



# IMPACT

2025

## REPORT



SOUTHERN NSW  
**Innovation Hub**

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE,  
LANDSCAPES AND COMMUNITIES





# Introduction

The Southern NSW Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub (Southern NSW Innovation Hub) is building a resilient future for local farmers, land managers and communities. It's our role to foster collaboration and connect people with the knowledge, tools and technologies needed to adapt effectively to a changing climate.

In 2025, Southern NSW Innovation Hub has enhanced the drought resilience of local communities and farmers through a model of change that spans insight generation, creating capacity, building capability, leveraging investment and innovative on-ground projects.

The Hub's impact to date has been built on a foundation of structured collaboration with its partners that prioritises giving people access to the skills and information they need for improved drought resilience. This approach goes beyond research into working directly with communities and farmers on innovation, adoption and knowledge sharing that makes them stronger, more adaptable, and better equipped to face the challenges of drought.

Southern NSW Innovation Hub's model of enabling change follows the below process, and this Impact Report identifies the specific programs and activities that have delivered against this in 2025.



2025 was Southern NSW Innovation Hub's fifth year in operation and this Impact Report follows the one produced for 2021-2024. It is another opportunity for the Hub to highlight the outcomes of its work to provide crucial drought preparedness knowledge, resources, tools and skills to farmers and communities in southern NSW and beyond. Southern NSW Innovation Hub looks forward to continuing its program of impact towards sustainable agriculture, landscapes and communities.

[Read the 2021-2024 Hub Impact Report](#)

Southern NSW Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub is one of eight hubs funded by the Australian Government's Future Drought Fund, established in 2021, and is hosted by Charles Sturt University.





# Table of contents

<b>Introduction</b>	3
<b>Director's report</b>	4
<b>2025 achievements</b>	10
<b>Generating insights</b>	11
Pathways to Impact Framework	11
First Nations Engagement Group	12
Understanding producer pressures	13
Early Insights for More Resilient Communities Dashboard	14
<b>Creating capacity</b>	15
Knowledge Brokers	15
Local knowledge in action in Bega	15
Collaboration goes the distance in Western NSW	16
Drought Adoption Officers	17
<b>Building capability</b>	18
Drought Adoption Officers	18
Emerging Researchers Network	20
Regional Soils Coordinators	21
<b>Leveraging investment</b>	22
<b>On-ground projects</b>	24
<b>New</b>	24
Smart Grazing Stronger Lands	24
Connection to Kalari Bila (Lachlan River)	25
<b>Expanded</b>	26
Early Insights for More Resilient Communities Dashboard	26
<b>Continuing</b>	27
Mixed Farming System Long-term Field Trials	27
RiskWi\$e National Risk Management Initiative	27
<b>Completed in 2025</b>	28
Farm Water Management Planning	28



# Director's report



I'm pleased to be able to share with you the 2025 Impact Report for Southern NSW Innovation Hub. Our team has delivered consistently with exceptional commitment to our programs, partners, producers and communities, in what was a year of uncertainty and varied conditions. I am grateful for their continued work and look forward to building on our momentum. Some of the key achievements of the Southern NSW Innovation Hub in 2025 included:

- The Hub's Pathways to Impact Framework officially launched: A new practical tool developed by Southern NSW Innovation Hub for anyone working across research, development, extension, investment, and delivery to design initiatives with real-world uptake in mind.
- Early Insights for More Resilient Communities went national: An Australian-first online tool capturing the factors contributing to community resilience in the face of extreme climate events proved so valuable that it was updated and expanded across the country.
- The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) secretariat granted the Hub accredited observer status: The Hub is sharing climate and drought resilience insights and experience from NSW on a global platform.
- Drought Adoption Officers enhanced drought resilience across NSW: Drought Adoption Officers continued to build strong relationships with farmers across NSW, fostering trust and providing informed advice to build drought resilience – made possible through a partnership with Local Land Services (LLS).
- Satellite technology helped pastoralists in NSW Rangelands better prepare for drought: A pilot cross-Hub program proved successful and is expanding into a new project - Smart Grazing, Stronger Lands – to further improve grazing management and ecosystem health in Southern Australia's Rangelands.
- New data showcased the impact of the Hub's programs: A survey of southern NSW primary producers and agronomists/advisors found that nearly 78 per cent of them believe Hub programs are helping to manage the impacts of drought and climate change.



# Director's report

- Establishing the Hub's [First Nations Engagement Group](#) got underway, with four initial members recruited to provide insight and advice, guiding our projects, activities, and investment decisions. More to come on that in 2026!
- The AgTech ROI Calculator went live, giving producers the ability to identify easily the potential benefits of digital technologies for their specific farming operations.
- The Farm Water Management Planning project unlocked increased efficiency, productivity and flexibility for farms, ultimately creating robust businesses that make effective decisions, even in challenging seasons.
- Knowledge Brokers in Western NSW and on the South Coast had an impact on-ground through local connections and collaboration.
- The Emerging Researchers Network spent a year building crucial extension capabilities in university researchers and bridged the gap between academia and industry.
- The Hubs Advisory Committee visited southern NSW in March 2025 and we showcased the breadth of the Hub's work over three days. This tour was an opportunity to demonstrate the tangible outcomes and highlight the impacts of Hub projects on our farmers and communities, and we were very pleased to be able to hear directly from local farmers and partners about how the Future Drought Fund's programs are helping them build drought and climate resilience.
- The Hub made international news with a story in *The Financial Times* on the multiple extreme weather events impacting Australia and the effects on our economy. Southern NSW Innovation Hub had the opportunity to provide key insights on how Australia's eight Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs are leading the way in connecting farmers and rural communities with practical, modern solutions to adapt to a changing climate. Our Australian-first Early Insights for More Resilience Communities Dashboard was mentioned and we were delighted that John Warlters, Chief Executive of our partner organisation Rural Aid, also featured in the story.

