Council did not yet have a specific policy around promoting agriculture in the Shire. This had been identified in various Council Plans in recent years but had not yet been acted upon. While there was a draft Economic Development Strategy, this was referred to as only a discussion paper, and there was a need for a more focussed strategic planning exercise which embraced the economic contribution of agriculture in the Shire.

I have talked about getting more of a focus on agriculture into our strategic plan. I think there is a lot more that could be done, to think about how we can really play our part in [promoting agriculture]. I’m not really sure that has been thought through as much. Whether [local government] can play more of a role, whether it can or it can’t, I don’t know because, you know, agriculture gets on. (Councillor 03)

The ‘localisation’ of agriculture – farm-gate sales and farmers’ markets

The noticeable growth of the local population, as well as a rise in tourism, was seen as a benefit to the fruit and vegetable growers and winemakers who sold their product locally. The majority of these farmers had direct access to local consumers, either through farm gate /cellar door sales, farmers’ markets or local grocery outlets. They were all cognisant of the advantages of being in an area with other tourist attractions and food and wine outlets.

All of the farmers who had farm gate sales were seeing a steady increase in their income from this aspect of their business – more people visiting and living in the area simply translated into more customers. Farmers mentioned that the main advantages of having
the sales outlet on the property were that it was relatively low maintenance and low risk, did not take them away from the property during the day, they could still get a retail mark-up on their product and the ‘local and fresh’ factor spoke for itself.

*In my size operation, you’ve got to grow the crop as well so you don’t want to spend too much time away from the property.* (FR30)

Local government staff and some farmers pointed out the challenges associated with farm-gate sales; the current regulations made some farm-gate operations difficult and all acknowledged that this was an area needing improvement.

While only one producer mentioned that he sold his product on-line, a number of others were considering the merit of using the internet to advertise, and other producers in the district are known for their internet sales. A few farmers said that there were challenges around direct sales, from having a sufficient diversity in products, to creating some value-adding to make it worthwhile for customers. This also increased risk. For some producers, there were challenges in keeping up with demand, so they were hesitant to advertise more than they were doing currently.

*I get people coming in and saying that the bloke up in the tourist information centre said you know, come down here. If I wanted to, in the future, I could put brochures up there. We don’t do it now because we haven’t got enough supply.* (FR06)

All of the farmers said that the most important aspect of the local sales (both farm gate and the Farmers’ markets) was the regular cash flow which generated ‘bread and butter money’ complementing the less frequent but larger cheques which came in from the wholesale collector.

*So we sell the rest at the front door here or at the monthly market and we probably sell more than I think we do because it sort of dribbles in rather than pours in. You know if you get a cheque from [the distributor] you think ‘wow that’s really fantastic’ but when you’re getting five dollars here and five dollars there, you spend it quicker than it reaches your pocket.* (FR22)

*In the old days, getting paid only three or four times a year I was lucky, but I couldn’t exist on that now. I wouldn’t have what I’ve got now if I didn’t have the cash flow. I’m right up to the limit now and the bank is on my back already, because it’s so difficult to match it all up. We’ve got a lot of wages going out,*
we’ve got double the crop we had last year, and we haven’t got any money coming in really. At this stage it’s starting to trickle in but what happens at farmers’ markets is it keeps the wolves from the door, so yeah there’s a lot of dynamics in it. (FR30)

The majority of farmers who had a local distribution network for their product also participated in local Farmers’ Markets. In 2010 there was only one established Farmers’ Market in the Shire which had a primary focus on food: the monthly Rutherglen Farmers’ Market. However, there were a number of other festivals and events which had produce markets, and there was discussion of establishing a monthly Beechworth Market. While the cash sales aspect of the monthly market was important, all of the farmers who were regular sellers at the Farmers’ Markets mentioned other aspects which they felt were important to them being there.

The fact that the market created a good opportunity for interaction with customers and a chance to make customers more aware of the value and attributes of locally grown produce was noted by all of farmers who were regular participants.

[At the market] we are really able to connect with customers and we’ve recognised now that that’s one of our really strong marketing tools because a lot of that is through word of mouth. I think it’s a good way of the community learning about the importance of food and let’s face it there’s a lot of kids these days who think milk comes out of bottles. (FR28)

Interestingly, an important angle of this educational aspect of attending farmers’ markets was the issue of who actually was selling the produce. There was a strong belief amongst this set of farmers that authenticity was important and that the customers wanted to speak to the grower. This created problems for small producers when there was more than one market to attend on a given day, or several weekends in a row, and having sufficiently knowledgeable staff to attend the market stall was often a challenge.

They get to talk to the producer. Like I found I could send a backpacker down there to sell our fruit, but they won’t talk to the customers as much. If it is me or if I sent [my partner] down there, then it works. (FR06)

There’s also this business that they like to see you there. I mean I was out of action for a while and they were very supportive through that period, but in my personal view, it wouldn’t have gone on many more months and it would have
dropped off, because they like to see that face. I’m not saying I’m anything special, but I’m sort of a bit of a character, I have a bit of a laugh and vice versa and it’s all part of that sort of attitude. (FR30)

However, the farmers did recognise that there were quite a few issues around the management, coordination and on-going support of the markets that still needed to be sorted out to make them a dependable and viable agricultural institution. It was also noted that not all farm products could do well in the current style of Farmers’ Markets and getting a good mix of staples of basic food items and more seasonal or ‘boutique-style’ items on a year-round basis was a challenge.

Councillors and local government staff mentioned that the diversity of food production in the area also contributed to the success of community events and festivals as well as tourism activities such as the Farmers’ Markets, and it was noted that the Shire had been an important facilitator in the feasibility investigations around a potential Farmers’ Market in Beechworth.

A number of farmers and Councillors also said that tourism based on appreciating local produce, and festivals focussing on local food, were important ways to educate the public about the value of local agriculture, the importance of healthy diets and raise awareness of local farmers and their contributions. This educational component was also seen as being reinforced through increased community access to agricultural activities and products, such as through farm gate sales or farm stays.

We’ve recognised now that [Farmers’ Markets] are one of our really strong marketing tools because a lot of that is through word of mouth. I’ve been talking to grain growers just out of Albury and I said look you’re growing your wheat or whatever it is, if you ground some of your wheat, and brought it into town and sold it at farmers’ markets…you would have consumers who would begin to understand why Australian wheat is good and then you get the retail mark-up. So I think farmers’ markets are good but I think there needs to be some care. It’s not going to be a panacea of all ills. (FR28)

It was also pointed out that having access to local produce was a way to help residents and visitors understand the issues facing farmers, especially if farmers are seeking support from government or the community with regard to farming issues.
I think telling the story about how it was grown and where it came from will become a stronger and stronger selling point but it will just take time. (Agri-business advisor 01)

I think [farm gate sales] are an opportunity which helps us to diversify or change the way we might think about agriculture. In some ways I think people still have an affiliation or an affection if you like, to the broad-acre farm and even if those industries weren’t as strong or disappeared I’m sure there’s still going to be that tension about what we do with that land because I still think there’s that feeling ‘that’s why I’m here’. (Shire staff 03)

However, farmers and some Councillors pointed out that promoting local food would always be a challenge because of the ‘competition from supermarkets.’

[Local food] needs to be marketed so that people appreciate the local brand, the local taste of it if you like, and the fact that you’re supporting local farmers. But whether enough purchasing people want to do that and support it for that reason, instead of going to the supermarket and having everything there, I don’t know. (FR34)

We just don’t appreciate what we’ve got half the time. I’d like to see much more local food production for our Shire. I’d like to see more farm shops. I’d like to be able to get hold of the stuff easily. It’s all about feeding ourselves; seasonally feeding ourselves from local produce and to actually enjoy the whole food thing. If you can grow all your stuff locally, you would actually protect your landscapes because there would probably be slightly more intensive farming going on. But until you can beat the supermarket mentality, I don’t know how you can really change things. It does seem to almost come down to that, so I don’t know. I think people are becoming a little bit more aware of the impacts of agriculture on their landscapes. (Councillor 02)

**Food production as a desired land use?**

From a local government perspective, the issues of food security, food supply and food sovereignty were all acknowledged as becoming increasingly important and topical. Planners expressed concern that the production of food on a local scale ‘was just not on the policy radar’ yet and there had been very little direction from State government as
to how local government should deal with it. All the local government staff noted that having food produced locally was an important aspect of people’s satisfaction and enjoyment of living in or visiting the area and therefore was an issue that needed to be addressed by Council. Food security and supply was a fundamental issue for local government because ‘it goes to the heart of how people live their lives, and we [local government] have got a stake in that.’ (Shire staff 03)

It was noted, however, that the issue of ‘food’ production crossed a number of departmental responsibilities as it could be considered a tourism issue, an economic development issue and a planning issue. There was also criticism expressed about local government’s ability to deal with the issues around food production.

*I just don’t think [local government] understands the [agricultural production] business… do they understand the supply chain that leads to Uncle Tobys? Do they understand Uncle Tobys needs? Why is Uncle Tobys at Wahgunyah? If you understand that, how can you leverage Uncle Tobys for other international companies? …Having Murray Goulburn there means the gas goes to Tangam, so the people in Tangam have gas where other parts of the Shire don’t - do they recognise that?* (Agri-business advisor 01)

Councillors were also very concerned about the issue of future food production, noting that ‘local food production would become fairly pivotal to the Shire.’ (Councillor 02) One Councillor saw food security in terms of immediate food needs, another saw a role for the Shire in protecting the capacity to grow food *‘because that is what we do’* (Councillor 04), and a third mentioned the emotional satisfaction of seeing where your food comes from (Councillor 03).

*I think there is a role for local government in the food security. We have a pretty good understanding of the categories of land capability that we have. And part of the land use strategy is to identify the land that is not just high grade but quite usable agriculturally. It may need extra nutrients or whatever, but make sure we have the capacity to develop those areas and still have the capacity to produce food. We are all concerned about the production of food.* (Councillor 04)

Agri-business advisors and a state government planner saw the issue of local food production as catering to a ‘*middle class niche market’* because it is seen as expensive and exclusive, and therefore much more aligned with tourism than actual food
production or land use planning decisions. For them, the discussion of food security in Australia is as much about the security of the people who grow the food (the farmers) as it is about having enough food to feed the country.

*We are an affluent nation with an enormous capacity to grow food; we produce far more than we can eat so even a catastrophic failure of our systems we still produce more than we can eat and that’s the reality.* (Agri-business advisor 01)

One aspect of local government’s involvement in food production was about protecting the investment, therefore ‘*to improve the ability of people to actually produce in this area [would] protect that investment*’ (Councillor 04). This concern was echoed by quite a few farmers who saw the connection between the loss of farm land, subsequent impacts on local food production and broader future food security issues. While they all acknowledged that currently Australia was capable of producing more than sufficient food, they personally felt a responsibility to future generations who may wish to access local products or to ensure that there would be a choice for consumers. A majority of farmers saw the issue of breaking up existing farms as a real issue of sustainability; there was a vital relationship between healthy food, healthy landscapes and healthy communities. Concerns were raised along the lines that ‘*we are just sort of letting things go without actually realising what we are losing.*’ (FR28)

*But if you look at it from the big picture, you know they keep breaking up farms and selling them into small blocks, but someone has to grow the food for Australia. We can’t just import all our food. I mean people just won’t want that. If it finally gets to the point that that is what is happening, people will ask, what have we done? It will be too late by then. But that is what I feel. They need to grow the food and produce, the wool somewhere, and in particular, people are quite fussy about what they eat and drink these days.* (FR17)

A State government planner raised the issue of climate change and future food production in the area, noting that the future scenarios would likely be different from now, that there might be a change in products grown in the area and that it could also be more challenging to farm.

*I believe, in this region specifically, it will become more difficult to produce food into the future but, relatively speaking, it might still be an area that is productive if you compare it to other dry areas.* (State government employee 01)
It was also pointed out that a recent study which compared dairy farming to beef farming in the area, including allowances for climate change, showed dairy farming to be more profitable and viable. However, this study also showed that there was need for incentives to encourage people to take up or remain in farming.

_The fact that it’s actually more profitable to dairy in this part of the world than it is on the flat country…flies in the face of all those arguments that we see [about unprofitable farming]. Yes it could be too expensive to go into broad acre cropping at Rutherglen I agree but why would you go into broad acre cropping at Rutherglen when you’ve got all these other opportunities? What we see is a lack of skills, knowledge and experience and appropriate guidance and understanding to provide the right incentives to get people in the right place._

(Agri-business advisor 02)

**The amenity value of agriculture**

Many people including farmers, local and State government staff and Councillors mentioned the diversity of the landscapes of Indigo Shire being one of its most attractive aspects, with a few also relating this to the diversity of agricultural production. It was pointed out by planners that attractive landscapes also play an important role in the economy through tourism and attracting future residents. However, they also noted that agriculture contributes to the appearance of landscapes, but that this connection wasn’t always obvious in the documentation or even actions of local government. This was partially because of the visible role of tourism and heritage protection in the day-to-day activities of the Shire.

