



# ANNUAL REPORT 2020 - 2021

  
farmers for  
climate action





## Acknowledgements

Thank you for supporting Farmers for Climate Action.

Farmers for Climate Action is a movement of farmers, agricultural leaders and rural Australians working to ensure farmers are a key part of the solution to climate change.

We support farmers to build climate and energy literacy and advocate for climate solutions both on and off farm. We are independent, non-profit and non-partisan.

This report covers the work and impact of Farmers for Climate Action from January 2020 to June 2021.



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# a message from the chair charlie prell

Welcome to my first report as Chair of the Board of Farmers for Climate Action. I'm proud to have been involved with FCA since our first meeting in 2015. We have come a long way since then!

Firstly, I'd like to pay tribute to our retiring Chair, Lucinda Corrigan, who completed her term in September 2020. Lucinda's extraordinary networking skills and ability to build relationships in agriculture and politics were a huge boost to FCA, and were critical to us gaining the profile and credibility that we have. I thank her deeply for her commitment and guidance during her time as Chair.

2020 began with drought and bushfires, followed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Living in a pandemic has motivated many Australians to consider the future, and we're excited to see climate discussions now being held openly and frankly without the fear of being branded as radicals. While Covid restrictions have prevented travel, the spread of FCA staff and Board Directors across the country meant we were already more skilled than most at communicating online. While our operations have been affected, we have been able to adapt to this new world as well as any.

For three months in 2019-20 our farm was blanketed in thick smoke from the devastating bushfires in the southern states. Then the drought suddenly broke and the fires were extinguished in February 2020 with 100mm of rain overnight. That was the day that I travelled to Parliament House to support the launch of the Climate Change Bill by Independent MPs Zali Steggall and Helen Haines. The Bill has come full circle and unfortunately but not surprisingly, it was rejected by the House Environment & Energy Committee. There is a lot of heavy lifting to be done in Australia on climate change if we are to meet the target of net zero carbon emissions by 2050. The longer we leave action to address climate change, the more intractable the problem will become and the harder it will be to implement the solutions.

In June 2021 Farmers for Climate Action took the opportunity to immediately call on new Nationals leader and deputy Prime Minister, Barnaby Joyce, to support a target of net zero emissions by 2050. We've been intimately engaged in discussions within the National Farmers Federation that have led them to accept the target, and we've frequently been asked for advice by commodity organisations





and state farmer groups to put together workable climate policies. As commodity prices soar and farmers adopt new technologies, we are seeing more widespread acceptance of the science of climate change.

In tandem with our political work, we strongly endorsed MP Helen Haines' Local Power Plan. This plan is focused on building a 'sunbelt' of community-owned, renewable power stations across regional Australia. In May 2021 it was very encouraging to see more than 300 people – half of them farmers – at the National Renewables in Agriculture Conference & Expo in Dubbo, NSW. In the same month, FCA was strongly represented in Tasmania with a stall at the state's largest field days at AgFest. In conjunction with the TFGA, we're organising the Tasmanian Climate-Smart Forum in September and expecting a healthy turnout.

I want to extend the warmest welcome to our new CEO Fiona Davis, who many of you will know as our former deputy director. Fiona replaces Wendy Cohen, who led us admirably through a difficult year last year, managing an increase in staff and member numbers, along with an increasing budget. Fiona was the outstanding candidate from a field of high quality candidates and has brought a new style of leadership to the role. She has instilled a new level of confidence and communication within the staff to ensure they are happy and productive.

Under this new leadership team, the FCA board and staff are working hard together to amplify the voices of farmers who want to take aggressive action to address climate change. We're also strongly focused on delivering fellowships to ensure Australia's farmers are as 'climate smart'



as possible as they confront the challenging weather systems that climate change is already bringing to us.

Talking about climate action has gone on for far too long. It's time to end the 'climate wars' in Australia. It's time to act. Farmers can and must be at the front line of climate action. Farmers for Climate Action will continue to show the way forward.

**Charlie Prell**  
**Chair of the Board**  
**Farmers for Climate Action**



# a message from the ceo fiona davis

It was no coincidence that Farmers for Climate Action's supporter base grew 40% between January 2020 and June 2021, at the same time as our movement grappled with fires, floods and a pandemic that ground the global economy to a halt.

With Black Summer still looming large in the public psyche, the prospect of a post-covid green recovery appealed to rural and urban Australians alike.

