

Current State of Play in Child Care for Australian Farming Families

Issues, Barriers and Opportunity for Improvement



Final Report

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Farmsafe Australia
- Working to improve the well being
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through enhanced health and safety
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FOREWORD

Farmsafe Australia is a partnership of industry and government agencies with a common goal to improve the well being and productivity of Australian agriculture through enhanced health and safety awareness. While Farmsafe Australia's philosophy is that the key responsibility for farm safety rests with the individual farmers, farm families and farm workers, it also has an important role in providing direction and support through pursuing unified and multidisciplinary strategies to ensure child safety interests are optimally served on Australian farms.

This Report on Child Care for Australian farming families is part of Farmsafe's Child Safety on Farms project which is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing. Access to affordable child care options can be a challenge for some families, particularly in rural Australia. This report examines the current state of play in child care for Australian farming families, the issues, barriers and opportunities for improvement.

Don Sutherland
Chairman, Farmsafe Australia

The more things change, the more they stay the same.

Very many drowned in rivers and streams, having been taken to the riverbank where their mothers were laundering or because their fathers were millers...

In Coroners' inquest rolls the great majority of the cases are drowning of toddlers and young children in ditches and pits.

Shulamith Shatar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages*
(London and New York 1990) Page 140-141

Drowning in farm dams and bodies of water is the most common cause of death of toddlers on farms and farm vehicles, motorcycles, horses and other animals are important agents of injury for older children.

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ABBREVIATIONS/TERMINOLOGY

ATV's	All Terrain Vehicles
CCB	Child Care Benefit
CWA	Country Women's Association
DFACS	Department of Family and Community Services (Australian Government)
FDC	Family Day Care Scheme
ICPA	Isolated Children's Parent's Association
LDC	Long Day Care
LGA	Local Government Area
OH&S	Occupational Health and Safety
OOSH	Out of School Hours Services
ICPA	Isolated Children's Parents Association
JET	Jobs Education and Training Programs

Child Care for Australian Farming Families

Child care unless other wise specified in the report, refers to all child care services that offer Government funded early childhood/middle childhood developmental, educational, recreational and care programs, enabling the parent/carer to undertake work, study, training and related activities. The child's parent or principle carer(s) are not present whilst the child participates in the service.

Reference is also made in the report to informal unfunded care arrangements when a relative, friend or other person cares for children enabling the parent/carer to undertake farming work, training and related activities. In these instances, the care will be described as informal child care arrangements.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There is one death every three days on an Australian farm and 20% of these are children aged 0 – 14 years. Water hazard is the major cause of death for children aged 0 – 4 years and farm machinery and motorcycles for children aged 5 – 14 years. Accidents occur at all times of day, week and year. Many children are playing in an area of farm work when fatally injured. One-third of children fatally injured are a visitor to the farm.¹

The national strategy for child safety on farms includes child care as one of its major components.

Its objectives are:

- Definition of child care needs of farm parents defined by state and industry;
- Collation of information on existing family solutions;
- Research to investigate flexible models for delivering child care;
- Review of and/or research into the relationship between child injury and access to child care and supervision;
- Mobilisation of a group to advocate for research and provision of child care services.

In 2004, the Australian Centre for Agricultural Health and Safety approached Contact Inc, the program for isolated children and families, to undertake activities based upon some identified issues for farming families access to child care. Subsequently, the organisation agreed to undertake the co-ordination of a project with the assistance of a Project Worker with strong connections with rural oriented peak and community agencies.

Through consultation with key child care agencies, farming organisations and farming families it was anticipated that the outcomes would be:

1. A practical draft resource(s) developed to assist farming families improve child care arrangements;
2. Strategies to assist in the mobilising of actions to address key needs identified;
3. Documentation of the current state of play in child care for farming families nationally including issues, barriers and opportunities for improvement;
4. Evaluation Report completed and presented.

¹ Source: ACAHS (Franklin, Frager et al)

It was essential that Australia's farming community and child care service peaks be aware and understand the project's purposes in addition to being provided with opportunities to participate in phases of consultation, planning and development. Pivotal was the need to consult directly with farming families about the child care services they access and any associated issues and barriers, solutions that they may have developed and the types of parent information that would be useful.

To reach people, an action research approach was employed which resulted in project activities altering according to emerging issues and needs.

Methodology included:

- Consultation with farming families, child care peak agencies and relevant State affiliated child care agencies, agricultural and rural farming related organisations, training organisations and other key stakeholders;
- Meeting with representatives of the Australian Centre for Agricultural Health and Safety and the Department of Family and Community Services;
- Development and distribution of two simple surveys to farming families, child care peaks and agencies, Rural organisations and networks, Government units and instrumentalities;
- Engagement with key groups and agencies to seek to identify the key needs and issues;
- Promotion of existing Farmsafe child related resources;
 - Dissemination of draft print resources and materials for comment,
 - Promotion of project brief and activity through radio and newspaper, media, conferences, meetings, publications and websites,
 - Data search, review, consultation and analysis on existing child care service provision for farming families.

Two simple surveys were developed. The first national survey was marketed through agricultural, farming, rural, women's, children's and child care peak agencies, organisation's newsletters and email networks (Appendix 2).

Over 300 surveys were returned from this sample and 297 were analysed. Responses were received from each State and Territory and representing farming families engaged in 32 different types of agricultural activity.

The second survey was provided at agricultural field days held in New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia during August 2004. Responses were received from 859 people who live or work on farms.

Australia's farming and pastoral activity are diverse with land holdings ranging from widely dispersed to closely settled. Farming and pastoral activities range from sheep, cattle, farming, cropping and dairy through to flower growing, viticulture, fisheries and others. The Australian Bureau of Statistics Agricultural Commodities publication indicates there were an estimated 135,377² establishments undertaking agricultural activity within Australian States and Territories in 2002.

The ABS 1986 to 2001 Census of population and housing indicates that in 2001 on Australian farms:

- 91% of farmers were part of a family household;
- 54% farms households consisted of a couple with children living with them;
- 3% were one parent farming families;
- 2.1 children on farms were younger than 15 years of age.³

Funded child care services aim to assist parents that are working or studying. Some services also provide support and programs (e.g. parenting) that may otherwise not be available for children and their families. The Australian Government through the Department of Family and Community Services (DFACS) supports a number of flexible funding and service delivery options to help families in rural and regional communities receive childcare. State Governments also support a range of children's services.

In rural areas child care may be offered in a number of ways including:

- From one site
 - long day child care centre,
 - out of schools hours centre including vacation care,
 - occasional child care centre,
 - multi-functional centre incorporating a range of childcare services,
- From many sites
 - itinerant (mobile) services that provides programs to a number of areas or regions,
 - child care services in a number of venues supported by professional staff that travel to the sites with the administration done at one base location.

² Source: ABS Agricultural Commodities Australia 2001-2002

³ Source: Australian Social Trends 4102.0 (2003)

- In the child's or a carers home
 - family day care scheme providing care and developmental activities for children in the homes of registered carers,
 - in-home where care is provided in the child's home for families in difficult circumstances such as a ill parent or sick children who do not have access to mainstream services,
 - in-home care where there are no other child care options or not a child care service available that can meet the child care needs such as non standard working hours.
 - overnight care for children whose parents work shifts or irregular hours.

The National Child Care Access Hotline (1800 670 305) and the Department of Family and Community Services (1300 653 227) are able to assist farming families investigate whether local child care services are available in their region.

The Australian Government 'recognises that the child care needs of rural and regional families are often different from families in larger regional or metropolitan centres'.⁴ Government and community have worked together in some rural and remote localities to evolve child care services to accommodate specific needs and better suit the needs and requirements of the communities and families.

All child care centres or services that provide a child care arrangement are licensed under relevant State or Territory Government regulations. Regulations prescribe requirements such as staffing levels, staff qualifications and the physical standard of the child care facility. Funding agreements and regulatory requirements will govern the hours of operation and the number of children that may be able to participate in the service.

The child care census provides a sample of the number of services operating in Australia. In 2003, there were 9,703 childcare service options operating in Australia of which 2,049 are available in rural and remote regions. The most commonly available rural child care options are out of school hour services followed by long day child care centres.⁵

The Australian Government assists with some child care costs through the Child Care Benefit and Families Assistance schemes. Families are only able to access the Child Care Benefit directly if they are using an approved child care service (e.g. long day care, family day care, outside school hour services, vacation and occasional care services) or a registered carer. Alternatively, families may pay the full fee to the approved child care service during the year and then claim the Child Care Benefit after lodging their tax return.

Carers and services that are registered to provide child care by the Families Assistance Office are called registered carers. Families that access care through registered carers may apply for reimbursement from the Family Assistance Office for fees paid.

⁴ Source: Press Release February 2005 – Minister Patterson

⁵ Source: National Office DFACS – Email, 29 July 2005

The Government acknowledges that ‘in rural and remote areas, families often have fewer child care choices than their city counterparts’ and in February 2005, the Australian Government announced that 53 child care services will share in almost \$2.5 million this year to help provide families in rural and remote communities with access to quality child care. These funds also will be used to replace some of the mobile children’s services vehicles and to expand their programs into new areas to provide child care to families living in the more remote areas of Australia.⁶

A number of National Peak Children’s Service agencies operate to advocate and represent individual childcare services types and the National Children’s Service Forum provides a platform for these Peaks to meet and collectively raise with Government a range of issues and child care needs. The Minister for Family and Community Services convenes the national Child Care Reference Group.

In a range of State and Territory based children’s service Peaks also function.

For farming families it is crucial that child care services are considered to meet both the working parents requirements as well as the child’s developmental needs. Farming families require a range of child care arrangements that are similar to those needed by more populous regions, i.e. ranging from child care on an occasional basis through to a regular full or part-time basis. However, the ability to deliver such care is inhibited by the family’s personal and geographic situation.

Planning for child care service delivery options for farming families needs to be considered in the context of locality, the various population work and training patterns and individual community variables. All of these influences will affect the ability of families to access child care services and because of this, each regional situation will also require a consideration of differing child care options.⁷

In rural and regional areas, farming families may have access to formal child care arrangements and the project survey revealed a number of options that were being utilised including occasional child care, family day care, long day care, in-home/on-farm care, before and after school care and Mobile service.

Child care is recognised as an important component to enable a balance between work and family life. Finding a child care option and being able to afford the service is a challenge for many families. The ability for many farming families to access child care to balance farm work and family life may not be so readily achieved.

In the absence of child care or children’s service options, farming families are reliant upon taking the children along as part of farming activities and utilising friends, neighbours and relatives for child care arrangements. Some respondents indicated that farming families are utilising the services of a paid carer such as a nanny or shared carer but they are the exception.

⁶ Source: Press Release February 2005 – Minister Patterson

⁷ Source: Contact Inc. Report – 1999

The inability of many families being able to afford to employ an outside farm worker should the mother be the primary carer, often requires the mother to be accompanied by the children when participating in the farming work activities.

The lack of child care facilities or services in the region was cited on a number of occasions and many farming families have accepted that the responsibility is theirs to manage the children and the farm work safely.

Farming families were asked to comment about how their current inability to access child care affects child safety or farm management practices. The key response was that an inability to access child care, for whatever reason, meant that one parent had to stay at home and the father worked alone which was seen as being dangerous, inefficient and limiting to the amount of work completed.

Many talked about the difficulty in weighing up the pros and cons of paying for care so that the wife could work alongside the husband. Some families hire a farm hand, leaving the women free to care for the children as well, of course to attend to the home and (presumably) office duties.

A number of women spoke about wanting to share the work with their husband. Because most families do not employ farm workers, the male is often left to work alone. This is seen as dangerous as well as meaning extra hours for the man to work. Therefore women will take the children down the paddock or to the shed so that they can be an extra pair of hands as well as company. They acknowledge that taking the children is not optimum safe practice but that it is their role to help where and when possible.