I'm also pleased to report that we've continued to have a significant economic impact in southern NSW and beyond, building on previous investment growth. From an initial cash investment of \$8.9 million in 2021, when Southern NSW Innovation Hub was founded, we grew to attract \$36.3 million (cash) as of December 2025. When you take into consideration in-kind contributions as well, that's investment growth of over 300 per cent - from an initial \$19.9 million to \$65.2 million.

Having said all this, there is always more to do, and I look forward to the Hub continuing to achieve and deliver impact for our region and beyond. I'd also like to take this opportunity to say thank you to our host organisation and lead partner Charles Sturt University for its valuable support, resources, networks and insights. We are excited to keep working with them and all of our partners and stakeholders across southern NSW to build the capacity of our agriculture and communities to thrive, regardless of the climate.

**Cindy Cassidy**

Director, Southern NSW Innovation Hub



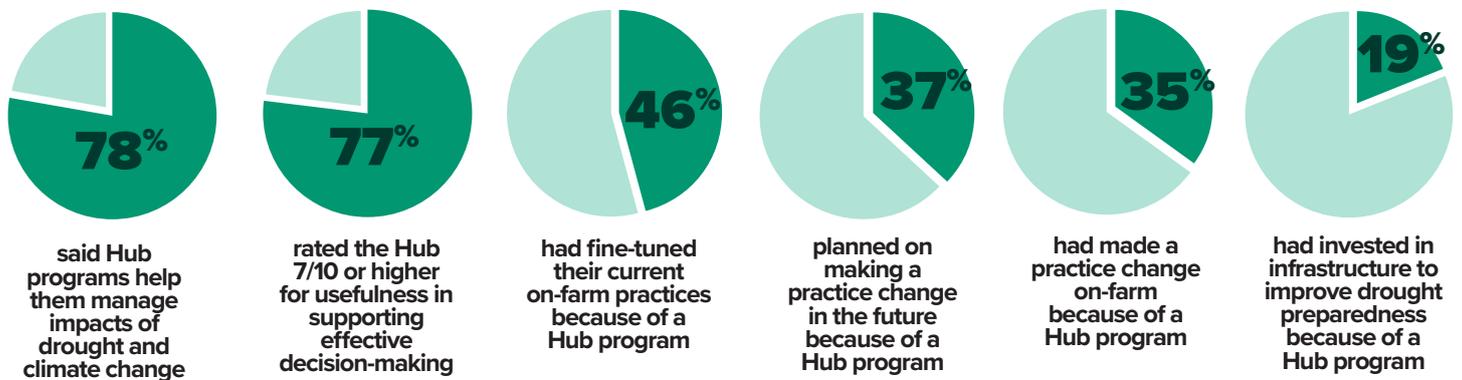
# 2025 achievements

In its fifth year of operation, Southern NSW Innovation Hub delivered insights, capacity, capability, investment growth and on-ground projects to ensure the farmers and communities of southern NSW are stronger, more adaptable, and better equipped to face the challenges of drought.

## SURVEY DEMONSTRATES ON-FARM IMPACT

The results of a month-long survey conducted with farmers and their advisors in 2025 demonstrated that a significant number of local primary producers are changing the way they do things on farm to prepare for drought and dry times.

The Hub survey showed:



Examples of on-farm change cited included:

- Stock confinement feeding areas
- Soil amelioration
- Maintaining groundcover
- Planting ideal pastures
- Improved weed control

## DROUGHT ADOPTION OFFICERS PUT RESILIENCE INTO PRACTICE

Embedded within Local Land Services (LLS), the Southern NSW Innovation Hub's seven Drought Adoption Officers spent 2025 working directly with farmers and landholders to boost drought resilience and preparedness.