_[The Shire] has some very attractive landscapes and it’s a pretty area to visit…and the food and wine I think is another big attraction, there’s a lot of very good quality produce and a lot of very good quality restaurants and a lot of really highly sought after wines. (Shire staff 04)_

While the diversity of agricultural products available locally was recognised by some as helping to underpin the tourism activities of the Shire, the focus was often on the consumption of agricultural products rather than the more subtle contribution of farming to rural scenery. A few farmers were able to articulate the connections between an attractive landscape and the protection of agricultural activities. Indeed, some farmers
mentioned that they felt privileged to be farming in such a beautiful area, especially after having visited many other farming areas in other parts of the world,

*I think this is a beautiful part of Australia, it is a beautiful area to live in, we have a great climate here, and I can understand why people want to live here but I think we have to preserve the ‘country’ feel to the area as well as keeping the primary production because it adds to the economy.* (FR32)

In terms of valuing the landscape as an attraction in itself, the local and State government planners noted that a neighbouring Shire had undertaken a specific landscape assessment or characterisation exercise to inform their planning process, and felt that this helped to identify the link between tourism and agriculture from a landscape point of view. It was noted that farming activities had helped to create the landscapes that some people valued, and that those landscapes were also ‘maintained’ by farmers who were residents of the Shire, so it ‘made sense’ to try and protect the industry.

However, it was also pointed out that in Indigo Shire, the link between agriculture and landscape hadn’t really been explored or exploited from either a planning point of view or a tourism point of view.

*Agriculture plays an important role but so does tourism and so do new people coming into the area and you have to acknowledge that. Why do they want to come into the area? Because it’s a pleasant place to live, because of the landscapes possibly, and agriculture sort of maintains some of those landscapes… Do we want to maintain [those landscapes]? The answer probably is yes. So how do we do that? The protection of landscapes then becomes an issue. So you then move away from the question of whether an area is perceived as being a viable farming area to what is the important aspect of the area.* (State government employee 01)

*I think one of the things needed to support agribusiness in what is essentially a tourism world is a much closer link between agribusiness and tourism. People come to the North East for all sorts of reasons, some to live, some to play. I don’t think [local government] has an understanding of the whole picture. We understand the snow, we understand Bright in Autumn, we understand the wineries, but we don’t necessarily, I don’t think, understand why people are*
coming to B&Bs. Are you coming to the North East for reasons other than wine and snow, and if so, what are they? (Agri-business advisor 01)

Summary

The data collected from farmers, agri-business advisors and Councillors revealed an overall sense of optimism about the future of agriculture in Indigo Shire, although there were some concerns expressed about a changing climate and where the next generation of farmers would be found. Adaptability, flexible ownership arrangements, an increasing local market in addition to a rising tourist trade and a strong agricultural heritage were among a number of attributes cited as contributing to the potentially positive future of farming in the area. While the various agricultural industries had all felt the pinch of waning markets, high input costs and the Millennium Drought, each sector had responded to these in different ways, through diversification, value-adding, local sales and in some cases, simple ‘belt-tightening’. It was apparent that the legacy of ‘production’ would continue. This sense of optimism parallels that found in studies undertaken in the United Kingdom amongst farmers undergoing diversification in attractive rural areas (Bohnet et al., 2003).

The economic contribution of agriculture to the region and the Shire in particular, was recognised by Councillors, staff and others, but it was identified that there was also a need to explain that contribution better in terms of value for the Shire. Some people noted that there were few links between agricultural products and the Shire as a ‘brand’, although there were many recognisable products such as regional wines and commercial goods with ‘Beechworth’ branding. Indigo as a place was not known and this was viewed as potentially a lost opportunity. In many cases, agriculture was viewed through a ‘tourism’ lens rather than a land productivity one. This is in stark contrast to the situation in South Australia where legislation has been passed to protect the ‘special character’ of well known wine regions and their agricultural capability (South Australian Government, 2013).

The diversity of agricultural products was seen as underpinning the rise of tourism based on food and wine experiences. While some concern was expressed by Councillors that this diversity could potentially be affected by climatic trends, it appeared that the Shire had not played a significant part in promoting, retaining or even
acknowledging the drivers as well as constraints of this diversity in agricultural products. This is seen as an opportunity missed, as pointed out in the literature on planning and food production (Born & Purcell, 2006; Pothukuchi, 2009) and discussed in Chapter 2.

In addition, the contribution of farming activities to the visual amenity of the landscape was not very well articulated by Councillors, local government or State agency staff, although some of the planners did see that there was a connection between an attractive landscape and the role of farmers as ‘custodians’ of that landscape. However, it was noted that this link was not apparent or clearly identified in any policy or planning documentation. This reflects the evolution of rural planning as discussed in Chapter 2, as well as the lack of a ‘landscape approach’ to planning which is much more common in the United Kingdom and Europe (Selman, 2010; Wilson & Whitehead, 2012).

Public access to local farm produce through Farmers’ Markets and farm gate sales was seen as having numerous benefits, including potentially raising consumer awareness of farming and farming issues in the area, but this link had not been actively explored or promoted. It was pointed out that there were challenges regarding managing markets and local sales in general, and more could be done to integrate tourism, planning and economic development around these issues, as is also referred to in numerous studies on local food and Farmers’ markets (Beckie, Kennedy, & Wittman, 2012; Ecker et al., 2010; Krabbe, 2013).

In a similar vein, most people had trouble articulating their views on the issues around food supply and food production from farms in the Shire. While Staff and Councillors noted there was a difference between food security and supply at a national sovereignty level, and local food production for local consumption, only a few people saw a link between either of these issues and the role of local government in protecting farmland and farming infrastructure in the Shire. It was apparent that much more could be done to link farming landscapes, local food production and community sustainability as pointed out by Campbell (2008).

This chapter concludes the presentation of issues, experiences and perspectives of some of the farmers, decision makers and advisors dealing with land use change in rural amenity landscapes. The breadth of influences on land use, the depth of concern about farming, communities, landscapes and the future, and the texture of these individual
experiences and perspectives are the many pieces of cloth collected for this research quilt.

The voices of people living in and caring about this landscape were loud and clear: they are at a crossroads of opportunities and many are concerned that the status quo will not lead to an optimal outcome, despite an undercurrent of optimism. These people care about sustainability and the future of their livelihoods and their landscapes.

The next chapter stitches together the issues described and analysed in the past three chapters. By integrating the main themes derived from the data into the broad theoretical frameworks around amenity landscapes, rural planning and governance, Chapter 8 discusses what the situation in Indigo Shire tells us about change in rural amenity landscapes and farming as a contributor to landscapes and the well-being of rural communities.
Chapter 8 – Discussion

Introduction

This chapter discusses the key findings in relation to the research results and the broader literature on amenity landscapes, rural land use planning, agriculture and food production. By exploring and interpreting the relationships between these rural themes, using a case study approach, this research has exposed issues and opportunities related to the causes and effects of change occurring in amenity landscapes. It is recognised that while amenity landscapes pose a unique set of circumstances related to rural land use, they can also be considered a microcosm of social and economic change affecting landscape values, thus providing insights into rural development and the role of governance processes in changing communities. Therefore, this research has implications for land use policy and rural development.

As pointed out in Chapter One, this research explored the role of agricultural production in the creation and continuity of rural amenity landscapes, and sought answers to the following questions:

1. How does land use change affect farming activities in amenity landscapes?
2. How do planning processes impact on farming activities in amenity landscapes?
3. What are the perceptions of the role of farming in amenity landscapes?
4. What are the implications for the future of farming in amenity landscapes?

The responses to question one were presented in Chapter 5. Likewise, Chapter 6 contained the exploration of planning processes and relationships between farmers and agencies arising from question two. The perceptions of farming and its future were presented in Chapter 7. This chapter brings together the key findings in relation to the first three research questions in the form of several integrating and concluding themes. The fourth question is addressed in Chapter 9.
1) Farming in amenity landscapes doesn't have to be destroyed by consumption

Rural amenity landscapes are complex social, economic and physical landscapes, where the diversity of values influence land uses, directly affecting the landscape and its sustainability. The social dynamic that is created as a result of people migrating to an area because of its ‘rurality’ and importing rural ideals or ‘idylls’ can result in the commodification of the landscape, as previous land uses including farming and resource-based industries are pushed out. Much of the literature related to amenity migration and landscape change focuses on the inevitability of this process or the ‘creative destruction’ of the attributes upon which the amenity is based (for example Abrams et al., 2012; Mitchell, 1998; Tonts & Grieve, 2002).

It is recognised that in agrarian landscapes, the amenity migrants are but one of a myriad of influences affecting the decline of rural-based industries, albeit a highly visible presence affecting the look of the landscape as well as its communities (Barr, 2009; Curry et al., 2001; Gibson et al., 2005). However, the concern about the loss of farmland due to rural residential development is a highly contentious issue, and despite a few examples of amenity landholders actually participating in farming at commercial scales (for example Abrams & Gosnell, 2012; Gill et al., 2010), there is a general consensus that farming will be negatively impacted by more people moving into rural areas (Daniels & Bowers, 1997; Future Farming Rural Planning Group, 2009; Sinclair & Bunker, 2007) creating tension between productive and consumptive uses of land (Holmes, 2006).

The findings in this study challenge that assumption that all is ‘doom and gloom’ for farming in amenity landscapes. Instead, it revealed a general optimism toward the future viability of farming, despite the increasing rural population of primarily non-farmers [Chapter 7]. This optimism was grounded in the belief that the physical attributes of the environment and the regional location made it a good place for agricultural production. Thus, the broader landscape and its attributes were relevant to the outlook of these farmers, as many saw their businesses still being able to take advantage of the economic and biophysical aspects of their geographical location. In addition, this awareness and linkage between the location, its attributes and social change was obvious in some of the farmers’ reflections on the attractiveness of the
landscape and an understanding of the motivation of others wanting to move into the area. There were a number of ways that the farming population had adjusted and, in some cases, embraced the changes [Chapter 5].

Regional newcomers wanting an Australian rural idyll

For the majority of farmers, the growing rural population was seen as beneficial from a social well-being perspective and meant there were more people in the local community, volunteering for the fire brigade and bringing businesses into the local area [Chapter 5]. This participation in local community activities is similar to what Smailes (2002) noted in the rural communities subject to rural dilution in the Southern Yorke Peninsula in South Australia: that the existing residents were aware that newcomers participated in the formal social institutions as well as supported local businesses and upheld a local ‘sense of belonging’. This is also consistent with some of the findings of Guimond and Simard (2010, p. 459) in their study of a high amenity landscape in eastern Quebec, Canada where long term residents generally ‘had a positive view of newcomers’ contributions on various levels of community life, especially in local associations, and also conceded that there were environmental and landscape benefits derived from the wealth and endeavour of the newcomers.’

Statistics show that the majority of new purchasers of land in Indigo Shire came from within the regional area and that there were almost equal amounts of land aggregation (land purchased by a local) as land conversion (land purchased by someone outside the Shire) (Neave et al., 2012) [Chapter 3]. Given that the regional area includes two growing regional cities within easy commuting distance, it is likely that the migration to the rural countryside reflects more of a population ‘re-distribution’ as opposed to the more commonly described counterurbanisation (Argent et al., 2011). This is supported by Barr (2012) who notes that the majority of property purchasers are from within the immediate region.

Therefore, this amenity landscape is different from many of those described in the literature, both in Australia and elsewhere. In this instance, most of the newcomers are not necessarily ‘ex-urbanites’ leaving the city to start a new life, but rather regional residents likely to be familiar with the area seeking specific amenities, or perhaps the next generation moving ‘up the road’ and staying close to the family farm, and certainly includes retirement migration from the regional towns. These are all features which
distinguish rural amenity landscapes from the peri-urban or coastal amenity landscapes (Burnley & Murphy, 2004). The motivations, attitudes and tolerance toward rural activities held by the ‘newcomers’ could be substantially different from those migrating (or escaping) from large metropolitan areas. Argent et al. (2011, p. 40) point out that much of the research on rural gentrification and impacts of amenity migration has occurred in places where ex-urbanites represent the majority of newcomers, and cautions against the assumption that these issues are typical of rural amenity landscapes in Australia. This study shows that the composition of the demographic change is likely to influence the social interactions within the community and that counterurbanisation and its associated frictions are not necessarily found in all amenity landscapes.