Many saw taking the children down the paddock or into the work area as the only option whilst acknowledging the danger involved particularly at peak seasonal times. Comment was regularly made that the farming activities were a seven day a week operation and the weekends are just as busy.

Most respondents were aware of the risks involved in taking the children down the paddock or to the shed but felt that being aware of the risk and being extra vigilant was the only option if the job required two people.

The restriction on work hours and jobs not completed or delayed was cited as a result of lack of access to child care. Many acknowledged that farming practices were compromised by having to maintain extra vigilance if children were around worksites. They indicated this meant not only the actual physical safety of the adults and children but having the children out in the heat for example. Overall comments gave the impression that not having access to care increased the load in a number of ways. Lack of time together was mentioned so too was not wanting to involve friends or family too often.

Respondents that have child care available in their region provided insights into their issues and the barriers associated with their child care access. Standard models of child care are not necessarily meeting the needs of the farming families that participated in this project. The issues that were limiting farming family access included:

- Distance and the time required to travel to access the services;
- Costs of care and the ability to afford options that may be available;
- Limited availability of child care places or child care staff;
- Limited flexibility of services to meet their child care needs;
- A lack of knowledge of current options available.

Farming families and community members that have attempted to establish funded child care for farming families or are now operating services, provided insights into some of the issues related to delivering a child care service in rural and regional areas. Many of these issues were supported by rural peak organisations as well as child care providers and mirror 1993 Social Justice Taskforce findings. Limitations imposed by small population density, funding, program guidelines, sponsorship, co-ordination and staffing were evidenced.

Issues included:

- Funding viable child care service provision with small populations spread across large areas and catering to diversity of farming practices, peak seasons, populations needs;
- Service operations
 - Finding suitable venues to provide child care service,
 - Inconsistency of licensing regulatory legal framework nationally
 - Recruitment and retention of child care trained and untrained workers,
 - Supporting child care workers in isolated circumstances,
 - Sponsorship and maintaining a management committee,
 - Complex accountability requirements.

Generally, rural family members are usually able to identify their child care needs and overwhelmingly, farming parents in all States and Industries indicated a need for **more comprehensive availability of service**. No one deemed child care unnecessary.

Two types of child care options were highlighted as most adaptable for farming families' child care solutions. Centre-based child care services were not in the main raised perhaps as their application to address the distance, time, widely spread and often sparse population is limited.

The two aspects of child care arrangements identified which are most applicable and adaptable to farming families are:

1. Itinerant Child Care Service

A mobile child care service for children aged 0 – 12 years that moves from venue to venue as a community need defines and utilises existing community facilities in geographically isolated circumstances where a stand-alone service is not viable.

2. Care on the farm

Child care for children aged 0 – 12 years provided on the farm within the child's home for designated periods.

Nationally, child care arrangements for farming families cited in order of preference were:

- In-home care with carer staying with the family was significantly the most important need identified. Whether as an ongoing child care option or at end of financial year, peak work times or for new baby or illness/emergency, many farm families would like someone to come and stay when there is a need.
- A Mobile child care service operating within reasonable distance during peak times was cited as the next most appealing choice on the wish list.

There was no significant difference in the needs of families in different States or Territories. They showed the same preferences.

To assist farming families to balance work and family life, it is recommended that funding for both established and flexible models of child care continue to be funded and to better respond to farming family child care needs. As a priority, on-farm child care and Mobile child care services are identified as best placed to meet the needs of many farming families.

Families relate to many organisations and people and seek information from sources they trust. The project survey asked farming parents about the types of information they would like and how they would access this detail. Farming families indicated a preference to access information in order of priority indicating:

- the need for simple fact sheets;
- then printed books;
- followed by website technology as the preferred source of accessing information.

The types of information they would find useful included details about:

- Child development;
- What other farming families are doing in the absence of formal child care opportunities;
- Funded child care options;
- How to establish child care arrangements;
- Assessing the home and farming surrounds to improve home and farm child safety measures.

As a result, a series of four draft fact sheet print resources have been developed covering the following topics:

- A ‘tip sheet’ containing details about child safety on farms and ideas that families have developed in the absence of formal child care arrangements;
- A home and farm child safety checklist;
- Child care fact sheet containing a summary of types of services available, child care fee assistance available and how to find out more about the services including the national Childcare Access Hotline to provide links to local services, the types of programs offered and fees;
- Setting up a child care service in your region, what to do, whom to contact and things to consider.

Many families may continue to have minimal or no access to funded and informal childcare arrangements. Children, in some instances, may still need to be cared for by parents engaged in farm activities. It is suggested that Farmsafe explore the issues associated with providing safe, child-friendly environments in working areas such as the wool shed, a facility adjacent to the dairy or other relevant areas and, if appropriate, develop guidelines and resources to support this.

Many peak farming, rural organisations and children’s services contributed within this project and maintain a keen interest in farm child safety and child care. Many voices and organisations individually have an ability to take up some aspects raised within this report in their own sectors and advocacy work. National children’s service peaks and rural oriented organisations have expressed a keen interest to promote child and farm family safety messages and resources. An opportunity exists to harness this audience to promote farm child safe messages.

Child related accidents on farms can often be attributed to visiting children and as such there is a critical need to capture as many people as possible to promote awareness of child safety on farms. There is a potential for:

- regular feature articles that could be available to agency networks for inclusion in sector newsletters, journals and publications; and
- child and family sector conference presentations and promotions.

This report represents another step towards raising the profile of the relationship between child care and child safety on farms.

The availability of farm family information channeled through many agencies in order to have an ongoing links is one way forward. Equally, raising the profile of farming family needs for child care and the associated barriers may assist future opportunities for viable and sustainable child care options to better meet their specific requirements.

The results of this preliminary study could be followed by a case study of regional farming areas identified as high need due to limited or with no child care service. A case study approach would enable the collation of advice, guides and documents about how a community solves their child care issues. Case studies could contain community surveys as to child care needs, solutions identified, support sought and harnessed and the services developed. The resulting documentation could be published as a guide for rural farming communities to seek to solve own problems.

Contact Inc. believes this document could be used as an opportunity for Farmsafe to lobby Government for relevant Ministers to arrange meetings with rural-based family networks (ICPA, CWA, Rural Women's Networks) during agricultural shows or field days in order to gain a further understanding of the issues associated with child safety on farms. It is also recommended that Farmsafe consider the potential of a Farming Family Child Care National Initiative (such as a summit) that would bring together key farming, child care, community and government representatives to proactively evolve strategies to progress issues raised within this Report.

Whilst ever barriers to employing workers on farms multiply – new OH&S regulations, Workcover premiums and excess penalties, costs of compulsory training for staff and much more, the women in a farming family will be required to become farm workers.

Women's increased participation in the farm labour force coupled with limited or no access to child care options will continue to place children on farms at risk.

“As a family farm I need to do secretarial work and need to concentrate so I send my child with Dad to do some jobs. While I know it is not always safe - unless someone can provide babysitters it has to happen this way. We can just be as aware of safety as possible and hope fate won't visit us some day.”

Farm Parent, August 2004

RECOMMENDATIONS

Child care is a critical issue for rural and farming communities. Overwhelmingly, farming parents in all States and industries have expressed a need for **more comprehensive availability of service**. No one deemed child care unnecessary. Needs vary and individually each region is best placed to define those concepts of child care provision that can most appropriately meet diverse local needs.

Responses from farm families have shown that those with minimal or no access to funded and informal childcare arrangements are more likely to care for their children while working in the farm workplace. There are thirty deaths of children aged 0 - 14 years on an Australian farm on average each year. 77% of the children were in an area where farm work was being carried out. Most children (73%) were playing when the incident occurred and 13.9% were involved in recreational transport and 8% were working.

1. Addressing Farming Family Child Care Needs

Government child care policy should recognize the **unique** connection between a lack of child care options in rural areas and the risk to children who may, as a result, be required to be cared for in the farm workplace and reflect this in child care policy, administration, funding and taxation arrangements.

It is recommended that:

- 1.1 Funding arrangements be supported to enable the evolution and expansion of childcare options to best suit the needs of this sector.

It is recommended that:

- 1.2 Funding for established and flexible childcare options of service delivery that currently provide childcare for farming families continue and where appropriate expand to meet unmet need. As a priority, on-farm childcare and mobile childcare models are supported with increased funding to develop and expand to meet farming family childcare needs.

** Supported by input from farming families as to preferred options to meet their needs.*

2. Many peak farming, rural and children's service organisations contributed to this project and maintain a keen interest in farm child safety and childcare. Many organisations have an ability to take up issues raised in their own sectors and advocacy work.

It is recommended that:

- 2.1 Farmsafe consider the potential of a Farming Family Child Care National Initiative (such as a summit) that would bring together key farming, child care, community and government representatives to proactively evolve strategies to progress issues raised within this Report.

It is recommended that:

- 2.2** Farmsafe Australia write to all farming, childcare, and community peaks and government agencies that have supported and contributed to this project, advising them of this report, inviting comment on the recommendations and seeking assistance in progressing the further development of child care arrangements for farming families.

It is recommended that:

- 2.3** The Final Report be made available on the Farmsafe website so that organizations and individuals can access the information, use details as relevant in their ongoing activities on behalf of farming families, children and communities and provide feedback and comment.

3. Increasing use of existing Child Care Options by Farming Families

Many farming families indicated that they were not aware of the childcare service options in their region. Limited knowledge of the types of children's service and where to go for help was also raised as an issue.

It is recommended that:

- 3.1** The National Child Care Access Hotline (1800 670 305) and the Department of Family and Community Services (1300 653 227) be promoted through the Farmsafe Australia website and publications as well as by all organisations that have a link with farming families and industry.

4. Helping farming communities expand child care options

Many farming families in sectors of agriculture such as dairy farming and fisheries have unique and complex working hour patterns are constrained in their ability to access existing childcare services by factors such as distance, time and farm working hours.

It is recommended that:

- 4.1** Specific studies are conducted into child care solutions for agricultural sectors with complex working patterns in conjunction with industry sector stakeholders (e.g. Australian Dairy Corporation, Women in Dairying or Women in Seafood).

A fact sheet for parents in rural or isolated areas on how to set up an appropriate child care service (or simply direct people to contact points) has been developed as part of this project. However establishing child care options is a complex process requiring extensive community commitment.

It is recommended that:

- 4.2** A case study project focusing upon farming areas identified as high need with no child care service options be conducted to document how identified communities/regions solve their own childcare problems. A mix of closely settled and widely spread pastoral holding regions should be incorporated in the Project.

Many families may continue to have minimal or no access to funded and informal childcare arrangements. In some instances, children may still need to be cared for by parents engaged in farm activities.

It is recommended that:

- 4.3** Farmsafe explore the issues associated with providing safe, child-friendly environments in working areas such as the wool shed, a facility adjacent to the dairy or other relevant areas and, if appropriate, develop guidelines and resources to support this approach.

It is recommended that:

- 4.4** Workshops on child farm safety be conducted at agricultural field days providing women with something else to attend alongside the fashion and food. These workshops could have examples of how temporary safe play areas might be created and other child safety hints and tips.

5. Child Care Administration and Funding Arrangements

Many farming families and child care providers shared concerns about the inflexibility of some current funding arrangements to enable child care arrangements capable of responding to differing farming family need.

It is recommended that:

- 5.1** Child care services operating in farming areas have funding provisions with sufficient flexibility to enable programs to be offered which are:
- reflective of the whole community;
 - adaptive and transferable to cater for changing and varying population needs;
 - responsive to shifting population issues as they arise.

The costs of child care service delivery in rural and remote areas will be higher than urban localities due to distance and the isolation of communities. Small numbers of children mean a small fee base, less operational money and a higher service delivery cost per child and may be ineligible for CCB funding. Regular fee income and supplementary incomes from alternate sources including fundraising may also not be available.

