

### “Business and drought preparedness planning better than I thought it would be!”

Steve and Gill Wittwer own a 1060 ha cattle breeding property south of Monto in Queensland’s North Burnett.

#### The challenge and opportunity

The couple have weathered severe climate events in their 10 years on “Tranquility”. With the 2019 drought fresh in mind, Steve and Gill were quick to see opportunity in the new proactive drought policy which supports primary producers to install permanent infrastructure which helps businesses to prepare and manage through drought. They knew that a new shed to store more hay would help to sustain their cattle during future droughts and they applied for a grant to cover 25% of the cost. To get the 25% [Drought preparedness grant](#) required a written business plan and project application approved by QRIDA.



Steve and Gill Wittwer used the 25% drought preparedness grant towards a hay shed to help manage future droughts.

“Ask me several months ago what I think of business planning – not much. Now I recommend it to all graziers even if not applying for a grant” says Steve Wittwer. To help with preparing the application Steve and Gill also used the [Farm management grant](#) which provided a 50% subsidy up to \$2500 for professional advice. “Our accountant’s advice was very valuable though I advise people check first with QRIDA that your advisor can be approved under the program.”

#### The journey to improved business resilience started with a workshop

For Steve and Gill, the journey started with Katie Muller from the Burnett Catchment Care Association (BCCA) inviting them to a [Building Farm Business Resilience](#) workshop delivered by the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF), Rural Solutions Queensland (RSQ) and the Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority (QRIDA). The workshop explained how the previous drought relief assistance scheme, which required being drought declared, has been replaced with the new drought preparedness grants which can be accessed at any time.

On the day, graziers stepped through an easy business self-assessment checklist which showed where the business was on track and areas for improvement, all of which contribute toward the business plan. A business plan template was also provided to help people get their business plans out of their heads and written down for the benefit of all stakeholders within and outside the business to a gain greater understanding of the unique direction for each individual operation.

Steve mentioned “it’s not possible to complete a full plan at the workshop. Writing a comprehensive, meaningful business plan and an application takes a lot of time. On the day, we made a start on our business motivation, goals, and identified priority risks”.

Steve and Gill had a refresher by attending a second workshop in Monto which combined two different projects: [Grazing Resilience & Sustainable Solutions](#) (GRASS) and Farm Business Resilience & Drought Preparedness. The GRASS project provides one-on-one support and tailored land-management plans for beef producers in the Burdekin, Fitzroy and Burnett Mary regions, to address land in poor or degraded condition. Overall, Steve was impressed with the range of help available for landholders. He also thought that the planning aspects in the GRASS project such as property maps, ground cover data and land management plans could dovetail well with the business resilience and drought preparedness plan.

#### **Learning with other graziers**

Not long after the Monto workshop Steve and Gill worked with Hayley Webster (BCCA) and hosted a “Billy tea and damper under the blue gums” event on their property where graziers discussed dry season management and pasture budgeting. “Besides honing my camp oven damper skills” said Gill, “this has been a fun day to meet other people and learn from each other”.



Gill and helpers cooking the damper.

Steve said, “The whole exercise helped us think much more about our direction. Other successful grant applicants attending our ‘Billy tea’ day said exactly the same thing. I found myself thinking a lot while out in the paddock and on the tractor and was keen to get back in the office and get things written into the plan. A bit of a turnaround from not that long ago and I am pleased with the outcomes”.

Since the drought preparedness grant offers 25% subsidy up to \$50,000 over five years, Steve and Gill can revisit their business plan and goals to consider any further applications for permanent infrastructure, such as fencing, water and irrigation, which can help them prepare for drought.

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