2025 Drought Adoption Officer achievements:



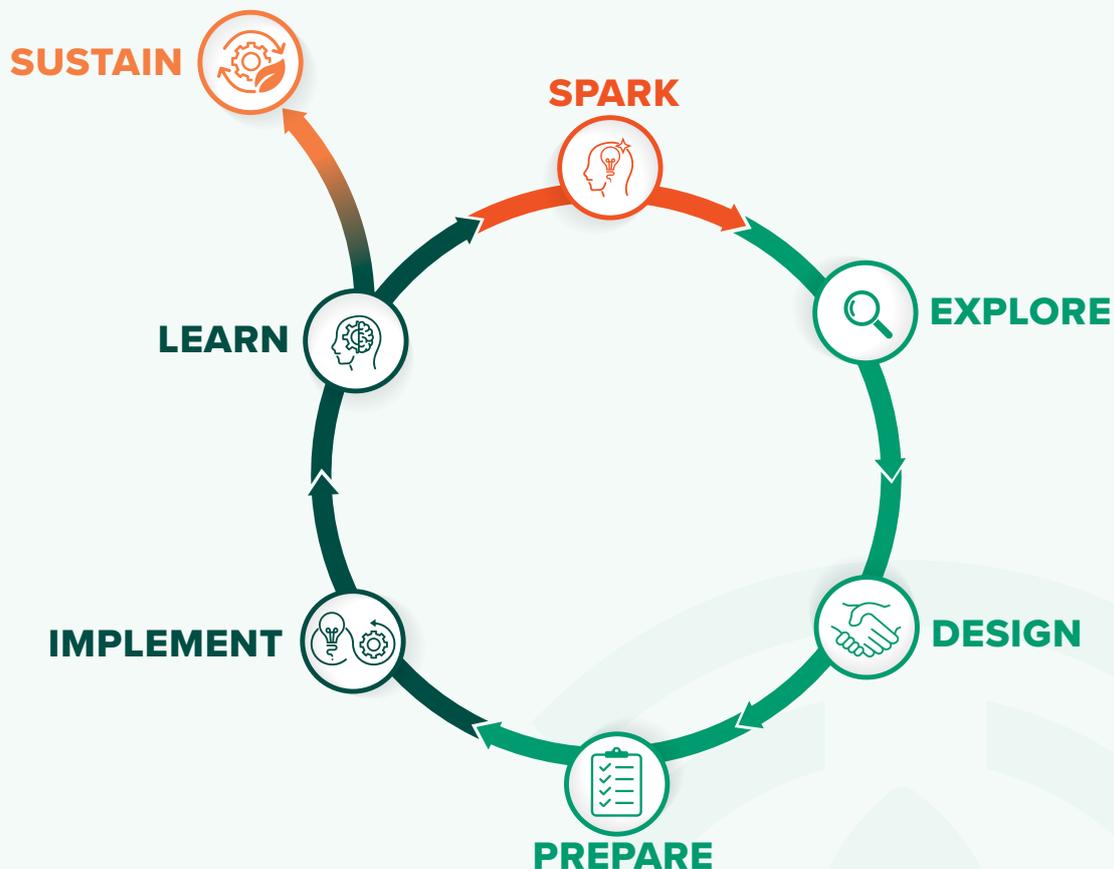


# Generating insights

## PATHWAYS TO IMPACT FRAMEWORK

Australia has a proud history of agricultural innovation, built on decades of research, industry collaboration, and farmer know-how. But great ideas alone don't create impact. For innovations to improve farming systems, resilience, productivity, equity, or sustainability, they must be understood, trusted, used, and supported. That's where good extension and adoption come in.

Southern NSW Innovation Hub developed and launched the Pathways to Impact Framework in 2025 as a practical tool for those working across research, development, extension, investment, and delivery to design initiatives with real-world uptake in mind; right from the start.



Impact isn't just about productivity. It includes environmental stewardship, social wellbeing, economic resilience, cultural values, and equity of access. This Framework recognises that agricultural innovation plays a role in all of these outcomes and is a powerful vector for change.

Designed to be used by anyone, whether they are delivering an on-ground program, shaping strategy, writing a funding bid, or improving an existing initiative, the Framework can help clarify the problem, engage meaningfully with stakeholders, and build a stronger path from idea to impact.

Importantly, it highlights the opportunity to unlock greater value across the entire research, development and extension (RD&E) continuum. By planning for integration into practice earlier and more intentionally, we can ensure that fit-for-purpose innovations reach the right people, in more meaningful ways, and deliver broader impact.



# Generating insights

## FIRST NATIONS ENGAGEMENT GROUP

Work began in 2025 to develop and formalise a Southern NSW Innovation Hub First Nations Engagement Group on Drought and Climate Resilience to provide insight and advice to the Hub, guiding our projects, activities, and investment decisions.

Guided by the Hub's First Nations Engagement Officer Karen Kime four initial members of the new Group were recruited in 2025, including:

- Leanne Atkinson
- Aunty Sue-anne Cutmore
- Brenden Moore
- Larry Towney

In 2026, the Group will work closely with the Hub's Director, Knowledge Broker, and First Nations Engagement Officer to strengthen the Hub's collaborative links with community organisations, industries, government agencies, and research institutes.

Roles of the First Nations Engagement Group include:

- Provide advice on the cultural, economic, and social resilience of Aboriginal people in the face of climate change and drought
- Provide insights about the specific vulnerabilities and needs of Aboriginal communities, particularly under drought conditions
- Provide advice on potential new Hub activities to boost resilience, as well as the rollout of existing projects
- Provide insights on the inclusion of traditional ecological knowledge in scientific research and decision-making processes, and the role of First Nations Engagement Officers
- Provide advice on the development of a Hub Framework for working with First Nations communities, to be considered by the Board
- Assist in the development of strong collaborative links with relevant community, industry, government agencies, and research institutes
- Contribute to the co-design of Hub activities and investment planning within the First Nations Community Resilience impact area.



# Generating insights

## UNDERSTANDING PRODUCER PRESSURES

In August 2025, the Hub partnered with Local Land Services, Rural Aid and Warren Davies – the Unbreakable Farmer to host four A Good Feed & A Good Chat community events across southern NSW. This was in response to recognition that seasonal conditions weren't great for farmers, so it was an opportunity to get together with mates, and Warren, for a conversation about resilience, persistence, determination, leadership and wellbeing. Events were held in Greenethorpe, Illabo, Culcairn and Osborne.

Then, in late November 2025, in response to feedback from Drought Adoption Officers operating in the south west of NSW, Southern NSW Innovation Hub hosted an invitation-only workshop for financial services professionals and support providers on the theme of Understanding Producer Pressures in a Tough Season.