In addition, Indigo Shire portrays a typical landscape of small farms and traditional rural endeavour, so the changes in land use from a productivist-orientated approach to a multi-functional countryside are likely to be much slower and less noticeable. The landscape now displays aspects of the recent renaissance of small rural industries, principally wine grapes, olives, specialty small goods and food production, and some farm or rural-related tourism establishments [Chapter 3]. These land uses, along with the Shire’s historical cadastral layout, have resulted in a landscape appearance on scales similar to those of the United Kingdom and Europe, where the ‘rural idyll’ is highly valued and there has been recent renewed interest in ‘local, organic, artisanal and non-food-producing functions and ‘public good’ conceptualisations of the rural.’ (McDonagh, 2012, p. 3) Thus, the findings of this study could be applied to other agrarian landscapes undergoing the transition from productivist to multifunctionality, although it is recognised that the dynamics of land use change are complex and quite location specific (Argent et al., 2011; Selfa et al., 2010).

**Mutual respect for farming**

One of the big concerns related to the demographic change as a result of amenity migration is rural dilution. Described as the dwindling of the primary or existing population of landowners, most of whom had made a living off the land, being offset by increasing numbers of newcomers who are attracted to the landscape by choice (Vince (1952) in Smailes, 2002), rural dilution can create a subsequent impact on the ability of farmers to continue farming efficiently (Jackson-Smith, 2003 in Gosnell & Abrams, 2011).
Conflicts between farmers and non-farmers over farm noises, smells and incompatible uses were not as concerning as expected, despite the diffuse settlement patterns of the Shire. In this study, farmers generally did not see these as significant or insurmountable issues [Chapter 5]. They did acknowledge that conflicts had occurred in the past and that these had often been disputes between neighbours, but these were just as likely to occur between two farmers as between farmers and non-farmers. Issues such as the use of herbicides and pesticides near organic farms, using audible scare-guns to disperse birds or controlling pest animals were all mentioned as creating conflicts which could be challenging to deal with, but were essentially resolvable [Chapter 5]. This attitude is considerably different from the situation often described in peri-urban landscapes where antagonism between farmers and new residents is generally seen as heralding the disappearance of farms from the area (Buxton et al., 2006; Condon et al., 2010; Sinclair & Bunker, 2007). There are a few other studies which have looked specifically at the interaction between farmers and new non-farm landholders. These include a study which showed there was considerable antagonism between the long term residents and new landowners in ranching country in Montana (Yung & Belsky, 2007), expressions of incompatible values between farmers and commercial forestry operators (Schirmer, 2007) and concerns about the ability to control regionally significant weeds as a result of new rural ‘amenity’ landholders (Klepeis et al., 2009).

This study found few explicit examples and minimal first-hand experience in conflicts which had resulted in significant lifestyle change, the alteration of farming practices or the loss of farming from the area. While there is no Right-to-Farm legislation in Victoria and some of the farmers in this study suggested that there should be, Shire staff and Councillors expressed support for farmers when conflicts arose [Chapter 6]. Further strengthening of Right-to-Farm policies has also been suggested by the Future Farming taskforce, but it remains to be seen whether this recommendation is acted upon (Future Farming Rural Planning Group, 2009). Interestingly, the findings in a multi-county study undertaken in the United States showed that in some counties there was a positive correlation between the way local authorities handled controversies with neighbours arising from agricultural activities and optimism about the future of the farming enterprise, including the likelihood that their farm would not be developed in the next ten years (Esseks, Oberholtzer, Clancy, Lapping, & Zurbrugg, 2009).

It is acknowledged that by exploring these conflicts more, and seeing them as important indicators and adjuncts to rural societal development (Mann & Jeanneaux, 2009), it is
likely a broader understanding of the differences in the interests, values and perceptions of the rural landholders could be gained. While this study did reveal a low level of antagonism between farmers and newcomers [Chapter 5], it only investigated the issue from the farmers’ and Council perspective, and did not explore the perceptions of newcomers and non-farming landholders who may have raised concerns.

**Multifunctionality creating economic and social resilience**

In terms of the economic viability of farming in the face of rural change, this study also found that different agricultural sectors were responding to land use changes differently [Chapter 7]. Some sectors, such as horticulture and viticulture were taking advantage of the increasing residential and tourist markets through diversification and value-adding and other sectors were adapting to changing land ownership through different land management arrangements. This diversity of rural industries and land uses, reflective of a multifunctional landscape, is likely to be contributing to the economic and social resilience of the Shire. As pointed out by Wilson (2010), multifunctionality is an important component in the creation of resilient and sustainable rural communities and represents a working balance between the social, economic and environmental needs of the community. Wilson (2010) notes that the evolution of former ‘agricultural’ communities into ‘rural’ communities as a result of new industries, diversification and demographic change, has the potential to increase community resilience.

This conceptualisation of resilience as an outcome of landscape change is usually discussed in relation to environmental changes, but can also be applied to the social and economic consequences of land use change (B. Walker & Salt, 2006). The challenge is to identify thresholds which, if crossed, could result in irreversible changes in the economic and social values generated by the region (B. Walker et al., 2009). In an amenity landscape, these thresholds could be considered similar to those described in ‘creative destruction’ models (Mitchell, 1998; Tonts & Grieve, 2002). They can represent the tipping points, past which an undesirable state may be entered into and the amenity values degraded or lost. This study showed that, despite the diversity of adaptation responses, the capacity and aspirations of the majority of farmers was still focussed on maintaining a productive and working landscape, and the balance had not yet tipped into a new, consumptive or destructive state.

Furthermore, the separate production, consumption and protection aspects of this
landscape have become more entwined and prominent as a result of amenity migration. The decline in the terms of trade for some traditional broad-acre farming enterprises and the strengthening of local markets for others such as niche agricultural products and horticulture, and the increasing value of tourism combined with the creation of the Chiltern Mt Pilot National Park in 2002 all combine to create a complex mix of uses characterising rural transition in multifunctional landscapes (Holmes, 2006). Indeed, this particular landscape encapsulates both the amenity and pluriactive occupancy modes as described by Holmes, with variability in emphasis between protection, production and consumption activities at a variety of scales, from individual holdings to whole valleys or geographical areas. Therefore, this research also adds detail and practicality to the positioning of rural amenity landscapes within the literature of multifunctional landscape theory, responding to the need identified by Holmes for ‘fine-grained research relating landscape dynamics to individual domestic practices’ (Holmes, 2006, p. 156). The heterogeneity in values placed on the landscape impedes spatial delineation and representation of clearly identifiable occupancy modes, thus making characterisation challenging. However, the conceptualisation of multifunctional transition as a dynamic process of shifting between production, consumption and protection values is worthwhile in the consideration of future planning trajectories. The fact that farming continues to make a significant contribution to the economic base of the Shire as well as maintaining amenity landscape values, provides a strong foundation on which the concept of a ‘working’ amenity landscape, as a functional outcome of planning could be based and maintained (Cannavo, 2007).

**A working multifunctional amenity landscape**

A multifunctional amenity landscape certainly encapsulates the concept of a ‘working’ landscape, although the term ‘working landscape’ is much more evocative of the real purpose and objectives of the activities occurring within it. Indigo Shire could be considered a ‘working landscape’ in that it meets the criterion of the continuing emphasis on the economic contribution of agriculture to the rural economy (Daniels, 2000) as well as having a balance between cultivation and natural habitat (Cannavo, 2007). The strong desire to continue farming and the optimism of the majority of farmers towards the potential of agricultural production in Indigo Shire would also appear to support the concept of a working landscape, although it was not articulated specifically by anyone. This is not surprising given that the concept has not yet been
significantly embraced in Australia. The terms ‘working river’ and ‘working Basin’ have been used in relation to developing a balanced approach to the environmental, social and economic values of the Murray-Darling Basin (SEWP&C, 2011), but have not been widely adopted.

However, the concept has been briefly explored in relation to amenity landscapes. In their study of a forestry and cattle grazing landscape in eastern Oregon, Abrams and Bliss (2012, p. 13) point out that the concept of a working landscape was important as ‘an alternative vision to the more common trajectory of land use changes associated with amenity migration and rural gentrification’. Their study showed that landholders were concerned about maintaining an ‘authentic’ working landscape, despite quite different definitions between the established landholders and the newcomers of what that vision entailed. There was interest amongst newcomers in fostering land use continuity, albeit in subtly different ways from the land management practices of some of the existing landholders and managers (Abrams & Bliss, 2012). This was an example of changes in an amenity landscape that did not necessarily result in land being lost from production, and thus irrevocable landscape change. Of course, it is also recognised that these studies show only a ‘snapshot’ and that longitudinal studies are better able to show trajectories of social, cultural and economic change (Mitchell & de Waal, 2009).

In the case of Indigo Shire, there is current stability in the number of small farms. The majority of farmers are no longer purely full time primary producers. Off-farm income is not just a survival strategy; rather it is a deliberate choice for many rural landholders, whether they are newcomers seeking to diversify their lifestyle by producing food or fibre from their land, or retiring full time farmers still wishing to ‘keep their hands in the dirt’ by retaining some elements of production without the associated financial or physical risks. This realignment of priorities requires a paradigm shift in approaches to the countryside and its governance, involving endogenous, territorially-based integrated rural development (McDonagh, 2012). The challenge incumbent on private landholders as well as public decision makers is to recognise the need to manage the balance between production, protection and consumption in this attractive landscape in a way that is economically, socially and environmentally sustainable.

One of the five goals to engender a working landscape as suggested by Daniels (2000, p. 262) is to strive to maintain a critical mass of farmland which enables the
continuation of farming and supporting businesses to thrive. In small farm landscapes, it is necessary to embrace a diversity of agricultural products as well as the multiplicity of scales of production as an integral part of sustainable rural development (Selfa et al., 2010). Small farms have a vital social, environmental, cultural as well as economic role in sustaining rural communities and contributing to an aesthetically pleasing ‘countryside’ (Campbell, 2008). There is also value in ensuring an ‘interconnectedness’ between farms and their landscapes (Marsden & Sonnino, 2008) through the production of goods sourced from the land. Acknowledging and capitalising on this aspect of rural landscapes is an important avenue of validating the role of farms and farming as an active use of the land and contributor to amenity landscapes.

By recognising the multifunctionality of landscapes and the variety of tangible and intangible values present within them, there is an opportunity to retain and enhance those values and benefits (Wilson & Whitehead, 2012). In Europe and the United Kingdom, the broader concept of landscapes and landscape planning, as opposed to land use planning, has provided the framework for many aspects of sustainable development (Moore-Colyer & Scott, 2005; Powell et al., 2002; Selman, 2006). However, in Australia, landscape planning is primarily considered in the context of aesthetics and cultural values and has not been associated with agricultural production (Buxton et al., 2006).

This situation may be changing. In South Australia, the State government has recently passed landscape-scale legislation to ‘recognise, protect and enhance the special character’ of the two well known agricultural and wine regions in the state: McLaren Vale and the Barossa Valley (South Australian Government, 2013). Character Preservation Bills for these two areas were passed in January 2013, recognising rural and natural landscape and visual amenity; heritage attributes; the built form of the townships as they relate to the district; the viticultural, agricultural and associated industries; as well as the scenic and tourism attributes of the district (South Australian Government, 2013). Aimed at enabling legislation to maintain and preserve the rural amenity, rural character and scenic vistas as well as ensuring development supports the dominant land uses – wine, food, agriculture and tourism, the legislation was passed after lengthy community input and several iterations of boundaries. The standout characteristics include taking a regional landscape scale approach and focussing on identifying the values that are to be retained, maintained, protected and restored. This is the first legislation of its kind in Australia (Johnston et al., 2012) and it remains to be
seen where it will lead.

While the South Australian Character Preservation Bills will likely set a very high standard for planning in amenity landscapes, it is unlikely to be emulated easily in other contexts where the economic, social, cultural and historical values are not as well known or defined. However, it does provide a tangible example of a landscape perspective to planning that goes beyond the static notion of ‘preserving’ farmland to ensure it is not lost to farming. Rather, this approach encompasses a variety of other values, recognising the interaction and dependencies of environmental, economic and social capital in relation to rural land. It could also be considered a way of expressing and managing a working multifunctional landscape.