It is recommended that:

5.2 To support rural service delivery and viability:

- Service allocations reflect the true costs of service delivery including community development and travel with an additional monetary rural factor percentage incorporated;
- Child care services targeting isolated farming families be funded on an individually determined budget-based arrangement rather than from an existing child care service type formulae;
- Funding arrangements be based on service delivery rather than the numbers of children;
- Small rural child care options be eligible for CCB to assist with affordability for families and the ongoing viability of the service.

6. Child Care Service Staffing

Recruitment and retention of child care staff, relief staff and carers is a national issue and is affecting rural childcare options. Attracting and retaining appropriate management and suitably skilled staff will be paramount to the success of the child care service for farming families. A number of initiatives are currently evolving to address and find solutions to recruitment and retention of trained and untrained children's service workers.

It is recommended that:

6.1 Responsive child care services targeting farming families are sufficiently resourced to provide:

- Incentive-based staffing contracts inclusive of a salary which parallels the child care services responsibilities;
- The employment of an Administrator or Co-ordinating Manager separately to the services primary child care contact staff;
- Support and assistance to child care workers based in areas that are a distance from the service manager;
- Budget allocations to enable the purchasing in of expertise as required.

It is recommended that:

- 6.2** Farmsafe Australia, farming related organisations and those associated with the National Strategy for Child Safety on Farms maintain an active interest in these activities and endorse any measures, as appropriate, that relate to the rural child care workforce;
- 6.3** Farmsafe and relevant rural peaks contact and work with TAFE divisions and other tertiary instrumentality's that may need data and evidence to support their requests for increased funding for child studies courses in rural areas.

7. Child Safety on Farm Resources

Families relate to many organisations and people and seek information from sources they trust. There is a critical need to engage as many people as possible to promote awareness of child safety on farms.

It is recommended that:

- 7.1** Existing child safety on farm resources be available in newsletter article format so that child care peak agencies, health workers, farming groups, women's organisations and related fields can take the message to their ongoing audience in newsletters and promotions at sector functions such as conferences and workshops. These materials may also be available to be downloaded in PDF format from the Farmsafe website.

** Supported by input from farming families as to how they prefer to receive such information.*

It is recommended that:

- 7.2** The four (4) draft child care fact sheets related resources prepared as part of the project brief be made available in the same format and in a black and white master so organisations and agencies may photocopy and readily distribute to farming families as required. It is also recommended they be available to be downloaded in PDF format from the Farmsafe website.



SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

There is one death every three days on an Australian farm and 20% of these are children aged 0 - 14 years⁸. The national strategy for child safety on farms includes child care as one of its major components.

Its objectives are:

- Definition of child care needs of farm parents defined by state and industry.
- Collation of information on existing family solutions.
- Research to investigate flexible models for delivering child care.
- Review of and/or research into the relationship between child injury and access to child care and supervision.
- Mobilisation of a group to advocate for research and provision of child care services.

A farm child care working group was established in July 2000 including representation from most State Farmsafe organisations and some additional organisations such as the Isolated Children's Parent's Association (ICPA). This group contributed to the development of an initial discussion paper and an information paper published by the Department of Family and Community Services. The working group ceased meeting once the Department of Health and Aging grant to support the national child safety on farms strategy was announced.

The preliminary background prepared Paper "Childcare on Australian Farms":

- Highlighted the lack of child care as a risk factor in exposing children to farm hazards;
- Examined some of the issues involved including:
 - Child care needs specific to various farming contexts and the types of flexible child care necessary for farm families;
 - Criteria for optimal child care – drawing upon Commonwealth Government aims;
 - Currently available child care arrangements (Commonwealth funded).

⁸ Source: ACAHS Website (Franklin Frager et al)

In 2001, the Department of Family and Community Services (DFACS) published the document “Flexible Child Care in Rural and Remote Australia” which:

- Aimed to inform potential child care providers of funding options to establish and deliver child care services in rural and remote areas;
- Provides details of assistance for families to support with child care costs;
- Outlines different types of childcare options including case study samples.

A number of key issues and future tasks were identified as a result of these documents including:

- Funding support to increase the number of qualified child care workers for remote communities;
- Financial assistance for child care workers to travel the distances required;
- Opportunities that may be available through State programs/funding (e.g. Victorian Community Development funding);
- Develop a procedural (step-by-step) document for parents in rural or isolated areas on how to set up an appropriate child care service (or simply direct people to contact points including:
 - Evaluation of funding models in various States
 - What types and combinations of child care models work best in the rural/remote context?
 - What are the barriers to the uptake of childcare for farming families and how might they be overcome?

To address these issues a number of proposed approaches were identified.

1.2 The Project

In 2004, the Australian Centre for Agricultural Health and Safety approached Contact Inc., the program for isolated children and families, to undertake activities based upon some of the identified issues. Subsequently, the organisation agreed to undertake the co-ordination of a project with the assistance of a Project Worker.

The organisation’s strong connections with rural oriented peak and community agencies enabled a wide ranging and comprehensive mix of consultation.

The agreed project tasks were to:

- Document the current state of play, needs and issues associated with the development and delivery of child care services for farming families nationally;
- Consult with key players in an exploration of issues associated with child care service delivery for farming families;
- Identify strategies and approaches to mobilise action to address the child care needs for farming families;
- Develop to final draft stage an information resource/resources for farming families to provide information about:
 - Assessing and appraising the current child care arrangements in place for their children;
 - Resources, considerations and ideas to support the improvement of the current child arrangements;
 - Information about how to access child related resources, child care programs/options, development and advice.

Through consultation with key child care farming organisations and farming families it was anticipated that the outcomes would be:

- Practical draft resource(s) developed to assist farming families improve child care arrangements;
- Strategies to assist in the mobilising of actions to address key needs identified;
- Documentation of the current state of play in child care for farming families nationally including issues, barriers and opportunities for improvement;
- Evaluation Report completed and presented.

1.3 Methodology

It was essential that Australia's farming community and child care service peaks be aware and understand the project's purposes in addition to being provided with opportunities to participate in phases of consultation, planning and development.

Pivotal was the need to consult directly with farming families about the child care services they access and any associated issues, barriers and solutions that they may have developed and the types of parent information that would be useful.

To reach people, an action research approach was employed which resulted in project activities altering according to emerging issues and needs.

Methodology included:

1. Consultation with farming families, child care peaks and relevant State affiliated child care agencies, agricultural and rural farming related organisations, training organisations and other key stakeholders;
2. Meeting with representatives of the Australian Centre for Agricultural Health and Safety and the Department of Family and Community Services;
3. Development and distribution of two surveys targeting farming families, child care peaks and agencies, rural organisations and networks, Government units and instrumentalities;
4. Engagement with key groups and agencies to seek to identify the key needs and issues;
5. Visits to some rural child care services;
6. Promotion of existing Farmsafe child related resources;
7. Dissemination of draft print resources and materials for comment;
8. Promotion of project brief and activity through radio and newspaper media, conferences, meetings, publications and websites;
9. Data search, review, consultation and analysis on existing child care service provision for farming families.

1.4 The Surveys

The first national survey was developed with advice sought from the National Office of the Australian Government's Department of Family and Community Services. As a key player in child care funding and policy, their feedback as to the types of information that may be useful was important.

The resulting product was marketed through agricultural, farming, rural, women's, children's and child care peak agencies and organisations, newsletters and email networks (Appendix 1 and Appendix 3). The survey was presented in two formats for inclusion either on websites or as a newsletter insertion (Appendix 2).

As a deliberate strategy, the survey contained the details of the Farmsafe Australia website and was placed on this site. This approach meant that individuals that received the survey or heard about it through other means such as radio or newspaper would gain an awareness of the Farmsafe website and potentially greater understanding and access to the information contained.

Over 300 surveys were returned and 297 were analysed (Appendix 4). The remaining unanalysed surveys were consistent with existing information and were received after the close-off date provided. Responses were received from each State and Territory.

Farming sector responses defined their agricultural activity by 32 types as follows:

Cereal	Fishing	Irrigation	Sheep
Cattle	Fodder	Mangoes	Sheep & Cattle
Contact Mustering	Grain	Mixed	Stock
Contract Spraying	Grain & Stock (Mixed)	National Parks	Sugar/Sugarcane
Cotton	Grazing & Horticulture	Orchard	Trout
Cropping	Hobby	Rice	Turf
Diary	Horse	Rice & Grains	Viticulture
Farm-stay	Horticulture	Rice & Stock	Wool

The second survey was developed with the Australian Centre for Agricultural Health and Safety and provided at agricultural field days held in New South Wales Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia during August 2004. Responses were received from 859 people who live or work on farms.

The project findings sample of 1,159 farming family responses cannot be interpreted as a national farm family child care need audit. However, the breadth of response from across Australia and by industry provides some clear insights into issues, barriers and needs.

Findings of all activities formed the development of the Final Report.

SECTION 2

CONTEXT

2.1 Child related injuries and deaths on farms

There is one death every three days on an Australian farm and 20% of these are children aged 0 - 14 years. Water hazard is the major cause of death for children aged 0 - 4 years and farm machinery and motorcycles for children aged 5 - 14 years. A study of on-farm traumatic fatalities of children by Franklin et al (2000) reported 177 deaths of children aged less than 15 years of age over the period 1989 – 1992. Drowning was the most common cause (42%) mostly for children aged less than 5 years. Vehicles and tractors were the next most common cause of death (36%).

In all states of Australia, for every 10,000 farms on average there are two child fatalities per annum. 77% of the children were in an area where farm work was being carried out. Most children (73%) were playing when the incident occurred and 13.9% were involved in recreational transport and 8% were working.

Many children are playing in an area of farm work when fatally injured. Boys are more likely to be involved than girls. One-third of children fatally injured are visitors to the farm. Accidents occurred at all times of the day, week and year.

Motorcycles, horses and farm vehicles are the most common causes of non-fatal injury across-the-board for different states and regions⁹.

Responses from farm families has shown that whilst parents are aware of the dangers of taking children into the workplace, there is often not an option when there is no one else to care for the children.

Recorded injuries from hospital emergency departments are difficult to define as recordings show the nature of injury rather than necessarily as farm related injuries. No comments are recorded as to whether children were supervised, were participating in work related activity, were bystanders or had travelled to an area away from supervision.

Some factors identified as contributing to deaths and injury on farms:

1. Increased use of motor cycles and ATVs;
2. Ageing farmer population;
3. Fewer farm workers;
4. Both parents working;

⁹ Source: ACAHS Website (Franklin Frager et al)

5. A factor in child risk on-farm is the higher rate of employment of women both on and off-farm. This may expose children to greater risk due to reduced capacity to supervise children and the inclusion of children in farm activities due to combining the child minding role with farm work.
6. Increasing scale of properties – distances travelled.¹⁰

A comprehensive study into the relationship between child injury and access to supervision childcare arrangements would require a significant study of farm families and injuries, recorded and otherwise. Access to this type of information, whilst valuable, was out of scope within the Project brief.

2.2 Profile of Australian Farms by Agricultural Activity

Australia's farming and pastoral activities are diverse with land holdings ranging from widely dispersed to closely settled. Farming and pastoral activities range from such activities as sheep, cattle, farming, cropping and dairy through to flower growing, fishing and viticulture to name a few.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics Agricultural Commodities publication indicates there were an estimated 135,377 establishments undertaking agricultural activity within Australian States and Territories in 2002.¹¹

Table 2.1 profiles the major agricultural activity of these establishments with beef cattle production being the most predominant activity, followed by grain growing, mixed grain and stock, sheep production, dairying and sheep cattle mixed holdings.