The aim was to equip finance lenders and support providers with broad insights into the seasonal and financial challenges local producers were facing as the end of the year approached. It also served as an opportunity to network, share information, resources and ideas across a network of people that don't otherwise engage with each other, in order to help them work effectively with primary producers in southern NSW and beyond.

The three-hour Understanding Producer Pressures workshop was held at Charles Sturt University, facilitated by Hub Director Cindy Cassidy with presentations on the topics of weather and seasonal forecasts, what it's like on-farm right now, primary producer mental health and wellbeing, and the financial outlook. 25 people attended including representatives from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Rural Aid, Regional Investment Corporation, Rural Financial Counselling Service, Rural Adversity Mental Health Program, NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD), NSW Local Land Services, Commonwealth Bank, NAB, Westpac, ANZ, Bank of Queensland and Sprout Ag.

Resources and tools that were shared at the workshop included:

- NSW DPIRD [State Seasonal Update](#)
  - [Combined Drought Indicator](#)
  - [Farm Tracker app](#)
- [Farming Forecaster](#) - soil moisture, local weather, pasture production and livestock performance information
- Rural Adversity Mental Health Program (RAMHP) – [get support and find a local coordinator](#)
  - [Let's talk managing stress during drought](#)
  - [The real cost of financial stress](#)
- [Rural Aid](#) support includes Disaster Assistance, Mental Health & Wellbeing, and Community Development
- Rural Financial Counselling Service (central and southern NSW) – [find a counsellor](#)
- [Early Insights for More Resilient Communities online dashboard](#) – NSW local government area level data on resilience indicators

This network and further Understanding Producer Pressures workshops will continue as regular events in 2026 with support from Southern NSW Innovation Hub.



# Generating insights

## EARLY INSIGHTS FOR MORE RESILIENT COMMUNITIES DASHBOARD

The Early Insights for More Resilient Communities online dashboard was developed as a pilot project funded through the Southern NSW Innovation Hub as part of the Australian Government's Agricultural Innovation Hubs Program.

It is an online dashboard of data for non-metropolitan NSW local government areas that provides organisations and people with easy-to-access, up-to-date evidence about what's happening in their communities. It helps communities move beyond anecdotal understandings of sentiment into tangible measurements for resilience and wellbeing.



“  
The dashboard helps us turn complex lived experiences into something actionable – not just at the community level, but for program design, funding applications, and even policy.  
”

MADELINE HINES

EXECUTIVE OFFICER, ALPINE VALLEYS COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

In 2025, the dashboard added new metrics to include more information about agricultural industries and expanded into Western Australia, Tasmania, the Northern Territory, and Victoria.

*Please note: More information about the Early Insights for More Resilient Communities Dashboard program is available in the On-ground Projects section of this report.*

The 2025 Early Insights for More Resilient Communities project received funding from the Australian Government through the Future Drought Fund.



# Creating capacity

Southern NSW Innovation Hub created capacity by providing farmers and communities with access to skilled people and resources that helped build drought resilience. Two programs crucial to this were Knowledge Brokers and Drought Adoption Officers.

## KNOWLEDGE BROKERS

Knowledge Brokers provide crucial skills, resources and insights direct to landholders and communities.

The role of the Knowledge Brokers is to capture local priorities and opportunities and deliver that back into research organisations and government, activating co-design and participatory research that meets their communities' unique needs.

In 2025, the Hub had Knowledge Brokers Mary-Anne Watson and Diana Anderson based at Broken Hill with Western NSW Landcare and Chloe Wilson based at Bega with the Regional Circularity Cooperative.

### Local knowledge in action in Bega

In her role as a Hub Knowledge Broker at Bega Regional Circularity Cooperative during 2024 and 2025, Chloe Wilson brought people together to identify what matters to them, facilitate workshops around those priorities, and help turn ideas into action.

Chloe said, "Networking with producers the whole way through has been great to build relationships, keep them engaged, and keep them informed."

"From the feedback I've had, locals really value being listened to and involved in designing the initiatives. They feel their needs are being met."

The South Coast is home to a wide variety of agricultural industries, which added both challenge and opportunity to Chloe's work.

"I've connected with producers of the south coast across all agriculture industries - so beef, dairy, horticulture, we've got aquaculture and small-scale viticulture as well.

"Being a Knowledge Broker meant I was in a unique position to be able to shape projects that will deliver something that is meaningful to local farmers, which they are interested in. That gives a greater impact."



# Creating capacity

## Collaboration goes the distance in Western NSW

Based in Broken Hill with Western Landcare NSW, two Hub Knowledge Brokers, Diana Anderson and Mary Anne Watson, supported NSW's most remote region in 2024 and 2025, engaging directly with locals to identify needs and enhance drought resilience.

Operating as a duo allowed Diana and Mary-Anne to cover most of the vast region while playing to individual strengths. They maintained a strong working relationship with Western Landcare, leveraging networks, sharing insights, and supporting joint initiatives.

They collaborated widely with agencies to host community events, share resources, and connect people with available services. Rural Services Network meetings – attended by around 30 organisations including Western Local Land Services, the Department of Primary Industries, the Royal Flying Doctor Service, and Lifeline – proved particularly valuable.

A highlight was connecting the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water with landholders during vegetation surveys in the Western Division. Diana and Mary Anne provided information on native vegetation classification and mapping, helping secure local participation.

Engagement also took place via countless phone calls, industry events, field days, on-farm visits, and informal conversations in cafes and main streets.