2) Planning processes need to consider the role of agriculture in rural amenity landscapes

The increasing complexity of place-based issues in rural amenity landscapes highlights many of the tensions and conundrums of living in and managing multifunctional landscapes. Governance arrangements, including land use planning processes, struggle to find footing in the flood of environmental, social and economic changes bearing down on them. This study clearly illustrated that local government arrangements have been challenged by efforts to accommodate the diversity of local agricultural issues, creating a difficult relationship between farming, planning and economic development [Chapter 6]. The cultural, political and bureaucratic histories of both the agricultural sector and the planning discipline have meant there has been little common ground from which to develop and implement integrated policies at any scale. There are a multitude of causes for this disjuncture, some related to the evolution of rural planning as described in Chapter 2, and others related to the ‘sectoralism’ of resource industries such as agriculture which tends to be viewed through State and national lenses, rather than local ones (Campbell, 2009). Indeed, the dominance of sectoral thinking in government departments, agencies and jurisdictions thwarts integrated and pre-emptive policy solutions to problems which occur at the interface of ‘land’ and ‘use’ (Buxton et al., 2006). These policies also fail to address the interconnectedness between various forms of capital, undermining the sustainability of rural areas (Tonts, 2005). Holmes (2006), Marsden and Sonnino (2008) and Wilson (2008, 2010) all point out the
challenges of embedding multifunctional agriculture in traditional government policies which tend to have a ‘silo’ approach to agriculture or rural development.

Agricultural production and the use of agricultural land are generally considered economic functions, driven by external markets and far removed from the interests and capabilities of local government (Budge & Slade, 2009). In addition, the focus of agricultural policy is largely on production, including managing the resource and developing supply chains to meet market demand. The opportunities for local community intervention or local government involvement in terms of defining markets or influencing resource allocations are generally minimal when the sector is viewed through this ‘productivist’ lens. Yet amenity landscapes, as discussed above, have mostly moved beyond this ‘productivist’ stage and therefore are in need of a more integrative and responsive approach to the social and economic impacts of evolving agricultural land use.

This lack of connection between local government processes and agriculture was seen as both a cause and a symptom of many of the land use challenges facing the Shire. As shown in Chapter 6, there are a multitude of issues which arose from the exploration of the interaction between farming and planning, however, there appeared to be two main issues which contributed to the challenges of rural land use planning: the lack of effective tools including policies which were able to assist in the management of multifunctional landscapes, and the lack of skills and expertise within the Shire to enable effective decision-making relating to agricultural activities.

**Having the right tools for planning**

Planning staff and some Councillors expressed frustration at the lack of tools to assist in land use decision making [Chapter 6]. It was noted that the State Planning Policy Framework provided minimal direction with respect to agriculture, and there was no overall State strategy that applied to rural areas. The broad policy of ‘preserving agricultural land’ appeared to create more difficulties than it solved when applied to local situations.

The majority of the issues raised by farmers and planning staff alike in this study could be traced back to the lack of strategic land use planning at the local government level. The struggle to develop a Rural Land Use Strategy occurred concurrently with this research [Chapter 3]. Local government staff and Councillors invested significant time
and resources into the Strategy and had high hopes for it to provide guidance for
decision making in rural areas. Unfortunately, the document was never officially
completed, although a report was received by Council and a partial implementation
program adopted based on recommendations in the report [Chapter 4].

Strategic plans are in essence planning management tools and strategic planning is a
process that can enable local government and the community to spend time working out
a future direction (Mant, 2000). Although the process of developing a strategic plan can
be as useful as the Strategy itself, in the case of Indigo Shire, the unfinished nature of
the engagement process, along with the lack of a Strategy at the end of it, likely
heightened the confusion, feelings of uncertainty and sense of frustration with planning
expressed by the farmers in this study [Chapter 6].

Developing a rural land use strategy can be a difficult task, and this was recognised by
the Department of Community Development and Planning in 2008 when they provided
$500,000 in funding to Councils across Victoria to develop rural land use plans
(Municipal Association of Victoria, 2010). Indigo Shire had been successful in
obtaining some of that funding to undertake the development of its Rural Land Use
Strategy. At that time, only 13 of the 48 rural Councils had rural land use strategies,
with only four of those having actually incorporated the strategy into their planning
scheme. All but one of the existing strategies have been developed since 2007
(Municipal Association of Victoria, 2010). Therefore, rural strategic planning
undertaken by local government could be considered a recent phenomenon in Victoria
(Buxton et al., 2005), and the lack of a strategic rural land use plan in Indigo Shire is not
unique.

Strategic land use planning is critical in providing the statutory basis and guidance for
decisions on land protection and development (Sinclair & Bunker, 2007). However,
many of the broader issues affecting rural subdivisions, farm viability, rural character
and landscape amenity cannot be properly addressed by the planning system alone
(Municipal Association of Victoria, 2010). Thus, each strategic planning process needs
to determine just how comprehensive its plan will be and it has been recognised that the
process to develop a rural strategy can be overwhelming for many small Councils
(RMCG Consulting Group, 2008). This was partly the problem in the case of Indigo
Shire; the project was overly ambitious in terms of the scope of the issues being
considered. The current situation of the Shire is also a reflection of the difficulty in addressing the challenges in this dynamic landscape.

While having a strategic plan to guide land use decisions was considered vitally important to the overall cohesion of rural policies, rural land use is also affected by the breadth of State planning tools available. Shire and State planners noted the limitations of the Victorian Planning Provisions and the restrictive nature of the Farming Zone, despite its widespread use across variable quality farmland. The fact that some agriculture-related tourism, recreation and value-adding activities were unable to be considered in the Farming Zone, while the Rural Activity Zone was under utilised and poorly understood, were contentious issues well known across the State (Buxton et al., 2005; Future Farming Rural Planning Group, 2009). Changes to the Planning and Environment Act 1987 and the Victoria Planning Provisions were underway in late 2012. However, it is unknown whether or not the advice of the Future Farming Taskforce and the outcomes from other reviews of the planning system has been considered in changes to the legislation.

What is key to the discussion about planning tools is that ultimately the land use planning system cannot require agricultural land to be farmed; it can only prevent it from being used for non-agricultural purposes if those purposes require planning approval (Budge & Slade, 2009). Thus land use policy only mitigates negative pressures and does not provide the context to inspire and encourage agri-food production or environmentally sustainable landscapes (Campbell, 2008). That direction must come from other social, economic and political persuasions, including community concern and support.

The capacity of local government to address agricultural issues

Part of the reason Indigo Shire’s Rural Land Use Strategy was not finalised as initially envisaged was the inability of the Shire to attract and retain staff of the appropriate calibre to undertake this type of work. Lack of skills and availability of technical and financial resources are recognised as barriers to small rural municipalities in undertaking critical rural strategic work (RMCG Consulting Group, 2008). This was a problem pointed out by Shire staff and Councillors [Chapter 6], and is a common issue in many small rural Shires in Victoria (Future Farming Rural Planning Group, 2009).
Across rural Victoria, over 60% of councils noted that restricted staff resources are a high priority and significant impediment to developing and implementing a rural strategy (Municipal Association of Victoria, 2010). In addition, the development of a rural land use strategy also requires a diverse range of skills and project-based work that are prohibitive to retain in-house for most rural councils. Therefore rural Councils are reliant on external consultants to undertake the required research and develop the strategic justification to prepare and progress a strategic plan and related planning scheme amendments.

At a more detailed, day-to-day decision making level, this study also revealed that there was a lack of agricultural expertise in the planning department to address rural issues [Chapter 6]. Planning staff explained that they often didn’t have the skills and training to adequately assess issues of farm viability, contemporary farming practices and land capability so had to rely on data and information from elsewhere. This lack of knowledge and expertise was exacerbated by the tight timeframes and complexity of land development issues. One planner noted that for the most part, their training had not prepared them for dealing with the detail of farming issues, or in fact many of the rural issues they had to address. This concern is supported by the Municipal Association of Victoria (2010) which surveyed rural Councils across the State. One of the key problems identified was the shortage of planners and the relative inexperience of planners when dealing with agricultural issues. Planners that are located in rural councils are most often over-worked and lack the support and opportunity to engage effectively in strategic planning policy. In addition, within virtually any rural council, there was usually very little or no skill-base or experience related to agricultural matters. Statutory planners and councillors were often required to make decisions using, at best, common sense rather than knowledge of the potential implications of a proposal, be it a rural dwelling, rural subdivision or intensive animal husbandry (Municipal Association of Victoria, 2010, p. 14).

The concern about the multitude of rural issues facing planners and their ability to respond adequately was also identified as an issue by the Victorian Planning System Ministerial Advisory Committee in their report to the State Planning Minister in 2011. For example, in one submission, Warrnambool City Council requested ‘more support to rural and regional Councils. Rural councils with multiple issues, small rate base and a large asset gap cannot afford to do flood studies, biodiversity studies, land suitability studies, heritage studies etc. They often do not have the staff capacity for strategic
planning or enforcement; however the planning system places the responsibility on local Councils.’ (Submission 375, Victorian Planning System Ministerial Advisory Committee, 2011)

The need to provide further training and skills development for rural planners as well as Councillors with respect to the development of strategic plans and the implementation of rural planning has been noted in numerous reviews of the rural planning system in Victoria (Future Farming Rural Planning Group, 2009; Municipal Association of Victoria, 2010; RMCG Consulting Group, 2008). Whether or not this need can be acted upon given the political process and administrative responsibilities remains to be seen. What the case study of Indigo Shire did reveal is that the lack of tools and gap in capacity in relation to rural planning is not unique to small rural Shires; rather the situation is systemic across Victoria, and is likely to be similar in other States in Australia, given the evolution of the planning profession from its urban/town planning roots (Marshall, 2007).

Indeed, the need for new tools and skill development to assist planners in dealing with changing social and environmental demands is noted in most developed countries (Forester, 1999). As pointed out in Chapter 2, the issues around sustainable development, climate change, public participation and food security have all challenged the traditional planning paradigms (Berke, 2002; Selman, 2010) and generated calls for reform. However, there has been less overt conceptualisation of the challenges facing the role of planning in agricultural landscapes expressed in the literature, other than to point out that in many cases, rural planning is often an issue relating to the lack of responsible urban planning (Paul & Haslam McKenzie, 2009; P. A. Walker et al., 2003), or suffers from not being able to address the sociological nuances of changing ownership patterns (Onega-Lopez, Puppim de Oliveira, & Crecente-Maseda, 2010).

3) **New governance processes are needed in agricultural amenity landscapes**

Typical of rural amenity landscapes in developed countries, farming in Indigo Shire needs to be viewed as a multifunctional activity in itself, with numerous outputs and incorporating a myriad of values. Despite an outward appearance of agricultural land management and community connections remaining largely unchanged over the past 50
years, the social and political implications of the role of farming in the Shire’s economy have altered significantly [Chapter 7].

Farming in general is no longer the social and cultural force it once was (Botterill, 2009) and this is particularly apparent in amenity landscapes where farming has retreated from the main focus of economic and political life. Rural issues now encompass a much broader range of political influences, focusing more often on the ‘meaning and regulation of rurality itself’ rather than just being politics located in rural space (Woods, 2003, p. 312). This shift from ‘rural politics’ to ‘politics of the rural’ has been discussed in relation to land use decisions in coastal amenity landscapes (Argent, 2011; Essex & Brown, 1997; Gurran, Blakely, & Squires, 2007) and underlies much of the concern about governance arrangements in environments subjected to amenity migration and counterurbanisation. If governance can be described as ‘the relations between government, the private sector and civil society, then to be able to address real social, environmental and economic issues, all three sectors need to work together in some form’ (Gurran et al., 2006, p. 6). In amenity landscapes, governance arrangements need to also reflect the shifting values and expectations of an evolving and increasingly heterogeneous rural society. Where farming fits into that social and economic milieu is by no means clear. What is apparent is that farmers themselves are still struggling to identify their roles as land users and business providers, and local government is challenged by farming’s unique positioning in underpinning the future of rural amenity landscapes.

In relation to this study, the majority of farms in Indigo Shire are family-run businesses (Indigo Shire Council, 2012a) and, like farms everywhere, they also contribute to a broad range of social, environmental, economic and cultural values (Pretty, 2002). This study exposed the need for new governance arrangements in relation to farming being seen as a critical activity in the future sustainability of the Shire as a result of the changing demographics. The ‘cultural’ gap between local government and farmers meant that communication was a challenge [Chapter 6]. The changing land uses, coupled with the absence of local level information about agricultural output revealed a lack of awareness and connection between the activities and products of agriculture and the Shire’s economic aspirations in relation to promoting tourism and amenity landscapes [Chapter 7]. These two aspects are deconstructed further below.
The widening gap between Council and farmers

This study highlighted one of the demographic realities of rural amenity landscapes: farmers no longer make up the majority of the population and, along with the changing roles of local government, there are fewer farmers who run for, or are elected to, Council [Chapter 6]. At the time of this study, there were no Councillors with a strong background in farming or who had direct farming experience in Indigo Shire. Of course this does not mean that the Councillors did not understand agricultural issues or did not have close personal ties with farmers in the region. Rather, it is symptomatic of the ‘changing times’, reflecting the evolving demographics of a rural amenity landscape (Barr, 2009). On the ground, this provided another opportunity for those farmers who felt threatened by the changing community structures to, cynically, point out the lack of representation of their interests on Council. Conceptually, it was just an aspect of the dynamic political relationship between government and the community, reflecting the changing needs of governance arrangements.