Table 2.1 Major Agricultural Activity

Activity	No. of Establishments
Grain Growing	15,911
Grain - Sheep/Beef	15,610
Sheep/Beef Cattle	8,424
Sheep	13,911
Beef Cattle	34,110
Dairy Cattle	11,135

¹⁰ Source: ACAHS Website (Franklin Frager et al)

¹¹ Source: ABS Agricultural Commodities Australia 2001-2002

Australian Labour Force Statistics reveal that in Agricultural enterprises in 2005 (excludes Forestry, Logging, Fishing, Hunting, Trapping) there are:

- 238,000 people in full-time employment;
- 82,300 people in part-time employment;
- Within this figure - 216,500 Males and 103,800 Females.¹²

The ABS 1986 – 2001 Census of population and housing indicate that in 2001:

1. 91% of farmers were part of a family household;
2. 54% consisted of a couple with children living with them;
3. 3% were one parent families;
4. children aged younger than 15 years¹³.

In a study into working people aged 45 - 64 years (2003) the Education Industry employed the highest proportion of workers in this age group (47%) followed by Health and Community Services (42%) and Agricultural, Forestry, Fisheries (41%). The high proportion in Agricultural, Forestry and Fisheries category is consistent with the trend for fewer young people to enter into farming. Women concentrated in Agricultural, Forestry and Fisheries in this age group represent 51,100 or 46% of all women in that industry.¹⁴

2.3 The varied context of farming families' working, training and community profiles - a consideration of relevant issues to child care

For farming families it is crucial that child care services are considered to meet both the working parents requirements as well as the child's developmental needs. The needs of child and family are inextricably linked. Farming families require a range of child care arrangements that are similar to those needed by more populous regions, i.e. ranging from child care on an occasional basis through to a regular full or part-time basis. However, the ability to deliver such care is inhibited by the family's personal and geographic situation. Farming families who live in close proximity to State boundaries may be faced with the unique dilemma of services being available in a nearby rural town yet have a limited ability to utilise the service because they live in another state.

Needs vary and individually each region is best placed to define those concepts of child care provision that can most appropriately meet diverse local needs.

¹² Source: Australian Labour Force Statistics ABS February 2005

¹³ Source: Australian Social Trends 4102.0 2003

¹⁴ Source: Australian Labour Market Statistics 2004

Planning for child care service delivery options for farming families needs to be considered in the context of locality, the various population work and training patterns and individual community variables. All of these influences will affect the ability of families to access child care services and because of this, each regional situation will also require a consideration of differing child care options.

To assist in an understanding of the extent of this diversity, a range of generalised primary industry, working, training and community profiles are presented. It would be inappropriate to suggest specific child care solutions with farming family profiles as no one region is the same. Individual determinants will define local decisions as to what is best suited for their region.

Primary Industry

“Locations in which population density is low and which are generally dominated by primary production.”

(NCOSS 1996, page 1)

2.3.1 General Comments – Working and Training Considerations

- Some primary industries are not necessarily ‘property based’ as the enterprise is located within the boundaries of a town centre, e.g. oil, seed, storage and processing. Families who are involved in these enterprises would be considered as part of a town population profile.
- Dairy farmers and fisheries are presented as a separate profile since these families have unique child care needs that differ from other property based groups.
- Unpredictable weather patterns can impinge on rural and remote primary industry families’ access to children’s services as unsealed roads and water crossings can become impassable in wet weather.

Working Considerations

The land holdings on which a primary industry is undertaken may be:

- Widely dispersed or closely settled.
- The income source for the family may be parent(s) working in partnership or as employees within the primary industry enterprise.
- Additional labour may also be employed on the holding to support the operation either on a regular or casual basis or hired on contract for peak requirements, e.g. mustering/pruning.
- The reality of primary industry production for many families is that one or both parents will be required to work either on the farm or in an off-farm income subsidising enterprise. This means the supervision of the children is undertaken at the same time as the work. As a workplace as well as the family home, farms are the least safe environment.

- The purchase of property related goods such as machinery parts, banking, the payment of accounts and household shopping is generally conducted either in a localised or regional rural town service centre. Such activities are widely recognised and considered as an integral component of any primary industry work related activity.

Seasonal based work for primary industry is varied dependant upon the industry.

Harvesting, fruit and vegetable picking, because of similar planting and ripening conditions, generally occur seasonally at specific times in regions across the state. The start and conclusion of the harvest for all primary industry can be unpredictable due to varying seasonal differences.

The hours of employment during a harvest...

- are long, to enable the harvesting to be completed as quickly as possible, or
- are unusual, for example daybreak until midday (to minimise bruising and damage to the crop),
- can continue seven days a week until the crop is harvested,
- seasonal workers complete their tasks on the property as contracted. Dependant upon the nature of the harvest the employees may be a mix of both local as well as itinerant seasonal workers,
- local workers will travel each day to the property. Itinerant seasonal workers and their families are generally either based on the property if facilities are available or in residence at a local caravan park throughout the season.

If there are child care options within a community, given the short-term nature of harvest employment, it may be difficult for existing services to have facilities or child care places to cater for these additional children. Often, if care is available, it will be some distance from the place of employment.

It is noted that itinerant family workers would need to rely on local advice and networks to assist with information regarding possible child care arrangements. In some instances, harvest workers are from non-English speaking backgrounds with limited English language oral and written skills. This can impact upon their ability to access local services.

Seasonally transient families need child care throughout the harvest season in the following ways:

- Care for much of the day for 0 – 5 year olds;
- Out of school care for children 5 - 12 years of age;
- In both instances, weekend care may be a need.

Training Considerations

To maintain a currency of industry related information, individuals may participate in localised training such as...

- a one-off event, e.g. intensive agricultural field day, OH&S regulations, chemical certification;
- short-term skills development course, e.g. computer, bookkeeping;
- long-term skills development offered over several months or years, e.g. wool-classing, machinery maintenance.

In some instances training can be completed by Distance Education.

2.3.2 Primary Industry Property Holdings - Closely Settled

Family Activities

These families are able to more readily access rural town centres for business appointments and household requirements. Off property supplementary income opportunities are further enhanced by families closer proximity to the town centres. The families are able to travel on a more regular basis to be involved in schooling, recreational, social and community activities.

Child Care Needs

For intensive and non-intensive primary industry work periods, it would seem feasible that closely settled, property holding families may have access to child care provision in towns. Families' ability to access in-town care is, however, dependent upon individual circumstances such as:

- on property activities;
- distance of property from town center;
- travel time;
- road conditions.

Regular child care provision may be possible on the property 'in the child's home' or in a district facility such as a community hall as opposed to 'in-town care'. Child care for children 0 - 12 years is required...

- for both on and off property work on a scheduled, full or part-time basis;
- on an itinerant basis within the family home during intense farm work periods or in times of family crisis;
- on a part-time basis to enable the parent(s) participation in localised training;

- for school aged children on a regular or scheduled basis. This would also enable parents to complete town appointments without being tied to the school bus run schedule;
- during school term and holiday periods to provide the opportunity for the children to participate in peer activities.

2.3.3 Primary Industry Property Holdings - Daily intensity of work for specific periods

Examples that typify this category are dairy and fish farming.

Family Activities

Dairying families and some other enterprises such as fisheries have working patterns that are unique and differ from other agricultural enterprises. There is a daily intensity of work for specific hours 2 – 3 hours.

Dairy parent(s) may be involved during the day in many all encompassing activities on the farm such as the feeding of cows, the moving of irrigators, pasture preparation, the cleaning of milking machinery and the yards, in which there are sluice pits.

Fishery parents may be involved in early morning activities that are subject to change dependant upon weather conditions.

Families who have access to a family member or neighbour who is able to assist may have a ‘child care’ arrangement during the regular farming routine. However, in many instances the solutions in place may be...

- older siblings caring for the younger children;
- utilising a UHF radio monitor between home and shed;
- taking the children to the work area;
- the children being taken to a safe place, purpose built and adjacent to the work area.

Child Care Needs

During the regular intense daily routine parents may require child care in the family home to ensure both the safety as well as non-disruption of the child’s sleep.

It is noted that:

- The grouping of families for child care would not readily work in the early morning hours. The travel involved, as well as the unusual hours, would be disruptive to the children and difficult for the parents.
- A system of child care workers providing care on farm at intense times may not be cost effective in some areas as this would require an availability and an extensive pool of casual child care workers.
- When dangerous activities are undertaken on the dairy farm, such as cleaning the sluicing pits,

families may need a regular day of child care in the family home or child care off the farm in an accessible community facility.

- To enable parents to participate in localised training, child care would be required in a local community or on-site at the training venue.

It is beyond the scope of this report to investigate all the issues and child care solutions for these unique sectors. It is suggested that more specific studies be conducted into child care solutions for agricultural sectors with complex working patterns in conjunction with industry sector stakeholders (e.g. Australian Dairy Corporation, Women in Dairying or Women in Seafood).

2.3.4 Primary Industry Property Holdings - Widely Dispersed

Family Activities

These families may travel to a small town centre for general goods, schooling, medical and emergencies, specialist or flying doctor clinic day, a distance education centre as well as for social and recreational activities. For more extensive selection of goods, appointments and household requirements often including banking, the family would need to drive to a larger rural centre.

Child Care Needs

Given the localities, distances, unusual work hours and family activity, it would be impracticable for many families to regularly travel to town to access child care. Generally, often the only child care options available for property-based parents will be dependent upon the proximity and willingness of either other family members, friends or neighbours to assist. Child care in crisis times or for respite is rarely available to these families.

Child care arrangements for children aged 0 – 12 years maybe required in the following circumstances:

- During intense work periods, e.g. mustering, shearing or family crisis times, e.g. illness or new baby. Care would need to occur either in the home or in close proximity to the property. Generally, it would be unrealistic to consider child care concepts which provide care on a daily or ongoing regular basis outside of the child's home unless a carer was located in the area given the distances.
- Families have a limited access because of distances, work patterns, and economic considerations to health programs, parent supports and information as well as child focused activities.
- There will be times within the family activities that require the parent(s) to travel to town whilst they complete business appointments and shopping. At these times, families may require 'in-town' child care.
- Parents may participate in 'localised' training or special events such as agricultural field days. As a result, care may be required 'in-town' or at the training venue.

The school-aged children who live on widely dispersed properties have few opportunities to participate in peer related activities except during situations such as distance education organised mini schools. The provision of an itinerant school aged care program, particularly during school holiday times, would

assist'.¹⁵



¹⁵ Source: Contact Incorporated Report 1999

SECTION 3

CURRENT STATE OF PLAY IN CHILD CARE FOR FARMING FAMILIES NATIONALLY – CONSIDERATION OF GOVERNMENT FUNDED CHILD CARE SERVICES OPTIONS FOR FAMILIES IN RURAL AND REGIONAL AUSTRALIA

Child care service availability varies across rural and regional Australia and is offered for families irrespective of their employment background rather than solely targeting farming families. This section examines the extent of child care options available in rural and remote areas of the Australian States and Territories.

3.1 Current Child Care Options

The Australian Government through the Department of Family and Community Services (DFACS) supports a number of flexible funding and service delivery options to help families in rural and regional communities receive childcare. State Governments also support a range of Children's Services. Within a region, farming family child care needs can differ widely and flexible child care services can provide opportunities for care that is most relevant to individual families need.

In rural areas, child care may be offered in a number of ways including:

- From one site
 - long day child care centre;
 - out of schools hours centre including vacation care;
 - occasional child care centre;
 - multi-functional providing different programs.
- From many sites/itinerant
 - mobile services that provides programs to a number of areas or regions;
 - child care services in a number of venues supported by professional staff that travel to the sites with the administration done at one base location.
- On farm, in home of child or carer
 - family day care scheme providing care and developmental activities for children in the homes of registered carers;
 - in home or on farm where care is provided in the child's home for families in difficult circumstances such as a ill parent or sick children who do not have access to mainstream services;

- overnight care for children whose parents work shifts or irregular hours;
- in-home on farm care where there are no other child care options or not a child care service available that can meet the child care needs such as non standard working hours;
- overnight care for children whose parents work shifts or irregular hours;
- registered home based carers.

