

Future-Proofing Australian Hay

Natalie Schlitz
2024, Victoria



Research Purpose

"Almost every farmer in Australia touches fodder regardless of their farming system" (AFIA, 2023)

High-quality hay production is a critical tool that remains undervalued, particularly at a national level. While its importance during droughts and floods is well recognised and quantifiable; hay plays a strategic role during favourable seasons by supporting farm profitability, productivity, and operational flexibility, all of which are key factors that build long-term resilience to climate variability. My study explores global hay production, focusing on the necessity for future climate resilience in Australian agricultural systems.

Key Learnings

- High-quality fodder supports farm profitability, sustains domestic/export markets, and buffers livestock systems during climatic extremes.
- The industry is complex in that climate variability, social licence pressures, and limited RD&E investment demand stronger collective action.
- Global networking was challenging. Greater collaboration would support peer-to-peer learning to drive productivity despite future climate challenges.

Travel (Map or Photo)



Case Studies

- **California:** public scrutiny over water use during drought saw hay producers face reputational damage despite operating legally; reinforcing the importance of building and maintaining social license.
- **Canada:** harsh climatic conditions and market pressures have led to innovation and diversification through investment in various new product lines but also by creating pathways for forward thinking individuals into business leadership.
- **Europe:** the Common Agri Policy has preserved heritage systems like Austria's hay milk industry. This highlights the increasing pressure for public investment to prioritise and achieve environmental objectives.

Recommendations for Industry

- Prioritise hay-specific research, development and extension with a specific focus on underrepresented commodities such as oaten hay, to lift the quality and quantity produced nationwide.
- Earn and maintain social license by committing to transparency by using robust data, and clearly demonstrating the hay industry's economic, environmental, and social contributions.
- Provide state or federal primary production grants that support capital investment and drive innovation to strengthen farm business resilience and support a considered long-term vision.

+ four more in my report!

Thank you to my sponsor



Contact

Natalie Schlitz
0421 532 112
natalie.schlitz@outlook.com