This study found that although farmers were not overwhelmingly negative toward the Councillors despite not having ‘one of their own’ on Council, there was an overt concern about the overall ‘standing’ of agriculture in civic affairs and acknowledgement of the role of farmers and farming in the Shire. The impact of this gap was manifested in the Shire’s lack of close communication and inability to engage with farmers on a regular basis [Chapter 6].

With little expertise at any level related to agriculture and the particular needs of farmers within Council, the relationship between the Shire and the farming community had shifted over the last decade. Up until 2008, there had always been at least one Councillor from a farming background on Council. Council staff and Councillors pointed out that they didn’t engage with farmers as a specific group within the community as such and they also noted the challenges of communicating with the ‘people in-between the towns’, meaning the farmers as well as other landholders who didn’t consider themselves town residents. This lack of close affinity with the farming community, despite its diversity, did have impacts on the ease of communication with the farming community around planning issues, as well as farming issues in general.

There is little doubt that the increasing heterogeneity of the communities within rural amenity landscapes makes engaging with the diverse ‘publics’ difficult (Bohnet, 2008; Gill et al., 2010). This diversity is a challenge for local government’s established
communication and engagement processes, and requires considerably more effort, given that farming and farming issues are in some instances beyond the ‘awareness comfort zone’ of many staff and Councillors. The situation is compounded by the expectations of the broader community that they will be able to participate in decision-making processes, especially those related to land use planning (Zehner & Marshall, 2007). Planners also recognise the need to engage the public: ‘If many people representing a variety of interests become active in the planning process, a consensus on the vision for the community will reflect broad support’ (Daniels (1999) in Buxton et al., 2006, p. 222).

However, increased public participation does not necessarily mean increased coherence in planning. There are numerous examples where public opinion and strong opposition has ‘caused planning to work by restraint rather than by policy and positive creation’ (Essex & Brown, 1997, p. 282) resulting in divisions within the community due to participation in planning processes (Argent, 2011; Forester, 1999; Olson, 2005). Indeed, these are often the situations picked up in the media and oversimplified, pitting ‘pro’ and ‘anti’ development interests against each other when often there are many subtleties. This was also the case in Indigo Shire where the planners heard from farmers who supported policies to allow subdivision of land for rural residential development which would fund their retirement, and other farmers who adamantly supported the view that the land should never be subdivided because it was valuable for farming (as shown in Figure 11, Chapter 4). For the most part, the broader community was not engaged in these debates, nor did Councillors actively participate due to the absence of strategic planning and the fact that the more contentious decisions often ended up at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal.

One of the challenges of the role of the local Council is that they must set the strategic direction of the Shire and then interpret and implement it through decisions that can directly affect individual constituents (Future Farming Rural Planning Group, 2009; Municipal Association of Victoria, 2006). Introducing a degree of separation between policy making and interpretation could potentially ensure a more objective policy and decision-making process. This has been done in Victoria’s Surf Coast Shire where an independent committee, consisting of community representatives, planning experts, architects and other appropriately qualified people, have the delegated responsibility to make decisions on particular planning applications (Gurran et al., 2006). The full Council retains the ability to ‘call in’ a decision on a planning permit where the issues
are contentious to the wider community or where the decision may influence policy development (Surf Coast Shire, 2000). This is seen as a more transparent approach to planning decisions and could be a model for skills-based decision making around land use (Gurran et al., 2006). Along these lines, Agricultural Advisory Committees have been proposed to provide advice or consult on conflicts between farmers and residents in land use planning disputes in Canada (Churchyard, 2010).

For agricultural land and farming to remain as a viable land use, it will require more than legislation to protect land or encourage sustainable land use, or local government processes to engage in comprehensive planning. Rather, a more holistic approach to valuing the landscape and its products is needed. In line with this, there are many case studies of rural land use change showing strong support from the community for farming (Gibson et al., 2005; Paquette & Domon, 2003; Ruiz & Domon, 2012; Selwood et al., 1996). It makes sense that establishing tangible processes which recognise the value and contribution of farming is likely to gain some traction within the broader community. The challenge is to create the openings in the discourse to enable buy-in from a broader cross-section of the community. This concurs with the suggestion by Selman (2006) that stakeholder involvement is not an agent of social revolution but is a necessary condition for progress of planning for landscape-scale outcomes. A beginning point for that broader engagement is linking agriculture to local economic development.

The connection between the activities and products of agriculture and the Shire's economic aspirations

The findings of this research, including the perspectives and experiences of Councillors, Shire staff and farmers were testament to the gap between the economic activity of farming as producing food, fibre and landscape values and the Shire’s economic aspirations related to tourism and amenity migration. Agricultural issues, despite being fundamental to the economic base of the Shire, were seen by some Councillors and Shire staff as somewhat less relevant to the future in comparison to tourism, retail and residential growth and management [Chapter 7]. There was a general lack of awareness and ability to articulate the current or potential role of farming to the economy, landscape or communities of the Shire. While the number of farms and the overall value of agricultural production to the Shire were referred to in some documents, Shire
staff found it hard to verify these statistics, noting that these numbers did not represent the true value of local agricultural production and consumption.

This situation is not unusual given the challenges with data collection from small farms. As discussed in Chapter 2, the contribution of small farms to agricultural production is difficult to quantify, given the Census data collection techniques (Ecker et al., 2010; Houston, 2005). The fact that the Shire has two Farmers’ Markets, many farm-gate and wine-cellar door sales outlets, several retail outlets which sell local produce as well as many restaurants which opportunistically and frequently purchase local farm products, proves this point. What is perhaps surprising is that the Shire had not attempted to collect this information as part of understanding the role of local food and wine to the tourism trade. Nor had they made the link between these products and the process of creating and justifying a rural land use policy, although brief mention was made of the aesthetic value of agrarian landscapes to local tourism.

The relationship between economics and planning is often overlooked by planners who tend to focus on physical development and spatial issues, and it is ignored by economic development officers who are looking for development opportunities, regional competitiveness and comparative business advantages, most of which are not spatially focussed. This lack of understanding of the role of planning in the economics of Shire development is due in part to the resource issues mentioned above, but also because of the organisational structure of local government and in particular small rural Councils. The common ground to start the conversation between these two separate sectors just may be around the production (land use and activity) and consumption (tourism and value-adding) of local food as an outcome of local agriculture.

This ‘re-spatialisation’ of food production has become an increasingly important social, economic and political force in Europe, leading to a ‘revised geography of rural development’ (Renting et al., 2003, p. 408) but has not been widely studied or acknowledged in Australia. While there has been increasing interest in local food production through activities such as Farmers’ Markets (Coster & Kennon, 2005), the connection between land use and local agricultural production in terms of governance processes such as planning has been tenuous at best (Budge & Slade, 2009). This is discussed in more detail next.
4) Local food production could enhance the sustainability of amenity landscapes

This study showed that some Councillors and farmers saw the connection between local produce and landscapes, although many recognised that the diversity of farm products enhanced the ‘liveability’ and attractiveness of the area for tourists as well as residents [Chapter 7]. Yet, as referred to earlier in this chapter, the quantum of food produced and consumed locally and the actual role of these farms in providing a secure and acceptable source of local food is not well understood. Nor has this component of rural amenity landscapes been widely explored with respect to the impacts of in-migration and changes in land ownership.

The traditional small farms of amenity landscapes attract residents and tourists who in turn are increasingly seeking nutritious, fresh food that is locally produced. This is an important part of the local identity and the cultural value of the landscape. The connection between the local environment, the local economy, the local community and individual food choices is an integral part of the rural lifestyle in amenity landscapes.

Despite food and wine being a very important part of Indigo’s tourism profile (Indigo Shire Council, 2011b), this study showed that few farmers, local government staff and Councillors were able to articulate the advantages of local food production as a means of linking together rural farming activities, land use, farmers’ business aspirations, local food consumption and the behaviour of an increasing non-farming rural population [Chapter 7]. In essence, an agri-food network had not developed in this landscape yet as it has appeared to have done in some of the agrarian amenity landscapes of the United Kingdom and Europe (Selfa et al., 2010; van der Ploeg & Renting, 2004). Neither has local food production been acknowledged as an important component of community health and well-being by local government as it has in some parts of Canada (Churchyard, 2010; The Land Conservancy of British Columbia, 2009).

Local marketing of food and wine and the related tourism and development strategies could be important avenues to maintain and enhance the functionality and stability of food production in an amenity landscape such as Indigo Shire. Experiences from other countries including Canada, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Italy demonstrate the interdependence of agriculture, tourism, heritage and local sustainability in multifunctional landscapes (Alterman, 1997; Bills & Gross, 2005; Churchyard, 2010;
Embedding local agricultural production into the cultural and economic aspirations of the community would assist in creating support for the multiple values of the existing farms.

Local food production invariably comes from small farms which are able to respond to the diversified needs of local markets (Ecker et al., 2010). It is recognised that this style of food production will not feed the world, and it is unlikely that it will contribute significantly to national gross domestic production. However, it can, and does, capture the imagination of the local community, with the potential of engaging people in practices that can create and maintain attractive sustainable landscapes. An important component of the benefits arising from local food production is the potential to re-establish connections between food and place, thereby enabling locals to see the landscape differently. Thus, local food production can assist in raising awareness and support for farm-related issues and food production (Campbell, 2009; Coster & Kennon, 2005; Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry, 2011).

Comments from local government staff and Councillors indicated that the integration between food systems and landscapes had yet to be formally recognized or acted upon in this Shire [Chapter 6]. Agricultural production and local food processing and consumption as activities central to tourism, land use and community well-being were not well articulated in current Shire policies and plans. There were no clear and established links between food production and land use planning, or food production and economic development. Indigo Shire is not alone in this regard, with other local and regional government agencies struggling to ‘fit’ food production and security issues into their respective agendas (Budge & Slade, 2009; Commonwealth of Australia, 2010; Larsen et al., 2008).

Local food production and consumption can also assist in the development of stronger social connections in communities (both urban and rural), increase awareness of the benefits of fresh fruit, vegetables and local food in a healthy diet, and a greater appreciation of the connections between the processes of food preparation and food quality (Donovan et al., 2011). It can also require fewer energy inputs and reduce the vulnerability associated with dependence on long supply chains that are becoming more fragile (Burton et al., 2013). Local food production also contributes to community food security. By considering it thus, local food becomes more than just a niche product responding to a ‘locavore’ or ‘foodie’ trend (DeLind, 2011); rather it can be about
regenerating the agri-food system and restoring the connections, transparency, knowledge and protection of local food production processes and activities (Budge & Slade, 2009; Kirwan & Maye, 2012).

It is useful to consider local food production in amenity landscapes within the larger concept of food security, despite the concept being fraught with nuances. The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) define food security as ‘Food and nutrition security exists when all people at all times have physical, social and economic access to food, which is safe and consumed in sufficient quantity and quality to meet their dietary needs and food preferences, and is supported by an environment of adequate sanitation, health services and care, allowing for a healthy and active life.’ (Food and Agriculture Organisation, 2012, p. 2) Nationally, food security can be interpreted as the ability for every Australian to be able to afford a healthy diet, and is often referred to in conjunction with food sovereignty and the need for Australians to control the supply and production of food in terms of quality, quantity and other resources consumed in the process (Farmar-Bowers et al., 2013). This concept could easily be scaled down to a local level.

Australia currently produces enough food to feed approximately 60 million people and therefore is considered ‘food secure’ (PMSEIC, 2010), although this is disputed as there remain ‘pockets of people in poverty’ who do not have access to the sorts of foods that allow them to lead active and healthy lives (Lawrence et al., 2013). Then there are concepts such as food sovereignty and food democracy which focus on issues such as the rights of small scale producers, sustainable agricultural practices and the rights of consumers to access fair trading systems when purchasing food (Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance, 2012). It is at this end of the food security discourse that local food production is found, and this sets the context for the integration of local agricultural production and community consumption.