It was in this context that we released Regional Horizons, a five-year \$1.8 billion program designed to create new opportunities for jobs and industries, while building a climate-smart rural and regional Australia.

In the months since many of the initiatives put forward by Regional Horizons are well on their way to becoming a reality. The National Climate Change and Agriculture Work Plan is progressing with the Victorian Government at the helm, and Drought Resilience Hubs which closely resemble the hubs we put forward are being rolled out.

Our staff also grew in 2020-2021 as we looked to increase our presence on the ground across the country. While the pandemic put physical events on hold for the most part, I was incredibly proud to see the FCA team 'pivot' online and maintain momentum under trying circumstances.

I would like to thank the Board, and particularly our outgoing Chair Lucinda Corrigan and new Chair Charlie Prell for their enthusiasm and critical strategic guidance. We are fortunate to have such high calibre advocates guiding our work.

With the UN climate talks due this coming November and a federal election, FCA's work amplifying farmer voices has never been more important, but neither have we been so well placed.

As we near the end of our first strategic plan, which paved the way for great outcomes throughout 2018-2021, I'm looking forward to working with the Board to set our strategy and plans for 2022-24 with the input of our farmers, supporters and staff.



The window to act on climate change is closing, but the opportunity that good climate policy presents is growing. Let's make the coming year the one that we cut through the divisiveness of climate politics in Australia, and begin to fundamentally shift our climate change trajectory.

**Fiona Davis**  
**CEO**  
**Farmers for Climate Action**



# about us

Farmers for Climate Action grew out of a 2015 Blue Mountains meeting of farmers frustrated by the lack of commitment to finding solutions to climate change. Six years on, we represent more than 6,000 farmers across Australia and over 30,000 supporters who are committed to climate action for agriculture. Our farmers, supporters and Board members can be found across the country – from the tropical north of Queensland and the Northern Territory to the cooler climes of Tasmania, and from the wine growing regions of Western Australia across to the sheep and cropping farms of New South Wales and Victoria.

## what we do

Farmers for Climate Action is a movement of farmers, agricultural leaders and rural Australians working to ensure farmers are a key part of the solution to climate change.

The only farmer-led organisation that specialises in climate action, we work across the agricultural and climate sectors to manage risks and find opportunities to adapt to, and mitigate, climate change.

## our mission

We are an inclusive movement of farmers and rural Australians leading the way on climate solutions.

## our theory of change

If we organise farmers, graziers and agriculturalists to lead climate solutions on their farm and advocate together, we can influence our sector and the government to implement climate policies that reduce pollution and benefit rural communities

## our board

The FCA Board has over 200 years of combined experience in agriculture and is made up of industry leaders from across the country.



## our staff

Our staff come from various backgrounds including media, communications, political campaigns, farming and the wider agriculture industry. They work to bring our strategy to life, engaging farmers, industry and supporters to drive our programs and engagement.

Our staff team grew in 2020/21, expanding our capacity to engage with farmers, supporters, and industry.



# highlights

Farmers for Climate Action grew our reach and our impact in 2020/2021.

Looking back at some of our highlights, we:

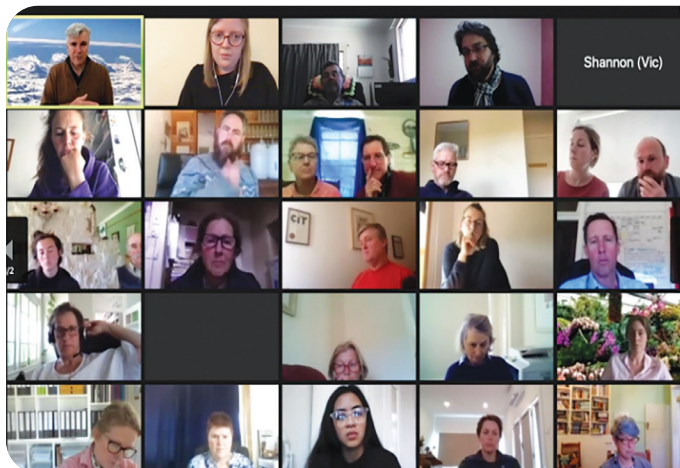
Released our Regional Horizons report, securing community and political support for our vision for rural and regional Australia's central role in the COVID-19 economic response

Hosted a series of Community Resilience Forums, building rural connections and skills in the face of disaster, climate-smart agriculture and community politics