“One couple left their property and business outside of Broken Hill for an entire day to take part,” Mary Anne said of one co-design event. “Then on the way home, they were so engaged with what they had heard, they kept texting and calling with ideas. And that wasn’t an isolated case. It was fantastic.”

“  
For locals to be able  
to tell their story  
and flag their issues  
with us...  
then come up with  
some actions...  
that was hugely  
beneficial for the  
region.

”  
MARY ANNE WATSON

KNOWLEDGE BROKER,  
WESTERN NSW LANDCARE





# Creating capacity

## DROUGHT ADOPTION OFFICERS

In 2025, Southern NSW and Southern Queensland Northern NSW (SQNNSW) Innovation Hubs continued their partnership with Local Land Services (LLS) to deliver the Drought Adoption Officers program across the state.

With 50:50 joint funding for the program provided by LLS and the two Hubs, through the Australian Government's Future Drought Fund, seven Drought Adoption Officers strategically located across NSW helped landholders and rural communities build drought resilience.

In 2025, Drought Adoption Officers continued to build strong relationships with farmers, fostering trust and providing informed advice to build drought resilience. They contributed significantly to long-term sustainability by consistently promoting resilient agricultural practices and providing tailored advice.

“  
We've got more strategies in place now and I feel a lot more confident than I did five years ago... We're more prepared and ready if there were to be a big drought.

”  
ANTHONY NICHOLLS  
FARMER, COOLAC, NSW



Key to their role as capacity creators was how Drought Adoption Officers serve as connectors between farmers and available resources, as well as providing tailored advice, expertise and demonstrations that help them make informed decisions in the face of climate variability.

***Please note: More information about the Drought Adoption Officers program is available in the Building Capability section of this report.***

In 2025, the Drought Adoption Officer program was funded by the Australian Government's Future Drought Fund through Southern NSW Innovation Hub and SQNNSW Innovation Hub.



# Building capability

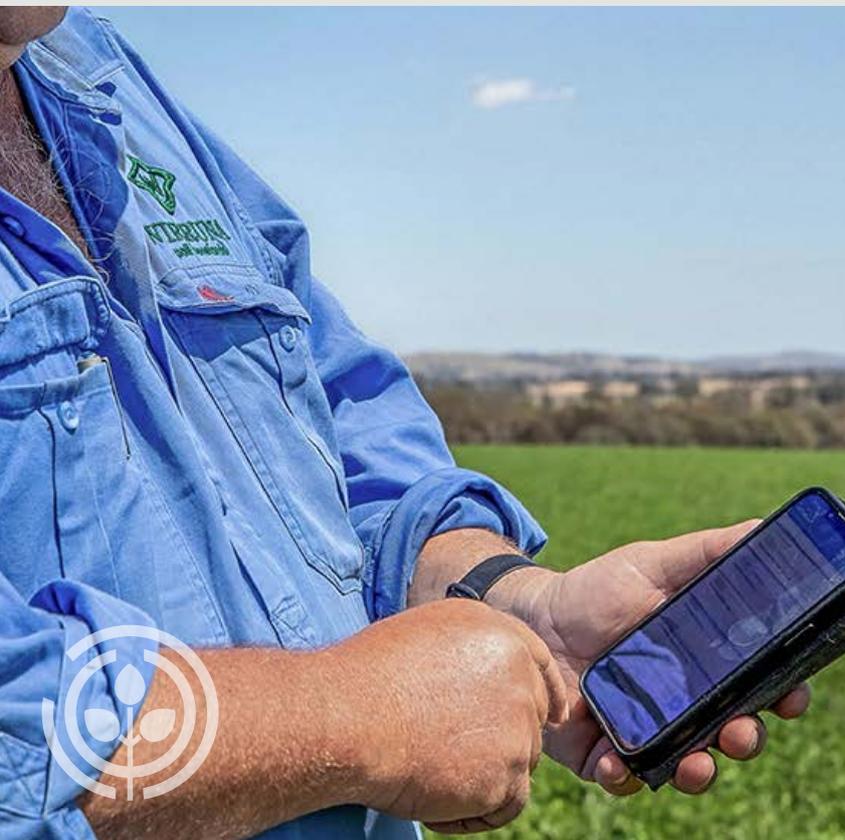
Southern NSW Innovation Hub programs focus on providing expertise, training and technical skills to communities and farmers, boosting core competencies to manage the impacts of drought and climate change. Three programs in particular demonstrate the Hub’s capability building work – Drought Adoption Officers, Regional Soils Coordinators and the Emerging Researchers Network.

## DROUGHT ADOPTION OFFICERS

A key part of the Drought Adoption Officer program (see details in the Creating capacity section) was building the skills and capabilities of farmers and landholders to prepare effectively for drought and make informed decisions in the face of climate variability.

In 2025, the Local Land Services/Southern NSW Innovation Hub Drought Adoption Officers engaged directly with producers across Murray, Riverina, Western, Central Tablelands and Hunter regions. They provided tailored technical support in response to challenging seasonal conditions, including below-average rainfall and poor pasture growth.

Their engagement with landholders was delivered targeting key themes such as feed budgeting, confinement feeding, pasture recovery, and seasonal planning. Practical tools for farmers were promoted including Ag360 and the Feed Budgeting Tool, linking producers with timely decision-making resources. Overall, the work of the Drought Adoption Officers continues to build farmer capability and their confidence in adapting practices to manage feed gaps, water scarcity, and livestock condition.



