

Australia's Drought Affected Farmers



By Laura Ashby (Year 8)

Little green can be seen in the parched landscape. Cattle, ribs protruding from their dusty hides, feed on the scarce remains of vegetation. The carcasses of those who haven't survived spot the countryside. This is what remains of farms in Outback Australia. For five or more years much of Australia has been in drought. Farmers are not certain when rain will come, if their cattle will make it through another year, or if they can afford to keep the livestock alive. What is certain, though is that, like in the past, another drought will follow this one. Droughts may never stop occurring in the outback. Farmers have turned to the government and public for help. Is it everyone's job to support our farmers? Do they need help, or will more money be wasted when the next drought comes? There are alternatives to the drought prone areas. There are many things that are everyone's responsibility but bailing out drought effected farmers is not one of them.

The television program, 7.30, tells us that hardly any feed is left in the Outback. 7:30 paints a grim, desperate picture of life in the mainland's country. Both domestic and wild animals alike are becoming sick and are dying from lack of water and food. Most farmers have been buying hay bales, which is costing thousands, if not millions. Cattle are getting trapped in dam mud, being too weak from dehydration and starvation to escape. 7:30 did show some fortunate farmers in Queensland who have a steady supply of Mulga Trees that they bulldoze so that cattle can eat the leaves. But the program continues to explain that limitations have been placed on the bulldozing of Mulga, which has angered farmers who depend on this resource. The program describes how drought is affecting farmers' mental health, family life and socializing in a negative way. They and their families are suffering from depression and anxiety. However, these farmers are being given government funded grants and are receiving donations. But, is what 7.30 tells us the whole story?

Many news sources, including 7.30, fail to tell us the other facts about the situation. Drought is not only a crisis for the farmers, but impacts on the Environment, as well. Precious environmental resources, such as the mulga, are being consumed by farmers and their cattle. Livestock is grazing the land to the bone, killing native plants and destroying habitat. Bulldozing the mulga is destroying the ground, causing potential erosion and preventing habitat plants from regrowing. Climate change is creating longer, more severe droughts and they are becoming more frequent. In many cases,

drought-affected land is obviously not suitable for farming, unlike the richer pastures of southern Australia. But, despite this, Urban Australia keeps expanding throughout the southern states, taking more prime farmland for residential and commercial purposes. This can easily be seen around Melbourne, where some of Australia's richest farmland is being opened to subdivision. The same has already happened throughout Southeast Queensland. Simple pay-outs won't address the problems of constant drought and the loss of our prime farmland. We should be stopping the trend of destroying the best agricultural land instead of supporting farmers who are trying to raise cattle in unsuitable regions.

Additionally, farmers suffering from drought often instantly expect bail-out money even though there are steps they can take to keep their businesses running during lean times. If they continue to stay in outback Australia, then why are farmers not searching for ways to reduce feed and water scarcity during droughts? Some farmers have taken steps to prevent scarcity of feed and water, and they do not need aid from the government. Why can't the other farmers do the same and reduce the amount of money that must be given to them? There are many possible solutions, other than just giving them money.

Not only are we being asked to give cash to bail out farmers in inappropriate regions, but prime agricultural land in Australia is being sold to other countries as well, or being used for other purposes. Foreign investors are getting farms that could be supporting Australia's economy and providing us food. Why is Australia selling good farmland when the land used in the outback can't support cattle? Good land in Tasmania and other places is being sold to foreigners and is also being built on for commercial and residential developments. Farmers should be moving to Tasmania or other more suitable areas instead of trying to run their businesses in a drought-prone area. If Australia sold less of itself and used more for farming, there would be no food and water scarcity problems. Rather than expecting bailouts, Outback farmers should be looking to relocate their businesses to better climates.

It is not everyone's job to relieve the pressure on our farmers. Our money should be spent on other things like military, education, transport, and infrastructure or even stopping global warming, which would help every farmer. Farms should be moved to more reliable and suitable lands. There they can flourish, and their businesses expand.

We must also ask, who are the cattle raised in the Outback for? Is Australia depending on outback farmers for food or are they just making money with their cattle while destroying the Environment and providing no other benefit to Australia. If they are, there is no benefit to Australia other than tax money and wages. The government does not support struggling businesses that are beneficial to Australia, so why should we support farmers who are exporting their products to other countries?

Bailing out farmers is not going to fix the drought. Giving money to farmers may fix the immediate lack of feed and water, but the problem will not be permanently fixed. There are many things Australia can do but supporting farmers with money is not our responsibility.