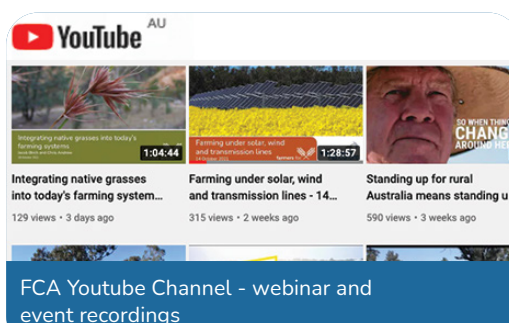
18

submissions made to inquiries, contributing input and recommendations to policy processes

Offered annual fellowships across three states that brought together more than 60 producers from sectors including beef, sheep, grains, horticulture, horses, viticulture and industry. These fellowships engaged and connected farmers who want to share and learn more about climate change, its impacts on agriculture and how industries can build resilience while remaining profitable and sustainable. See further images below in Fellowship section.



Held 20 climate-smart agriculture webinars to share knowledge and connect farmers, which attracted almost 4500 registrations



Welcomed  
13

industry groups committing to net zero emissions





Had representatives go to Parliament in Canberra to back the Local Power Plan Bill



Nathan Hancock, CEO of Citrus Australia, speaking as part of FCA's 3-day Mallee roadshow connecting with farmers, industry, local MP and councillors.

Mobilised  
**3400**

farmers in their communities, to  
take more than

**7500**

individual actions as part  
of our campaigns.



FCA community stall



Farmer Melinee Leather, central QLD

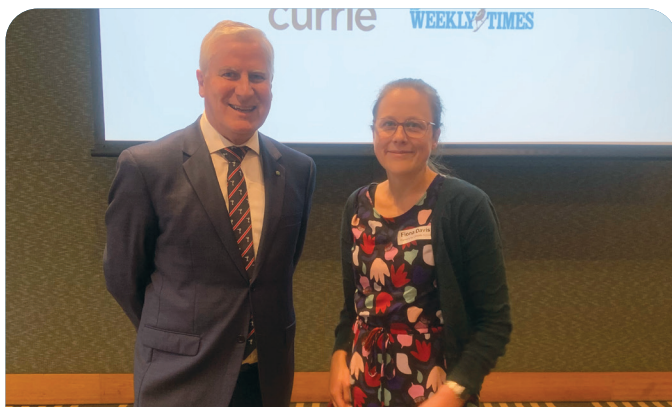
**40+**

meetings with  
rural and regional  
parliamentarians

Anne Webster MP meeting with  
Birchip farmer Bernadette Hogan and  
FCA's Claire Boyle







FCA CEO Fiona Davis meeting with Michael McCormack MP



FCA Chair Charlie Prell, engaging with the media and sharing his experience on the frontline of climate change impacts.

Friday, February 12, 2021  
Tumut and Adelong Times

## Farming emissions debated as part of 2050 climate goal

Katie Quinn

DEPUTY Prime Minister and federal Riverina MP Michael McCormack is at the centre of national headlines this week, suggesting that agriculture should be exempted from any push to lower Australia's carbon emissions to net zero by 2050.

Mr McCormack has flagged the idea leaving out farmers from any emission limits on farmers, telling Sky News that the Coalition government will not "whack regional Australia" in pursuit of 2050 target for climate.

"We are not going to hurt those wonderful people that put food on our table," he said.

According to the National Greenhouse Gas Inventory, the methane emissions from livestock account for 70 per cent of Australia's agricultural emissions.

However, Louise Freckleton at Highfield Farm and Woodland insists, "there is no future for farming in Australia without climate action."

Ms Freckleton and her husband, David Bray, run about 200 sheep on their property and lease their off-grid eco hut for holiday accommodation. She wants Highfield and the entire Australian agricultural sector to be included in a net zero emissions target.

"We all need to be doing [our part]," she said.

"We need to redeploy all the good community spirit [from dealing with Covid-19] into all taking part in reducing emissions. That is the sign of being a good citizen."

"Agriculture shouldn't be excluded, because it's a bloody big job and we've all got to do it, no exclusions, let's all do it together."

Gundagai, using a butcher in Mangoplah and selling between Tumbarumba and Wagga.

By changing Highfields' grazing practices and using native grasses in their pasture, Ms Freckleton said they're able to contribute towards lowering the nation's carbon economy. The native species are more drought tolerant and don't require the fertilisers or machinery needed for imported varieties.

Beside the environmental concerns, Ms Freckleton said she's nervous that the EU and USA will apply penalties to countries who aren't able to meet climate targets in the future.