“  
Thanks to the Drought  
and Supplementary  
Feed Calculator  
I can make better  
decisions about  
how to use my on-hand  
silage to effectively  
feed the cows  
through calving.

”  
FARMER  
FORBES, NSW



## Building capability

The combination of these approaches to engaging with farmers and organisations across southern NSW resulted in high-value, tailored conversations that strengthened producer resilience and built trust.

The Drought Adoption Officer program also reinforced the value of extension staff embedded in local networks, bridging technical knowledge with real-time seasonal decision-making. Officers played a vital role in connecting landholders with resources and reinforcing consistent drought messaging.

“  
It [a stock  
confinement feeding  
area] has meant during  
this dry period we  
have remained one  
step ahead, hopefully  
reducing the impact  
on our animals  
and land.

”  
FARMER  
SOUTHERN NSW



Southern NSW Innovation Hub also relied on regular updates from the Drought Adoption Officers operating across NSW to help understand local conditions and the challenges facing primary producers in 2025 which was then used to generate relevant information, events and training.

In 2026, the Drought Adoption Officer program will continue to build on its successes with 50:50 joint funding from the Southern NSW Innovation Hub and Local Land Services.



# Building capability



“  
Hearing from the Hub’s Karen Kime about First Nations culture has influenced how I’d like to approach future research into regenerative and sustainable agriculture.  
”

PRADEEP RAI

HUB EMERGING RESEARCHER 2025,  
CHARLES STURT UNIVERSITY

## EMERGING RESEARCHERS NETWORK

The Hub’s Emerging Researchers Network ran throughout 2025, supporting 11 early-career researchers working on drought and climate resilience across NSW. It represented a deliberate investment in future leaders who can drive resilience well beyond individual research projects and accelerate innovation into the future.

The program focused on strengthening the link between research and practice. Participants built skills in extension, adoption and co-design, while working directly with industry to understand on-ground needs. Each researcher was paired with industry contacts, creating space for two-way learning and helping shape research that is relevant, timely and usable beyond academia.

Participant feedback highlighted the value of this approach, with the program receiving an average rating of **9.7 out of 10**. Researchers noted the importance of strengthening their science communication skills, reassessing the resilience of their work under climate stress, and gaining new perspectives through sessions on long-term field trials and First Nations knowledge.

The Hub also benefited from the researchers’ insights. Their feedback helped refine the program and strengthen how the Hub supports the integration of extension, adoption and resilience thinking within the research sector.

With the program concluding in December 2025, the Emerging Researchers Network leaves behind a connected cohort equipped to translate strong science into meaningful, long-term outcomes for regional communities.



# Building capability

## REGIONAL SOILS COORDINATORS

The Southern NSW Innovation Hub's Regional Soils Coordinator program puts science into practice for farmers and communities, helping improve soil health and productivity. In 2025, the role was held by Luke Beange, working through the Hub's partner organisation, the NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD), to deliver integrated and targeted soil services across the state.

Nationally, Regional Soils Coordinators form part of the Climate-Smart Agriculture Program, which aims to build Australia's capacity in soil health and soil science to support agricultural sustainability, productivity and competitiveness. In southern NSW, this was achieved by facilitating a strong community of practice and ensuring the consistent sharing of high-quality scientific information with researchers, advisers and land managers.

In 2025, the Regional Soils Coordinator hosted 10 Soils Network of Knowledge webinars, providing tailored, evidence-based soil information for landholders and advisers. Each session attracted between 100 and 400 registrations or subsequent views. The Network's subscriber base grew to more than 850 people, supported by the Hub's promotion through its social media channels and SPOKE newsletter.

Key activities in 2025:

- Convened and managed a soils-focused community of practice for southern NSW, including hosting monthly Soils Network of Knowledge webinars.
- Actively participated in the national soils community of practice through Soil Science Australia.
- Partnered with Local Land Services (LLS) on soils initiatives, including monthly meetings, delivering a pilot soils training program, and establishing a network with LLS Sustainable Agriculture Facilitators in NSW and the ACT.
- Developed and delivered a soils training program for Ag N Vet agronomists and advisers, strengthening their understanding of soil science, diagnostic skills for soil constraints, and knowledge of soil carbon. This was delivered in collaboration with soil experts Jason Condon (Charles Sturt University) and Dr Susan Orgill (Impact Ag).
- Supported the mentorship of emerging soils researchers and specialists.
- Promoted new advances in soil management and research, primarily through the monthly Soils Network of Knowledge webinars.
- Provided advice to the Hub on investment planning related to soil health and sustainability.

The Regional Soils Coordinator program continues in 2026 and remains a core component of the Hub's capability-building activities.

The Southern NSW Innovation Hub's Regional Soils Coordinator program is supported by the Australian Government through funding from the Climate-Smart Agriculture Program under the Natural Heritage Trust.



## Leveraging investment

In 2025, Southern NSW Innovation Hub continued to focus on maximising the impact of the investment made by the Australian Government's Future Drought Fund in NSW. It does this by actively seeking investment and co-investment opportunities that support its objective of boosting drought resilience in its communities, agricultural industries and landscapes.

The Hub was involved in both developing opportunities for investment through project proposals and supporting the development of ideas and project outlines among its partner organisations throughout 2025. These included developing new project submissions and expanding on the success of previously impactful programs of work to meet grant and funding opportunities made available through the Federal Government and other organisations, including Meat & Livestock Australia and the Grains Research and Development Corporation.

