

The Common Thread: A Life Like No Other on the Land

By Abi Cook- Singh

In the early '90s, I sat beside my then-boyfriend in the ute as we drove across his fourth-generation farming property.

We were shooting sheep.

The paddocks were bare. The drought had bitten deep, feed was unaffordable to truck in, and the bottom had dropped out of the wool market. The environmental toll was evident, parched soil, depleted water, and a fragile ecosystem buckling under pressure. There were no choices left, only consequences.

It was my first real encounter with the silent devastation that shadows life on the land when the financials no longer stack up, and the emotional cost weighs even heavier. I watched his quiet resignation. Not from indifference, but from a lifetime of knowing that sometimes, this is what must be done.

That moment has never left me.

A Life of Deep Roots and Quiet Strength

Seasons passed. We married, and together raised two children, both gifted with a life grounded in land, legacy, and responsibility. It's a life that teaches accountability early and binds you to community in a way that few other upbringings do.

At the same time, I was working with women across rural Australia. The AgriFutures Rural Women's Award had begun to illuminate the untold value of women's voices, especially in the delicate, interwoven dynamics of family farming. Around kitchen tables and over countless cups of tea, we talked about what often remained unspoken: the pressure, the sacrifices, the generational expectations, and the fierce love for a life that can both bless and break you.

What we learned together was this: support and communication are not luxuries in farming families. They are essentials. Every relationship personal and professional is layered, complex, and often blurred. The stakes are high, and so is the silence.

Witnessing the Strain—and the Strength

In the early '90s, I also served on the board of the SA Rural Financial Counselling Service, travelling throughout regional South Australia. I saw it all up close: drought, suicide, bewilderment. The term "*Exceptional Circumstances*" was the government's answer, but for those living it, the phrase rang hollow.

Families weren't just looking for policy, they were looking for answers, for hope, and sometimes simply for someone who would listen without judgment.

And yet, through every crisis and quiet act of rebuilding, one thing remained constant:

The common thread.

It's in the fierce determination of rural families not just to survive, but to thrive. It's in the community spirit, the volunteer hours, the shoulders pressed together in shearing sheds, on showgrounds, and in fire trucks. It's a life like no other, held together by people who keep turning up even when overwhelmed.

Today, Still Walking Beside Them

Through my business *Working It Out Now*, I continue to walk alongside farming families. While I've stepped away from the land and we've chosen separate paths, my connection to these communities and my commitment to them remains strong.

I provide support, strategy, and solutions focused on generational sustainability, resilience, and navigating an increasingly uncertain future.

The headlines remain familiar: drought, flood, fatigue, despair. Support structures often miss the mark. Climate challenges every decision. Environmental impact is no longer a future issue it's a daily reality. Land regeneration, sustainable feed strategies, and intergenerational planning are now essential.

And still, through it all, I see what endures: **grit, skill, love, and hope.**

This Is Who They Are

Australia, please understand:

These are not *just* farmers.

They are highly skilled, deeply committed individuals with hearts as vast as the land they steward.

They care for your animals. They nurture your food systems. They raise your children, educate your youth, enrich your communities, and uphold your economy.

And they do it without fanfare.

If we turn away, we don't just lose livelihoods.

We lose knowledge. We lose ecosystems.

We lose legacy, leadership, and the heartbeat of regional Australia.

Over 70% of Australian businesses are family-owned, and they deliver over half of our nation's wages. Rural family farms aren't just part of that number they are the backbone.

It's Time to Act

It's time to respond with more than sympathy.

It's time to listen, to value, to support.

To stitch this common thread into the very fabric of national policy, community planning, education, and care.

Because a life like no other - deserves a future like no other, too.