"They're really looking closely at potentially putting taxes on imports from high emitting countries," she said.

"We're already experiencing more frequent and severe drought and floods and bushfires; the other threat is if we don't come into line as a country, it's potentially the case that our agricultural exports will be taxed or have carbon taxes applied to them."

She's hoping that the free market will also help influence farmers to be more aware of their carbon footprint.

"Consumers here (not just importers abroad) are wanting to see agriculture take action," she said.

"Those that are working to lower emissions and sequester carbon and to be part of a community wide effort are going to have a commercial advantage."

The Government is yet to announce any hard and fast goals for a net zero on emissions.

**Above left: David Bray of Highfield Farm and Woodland supports including agriculture in any national carbon reduction goals.**

 A photograph of David Bray, a man in a plaid shirt, crouching next to a blue sign that reads "I'M A farmer FOR CLIMATE ACTION" with the FCA logo below it. The sign is placed in a grassy field with a fence in the background.

Had Farmers for Climate Action spokespeople feature in more than 400 media items, across print, TV, radio and online.



Farmer Neil Westcott, Alectown NSW



# regional horizons

Regional Horizons is FCA's vision for how rural and regional Australia should be centered in Australia's economic response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and how communities can thrive into the future. It focuses on four core areas:

1. A National Climate Change and Agriculture Work Program
2. A new Land and Environment Investment Fund (LEIF)
3. A Regional Resilience Hub Network
4. A Regional Energy Transition Program

Regional Horizons attracted widespread support from farmers, researchers, politicians and industry leaders. We encouraged farmers to meet with their local National Party MPs, and five MPs expressed their support for the four core areas of Regional Horizons during the meetings.

Many of these key elements are already on their way to becoming a reality. The National Climate Change and Agriculture Work Program is currently being finalised by the Victorian Agriculture Department, after the Agriculture Ministers Forum unanimously endorsed the program in 2019. Done well, the Program stands to play an important role in coordinating efforts to promote climate-smart agriculture and build regional resilience to drought, fire and other mounting risks.

The Federal Government's announcement in 2020 of eight Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs closely resembles our vision for a Regional Resilience Hub Network, and connects researchers, primary producers and community groups to enhance resilience to drought impacts across Australia.

It has been encouraging to see increased government support for improving on-farm biodiversity. The increased support for renewables across all levels of government is also very promising. The Australian Local Power Agency Bill 2021 is reflective of the needs outlined in Regional Horizons and will ensure regional communities can benefit from the renewable energy boom.

***"Regional Horizons provides the framework to make changes that will enable us to develop the resilient society we need: one which is filled with hope, opportunity, equity and justice. It fosters the creation of truly sustainable communities that will be able to deal with the impact of climate change."***

Dorothy Hendersen, Esperance, WA



# focus area 1: agriculture is climate smart

After a devastating 2019-20 summer, FCA focussed on working with communities that had been impacted by bushfires and other extreme weather events like drought. In March, we joined the rest of the world in switching to fully online service delivery. We had always delivered webinars, but COVID-19 pushed them to the forefront.

Our five-part series of Community Resilience Forums was designed to bring together local communities with experts in community resilience in the face of disaster, climate-smart agriculture and community politics. Psychologist Dr Rob Gordon and grassroots political expert Denis Ginnivan bookended each forum, with a region-specific climate-smart agriculture session in the middle. Our Zoom forums in Bega, Wagga Wagga, Bairnsdale, Shepparton and Lismore were attended by locals and people across the country.

As our focus turned to COVID-19 recovery, Regional Horizons formed the basis of our webinar program. Our three-part Regional Horizons Summit took a deep dive into the big issues that underpin the program, and the risks and rewards it presents for Australian farmers. Our Road to Net Zero

series has covered topics from trade to hydrogen, livestock emissions to soils, and will continue through to the end of 2021.

We partnered with some amazing organisations to help deliver their climate-smart agriculture programs. The Renewables in Agriculture Conference, unable to be held in 2020, was taken online to showcase the broad range of options available to farmers in the on-farm renewable energy space, and in 2021 FCA was delighted to attend the physical conference when it was held in Dubbo, NSW. We worked together with Hepburn Shire Council's Z-Net program to launch their guide to net zero agricultural emissions in the shire. We were lucky enough to host a small number of in-person events, including the Sunraysia Climate-Smart Horticulture Forum in Mildura, a site visit to the University of Tasmania's perennial pasture trial site in Ross, and manning a stall at the AgFest field days. We've taken the opportunity to visit our farmers wherever and whenever possible, and our Farmer in Focus series has showcased agricultural producers in various industries across the country.