The Australian Government “recognises that the child care needs of rural and regional families are often different from families in larger regional or metropolitan centres”¹⁶

Government and community have worked together in some rural and remote localities to evolve child care services to accommodate specific needs and better suit the needs and requirements of the communities and families. Rather than transposing a “one size fits all” approach to child care, these services operate in areas where existing models of care may not be appropriate or viable particularly with a dispersed or smaller population.

Child care services aim to assist parents that are working or studying. Some of these services also provide support and programs (e.g. parenting) that may otherwise not be available for children and their families. Types of Government supported child care and children’s services are summarised in the following table and then described at greater length.

¹⁶ Source: Press Release February 2005 – Minister Patterson

	Care Available	Ages Covered	Operates
Family Day Care Schemes	Long day care, part-time care, occasional care, relief, emergency, casual, overnight weekend and on call care, before and after school care, holiday care, outside of normal work hours, 24 hour care and in-home care.	Birth to 12 years	In carer's home
Long Day Care Centres	Generally 12 hours a day, 48 weeks a year, Monday to Friday. Some centres may operate for longer hours to meet local needs (e.g. seasonal workers).	Birth to 6 years	In centre
In-home Child Care	Flexible hours	Birth to 12 years. Children older than 12 years in special or emergency situations	Child's home
On-farm or Farm based Child Care	Full or part-time, short or long term, flexible/seasonal. Dependant upon funding and carer availability.	Birth to 12 years	On farm in child's home
Outside School Hours Services	Year round care for children before and after school, on 'pupil free' days and in holiday times.	Primary school aged children	Often in/near schools or sometimes as a mobile service
Mobile Child Care, Children's Services and Toy Libraries	Flexible including holiday vacation programs, occasional care, long day care, preschool on a scheduled basis	Birth to 12 years	On or off farm, community facilities, school grounds
Multifunctional Children's Services or Integrated Child Care Services	Mix of services might include long day care, occasional care, family day care, preschool/kindergarten services, outside school hours and holiday programs.	Birth to 12 years	In centre
Occasional Child Care	Used for short-term care for casual work, respite and appointments.	Birth until school age	Community halls, shopping centres and specialised centres
Home-based Registered Carers	Full or part-time, short or longer term – flexible/seasonal.	Birth to 12 years	Child's or carer's home

3.2 Legal Framework

All child care centres or services that provide a child care arrangement are licensed under relevant State or Territory Government regulations. Regulations prescribe requirements such as staffing levels, staff qualifications and the physical standard of the childcare facility.

Funding agreements and regulatory requirements will govern the hours of operation and the number of children that may be able to participate in the service. Specific regulatory information may be found from each State and Territory Government Child Care Agency.

3.3 Child Care Services in Australia

Currently, Australian Government funded and supported options include:

Family Day Care Schemes

Family day care schemes provide care and developmental activities for children in the homes of registered carers.

Family day care schemes recruit, support and provide training for the carers, monitor the care arrangements, ensure that standards are maintained and provide information, advice and support to parents.

Care may be available for children of various ages, from babies through to before and after school care and holiday care for children up to 12 years. The hours of care may be flexible and can include a broad range of care arrangements outside of normal work hours and overnight care. Options available may include long day care, part time care, occasional care, relief, emergency, casual, overnight weekend and on call care, before and after school care holiday care, outside of normal work hours, 24 hour care and in-home care.¹⁷

In some areas, schemes have access to funding to cater for seasonal child care arrangements. Family day care schemes are facilitating in some areas care on farms in the child's own home and care in venues such as community facilities.

Long Day Care Centres

Long day care centres provide developmental programs for children aged birth to six years. Centres may be purpose built or operate out of a modified building. Some centres offer care for small numbers of school-aged children, before and after school and holiday care.

Long day care centres offer care as a priority, on a full day or part-time care basis, for parents that are working or studying. These services operate generally for at least 12 hours a day, 48 weeks of the year from Monday to Friday. In some areas, centres may operate for longer hours because of the unique needs of the local area such as shift or seasonal workers.

¹⁷ Source: National Family Day Care Council Australia email, January 2005

Flexible long day care centres have been developed in some rural localities where the hours of care and the days that the service operates is determined by need within the community. Standard care arrangements of 12 hours a day, five days a week, 48 weeks a year may not be required. The hours of care and the days that the service operates is determined by the community, the amount of funded places, the availability of child care workers and regional need.

Examples where this may assist farming communities might include child care being offered on designated days of the week when farming families travel to a community for business or at peak seasonal times when both parents are working on the property.

In some rural areas, existing children's services such as a preschool/crèche or kindergarten/crèche have extended or integrated childcare options alongside or within the service to offer additional programs such as long day, seasonal, occasional and holiday care.¹⁸

In-home Child Care

In-home child care provides care in the child's home by an approved carer, monitored and supported by an authorised agency.

This care arrangement may be available to families who cannot access other forms of child care or whose needs may not be readily met through another service. In-home care is aimed at providing care for children from birth to 12 years within the family unit. Care for children older than 12 years can occur in special or emergency situations.

Families in the following circumstances may be eligible for in-home care.

To be eligible the family needs to meet one criteria and in one or more categories.

The criteria are:

Criterion 1 There is no other child care service available (e.g. remote location).

Criterion 2 There is not a child care service available that can meet the child care needs (e.g. non-standard working hours).

Examples of families eligible to access in-home childcare may include:

- Families in rural and remote areas;
- Parents that work shift work or unusual hours;
- Families who have had a multiple birth of more than two babies and/or have more than two children under school age;
- Families where the parent(s) or child has a disability or illness;
- Breastfeeding mothers who are working from home.¹⁹

¹⁸ Source: DFACS 2001 Report 'Flexible Childcare in Rural & Remote Australia'

¹⁹ Source: In-Home Resource Support Service email, December 2004

In-home care is available through family day care schemes and other operators including other child care service types and agencies in the community.

On-farm or farm based Child Care

On-farm care can be facilitated and monitored through child care/children's services agencies such as mobile service, family day care and child care centres.

A carer travels to the property and looks after the children while the adults are involved in busy farming activities. The care is offered in the child's home for children aged from birth to 12 years. Child care is offered for farming families for full to part-time care ranging from several hours a day to several weeks. The length of stay is contingent upon funding and carer availability. Emergency on-farm child care may also be available.

Outside School Hours Services

Outside school hours services offer care for primary school-aged children. A broad range of activities is tailored to this age group with an emphasis on creative and physical activities in a relaxed environment. Homework time may also be part of the service program.

Some services provide year round care for children before and after school, on 'pupil free' days and in holiday times depending upon the location. Holiday care is also known as vacation care.

The services operate out of a variety of buildings, generally in facilities on or near schools.

In some rural areas, outside school hours services may operate from a number of different venues or through a mobile service.

Mobile Child Care, Children's Services and Toy Libraries

Mobile services operate out of community halls and buildings, schools and facilities where parents and children can be together.

Mobile Children's Services are able to move to different locations during the week and are responsive to the needs of isolated communities. Not all Mobiles provide a child care arrangement.

Depending upon the funding, staffing and the regions in which they operate, mobiles offer a range of services on a scheduled basis for children from birth to 12 years.

Including:

- Play sessions and preschool programs;
- Occasional child care for peak pastoral activities such as shearing or mustering and field days;
- Child care on a regular scheduled basis;
- Holiday vacation programs;
- Toy libraries;
- Child and adult educational activities;
- Early intervention;
- Parent libraries and information;
- One-off community event support such as gymkhanas and mini-schools.

A suitable vehicle with an appropriate range of materials and equipment is used to support the variety of programs offered. Hours of service vary depending on the locality, the distances required to travel, licensing requirements and family need.

Multifunctional Children's Services or Integrated Child Care Services

These services offer a mix of child care options for children from birth to 12 years depending on locality and need including long day care, occasional care, family day care, preschool/kindergarten, outside school hours and holiday programs. Programs are offered in the one facility or administered by the service, with care offered in different venues.

Generally, multi-functional children's services operate in communities that may not have a population size to sustain all of these service types individually. In some services, other programs such as parenting and health initiatives may also be provided.

Occasional Child Care

Occasional child care offers care for short periods for children from birth until school age.

The hours of operation depend on the service locality and vary from five to one day a week.

Occasional child care centres may be located in community halls, shopping centres or specialised centres. Occasional child care provides a service that is used for a range of reasons such as casual work, respite and appointments. Farming families may use these services to enable them travel into town to carry out business and appointments.

Nationally, a quality assurance measure is mandatory for long day care, family day care and out of school hours services.

3.4 The extent of child care options operating in rural and regional areas

Long day care, family day care, outside school hour services, occasional care and in-home child care services are available in every State and Territory of Australia. The 2003 Census provides a sample of availability. In this year, there were 9,703 child care service options operating in Australia of which 2,049 are available in rural and remote regions. The most common rural child care options by number of services are:

- Out of school hour services with 917 operating nationally; and
- Long day child care centres with 856 services.

Table 3.1 provides an analysis of currently available Australian childcare options by metropolitan and rural areas.

Table 3.1 Australian Child Care Service Options 2003 Statistics by Metropolitan and Rural/Remote Classification²⁰

SERVICES			
Service Type	Metropolitan	Rural/Remote	Total
Long Day Care	3,416	856	4,272
Family Day Care/In-home Care	213	201	414
Occasional Care	78	34	112
Outside School Hours Care	3,937	917	4,854
Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's*	9	27	37
Multifunctional services*	0	14	14
TOTAL	7,653	2,049	9,703

* MACS and Multifunctional figures are estimates from December 2000.

More recent figures supplied by the Department of Family and Community Services reveal that in 2005 there are additional Child Care Benefit approved child care services offering Long Day Care (123) and Occasional Care (76).²¹

The Australian Government assists with some child costs through the Child Care Benefit and Families Assistance. Families are only able to access the Child Care Benefit directly if they are using an approved childcare service (e.g. long day care, family day care, outside school hours services, vacation and occasional care services) or a registered carer.

²⁰ Source: National Office DFACS email, 29 July 2004

²¹ Source: DFACS 2005 Professional Support Co-ordination Application package Regional Profiles

Alternatively, families may pay the full fee to the approved child care service during the year and then claim the Child Care Benefit after lodging their tax return.

Carers and services that are registered to provide childcare by the Families Assistance Office (situated within Centrelink, Medicare, ATO access and enquiry sites) are called registered carers. Families pay the fees to the registered carer and then apply for reimbursement from the Family Assistance Office.

Table 3.2 provides a sample detail of Commonwealth expenditure for child care in both urban and regional areas of Australia. Nationally, in the quarter ending September 2003 an amount of \$369,449,389 was expended on Child Care Benefit with \$86,250,739 provided for rural and regional approved child care arrangements.

Table 3.2 Commonwealth CCB Expenditure for Child Care by Metropolitan and Rural and Remote Classification²²

CHILD CARE BENEFIT (CCB) EXPENDITURE \$ FOR QUARTER ENDING SEPTEMBER 2003			
Service Type	Metropolitan	Rural/Remote	Total
Long Day Care	213,781,051	54,603,655	268,384,706
Family Day Care/In-home Care	40,313,077	25,803,645	66,116,722
Occasional Care	1,050,551	573,061	1,623,611
Outside School Hours Care	28,053,971	5,270,379	33,324,350
TOTAL	283,198,650	86,250,739	369,449,389

Source: Centrelink Administrative Data supplied by National Office DFACS 2004.