If amenity landscapes are to continue producing food for local consumption and for exporting to other markets, more proactive and integrated approaches, tools and marketing ideas are needed. Creating innovative partnerships between local government and agricultural businesses that take advantage of the opportunities created by an increasing non-farming rural population could help build stability and acceptability in food production, thereby contributing to food security on both local and regional scales. The valuing of agricultural land through understanding and supporting
its economic, social, aesthetic and environmental contribution to the landscape can assist in decision making and community capacity building. Supporting local agricultural production can improve availability and access to food, create local economic profitability and local jobs, increase community interaction, and can assist in the protection of attractive landscapes, all important components in maintaining a working, multifunctional landscape.

This Discussion chapter has highlighted and reviewed the main themes arising from the study of farming in amenity landscapes. It has shown the complexity of drivers and influences on farming, not only as a producer of food and fibre but as an essential ingredient in the sustainability of rural amenity landscapes. The next and final chapter provides the conclusion to this research by drawing together the analysis and discussion presented thus far, and suggests some potential opportunities for future research as well as actions at a local scale aimed at helping to keep small farms and rural amenity landscapes viable.
The case for a land ethic would appear hopeless but for the minority which is in obvious revolt against these ‘modern’ trends. The ‘key log’ which must be moved to release the evolutionary process for an ethic is simply this: quit thinking about land use as solely an economic problem. Examine each question in terms of what is ethically and aesthetically right, as well as economically expedient. A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.”

(Aldo Leopold, 1949)

Chapter 9 – Conclusion

This chapter answers the fourth research question: What are the implications for the future of farming in amenity landscapes?

While the loss of agricultural land in amenity landscapes is unlikely to affect the nation’s food security (Millar & Roots, 2012), it does have the very real potential to affect local livelihoods and landscapes. This study has showed that there is an underlying and undeniable desire to keep farming and producing food in this amenity landscape, for economic as well as lifestyle reasons. Farming in amenity landscapes needs to be seen as an integral part of a multi-functional land use system where its products, both tangible and intangible, are overtly recognised. While the future of small scale farms may not lie solely in farming, their importance to the sustainability of rural communities cannot be underestimated (McDonagh, 2012). The recent interest in local food consumption for environmental, health and ethical reasons is an opportunity to recreate links between broader society and agricultural production. In amenity landscapes, where there is often the economic capability and cultural desire to purchase local products, effort needs to be made to develop the connections, support structures and opportunity to enable residents and visitors to engage with agriculture in social, economic and environmental ways. These landscapes, because of their associated demographic structure, can be the testing ground for innovation in small scale agricultural development and local food systems, aimed at creating and maintaining sustainable business models based on agriculture as a truly sustainable resource.

This research has contributed to our understanding of rural amenity landscapes and change by studying a landscape where farming is still ‘working’. Amenity landscapes
are often considered places where consumption has overtaken production, with the landscape providing only a backdrop for other activities. This case study has shown that an amenity landscape can be a ‘working landscape’ and produce a multitude of benefits. It has also shown that there are alternative pathways and outcomes to the ‘cycle of conversion’ presented in Chapter 1. But the research has also shown that this will not just happen by happy coincidence. Experience from elsewhere has demonstrated that pro-active and innovative planning processes, robust and inclusive governance arrangements and imaginative and inspired economic development are all required if these landscapes are to grow, rather than diminish, in value.

The learnings from this study can inform thinking and encourage reflection on the values of rural amenity landscapes at the individual farmer level as well as at local and regional government levels. The ‘politics of the rural’ in amenity landscapes will need to embrace the following points raised in this study:

1. There is an ever increasing diversity in aspirations, ability to adapt and perspectives about the future of agriculture amongst farmers. This diversity needs to be reflected in the engagement processes of local government, but also creates opportunities for economic innovation and marketing – the farmers of tomorrow will be very different to the farmers of yesterday, and while they undoubtedly will have very different needs, they will be there due to a strong desire and concomitant undertakings to keep farming in the landscape today;

2. Multifunctional landscapes require very different planning and governance tools than traditional farming or peri-urban landscapes, and therefore will require significantly more effort, guidance and imagination. The current governance arrangements and planning processes, based primarily on productivist models, have not kept pace with the changes in rural landscapes, and amenity landscapes are at the forefront of this evolution – these landscapes will be the litmus tests on the ability of governments to respond to the challenges of managing multifunctional land uses; and

3. Agricultural activities are undergoing significant change due to numerous external pressures, however in amenity landscapes there are likely to be more opportunities to create resilience and adaptation strategies because of their unique demographic and environmental attributes – therefore these landscapes
are an opportunity to reconnect the community with agricultural production and food, but it will require effort to create tangible and sustainable links.

The complexity of amenity landscapes will require a comprehensive mixture of approaches and tools to assist in their planning and management if they are to retain their amenity attributes and embrace sustainable development. There are no simple solutions or magical ingredients in the recipe for creating sustainable rural amenity landscapes. This research has uncovered a broad suite of opportunities which may move the collective forward toward that goal. Some of these could be considered ideas for future research, while others are about collecting information that could assist in better decision making.

1. Despite the numerous case studies of rural land use change and environmental consequences in the amenity landscape literature, there remains a lack of academic research focussing on the working agricultural landscape, and its potential to continue to produce goods for consumption. As concerns grow over local and regional food security issues and citizens’ groups call for more control over food production (Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance, 2012; Food Secure Canada, 2011) there may be interesting lessons to learn from approaches taken in different countries, particularly Canada and the United States in relation to local food systems and amenity landscapes.

2. There is a need for research to shed light on the social, economic, environmental and cultural linkages between the consumption of local food and the protection and promotion of local farming systems. Has the dramatic increase in the number of Farmers’ Markets had a subsequent impact on the viability of small farms in local and regional areas?

3. Further research is required to quantify and gain a deep understanding of the real value of agriculture to the local economy. The current methods of recording the value of agricultural output fall well short of encapsulating the total production potential of a given landscape. Determining new methods of data capture which could include the breadth of food transactions, from Farmers’ Markets to community gardens and everything in-between, including the contribution of local food to tourism, from restaurants to picnic baskets, would assist in defining the true agricultural value of farms;
4. Developing and enhancing local knowledge of landscape values is needed. Mapping high quality agricultural land as well as currently productive land, and exploring relevant agricultural infrastructure investments as well as the associated needs such as transport, surface water and groundwater availability including projections for climate change, will assist decision makers in recognising the synergistic needs of agriculture. This could then be used as the basis for collaboration or clumping of food production assets, identifying valuable agricultural lands and protecting investment;

5. There is a need to actively build linkages between economic development strategies, local food production, community development initiatives, biodiversity protection schemes and land use planning, so there is a true sense of integrated land use at a landscape scale – currently these are considered as separate entities with little scope for synergies to be created;

6. To change the status quo in terms of rural planning, there is a need to investigate, develop and implement a broader suite of land use planning tools such as setting and adhering to urban growth boundaries so that conflicting uses are minimised, reviewing policies which restrict the retailing of value-added agricultural products in farming areas, and promoting and adopting Food-Sensitive Planning and Urban Design principles to create multi-dimensional and multi-functional food systems (Donovan et al., 2011);

7. New opportunities could be discovered by exploring the feasibility of different share-farming, leasing, agisting and cooperative ownership arrangements, including exploring new types of leasing arrangements and specific incentives for properties owned by non-farmers (Ashby & Ashby, 2011). This could include investigating alternative land ownership models for high quality agricultural land, such as land trusts, cooperatives and tenements which could potentially assist new farmers entering the sector as well as inhibit the development of land for other purposes;

8. Integrating Right-to-Farm legislation and policies which recognise the value of agricultural production to the region could also be pursued, so there is increased awareness by all parties of the environmental, ethical and social aspects of farming activities (Martin & Shepheard, 2011);
9. Governance processes may benefit from having proactive and informed farming voices at the table within local government, such as through an Agricultural Advisory Committee (Churchyard, 2010), especially as rural Councils are increasingly comprised of non-farmers;

10. There are opportunities to create a local Food Policy Group made up of a wide range of stakeholders interested in creating and protecting sustainable agricultural landscapes and communities, to advise government as well as the private sector about opportunities (Heinberg & Bomford, 2009);

11. It appears to be worthwhile to further explore local food supply chains which can deliver food to consumers while also paying a viable price to producers, including buy local campaigns, encouraging food purchased for schools and hospitals to be sourced locally, and encouraging the development of Community Supported Agriculture schemes (Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance, 2012);

12. It would also appear to be worthwhile making food-safety regulations appropriate to the scale of production and distribution, so that a small grower selling direct off the farm or at a Farmers’ Market is not regulated as onerously as a multinational food manufacturer (Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance, 2012), thereby encouraging small farm production for local consumption.

Rural amenity landscapes will continue to attract people who seek the ‘rural idyll’ or perhaps the 21st century equivalent of a connection between landscape, lifestyle and livelihoods. Maintaining the diversity of benefits which can be procured from a healthy, working and sustainable landscape will require an engaged community and a proactive and integrated approach to planning at a variety of scales. Land use planning as a governance tool will not be sufficient to account for the complexity of these landscapes. Instead, innovative partnerships will need to be created between local government, agricultural businesses and communities to take advantage of the opportunities created by an increasing non-farming rural population as well support progressive change. The aim is to build viability, acceptability and longevity of agricultural production into these diverse landscapes, thereby contributing to food security, environmental sustainability and community well-being. This will take creativity, persistence and a belief that landscapes are the visible legacy of society’s cultural values and ethical responsibility; it is incumbent upon all of us to preserve their integrity, stability and beauty for future generations.
The End
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Appendix 1 – Letter to prospective Interviewees

FACULTY OF SCIENCE
School of Environmental Sciences

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PO Box 769, Albury NSW 2640
Tel: (02) 6051 0950 or +61 2 6051 0950
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Dennell Smith Drive, Wagga Wagga NSW
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isn@csu.edu.au, ext 2
ABN: 81 087 706 551

17 September 2009

Mr/Mrs [Farm owner]
W/Lana
[Indigo Shire Rural area,] Victoria,

Dear [first name],

Further to our brief telephone conversation the other day, here are some details about my research project:

My name is Jane Roots and I am a PhD student at Charles Sturt University, undertaking an independent research project on the future of farming in Indigo Shire.

The landscape of Indigo Shire is changing. Farming is becoming more difficult and less profitable in some parts of the Shire. Houses are growing in paddocks where once there were crops or stock. Yet farming is considered an important part of the community and a valuable land use. What is the future of farming here in the Shire? What are the forces affecting farming and who is being affected?

The project:

The purpose of this research project is to better understand how land use planning and community engagement processes affect the future of farming as a land use in Indigo Shire. The research will explore the issues around farming and landscape management from a social perspective, including the contribution of farming to landscape values as well as to the social and economic values of the broader community.

The outcomes of this research will contribute to our understanding of rural landscape change, helping to inform decisions about planning, community engagement and decision making. The results of this research will be shared with the community, local government, farming industries and state or regional agencies currently engaged in landscape management decision making.

The research:

I will be interviewing landowners in Indigo Shire who are primary producers (full or part time), and who are actively engaged in a food or fibre business (i.e. are selling or processing the products from their farm on a regular, commercial basis). I will also be talking to government agency staff and Councillors, as well as some retail businesses.

The interview:

Each interview will take approximately one and a half hours and is essentially a conversation between you and me about your perspectives, ideas, concerns and experiences with land use change and farming in Indigo Shire.
What happens to information from the interviews?

The information from our discussion is the data I need to describe the situation in Indigo Shire. As the principal investigator, I am responsible for all data entry and analysis, and transcripts of the interviews will not be available to anyone other than me and my supervisors (Dr Joanne Millar, Dr Rik Thwaites, Dr Rod Griffith). The information you provide is confidential and your personal details will not be published.

If you are interested in this issue and can spare an hour or two to talk, I would really appreciate it.

I will contact you in a few days to discuss the research and, if you are willing to participate, arrange a time to be interviewed.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at any time on the numbers below. I look forward to meeting you!