*"The Community Resilience Forum was excellent. All the speakers provided invaluable information on community behaviour and recovery after a disaster. My home town of Batlow was hit very hard in the bushfires and it is something I will never forget. Farmers had exactly 48 hours notification to relocate stock or do what they could to protect their properties. The images of devastating stock losses were on the national news but much of the footage was too graphic to show. The fire was a traumatic experience before, during and after, and it has impacted me for life. I am an environmental scientist. I will advocate for climate change policy in our country to prevent these types of disastrous events from reoccurring. I am glad this Forum was recorded and I can share the resources with my network. Thank you."*

Kelly Small, Batlow, NSW

22

farmer case  
studies developed

1132

farmers have greater  
knowledge about  
climate smart solutions  
as a result of our work

86.7%

of participating farmers  
report they have gained  
knowledge/skills

13

industry groups  
committed to net  
zero emissions

20

Climate-Smart  
agriculture  
webinars held

4493

registrations for  
our Climate-Smart  
agriculture webinars



# fellowships flourish across three states

With generous support from sponsors, FCA offered annual fellowships across three states in October 2020 for farmers who want to know more about climate change, its impacts on agriculture and how industries can build resilience while remaining profitable and sustainable.

The Victorian Climate-Smart Agriculture Fellowship, Queensland Resilient Regions Fellowship and Tasmanian Climate-Smart Grazing Fellowship brought together more than 60 producers from sectors including beef, sheep, grains, horticulture, horses, viticulture and industry.

Across two and a half intensive weeks, our Fellows heard from experts in climate science, climate-smart agriculture, advocacy and resilience. They were able to ask questions of leaders in their field, including Mark Howden, Rich Eckard, Cassandra Scheffe, Bec Colvin, Jacqui Schirmer, Terry McCosker and many more. Agronomist Cam Nicholson provided an overarching decision-making framework, sharing his experience in on-farm practice change.

Since the intensive program, FCA Fellows have been working to apply what they've learned to individual projects. These are diverse, including

future carbon-neutral farm business cases, working towards carbon neutral on farm, working with local councils to support agriculture's shift to net zero, and researching the impacts of various climate-smart ag practices on their operations. Each state's Fellowship program will finish with a conference in September 2021.



**Claire Gunner, 2020 fellow from Victoria**





# focus area 2: farmers mobilised to drive a clean energy transition

Farmers for Climate Action has worked to highlight the benefits of clean energy transitions for farmers, through case studies, workshops and knowledge-sharing.

FCA has undertaken capacity building work to upskill our farmers in climate science and policy, and to provide forums for farmers to share their skills and know-how within our networks.

We are calling for a rapid transformation of Australia's energy system away from fossil fuels and towards renewable energy in a way that maximises benefits to farmers and regional communities.

We've mobilised farmers to take action in their region on energy transitions, and to be heard by decision-makers in the halls of parliament.

**3400**

farmers mobilised in clean energy campaigns

**7659**

individual campaign actions taken by farmers

Rob Lee, sheep and beef producer from central west NSW



**459**

farmers mobilised in clean energy campaigns online



# parliament house delegation supports local power plan

In February 2021, Farmers for Climate Action sent a group of representatives to Parliament House, Canberra to voice the benefits that renewable energy can bring to rural and regional Australia.

The group watched from the gallery as Helen Haines, federal Independent Member for Indi, tabled her Local Power Plan Bill, a plan to ensure the benefits of renewable energy remain in rural and regional communities.

Afterwards FCA's members, including our Chair, Charlie Prell, spoke at a media conference in the Great Hall about the Local Power Plan, and the benefits renewables can bring to farmers and their communities. This was followed by five lengthy meetings with politicians as well as a number of casual encounters in the corridors of Parliament House.

It was fantastic to see so much interest in the Bill that day and the momentum is continuing, with more than 500 submissions made by supporters in favour of the Local Power Plan to an inquiry.



*Farmers for Climate Action delegation with Helen Haines MP and Zali Steggall MP*



# focus area 3: rural and regional mps are championing climate action

Farmers for Climate Action has engaged with elected representatives across party lines throughout 2020-2021, bringing farmer voices for climate action to the attention of regional and rural MPs across the country.