Notes:

1. Excludes CCB received as a lump sum payment.
2. The information in this table is based on pre-reconciliation amounts paid to families during the financial year. These figures do not take into account Centrelink advance/acquittals to services.
3. Nationally weighted.

In rural and remote areas 123,903 families and 182,796 children are currently (2004) using approved Australian Government Child Care options. Within these figures, farming families would be represented however this statistical analysis portrays families from all rural employment backgrounds. Table 3.3 and Table 3.4 provide details of families and child access to the major child care options in both rural as well as urban areas.

²² Source: National Office DFACS email 29 July 2004

Table 3.3 Families Access to Approved Child Care Services by Metropolitan and Rural and Remote Classification²³

NUMBER OF FAMILIES USING APPROVED SERVICES			
Service Type	Metropolitan	Rural/Remote	Total
Long Day Care	271,065	71,855	341,931
Family Day Care/In-home Care	47,995	34,077	81,941
Occasional Care	6,506	3,378	9,882
Outside School Hours Care	134,886	26,746	161,265
TOTAL	419,725	123,903	540,867

Source: Centrelink Administrative Data supplied by National Office DFACS 2004.

Notes:

1. Total does not represent an aggregation of service type data as some families used more than one service type during the quarter
2. Total does not represent an aggregation of classification (i.e. metropolitan or rural/remote) data as some families used services in both classifications during the quarter
3. The information in this table is based on pre-reconciliation amounts paid to families during the financial year. These figures do not take into account Centrelink advance/acquittals to services.
4. Total classification figures and grand total are nationally weighted. Service type totals and service type by classifications are service type weighted.

²³ Source: National Office DFACS email 29 July 2004

Table 3.4 Children using approved child care services by metropolitan and rural/remote classification²⁴

NUMBER OF CHILDREN USING APPROVED SERVICES			
Service Type	Metropolitan	Rural/Remote	Total
Long Day Care	334,772	93,559	427,088
Family Day Care/In-home Care	68,531	53,068	121,403
Occasional Care	7,808	4,225	12,028
Outside School Hours Care	192,544	41,100	233,073
TOTAL	583,630	182,768	762,999

Source: Centrelink Administrative Data supplied by National Office DFACS 2004.

Notes:

1. Total does not represent an aggregation of service type data as some children used more than one service type during the quarter
2. Total does not represent an aggregation of classification (i.e. metropolitan or rural/remote) data as some children used services in both classifications during the quarter
3. The information in this table is based on pre-reconciliation amounts paid to families during the financial year. These figures do not take into account Centrelink advance/acquittals to services.
4. Total classification figures and grand total are nationally weighted. Service type totals and service type by classifications are service type weighted.

²⁴ Source: National Office DFACS email 29 July 2004

3.5 Opportunities to expand current child care opportunities in rural and regional Australia

In more recent times, a range of Government commitments have been made to expand funding options for child care services and review some areas of current service provision.

An announcement was made in the Australian Government's Budget (2003/2004) to provide additional funding of \$16.3 million over four years to enhance services provided through the Child Care Support Program. This funding is targeted to access to child care for children with high support needs and increase support for rural, regional and indigenous communities by establishing up to 13 new services in these areas.

The Government acknowledges that "in rural and remote areas, families often have fewer child care choice than their city counterparts" and in February 2005 the Australian Government announced that 53 child care services will share in almost \$2.5 million this year to help provide families in rural and remote communities with access to quality child care. These funds also will be used to replace some of the mobile children's services vehicles and to expand their programs into new areas to provide child care to families living in the more remote areas of Australia.²⁵

Across Australia an additional \$94.3 million has been committed in Budget processes over five years to expand the number of family day care places by a total of 4,000. Over five years \$125.6 million (including \$3.3 million in 2003-04) has also been pledged to increase the number of outside school hours care places by a total of 40,000 in 2004 and subsequent years. Funding provided under both measures includes Child Care Benefit to be paid to eligible parents and for OOSH funding for the establishment of new services and subsidies to providers in disadvantaged areas to create additional places.²⁶

In response to some gaps that were identified during the recent redevelopment (2004) of the DFACS Child Care Support Program, changes are being implemented that will benefit families and children in rural and remote Australia. Child care support targeted to rural areas includes:

- Funding to establish new services in areas of need, including rural areas;
- Sustainability assistance for small services in areas of need, including rural areas;
- Travel assistance for rural and remote family day care and in-home care services;
- Support for services in areas of identified need that face barriers to receiving Child Care Benefit or have viability problems due to low utilisation;
- Budget based funding to support some rural services;
- Funding to establish new services for Indigenous families and communities;
- Better access to professional support for rural services; and

²⁵ Source: Press Release - Minister Patterson 2005

²⁶ Source: Australian Government Budget Website

- Improved access to inclusion support to help child care services include children with additional needs. Mobile childcare services will now have opportunities to participate in this program support area which has not been available in the past.²⁷

In 2005, the Australian Government also announced that an evaluation of the extent to which In-Home Care Program is meeting the needs of Australian families with reporting due in May 2005²⁸ would be conducted.

Some key issues for the review include:

- Program management issues;
- The relationship between in-home child care and other programs;
- To what extent it is being used a substitute for other programs;
- Access quality and affordability issues.

The Commonwealth Government's Child Care Access Freecall Hotline (1800 670 305) and the Department of Family and Community Services (1300 653 227) are able to assist farming families to investigate whether local child care services are available.

A number national peak Children's Service agencies operate to advocate and represent individual child care services types. Details of peak agencies are provided in Appendix 5 and can be accessed on the DFACS website at www.facs.gov.au

A national Children's Service Forum provides a platform for these peaks to meet and collectively raise with Government a range of issues and childcare needs. The Minister for Family and Community Services convenes a national Child Care Reference Group that comprises a representation of a majority of the National Child Care Peak Agencies. In addition, a range of State and Territory based Children's Service Peaks function.

²⁷ Source: National Office DFACS email 29 July 2004

²⁸ Source: Press Release – Minister Patterson 2005

SECTION 4

ISSUES, BARRIERS AND CONSTRAINTS IN ACCESSING CHILD CARE OPTIONS FOR FARMING FAMILIES

Child care is recognised as an important component to enable a balance between work and family life. The ACTU highlights that “accessible and affordable child care is an integral part of meeting this balance”. Child care assists families to be able to take on work, generate income, maintain employment and for some, respite.

Access to quality and affordable child care has many positive outcomes for families including:

- fulfilling work expectations of parents;
- effective use of the skills of working women;
- supporting women’s equality;
- provision of a current and future labour supply;
- promoting economic self-reliance of families;
- reducing poverty;
- increasing family income and its flow-on effects to consumption and economic growth, job growth, ensuring a broad tax base to sustain an aging population;
- higher fertility rates.²⁹

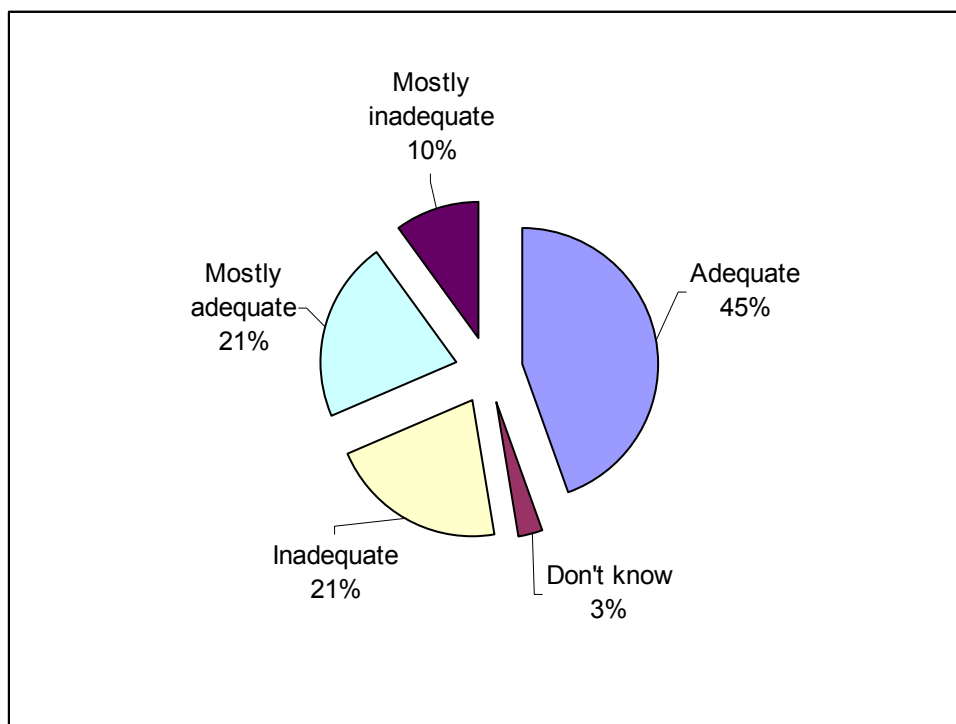
Note: ABS data reveals the majority of farming families live in inner regional outer regional and remote areas where fertility is higher than total Australian fertility.³⁰

In the 2004 survey, 859 responses were collected from people who live or work on farms at agricultural field days in NSW, Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia. Respondents were asked to rate their current access to informal and formal child care arrangements. Table 4.1 details the results of the 416 responses received in reply to this question with 52% in total indicating that the arrangements were not totally adequate.

²⁹ Source: ACTU 2003 Conference – ‘A Fair Australia Childcare Policy’

³⁰ Source: Labour Market Statistics 2004

Table 4.1 Farm Families ratings of their access to informal and formal child care arrangements. (n=416)



In rural and regional areas, farming families may have access to formal child care arrangements. The arrangements that were being accessed by farming families who responded to the national survey were as follows:

Occasional Child Care	=	42 Families
Family Day Care	=	35 Families
Long Day Care	=	32 Families
In home/On-farm	=	27 Families
Before/After School	=	26 Families
Mobile Service	=	21 Families

Occasional care enables families to book care only for the day required and is often an affordable option as families only pay for the hours of care use. Given that occasional care, in-home child care and Mobile services are smaller players in the national child care service arena (in terms of the number of services or child care places) these result suggests that these child care service options are being well used by farming families should they be readily available in the region.

Particular comment was made about a couple of valued services including RICE, Outback Childcare, RAFS and In-home Childcare.

“Able to access RICE and Outback Childcare (on Farm Care) based from Port Augusta Port Augusta – wouldn’t be able to stay in bush without”.

Finding a child care option and being able to afford the service is a challenge for many families. The ability for farming families to access child care to balance farm work and family life may not be so readily achieved.

This section provides insights about what farming families are doing in the absence of formal child care arrangements or at times when they cannot access child care and the impacts on balancing work and family life.

4.1 Informal child care arrangements for farming families

In the absence of childcare or children's service options, farming families are reliant upon either taking the children along as part of farming activities or utilising friends, neighbours, relatives for child care arrangements. Utilising informal carers that are not registered child carers does not enable an access to any CCB for the cost of this arrangement.

The inability of many families being able to afford to employ an outside farm worker should the mother be the primary carer often requires the mother to be accompanied by the children when participating in the farming work activities.

A number of farming families in the consultations indicated that they use a relative or friend for child care in the family home more than using a service that may (or may not) be available. Those able to have access to a relative or friend make good use of this opportunity with 74 families indicating that the informal child care occurred either in the family home or the home of friend or relatives. Shared care was mentioned on a number of occasions with a neighbour/friend sharing the care in their home or that of the relative, friend or carer.

