



Why collaborate, and why now?

New products and markets, shifting supply and labour demands, emerging environmental issues and new technologies make farming a complex industry, with complex problems.

Complex problems often have:

- multiple layers and stakeholders
- disagreement about the causes, and frequently interdependent causes
- no clear solution
- confusing boundaries – they do not fit into neat functional or organisational responsibilities.

Such complexity is often beyond the capacity of any one organisation or sector to respond effectively. It calls for a different approach to identifying issues, setting goals and taking action.

Collaboration aims to include many stakeholders in a collective conversation, to develop a broader understanding of the problem and solutions. This big-picture approach enables groups that might not have previously worked together (and might even have been in opposition or competition), to join forces in creating resolution and new directions.

Do you have a complex farming issue or idea that requires 'Big Picture' thinking?

Try the strategies below:

Big Picture Thinking Strategies

1. *Envision* – imagine ideas and solutions without restrictions. What might things look like if you are completely optimistic? Don't let 'be realistic' limit your options.
2. *Perspective sourcing* – find the people you haven't spoken to (even those you might disagree with) and ask about their views and solutions.
3. *Assumption hunting* – what are you automatically thinking is a barrier or opportunity? It might not be. Ask someone to critically question your expectations.
4. *Hero advice* – seek out the most respected voices in your community or field. How would they approach the issue or idea?
5. *Uncertainty sitting* – try to be okay with some uncertainty. Things that are unclear might simply need time to evolve. Flexibility comes from being able to manage uncertainty and learn from every experience, positive and negative.
6. *Flip skills* – if you normally write it all down, try drawing the problem as a mind map; if you usually make diagrams, try three-word bullet points. Using different skills to articulate can help open up new ways of seeing.



Collaboration* challenges conventional thinking by:

- taking a holistic perspective
- pooling resources
- harnessing collective skills
- realising that more can be achieved by working together
- prioritising commitment to the group goal

Collaboration builds high TRUST

The higher degree of trust needed in collaborative working relationships allows increased information sharing and pooling of resources (human, technology, financial, knowledge and data). This allows members to increase their commitment to common objectives.

Collaboration advantages

SYNERGY

The real advantage of collaboration is that it can create something that could not have been achieved by any one of the member organisations working in isolation. The synergy of pooled resources can create innovative responses and ideas for change. Collaboration can generate outcomes beyond the members' initial investment.

LEARNING

Collaboration also builds the capacity of individuals and organisations. A focused application of knowledge, resources and expertise helps groups to work together efficiently. Collaborators have an expanded skill set to draw from, as well as additional opportunities to develop skills-transfer between groups and organisations.

COMMITMENT

Groups who are interdependent tend to contribute to the success of the group goal with greater contributions and more frequent, streamlined communications.

For example, several fish farmers serving different markets jointly commission research into the value of a provenance brand. Feedback highlights international preference for a national, not regional brand, a desire for online recipes in two Asian languages, and different processing and packaging requirements. How will they move forward?



Take a first step

Collaboration is one way to respond to complex problems – in Australia and internationally. Taking the first steps requires people and organisations to adjust their ways of thinking and behaving. Sometimes, competitors become allies, and neighbours become business partners.

*Collaboration content originally developed by Dr Robyn Keast. Adapted for Farming Together by Dr Cathy Byrne.

The 'Farming Together' Program aims to:

- generate knowledge and skills about collaborative systems, co-operative structures and collective strategies
- help farmers and their business networks to explore the economic benefits of collaboration
- provide support to collaborative and co-operative approaches and training
- facilitate knowledge sharing & produce resources
- form regional and cross-jurisdictional networks

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