We are connecting parliamentarians with farmers, graziers and ag workers in their constituencies, to hear their stories and their call for strong policies on climate action to ensure a farming future for their families and communities.

2021 was the year in which a schism opened within the National Party, with the party's Victorian MPs coming out strongly in support of climate action. When Barnaby Joyce was elected as leader of the Nationals in June, farmers put pressure on Nationals MPs in Victoria, which led to a chorus of regional MPs from Victoria calling for stronger climate action and denouncing Mr Joyce's pro-coal approach. With a federal election due before mid-2022 FCA members will be looking to encourage regional MPs to champion climate solutions in their election commitments.

FCA worked closely with the federal member for Indi, Helen Haines MP, to develop her Local Power Plan proposal, which would ensure regional Australia sees the benefits of the renewable energy boom.

42

MP meetings

9

politically-focused webinars held

23

Community groups mobilised

2487

Registrations for our campaign webinars

8

Federal MPs in regional and rural electorates championing climate action

**Anne Webster** - Member for Mallee, VIC

**Damien Drum** - Member for Nicholls, VIC

**Darren Chester** - Member for Gippsland, VIC

**Bridget Archer** - Member for Bass, TAS

**Helen Haines** - Member for Indi, VIC

**Brian Mitchell** - Member for Lyons, TAS

**Kristy McBain** - Member for Eden-Monaro, NSW

**Rebekha Sharkie** - Member for Mayo, SA

**Julie Collins** - Member for Franklin, TAS



# mallee roadshow

In March 2021, Farmers for Climate Action headed to the Mallee in Victoria for a jam-packed three-day roadshow to build political momentum in the region.

In Dimboola, Birchip and Red Cliffs, we ran three well-attended Politics in the Pub events, where farmers had lively discussions about ways to persuade MPs to champion the interests of regional communities, particularly climate solutions.

We also ran a Climate-Smart Horticulture event in Mildura, where our farmers had a chance to ask questions of local federal MP Anne Webster, as well as interact with several local councillors. The various presentations were very engaging, and farmers thoroughly enjoyed connecting with their representatives over a delicious lunch.

FCA connected with many fantastic farmers in the Mallee, and momentum for change in the area is growing rapidly. Most of those who attended our Mallee Roadshow recently signed an open letter to Anne Webster, calling on her to champion climate action in regional Australia. The letter received lots of media coverage, and Anne has since declared her support for climate solutions.



*Sunraysia Forum;*



*Dimboola Politics in the Pub;*



*FCA's Claire Boyle and Denis Ginnivan in Birchip.*



# focus area 4: agriculture leaders are championing climate action

Agricultural organisations are now coming out strongly in support of net zero emissions targets and stronger climate policy.

In August 2020, Australia's peak farming body the National Farmers' Federation announced its support for an economy-wide target of net zero by 2050. Backed by most of the NFF's member organisations, this was a groundbreaking move that showed that the agricultural sector is behind climate action.

Leadership has also been shown by many farming groups including AgForce, Australian Pork Limited, Victorian Farmers Federation, NSW Farmers Association and GrainGrowers, particularly in the face of stalling and inaction at the federal government level on agriculture's role in emissions reduction.

We've worked with farmers taking leadership in their regions and in their sectors to amplify their voices as champions for climate action. We provide media and advocacy training for farmers in our network, and opportunities to make sure their solutions and ideas are being heard in the national media conversation about climate action.

## 150+

influencers across the agricultural sector championing climate action within the sector

## 100+

agricultural influencers regularly speaking out publicly on the urgent need for climate action, driving industry policy and perceptions



## growing our reach & mobilising farmers

**35,048**

Supporters online

**6,030**

Farmers who are supporters online

**611**

Active volunteers

**400**

media items featuring  
FCA or our farmers

**130+**

farmers trained as spokespeople,  
regularly engaging with the media  
and sharing their experiences on the  
frontline of climate change impacts.

Farmers for Climate Action has grown our supporter base and reach, building what is now a powerful, active and widespread network of FCA supporters and members. They're working together to help change the politics of regional Australia. Our campaigning and organising strategy will lay the foundation for our political wins, at local, state and Federal level.

Central to our strategy is establishing networks of grassroots farmers in key states, regions and electorates across the country. These networks will be run by volunteers, supported by our state coordinators.

These networks will allow Farmers for Climate Action to have a greater influence on politics at all levels, enabling our farmers to run their own campaigns, lobby their local representatives and connect with local media. We will also help farmers develop stronger advocacy skills and connect with others in their community.





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