It is interesting to note in the study into working people aged 45 – 64 years (ABS 2003) that “Women in this age group from Agricultural, Forestry and Fisheries represent 51,100 or 46% of all women in that industry”. This finding suggests that there may be fewer grandmothers and extended families available to assist young families with the care of their children if the mother is occupied.³¹

Some respondents indicated that farming families are utilising the services of a paid carer such as a nanny or shared carer. Some families have employed a nanny or home help but they are the exception. One mother commented “unlikely to find someone willing to work out here these days anyway” indicating that they would consider this if they could find a suitable and willing applicant.

Employing a nanny or private carer was a prohibitive option for some with no wage assistance coupled with the cost of travel.

Some solutions to child care arrangements shared by families included:

- Relative or friend;
- Extended stay with grandparents at peak farming times;

³¹ Source: Labour Market Statistics 2004

- Shared care by neighbours, friends, mutual swap with both taking on the responsibility of care; for example:
 - “*you look after mine this week and I’ll have yours next*” or swapping with neighbours when they have distance education school aged children;
 - “*I’ll teach yours and mine this week if you can take ours next week*”.
- Next door neighbour assisted cutting travel time and costs;
- Take children with parent whilst they undertaking activities on the property;
- A safe play area set up for the children in the farm work area;
- Children going with the parent for farm work and placing the child on the auxiliary seats in tractors or placing a child car seat in farm ute;
- Children left at home or the home yard or undertaking School of the Air lessons whilst parents undertake work;
- Setting strict rules;
- Leaving children at home with two-way, mobiles, use of remote monitors, UHF and walkie talkies;
- Putting barbed wire on home garden fences and gates so that the children cannot climb over readily;
- Never leaving children alone until after they were 10 years old;
- Care by older siblings;
- System of rotational informal child care between neighbours or parents in the area to keep costs down;
- Hiring an informal carer to visit one home and share cost with the neighbour(s) during peak times when all are busy.

4.2 Availability and responsiveness of Services to meet the needs of farming life

The lack of facilities or services was cited on a number of occasions and many farming families have as a result accepted that the responsibility is theirs to manage the children and the farm work safely.

“Simply, we have no services in this area. Access is not an issue – we’ve realised we have to do it all ourselves, living in the country means child care is just a dream. If you have kids you just have to accept that responsibility.”

One respondent said *“that women in the city would not stand for a lack of service in their suburb. Why do rural women accept a lack of services in their region?”*

4.3 Impacts of lack of child care and child safety

Farming families were asked to comment about how their current inability to access child care affects child safety or farm management practices. The key response from the national survey was that an inability to access child care, for whatever reason, meant that one parent had to stay at home (188 respondents) and the father worked alone which was seen as being dangerous, inefficient and limiting to the amount of work completed.

Many talked about the difficulty in weighing up the pros and cons of paying for care so that the wife could work alongside the husband. Some families hire a farm hand leaving the women free to care for the children as well, attend to the home and (presumably) office duties.

A number of women spoke about wanting to share the work with their husband. Because most families do not employ farm workers, the male is often left to work alone. This is seen as dangerous as well as meaning extra hours for the man to work. So women will take the children down the paddock or to the shed so that they can be an extra pair of hands as well as company. They acknowledge that taking the children is not optimum safe practice but that it is their role to help where and when possible.

It also appears that because women are the primary carer and therefore unable to participate in farming, their self esteem can be adversely affected. One said she felt left out, another that she and her husband did not ever have time together, another that she wanted to know what was being done, what decisions were being made.

- *Puts extra pressure on mother as the primary carer – children can't be near machinery.*
- *I am unable to help with basic farming.*
- *I presume other families face similar problems. We have to use a relative or book child carer in advance to come and stay a week at a time. Can only book a carer to stay in home. Thus limiting spontaneous events or needs and she has to be booked well in advance*

Many saw taking the children down the paddock or into the work area as the only option whilst acknowledging the danger involved particularly at peak seasonal times. 189 respondents in the national survey indicated that the children were taken with them as part of the farm work activity. Table 4.2 details the responses of 418 families (collected at agricultural field days in four states) to a question about how often a lack of alternative child care options result in children (aged 0 - 14 years) accompanying the adult doing farm work. Table 4.3 provides a cross tabulation of respondent access to child care with extent to which children are looked after in the workplace.

Table 4.2 Sample of children aged 0 – 14 years being cared for in the farm workplace due to a lack of alternate childcare options. (n=418)

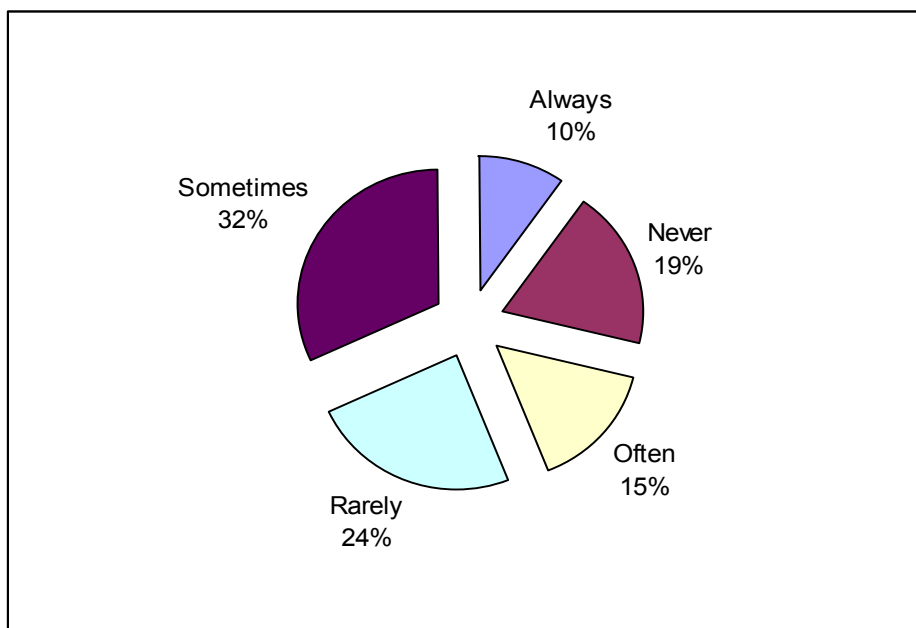


Table 4.3 Provides a cross tabulation of respondent access to childcare with extent to which children are looked after in the workplace

		How often are children looked after in farm workplace?		
		Always/Often	Rarely/Never	Sometimes
Access to childcare	Adequate/Mostly Adequate (n=266)	16%	54%	30%
	Inadequate/Mostly Inadequate (n=129)	44%	21%	35%

The distribution is significant according to Chi-square test; $p \leq 0.001$ (df=2)

Comment was regularly made that the farming activities were a seven day a week operation and the weekends are just as busy. Child care is not available at these times and the few child care workers available do not need to work extra hours. Working women in the towns or those earning off-farm with regular days work keep them busy enough during the week with regular bookings. Farming women cannot plan far enough ahead to make regular bookings.

Most respondents were aware of the risks involved in taking the children down the paddock or to the shed but felt that being aware of the risk and being extra vigilant was the only option if the job required two people. For example, a dairy family shared that they had set up a safe play area within the milking shed so that children were at hand but safe.

The restriction on work hours and jobs not completed or delayed was cited by 14% of the respondents as a result of lack of access to childcare. The necessity to pay for labour – either farm hand or child carer meant that the farming operation bore another cost. A number (36%) said that a farm labourer was hired to replace the mother – indicating that these women were seen as key players in the farm business but if care was not available it was up to her to take over.

As would be expected, a labourer was not hired to replace the father if he cared for the children. It would not be practical or useful when, generally the male of the farming partnership maintains the machinery, knows the farm infrastructure. However, some families share the care. One in particular spoke of feeding the children their evening meal, taking them in the ute down the paddock and taking over tractor driving from her husband. The father then took the children home for a bath, stories and bed thereby experiencing time missed by many other farming fathers. In this case study, the mother admitted that the peace of the tractor after a full day was welcomed.

Many acknowledged that farming practices were compromised by having to maintain extra vigilance if children were around worksites. They indicated this meant not only the actual physical safety of the adults and children but having the children out in the heat for example. Overall, comments gave the impression that not having access to care increased the load in a number of ways. Lack of time together was mentioned so too was not wanting to involve friends or family too often.

Leaving children at home alone was not seen as a good option. Some parents said that asking children to come as part of farm work activities caused fights or unsettled the children. The decision was to leave the children at home while farming activities were being undertaken.

More fencing and safety training was noted as one way to overcome lack of child care by some.

Examples of comments shared:

- We don't take children around fencing, hay carting, shearing;
- We try to train, educate and discipline the children so they are fully aware of the dangers;
- Whilst there are risks on farm, are the instances of child mortality and injury any higher for children on farms than in other areas of the community including all violence, road accidents, drug overdoses?
- I don't use child care on my farm because the jobs I do with my husband are either half hour jobs or on the weekend and we usually take the kids with us. They are aged 4, 8 and 10 years but they always come with us or we don't go.

- Children come fencing with us and play in the shed and yards when we are crutching or working sheep. When working in the cattle yards children sit in the back of the Toyota or stay home on their own.
- Defining when mother is needed – different from her wanting to be involved.
- Inability to access child care means children have to become very capable, independent farm workers because they've had to be outside and work with us. They are also very safety conscious because of the danger involved in being left at home alone
- Financial pressure requires one of the parents to work off farm. One parent becomes farmer and child minder. "I believe children are in more danger at home alone than with the farming parent. I would rather supervise my child in a work environment with its inherent dangers than leave the child alone around the house."
- Our children have been heavily involved in farming activities as toddlers as I was too. As teenagers they were more competent and safety conscious than most adult employees. I believe that with exposure at a very young age, they do exactly as they are told. As a parent I could think of nothing worse than losing a child to an accident – either on a farm or otherwise. I would not change the way our children were raised.

Given that many children are accompanying their parents as part of farm work activities there may be an opportunity for Farmsafe to consider the development of a resource document providing ideas and plans for safe child-friendly environments that individual parents could develop in areas such as the wool shed, a facility adjacent to the dairy or other relevant areas. This could complement the existing safe play environment resources.



SECTION 5

ISSUES ASSOCIATED WITH FUNDED CHILD CARE SERVICE DELIVERY AND DEVELOPMENT FOR FARMING FAMILIES – ISSUES AND BARRIERS TO THE UPTAKE OF CHILD CARE FOR FARMING FAMILIES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Farming families experience life in a diversity of ways. Current rural economic instability and social circumstances make the delivery and maintenance of children's, community, and social services much more difficult and tenuous but at the same time, more essential.

Respondents that have child care available in their region provided insights into their issues and the barriers associated with their childcare access. These findings support the view that standard models of child care are not necessarily meeting the needs of the farming families that participated in this project.

Issues that were limiting farming family access included:

- Distance and the time required to travel to access the services;
- Costs of care and the ability to afford options that may be available;
- Limited availability of child care places or childcare staff;
- Limited flexibility of services to meet their child care needs;
- A lack of knowledge of current options available.

5.1 Distance and Time

Many farming families acknowledge that whilst child care services may be available somewhere in the region in which they live, access is restricted due to distance, cost or time – sometimes all three.

Some properties are located simply too far out of town to access the services available on a regular basis and other the families are completely lacking an ability to access to care at all.

One of the biggest difficulties for most respondents appeared to be the time taken to organise care.

Distance is the partner factor in this constraint with 27% of farming family respondents mentioning that the distances to access a child care service was an inhibitor and 68% indicated the barrier was the time required to access the service.

If child care is available, the long return trip (twice during the day) negated the amount of time spent working on farm and therefore precluded use of the service. In most cases, it is simply not an efficient use of time nor cost effective with the additional consideration of petrol and road conditions.

“Many of us have to think carefully about the costs of petrol and whether we can justify the trip because we need to do jobs on the property.”