The Hub was deeply engaged in the Future Drought Fund's \$20 million Drought Resilience Innovation Challenges Pilot Program grant round in 2025, submitting proposals that were co-designed with partners, including one with SA Drought Hub focused on farmer mental health and wellbeing.

The Hub also partnered with a local Indigenous-led organisation in developing a Strengthening Drought Resilience on Country Program application; however, this has been held over for a future funding opportunity.

Under the \$27 million Scaling Success Program, a selected number of Future Drought Fund projects, including some from the Southern NSW Innovation Hub, had the opportunity to submit proposals to extend their impact beyond their initial scope and target improved drought and climate resilience for the public good of the Australian agriculture sector, landscapes, and communities.

The Hub was pleased to submit in December 2025 two key proposals for the Scaling Success Program:

- **Scaling Success in Soils and Water: Planning Horizons for Drought Resilient Rotations:** A \$1.98 million project to upscale and expand the previous Hub project Improved Drought Resilience Through Optimal Management of Soils and Available Water, to increase adoption of proven nitrogen management, crop rotation and early sowing practices that improve soil health, water retention and crop choices.
- **Scaling Landscape Scale Drought Resilient Livestock Production Systems:** A \$2.69 million project that brings together and expands on two eligible previous Hub projects Farm Water Management Planning and Saving Our Soils During Drought to create training resources and activities to build the skills, knowledge and confidence of trusted advisers who support drought resilient livestock production systems and landholders across NSW for longer-term impact.



## Leveraging investment

The Hub also worked closely with the SA Drought Hub on its proposal for the **Smart Grazing, Stronger Lands: Building Grazing and Land Management Capacity Across Australia’s Southern Rangelands**, which was announced as a successful recipient of a grant under the Natural Heritage Trust’s Climate-Smart Agriculture Program Capacity Building Grants Round 2 in October 2025.

*Please note: More information about the Smart Grazing, Stronger Lands project is available in the On-ground Projects section of this report.*

Several other proposals were prepared, in collaboration with key partner organisations, as well as collaborative efforts to develop unique opportunities and project outlines under Future Drought Fund programs, including:

- Drought Resilience Innovation Challenges Pilot
- Strengthening Drought Resilience on Country



“

I’ve gained confidence in what I have to do in a drought, how to handle it a lot better and to be water wise.”

”

CITRUS GROWER  
GRIFFITH, NSW





# On-ground projects

## NEW

### SMART GRAZING STRONGER LANDS

Smart Grazing, Stronger Lands helps pastoralists and land managers adopt proven climate-smart tools and technologies to improve grazing management and ecosystem health across Australia’s southern Rangelands. It is an expansion of a successful cross-Hub pilot program Managing Rangelands for Drought Resilience.

In NSW, Southern NSW Innovation Hub is the project lead for the component of the project that is making it easier for pastoralists to use the GEOGLAM Rangeland and Pasture Productivity (RaPP) satellite mapping tool to predict groundcover changes on farm and trigger management decisions like feeding, selling stock, and adjusting stocking rates.



“

Helping producers to predict drought and make timely business decisions... [that’s] the knowledge they need to plan ahead with more confidence.

”

CARON CHESTER  
NSW FARMERS,  
WESTERN DIVISION

Southern NSW Innovation Hub is working with DustWatch Australia (Dr John Leys), CSIRO, and NSW Local Land Services to make the RaPP technology more accessible and user-friendly so that Rangelands farmers can plan with confidence and make decisions that are good for their businesses, even when they’re facing dry times.

*The national Smart Grazing, Stronger Lands project is led by the University of Adelaide through the SA Drought Hub, supported by the Australian Government through funding from the Climate-Smart Agriculture Program under the Natural Heritage Trust.*



# On-ground projects

## NEW

### CONNECTION TO KALARI BILA (LACHLAN RIVER)

The Lachlan River flows through the traditional lands of the Wiradjuri, Nari Nari, Mutthi Mutthi, Ngiyampaa, and Yita Yita Nations, forming songlines and dreaming tracks.

As part of a project led by the Centre for Applied Water Science at the University of Canberra, long-term Flow-MER (monitoring, evaluation and research) work is underway in the Lachlan River System, and a key focus is partnering with First Nations communities to support their priorities in land and water management.

A key priority identified by the First Nations community was the need to capture and record the stories, history and memories of the Kalari Bila and its people. This became a new project started in 2025 – Connection to Kalari Bila (Lachlan River) – which pulls together a unique collection of stories through interviews with different families, traditional owners and individuals.

The stories documented include cultural practices, Indigenous science for the management of land and water, the history of the river and its people, local spiritual stories, and stories of loss – of access to land, water and connection. They are being compiled and edited to create a book that will be gifted back to the participants, and some of this knowledge will be shared with the public.

*The Connection to Kalari Bila project is supported by the Southern NSW Innovation Hub, through funding from the Australian Government's Future Drought Fund and also receives funding from the Australian Government's Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder (CEWH), through the Flow-MER Lachlan River Program.*



# On-ground projects

## EXPANDED

### EARLY INSIGHTS FOR MORE RESILIENT COMMUNITIES DASHBOARD

An Australian-first online tool that captures the factors contributing to regional community resilience in the face of extreme climate events such as droughts, bushfires, and floods proved so valuable that in 2025 it expanded across Australia.

In 2025, the project was expanded to include a new and improved version of the online Early Insights for More Resilient Communities dashboard, with additional datasets added and expansion beyond NSW into Western Australia, Tasmania, the Northern Territory, and Victoria.