Kind regards,

Jane Roots
PhD Candidate, Environmental Sciences
Charles Sturt University, PO Box 789, Albury NSW 2640
Mobile: 0429 437 600; School (BH): 02 6051 9827; Home (AH): 03 5726 1171
Email: jroots@csu.edu.au

If you have any questions about my research methods, or need more information, please feel free to contact me or any of my supervisors:

Supervisors:
Dr Joanne Millar
Lecturer, Natural Resources Management
School of Environmental Sciences
CSU, PO Box 789, Albury NSW 2640
2640
Phone: (02) 6051 9993
Email: jmillar@csu.edu.au

Dr Rik Thwaites
Senior Lecturer
School of Environmental Sciences
CSU, PO Box 789, Albury NSW 2640
2640
Phone: (02) 6051 9899
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Dr Rod Griffith
Research Fellow, Institute for Land Water & Society
GPO Box 274 Canberra 2601
Phone: 02 6161 2043
Email: griffith@grapevine.net.au

NOTE: Charles Sturt University’s Ethics in Human Research Committee has approved this project # 2009/178. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this project, you may contact the Committee through the Executive Office:
The Executive Officer, Ethics in Human Research Committee, Academic Secretariat
Charles Sturt University
Private Mail Bag 29, Bathurst NSW 2795
Tel: (02) 6338 4625; Fax: (02) 6338 4194
Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.
Appendix 2 – Human Ethics approval letter

10 December 2009

Ms Jane Roots
School of Environmental Sciences
PO BOX 789
ALBURY NSW 2640

Dear Ms Roots,

Thank you for the additional information forwarded in response to a request from the Human Research Ethics Committee.

The Committee has now approved your proposal entitled “The Future of Farming in Rural Amenity Landscapes – the role of planning and governance in a changing landscape” for a twelve month period from 10/12/2009. The protocol number issued with respect to this project is 2009/178. Please be sure to quote this number when responding to any request made by the Committee.

Please note the Committee acknowledges that due to the ambiguity of an email sent while the Executive Officer of the HREC was on sick leave you did not realize that a response to the email was required before final approval could be given. You have advised that you did make the changes prior to commencing your research even though you didn’t formally notify the Committee of this. Under the circumstances this letter is to confirm that approval is being given knowing the research has commenced with the assumption it had received ethics approval.

You must notify the Committee immediately should your research differ in any way from that proposed.

You are also required to complete a Progress Report form, which can be downloaded from www.csu.edu.au/research/forms/hrec_annrep.doc, and return it on completion of your research project or by 10/12/2010 if your research has not been completed by that date.

Please don’t hesitate to contact the Executive Officer on telephone (02) 6338 4628 or email ethics@csu.edu.au if you have any enquiries.

Yours sincerely

Letter signed by Julie Hicks, Executive Officer
Human Research Ethics Committee
Direct Telephone: (02) 6338 4628
Appendix 3 – Consent form for interviews

CONSENT FORM
FOR INTERVIEWS

The Future of Farming in Rural Amenity Landscapes: the role of planning and governance in a changing landscape

The purpose of the research has been explained to me and I have read and understood the information sheet given to me.

I permit Jane to record our discussion as part of this research project.

I understand that any information or personal details about me gathered in the course of this research are confidential and that neither my name nor any other identifying information will be used or published without my written permission.

I understand that I am free to withdraw my participation in the research at any time, and that if I do, I will not be subjected to any penalty or discriminatory treatment.

I understand that the Charles Sturt University’s Ethics in Human Research Committee has approved this research and if I have any complaints or concerns about the research or the way in which this interview has been conducted, I can contact the Executive Officer, Ethics in Human Research Committee, Academic Secretarial, Charles Sturt University.

Signed: ____________________________

Date ____________________________

(Each Interviewee signed one of these forms and they were kept in a confidential file)
The Future of Farming in Rural Amenity Landscapes: the role of planning and governance in a changing landscape

Information for the Participant

The purpose of the research has been explained to me and I have read and understood the information sheet given to me.

I permit Jane to record our discussion as part of this research project.

I understand that any information or personal details about me gathered in the course of this research are confidential and that neither my name nor any other identifying information will be used or published without my written permission.

I understand that I am free to withdraw my participation in the research at any time, and that if I do, I will not be subjected to any penalty or discriminatory treatment.

I understand that the Charles Sturt University’s Ethics in Human Research Committee has approved this research and if I have any complaints or concerns about the research or the way in which this interview has been conducted, I can contact the Ethics in Human Research Committee, Academic Secretariat, Charles Sturt University.

Signed by: __________________________

Date __________________________

Principal Investigator

Jane Roots
PhD Candidate
School of Environmental Sciences, Charles Sturt University
PO BOX 759 ALBURY NSW 2641 Email: jroots@csu.edu.au
Mobile: 0429 437 600 Phone: (02) 6051 9827

Supervisor

Dr Joanne Millar
Lecturer, School of Environmental Sciences, Charles Sturt University
Email: jmillar@csu.edu.au
Phone: (02) 6051 9859

(This was kept by the Interviewee along with the following Information sheets)
INFORMATION SHEET for INTERVIEWS
[this is left with each interviewee for further reference]

Title of Research Project:
The Future of Farming in Rural Amenity Landscapes – the role of planning and governance in a changing landscape

Principal Investigator: Jane Roots, PhD Candidate, Charles Sturt University

The landscape of Indigo Shire is changing. Farming is becoming more difficult and less profitable in some parts of the Shire. Houses are growing in paddocks where once there were crops or stock. Yet farming is still considered an important part of our community and a valuable land use. What is the future of farming here in the Shire? What are the forces affecting farming and who is being affected?

The project:
The purpose of this research project is to better understand how land use planning and community engagement processes affect the future of farming as a land use in Indigo Shire. The research will explore the issues around farming and landscape management from a social perspective, including the contribution of farming to landscape values as well as to the social and economic values of the broader community.

The outcomes of this research will contribute to our understanding of rural landscape change, helping to inform decisions about planning, community engagement and decision making. The results of this research will be shared with the community, local government, farming industries and state or regional agencies currently engaged in landscape management decision making.

The research:
I will be interviewing landowners in Indigo Shire who are primary producers (full or part time), and who are actively engaged in a food or fibre business (i.e. are selling or processing the products from their farm on a regular, commercial basis). I will also be talking to government agency staff and Councillors, as well as some retail businesses.

I realise that there are a number of other social science research projects occurring in this area currently, addressing issues around natural resource management and bushfires. I am endeavouring to align my interviews to minimise overlaps and avoid taking too much of any individual’s time.

The interview:
Each interview will take approximately one and a half hours and is essentially a conversation between you and me about your perspectives, ideas, concerns and experiences with land use change and farming here in Indigo Shire. With your permission I would like to record the interview, so that I can capture all the details of what you tell me, in your own words. This recording will then be transcribed into text and used as data for my research. The information you give me will remain completely anonymous and your name or any other identifying information will not be associated with the data (information) you provide to me. Of course you are free to end our discussion at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and can retract any statements you make during our conversation and you are free to withdraw from the research completely at any time.
What happens to information from the interviews?

As the principal investigator, I am responsible for all data entry and analysis, and transcripts of the interviews will not be available to anyone other than me and my supervisors (Dr Joanne Millar; Dr Rik Thwaites; Dr Rod Griffith). The information you provide is confidential and your personal details will not be published.

However, anonymous direct quotes from our conversation may be included in my doctoral dissertation and in journal articles arising from the research. No names or other identifying information will accompany these quotes if used, and these will not reveal any personal identifiable information. Transcripts and tapes of all interviews will be shredded after the research is complete.

If anything about this is unclear, or you need more information, please feel free to contact me or my supervisors:

Principal Investigator:
Jane Roots
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Charles Sturt University
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Dr Rod Griffith
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Institute for Land Water & Society
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Phone: 02 6161 2043
Email: griffith@grapevine.net.au

NOTE:
Charles Sturt University's Ethics in Human Research Committee has approved this project. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this project (#2009/178), you may contact the Committee through:
The Executive Officer
Ethics in Human Research Committee, Academic Secretariat
Charles Sturt University, Private Mail Bag 20, Bathurst NSW 2795
Tel: (02) 6338 4628 Fax: (02) 6338 4194

Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcomes.
Appendix 4 – Interview Guides

Interview guide: farmers

1. How long have you and your family lived here? If since 1990, why did you move here?
2. What do you produce and where do you sell it? What is its future outlook?
   If you sell your produce locally, tell me about how that works – is it sustainable?
   What would make it easier/more profitable for you?
3. How big is your property? How much area does your business cover (greenhouses, irrigation, sheds, etc) Has that changed over time – have your purchase or sold land recently?
4. Do you consider your farm profitable and/or sustainable? Yes/no Why/why not? (economically, ecologically and socially)? What would you need to change to make it profitable or sustainable?
5. What makes this a good farm – soil / climate / water / close to market?
6. Are your children interested in taking over the farm and running it as an agricultural business? Why/why not?
7. Do you think another farmer would be interested in purchasing your farm and why/why not? Does that affect the way you manage your property now or how you feel about it?
8. How do you think other farmers are going in this area?
9. Do you think it makes sense to encourage or protect farming as a land use in Indigo Shire? Why/why not? If so, who should be promoting it – local, State or Fed gov’t, or others?
10. Do you have an opinion on the issue of food security or local food production & consumption? Is having local produce available locally important to you? Why or why not?
11. Would you describe yourself as generally optimistic about the future of farming (and/or your production) in this area? If yes, what would farming look like? If not, what do you think might happen to the landscape?
12. Has your business been seriously affected by the drought or recent changes in climatic conditions? What sort of impacts are you feeling now? Have you made significant changes because of changed conditions?
13. Do you have any water management concerns at the moment? Have you in the past? Have the current water management issues (restricted allocations/licensing affected you? Your industry? How do you think some of these could be dealt with better?
The population of Indigo Shire is growing. People want to live here and that is what is creating some of the development pressures on land use & agriculture. Those people have lots of reasons why they are coming here. But as a long term resident,

14. What do you value in (like about) this area? What do you think makes this area special?

15. What sort of things do you think have changed in this area over the last 10-20 years?
   - people’s age, work habits, new comers, retirees
   - land use & business changes: traditional industries? Manufacturing? Value-adding?
   - pressure for non-agricultural land use – tourist accommodation or attractions
   - pressure from subdivision/residential estates – what scale/how much

16. How has your business been affected by those changes? What sort of things have you done differently in the last few years?

17. Are you aware of any issues/conflicts/concerns between new rural residents/non-farmers and businesses such as yours? Yes/no If yes, what are they? If no, do you think there could be? What is ‘keeping the peace’?

18. What do you think are the long term consequences of having more rural residents in this landscape? (if not addressed above in landscape values, probe for environmental, economic and social impacts, positive & negative)

19. In general, how would you describe the relationship between farmers and your local community? Has this changed over time?

20. Have you been involved in any local planning issues? Yes/no If yes, could you briefly describe the circumstances? If no, are you aware of and planning issues in your area?

21. Do you think you understand the current land use zoning requirements? Yes/no If yes, how did you learn about it? (probe for reasons: participation in meetings, or permit process, etc)

22. The farming zone is often defined by soil types and agricultural capability assessments. As a producer, how would you define the agricultural capability of this area? What are the sorts of issues you think need to be taken into consideration when determining capability?

23. What do you think about the 40ha minimum size requirement for a planning permit in this landscape?

24. What are the most important considerations for land use planning in your landscape? (probe for issues around future development or protection of farming, is it direct involvement or indirect – a concern about what is happening elsewhere?)

25. Do you think enough is being done to support farmers in Indigo Shire? What type of support are they/you getting now?
26. How do you think Council could improve its operations with respect to land use planning?

27. Have you been involved in any of the public consultation around the Planning Scheme, the Municipal Strategic Statement or the Rural Land Use Strategy? Yes/no If yes, why and how were you involved and how do you feel about the engagement process? (probe for reasons: interest in the future landscape, personal finance, etc and for feelings of being listened /fair process, results well communicated) If no, why not?

28. Have you been involved in any other government processes that relate to land use, land and water management, catchment management, salinity, etc? (probe for reason for engagement, how constructive it was, which agency was involved)

29. Do you feel that your voice (or the voices of farmers in general) or your concerns are being or have been heard by Council, the CMA or other agencies? Yes/no Why or why not? (probe reasons – process, outcomes, drivers, communication, follow up, responsibilities)

30. What do you think should or could be done to improve the way in which residents are engaged in land use planning and decisions about our landscapes?

31. Is there anything you think we haven’t covered in terms of the way you feel about your landscape and the way in which is it changing?
Interview guide: Councillors

Background

1. How long have you lived in Indigo Shire?
2. What made you want to become a Councillor and how long have you been in office?
3. What do you like best about Indigo Shire?
4. Do you think that is threatened by change (climate change, land use change, demographics, terms of trade etc)?

Rural land use & planning

5. In various documents, Indigo Shire is described as an ‘agricultural’ shire – what do you think that means? Economic value? Landscape appearance? Land use?