The 2025 new iteration of the Early Insights for More Resilient Communities Dashboard will include up to 10 new state-specific indicators and up to 10 new national indicators. It also included updated datasets current to 2025, for example, the 2025 Regional Wellbeing Survey now includes questions about the challenges of working in Australian agriculture.

*The expanded 2025 Early Insights for More Resilient Communities project receives funding from the Australian Government through the Future Drought Fund. It is led by the University of Canberra's Wellbeing and Resilience Unit with project partners including Southern NSW Innovation Hub, Northern Hub, South-West WA Hub, TAS Farm Innovation Hub, and Vic Hub.*



“  
Like a good data tool? It’s always a good starting point in better understanding how communities tick. The Early Insights for More Resilient Communities dashboard is another useful tool in better understanding how communities in NSW are faring.  
”

NINA O'BRIEN

FRRR (FOUNDATION FOR RURAL & REGIONAL RENEWAL)





# On-ground projects

## CONTINUING

### MIXED FARMING SYSTEM LONG-TERM FIELD TRIALS

Mixed farming systems are the most common type of farm system in southern Australia and make up around 70% of farms in NSW. They have separate grazing, cropping and livestock systems which require careful integration to optimise productivity, especially during times of drought.

By testing and analysing different mixed farming treatments that balance flexibility with stability, the Southern NSW Drought Resilient Mixed Farming System Long-term Field Trials project is identifying which system, when viewed as a whole, result in the highest productivity, economic value and environmental sustainability of each individual component in the system.

The #MixedFarmingTrials project commenced in 2023/24 and will run until 2027/28. Its structure includes seven trial sites managed by Charles Sturt University and Farming Systems Groups across Southern NSW, including Central West Farming Systems, Farmlink Research, Holbrook Landcare Network, Irrigation Farmers Network, Riverine Plains and Southern Growers.

*The Southern NSW Drought Resilient Mixed Farming System Long-term Field Trials project is led by Charles Sturt University and receives funding from the Australian Government's Future Drought Fund Long-term Trials of Drought Resilient Farming Practices program.*

### RISKWi\$E NATIONAL RISK MANAGEMENT INITIATIVE

Big machinery and infrastructure purchases, timing of expensive nitrogen, phosphorus and lime inputs, crop rotation choices and even carbon markets are some of the more difficult decisions growers are wrestling with on the farm.

Tackling these decisions with NSW grain growers and advisers, the RiskWi\$e project is showing decisions that consider risk – both upside reward and downside risk – are right more often.

RiskWi\$e training conducted in NSW, SA, WA and online with industry experts and researchers in 2025 combined what the project has learnt so far about risky decisions with tips, tools and data to better assess both upside reward and downside risk.

In addition, early results from a national network of nitrogen management trials show decisions to maintain a neutral to slightly positive nitrogen balance maximise profit and yield, buffer the risk of future nitrogen decisions and have few downsides in the long term.

RiskWi\$e, which runs from 2023 to 2028, seeks to understand and improve the risk-reward outcomes for Australian grain growers. It focuses on five priority areas including nitrogen (N) decisions, sowing decisions, enterprise agronomic decisions, enterprise financial decisions and managing natural resource capital.

*RiskWi\$e principal partner, Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC) has invested \$30 million to support this 5-year national initiative and the national lead partner for the program is the CSIRO. In NSW, the Hub is the Action Research Group lead for the program.*



# On-ground projects

## COMPLETED IN 2025

### FARM WATER MANAGEMENT PLANNING

The Farm Water Management Planning Project was a two-year initiative designed with a simple yet critical goal: to help farmers prepare for drought by developing and beginning to implement on-farm water management plans. These plans would allow farmers to assess their water needs for stock and domestic use, evaluate their storage and delivery capacity, and take steps to ensure that water is available in the right places at the right times.

This project was about empowering farmers across the Riverina, the Murray and Southeast NSW with the knowledge, tools and confidence to take practical steps that would minimise drought impacts on livestock, pastures, soils and natural assets. It was also about strengthening networks, building local expertise, and leaving a lasting legacy of resources and skills that will continue to benefit farming communities long after the project ended.

Over the course of two years, the project reached hundreds of farmers, landholders and technical experts. It exceeded many of its original targets for workshops, field days and demonstration sites, while also producing valuable tools and templates that are now freely available for future use.

Along the way, the project teams learned important lessons about delivery methods, communications, governance, behaviour change and the realities of working across a wide range of regions, agriculture enterprises and varying seasonal conditions.

*The Farm Water Management Planning project was a collaborative partnership through Murray Local Land Services, Southern NSW Innovation Hub and farmer and industry organisations. It was funded by the Australian Government's Future Drought Fund.*



“  
I signed up to be a demonstration site for farm water management so that our info could be used to encourage others to do similar works, or improve the efficiency of their production systems by improving water quality.

”  
IAN LOCKE

WIRRUNA POLL HEREFORDS,  
HOLBROOK, NSW





## ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

We respectfully acknowledge the traditional owners and custodians of the lands on which we live and work together. Southern NSW Innovation Hub and its staff pay respect to Elders within First Nations communities and acknowledge the continuity of cultures, languages, leadership and knowledge systems. We acknowledge First Nations peoples' continuous connection to Country, recognising the unique, diverse identities and cultures of peoples in our communities, regions and nation. As such, we value the collaboration to strongly position First Nations peoples in our university, through languages, leadership, cultures, knowledges, research and ceremonies.

### DISCLAIMER

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