6. What do you see as the critical and/or emerging issues with regard to rural lands in Indigo Shire? Why? including causes/drivers & changes over time:
   - social / demographic trends, expectations – increasing population
   - economic influences; food production, fibre / timber production, energy
   - environmental – water availability, climate change, drought, biodiversity protection, bushfires

7. How would you describe the relationship between the Shire and farmers with respect to land use and planning decisions? Conflicts between incompatible uses? Land value? Labour/housing? Succession planning? Water?

8. Do you think the Shire does enough to support agriculture, agri-business and farming as a land use? What are some examples? (probe for activities, programs, policies, incentives, types of support: financial, advice/extension, infrastructure – advertising, local markets, transport etc)

9. Is there a role for the Shire in protecting/enhancing food production/security? explain
Governance

10. (a) To what extent do community views and values influence rural land use decisions (or strategic decisions) within Council? Has this changed over time? If so, what were/are the drivers of those changes?

11. (b) What processes are there in place to facilitate the engagement of the farming community in decision making about rural land use? Has this provided useful feedback to your programs and policies? Why or why not? Could there be improvement in the way community members are engaged (and farmers in particular) in land use or planning issues in general? (probe for examples)

12. How would you describe the relationship between the Shire and the State Government in terms of rural land issues (planning, environment etc). Has this changed over time?

13. Can you describe how the Shire’s planning (and decision-making) is influenced or affected by State policies or initiatives?

14. Do you have a vision of the future landscapes of Indigo Shire?
Interview Guide: Local government staff (Indigo Shire)

1. What is your role with Indigo Shire?

2. How long have you been here and have you worked with any other Shires? What brought you here?

*Rural land use planning*

3. What do you see as the critical and/or emerging issues with regard to land use planning in Indigo Shire? Why? including causes/drivers & changes over time:
   - *social / demographic trends, expectations – increasing population*
   - *economic influences; food production, fibre / timber production, energy*
   - *environmental – water availability, climate change, drought, biodiversity protection, bushfires*

4. How do you think the Shire is placed to address these (above) issues?
   - *Resources, Professional capacity: staff & Councillors, Internal structure*

5. Focussing on rural land issues – what do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of the current (existing? or proposed) rural land use strategy?

6. How do you think land use planning decisions have affected farmers or agricultural land in the past? Conflicts between incompatible uses? Land value? Labour/housing? Succession planning? Water?

7. How does the Rural Land Use Strategy (or current land use policies) deal with these issues?

8. How do you see the issues around the 40hectare minimum lots size for a dwelling in the farming zone being addressed in the future? Are there alternative spatial arrangements? Is this situation unique to Indigo, or could the same be said for other Shires??

9. How would you describe the relationship between the Shire’s planning department and the State Government’s planning department? Has this changed over time?

10. Can you describe how (or if) the Shire’s rural land use planning (and decision-making) is influenced or affected by State policies or initiatives (such as…..)

*Farming & rural landscapes*

11. In various documents, Indigo Shire is described as an ‘agricultural’ shire – what do you think that means? *Economic value? Landscape appearance? Land use?*

12. What support do you think the Shire currently provides farmers? *(probe for activities, programs, policies, incentives, types of support: financial, advice/extension, infrastructure – advertising, local markets, transport etc)*

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13. What is the Shire’s role in protecting/enhancing food production/security? Do you think this will change over time? How does this fit in with planning?

Community Engagement & Governance

14. How would you describe the relationship between the Shire and farmers? Has it changed over time? What influences that relationship?

15. To what extent do community views and values influence rural land use planning? Has this changed over time? If so, what were/are the drivers of those changes?

16. What processes or resources are there in place to facilitate the engagement of the farming community in decision making about rural land use? Has this provided useful feedback to your programs and policies? Why or why not? Could there be improvement in the way community members are engaged (and farmers in particular) in land use or planning issues in general? (probe for examples)

17. Are there any other issues or ideas related to land use planning, landscape management or community consultation in Indigo Shire which you would like to share with me?

18. What do you think the future landscapes of Indigo Shire will look like?
Interview guide: Agri-business advisors

Background

1. What is your role in relation to agri-business?
2. Tell me about how you see the agri-business sector evolving in north east Victoria.

Rural land use in general

3. What do you think are the critical and/or emerging issues with regard to agriculture and agri-business in north east Victoria? including causes/drivers & changes, barriers & opportunities
   - social / demographic trends, expectations
   - economic influences; food production; terms of trade
   - environmental – water availability, climate change, drought, biodiversity
   - policies & strategies
4. How would you describe the relationship between agri-business and local government? Has this changed over time? What are its strengths/weaknesses?
5. Do you think local government (or government at any level) does enough to support farmers as land managers or agriculture as a land use? Why/why not? (probe for activities, programs, policies, incentives, types of support: financial, advice/extension, infrastructure – advertising, local markets, transport etc)
6. Do you think farmers and agricultural businesses have been affected by land use planning in rural areas?
7. Conflicts between incompatible uses; Land value; Labour/housing; Succession planning; Water
8. Maintaining or protecting agricultural land is a big issue in attractive landscapes – is there a role for agri-business to work more closely with government (planning? economic incentives?) or communities on this? What sort of actions have been or are considered? Why have/haven’t they worked?
9. Water is often mentioned as a critical issue in land use planning and farming – do you think we are heading in the right direction in terms of planning, incentives, regulations?
10. Adapting to climate change gets a lot of air-time – how do you think agri-business is dealing with those issues in north east Victoria?
11. What are your thoughts on the Federal government’s proposed Carbon Farming Initiative and the impact that might have on agri-business?
12. Are there any other issues or do you have opinions related to agriculture, land use planning, or community engagement which you would like to share with me?
13. Do you have a vision for the future landscapes of north east Victoria? What are the barriers to achieving that?
Interview guide: State Government staff

Background

1. What is your role in relation to Indigo Shire? How much interaction do you have, on any issue?

2. Do you work with other Shires in the area? Is your role different with them?

Rural land use planning in general

3. What do you see as the critical and/or emerging issues with regard to land use planning in general? Do these issues also apply to Indigo Shire? Why? Explore/probe, including causes/drivers & changes over time:
   - social / demographic trends, expectations
   - economic influences
   - environmental – water availability, climate change, drought, biodiversity

4. How do you think local government is placed to address these (above) issues?
   - Resources
   - Professional capacity: staff & Councillors
   - Internal structure
   - politics...

5. Focussing on rural land issues – what do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of the current (existing? or proposed) rural land use strategy, or policies and directions that you are aware of?

6. Do you think that situation (described in previous question) is unique to Indigo, or could the same be said for other Shires? Why/why not and which other Shires?

7. How would you describe the relationship between the Shire’s planning department and the State Government’s planning department? Has this changed over time?

8. Can you describe how various State government documents will or are influencing rural land use planning, such as…

Farming & rural landscapes & communities

9. Do you think government does enough to support farmers as land managers? Why/why not? (probe for activities, programs, policies, incentives, types of support: financial, advice/extension, infrastructure – advertising, local markets, transport etc)
10. Has that support changed over time – and do you see it changing into the future?

11. Do you think planning has a role in protecting/enhancing food production/security? Do you think this is an issue?

12. How do you think land use planning decisions affect farmers?
   - Conflicts between incompatible uses
   - Land value
   - Labour/housing
   - Succession planning
   - Water

13. To what extent do – or should – community views and values influence rural land use planning? Do you think that influence has or will change over time? If so, what are the drivers of those changes?

14. Where do you think there could be improvement in the way government at any level engages members of the community (and farmers in particular) in land use or planning issues in general? (probe for examples of actions if appropriate)

15. Are there any other issues related to land use planning, landscape management or community consultation in Indigo Shire which you would like to share with me?

16. Do you have a vision for the future landscapes of Indigo Shire?
## Appendix 5 – Initial List of Codes

(Used with data from Farmers only)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tree nodes</th>
<th>Description where needed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adaptation</td>
<td>in response to landscape changes identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changed farm management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural capability</td>
<td>of current business enterprise including land capability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude toward subdivisions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes towards farming</td>
<td>how they felt their neighbours &amp; the broader community perceived farming activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bushfire risk</td>
<td>of the current landscape; were they overtly concerned about bushfires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CFA activities</td>
<td>were they involved &amp; the impacts of increased rural population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate change</td>
<td>perceptions and actions undertaken in response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community consultation</td>
<td>had they been involved in any, for any purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council meetings – general</td>
<td>on anything</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making submissions to Council</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RLUS public meetings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community strengthening</td>
<td>heard of or involved in this Council initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of land</td>
<td>aware of increases; impacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council communication and interaction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community engagement invitation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct contact with Council</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From other government agencies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General dealings with Council</td>
<td>familiarity with Council processes, staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know something about RLUS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know something about the MSS</td>
<td>Aware of the Municipal Strategic Statement &amp; role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council Planning role and responsibilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council rates</td>
<td>Roads, rates, rubbish and more??</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council representation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have been a Councillor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council responsibilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council support for farming activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Description of business

Future of business sector in the area

Description of property

Identification of main values

External factors related to production

Commodity prices

Drought

Rising operating costs

Water availability

Factors relating to success of business

Local advantages

Selling produce locally

Value-adding on site

Future of property

Life-stylers and Tree-changers

Local farmers’ market

Observed changes in land use

Bigger houses

Fewer farmers

More businesses

More people / more houses

More skilled workers / contractors

More traffic

More trees – looks better

More weeds – looks worse

Not much change

Tidier – looks better

Participation in community governance activities / involvement other than Shire/Council

Government Advisory Boards

Industry Advisory Boards & organisations

Landcare

North East CMA

Planning issues

Involved personally

Commenting on a subdivision

Obtaining a building permit
Obtaining a subdivision permit
Water allocation / permit

Protecting farm land

Reason for moving to the area
Stage in life describing what was happening in their life & succession planning

Back on the family farm and loving it
Nearing retirement
Well set up for now
Young family

Succession

Children away & not interested in farming
Children already taking over farm
Children wanting to live there but not farm

Surrounding land uses

Conflicts
Animal welfare
Chemical spray drift
Dogs and stock
Dust
Gates & private property
Machinery noise
Scare guns
Smells
Stock on roads
Trees and birds

Tourism
Using or creating local businesses

Value-adding to main product

Valuing the landscape
Diversity of landscape features
Location / proximity to Albury/Wodonga
Natural environment
Small population – rural lifestyle
Sufficient rainfall / water availability

Visual amenity issues
Appendix 6 – Final List of Codes

(Used with all data)

Tree nodes

• Challenges
  • Cultural
    o Community perception of farmers
    o Conflicts with neighbours
    o Increasing population – traffic, etc
    o Leasing and share-farming
    o Organic farming, expectations and restrictions
    o Permits, licences and OH&S
  • Economic
    o Commodity prices
    o Communications and infrastructure
    o Corporate ownership versus family farms
    o Expansion
    o Farmers’ markets – opportunities & challenges
    o Farm gate sales – opportunities & challenges
    o Future of Industry
      ▪ Beef
      ▪ Cropping
      ▪ Dairy
      ▪ Horticulture
      ▪ Viticulture
    o GM foods & innovation
    o Government grants, Exceptional Circumstances & banks
    o Intensification & Value-adding
    o Operating costs and labour
  • Environmental
    o Biodiversity protection
    o Bushfire
- Climate change
  - drought
- Landcare – involvement, community engagement
- NRM issues – tree planting
- Soil capability, carrying capacity & land management
- Sustainability – triple bottom line
- Water availability & allocations
- Water quality, groundwater impacts
- Weeds and pest animals
- Personal / Individual / Family issues
  - Future aspirations
  - Inter/ multi-generational management of the business
  - Risk response / adaptation
  - Stage in life – affecting attitude & perspectives
  - Superannuation
- Governance
  - Rates
  - Support from local government
  - Shire amalgamation & Albury-Wodonga Development Corporation – impacts
- Lifestyle properties & hobby farms – perceptions & interactions
- Location – influences – positive and negative
- Opportunities
  - Farming as a lifestyle
  - New markets
  - Productive potential – of property, and region
  - Value of land in the future – for production or for residential
- Planning
  - Building permits and subdivision
  - Community engagement
  - Conundrums identified
  - Impacts of historical decisions
  - Increased population
  - Informed decision-making – by local government
  - Planning processes – Council-led
  - Productive land – definition of
- Restrictions on property based on size
- Roads, infrastructure in rural areas
- State-driven issues being implemented by Council
- Strategic planning policies and issues
- Supportive actions for engagement
- Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal

- Role of farmers & farming in the community
- Sustainability issues – broad brush
- Valuing the community’s contribution to landscape
- Valuing the landscape – aesthetics
Appendix 7 – Map of Soil and Landforms

Appendix 8 – Map of Lot Sizes by Hectare Range