“Some parents have had to cancel care because at busy times they were unable to leave farm chores and drive an hour to get to the service then back to the property and do the same thing at the end of the day.”

Lack of transport was also raised as a barrier for 25 respondents. In areas where a school bus system operates, some farming families are using this transport system as a solution to their limited time and distances issues. One example provided was the preschool child travelling on the school bus to the child care service some 50 kms away. Children travelling on a school bus are at the discretion of the bus driver/service as another family shared *“though there is an extensive school bus system, the children attending child care are not permitted to travel on the bus even though other family members may have been on board. Thus, the necessity for parents to drop children into care.”*

It is assumed that if an older school aged sibling is on board they would be required to monitor the travel arrangement for the other siblings. The safety issue is acknowledged however for some families this was perceived as the only solution.

In some instances, pooling with neighbours to share the travel into town to access the care arrangements by taking turns was occurring.

Examples of feedback shared included:

During shearing the mother would need to spend four hours a day in the car to access child care leaving only four hours to work in the shed which meant it was easier either for the husband to work longer or for the family to hire a worker.

Another family indicated that their neighbour drives two hours in and then back to access care, driving a 120 km round trip for child care in busy times.

Access to child care would require me to take on 90 kms travel twice a day.

If we had a child service within 30 kms it would be an asset, travel beyond this makes care uneconomical and time consuming.

We are currently employing a farm worker on a part-time basis as otherwise it is a 160 kms daily journey to access child care.

By the time we drove into town it would not be worth while to try and use any child care service. I think that this would be the same for most families in our district. We really need something that comes to us rather than us to them. Does such a service exist?

One parent also shared that the quality of care available affects issues of access, time and cost meaning that they would access the service irrespective of these factor if arrangements available were of good quality.

A number of respondents stated they would like to see visits to rural areas by child care agencies and Government department officers.

For many, this appears to be a key as to how they can be assured there will be some interest or understanding of the needs of and difficulties faced by rural families. *“They need to come and see for themselves how unrealistic it is to organise the children, drive 40 kms in to town, then back home to help with shearing...then be back in town to pick up before 5.00 pm and drive back home in time to muster the next day’s mob.... Even if we hire someone to work for the day or days, we are often let down either by him not turning up or the contractor arriving one short. The one certainty in farming is... nothing is certain.”*

5.2 Cost

Cost factors are an inhibitor for farming families in their access to both formal and informal child care arrangements with 62% of respondents raising a number of facets and perspectives including:

- “have had to sort it out ourselves... we are so used to paying a lot for limited choices”;
- that they are unable to estimate their income and miss out on CCB;
- asset threshold limits access to Childcare Benefit;
- that they need to pay back a subsidy after end of year return
- “Most agricultural enterprises that are run by families generally find that they are above the asset test but this does not mean that they are capable of paying fees.”
- “Our area has been in drought for a couple of years now. We would currently have a real issue in meeting the costs associated with the children’s service because some of the families just cannot afford the fees”.

Child care costs including the building of a safe area adjacent to farming work areas are not tax deductible in Australia. The Australian Taxation Office does not recognise the provision of a safe playroom attached to the dairying shed for example as “the add-on safe place for children adjacent to a dairy is not income producing, and as such, no related costs are tax deductible.” (*Australian Taxation Office*)

Taxation laws in Canada enable farming families to deduct child care expenses as a legitimate expense from income tax according to a number of rules including the deduction can only be taken by the spouse with the lower income. Canadian representations have tried unsuccessfully to have this changed. In reality, it seems this tax benefit offers limited assistance to the farming families.

To illustrate the situation, a respondent provided the following Canadian comments.³²

³² Source: Email - Beverlie Nelson, Farm Women’s Network Canada, August 2004

For example in Canada, the female partner goes out to work and earns a minimum wage of about \$15,000 per year. Child care costs are around here is \$600 - \$900 per month for one child. The tax deduction or tax credit for this could only be subtracted from her income if the farm made a profit of more than \$15,000 that year. The reality with farming incomes is the chance of this happening in the past few years in Canada is close to nil with drought, weather patterns and cattle markets, farm incomes for the whole country are negative. So the bit of money that the female earns is then fully taxable and her child care expenses are horrendously large that it makes no sense for her to leave the farm to go to work. Or else the children get left home on the farm with the father as a babysitter.

No other business in the world allows a child's playroom to be in an operating factory with belts, chains, machinery etc. But that is the way that it is in farming. A farm loss can't have the expenses deducted to make a greater loss.

The Revenue Agency would have to prove that the person hired to look after the children did MORE other things on the farm in the course of the day”.

5.3 Availability and flexibility to meet families’ needs

For many families because of their geographical isolated situation, no childcare option exists. When a regional childcare option does exist, challenges evidenced included an ability of the service to meet changing need, diversity of population, farming peak seasons and work hours.

Farming is a seven day a week business and continues regardless of seasons or school holidays. The lack of care availability during holiday periods was mentioned many times.

In other areas where a child care arrangement was available, the service was fully utilised and thus limiting access. Families indicated that they could not rely on a child care place being available when required or child carer being available to access care in town or on farm when needed.

A few respondents indicated that in-home care was a feasible and affordable option for their situation however an ability to access an in-home carer was often not possible in the region.

“We have access to a Mobile child care service and farming families want the service more than one day a week.

The child care venue is only licensed for 12 children, because of the physical dimensions of the site. The demand is great and so we have some families who alternate so that more people can access the service. The families are most appreciative of the quality care their children are receiving.”

“We live on a property 56 kms from the nearest town and also have access to wonderful services such as Remote Family Care Service (RFCS-Frontier Services) and in home care. However, both these services have limitations. RFCS is only for three weeks in any calendar year (our mustering takes on average three months) and finding a carer to provide in-home care in our area is almost impossible. The in-home care organisations don't locate the carers.”

For many families the operational hours of the child care services did not match their needs in terms of farm work hours and this was highlighted by 44% of respondents. A lack of flexibility of services hours and requirements were cited as reasons for not accessing childcare.

The reasons for these limitations included limited places, a requirement to pre-book care, coupled with the hours that the services operated.

Family situation examples further illustrate this...

- *The family is not in a position to book child care for a particular day each week as their farming work is so variable depending on contractors and the weather. As so often is the case, they were not able to say they would need a place on a certain day as the decision is usually the night before to muster or spray or fence... This meant that the mother could not assist because there was no ability to book care at short notice. As a result, the property work took much longer as they cannot afford a farm hand and without the mother assisting they were short of one worker.*
- *We often require child care but not on regular basis, e.g. same day each week which means we cannot often access care when we need it. The service requires a regular booking.*
- *Flexibility of the service would help us but we understand how realistically unviable this would be for the service.*
- *Childcare is not available weekends, night time, harvest - over Christmas/New Year.*
- *Farm based child care, whilst excellent, is only available five days per week.*
- *Because of the hours that we work on our dairy, there is no way that we could use a normal child care service.*
- *Ideal would be a child care centre with staff nearer to home – currently one hour in and out each time. Poor road, distance to town, no child care open on weekends all makes it difficult.*
- *Bookwork is done after 9.30 pm and often until 2.00 am.*

One farming family also commented that a solution to some of their child care needs would be an extension of the existing Mobile Service child care service hours of operation beyond the current 10.00 am to 3.00 pm option. A Mobile service shared their situation with child care staff travelling up to two and half hours to set up the child care service and many families driving up to an hour to participate in the child care session. The potential to extend Mobile service hours may not be a readily available solution as service operations need to accommodate travel time, costs for the child care staff (in services the workers may be casuals), availability of staff to offer the service and parents travel time.

5.4 Lack of knowledge about child care services available

Many farming families indicate that they are not aware of whether there are any child care service options in their region.

Understanding what is available, limited knowledge of children's service types and where to access assistance was raised as an issue on a number of occasions. An expectation that people will automatically seek the agency to meet their need was raised as a concern. This is further exacerbated when the individual is isolated and has limited child and family services in the region.

It is recommended that the Child Care Access Hotline free call (1800 670 305) and the Department of Family and Community Services (1300 653 227) be actively promoted through the Farmsafe Australia website, publications as well as by all organisations that have a link with farming families and industry.



SECTION 6

BARRIERS AND ISSUES FOR CHILD CARE SERVICE DELIVERY FOR FARMING FAMILIES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Farming and other rural families child care needs will not be met effectively nor be sustainable within existing child care models which are designed for the more populous regions of Australia. The Australian Government 'recognises that the child care needs of rural and regional families are often different from families in larger regional or metropolitan centres' and that traditional models of child care may not best meet the needs of these families.³³

Delivering Government funded and supported work-related child care programs in rural and remote Australia is impeded by the widely spread and often sparse population. Butlin & Hall (1994, page 1) highlighted The Social Justice Task Force (1993) findings that indicated this as well as other further impediments, which included:

- limitations imposed by small population density;
- inflexibility in program guidelines;
- geographic factors;
- lack of staff with relevant training;
- ineffective co-ordination and planning by service providers;
- lack of regional database and social indicators;
- limited funding.

As a result it was concluded that...

"Innovative service delivery models are needed for people living in rural and remote areas which address cost, distance, cultural and climatic factors, so that effective human services employment and training, community, health and education services are to be delivered to these communities."

(Butlin & Hall, 1994, page 1)

Farming families and other community members that have attempted to establish child care for farming families or are now operating services provided insights into some of the issues related to delivering a child care service in rural and regional areas. Farming organisations as well as child care providers supported many of these impressions. Many mirrored the 1993 Social Justice Taskforce findings. Limitations imposed by small population density, funding and program requirements, sponsorship and co-ordination and staffing availability were evidenced.

³³ Source: DFACS 2001 'Flexible Childcare in Rural & Remote Australia'

Issues include:

- Funding viability child care service provision with small populations spread across large areas and catering to a diversity of farming practices, peak seasons, populations needs;
- Service operations;
- Inconsistency of licensing regulatory legal framework nationally;
- Finding suitable venues to provide child care service;
- Recruitment and retention of child care trained and untrained workers;
- Supporting child care workers in isolated circumstances;
- Sponsorship and maintaining a management committees;
- Complex accountability requirements.

6.1 Funding Viability – Service provision with small populations spread across large areas catering to a diversity of farming practices, peak seasons and population needs

Attempting to meet farming family requirements for child care supports over a regional area with diverse farming practices and peak seasons will vary from one community to another even though there is a demonstrated need for child care services.

Small numbers of children directly impact upon the viability of offering a service. In comparison to urban-based child care services, the number of children potentially attending a rural and regional child care service will at any one time be less given the smaller and more spread population base. The attendance of a small number of children in many rural communities could constitute a total usage.

Limited usage is further compounded by the nature of child care provision for widely spread populations with farming families who have varying work patterns, income and child care needs. There is a need for sufficient numbers of children and families that will access the service. This is another factor as to whether a service will be viable.

In many rural areas this may be an issue for farming families. A smaller number of children means a smaller fee base, potential inability to attract Child Care Benefit (CCB) less operational money and a higher service delivery cost per child. Itinerant as well as intermittent service delivery and attendance provides limited guarantees for regular and consistent payment of fees. Equally, limited contact with parents or an intimate knowledge of family's financial circumstances make it difficult to follow up on any non-payment of fees.

Regular fee income generated by families' participation as well as an ability to obtain supplementary income for the children's services from fundraising sources, cannot be considered a given for rural and remote locations. The reality of a low population base coupled with farm parents uncertain incomes and changing workforce requirements make fundraising to make up for funding shortfalls an unrealistic option.

Comments received from some farming families reflect this:

- *“The Funding source of the children’s service and the limited numbers of children that attend the service meant that the program was ineligible for CCB thus limiting affordability.”*
- *“Having sufficient numbers of children and the funding available to be viable so that parents could afford the service is one of the biggest challenges.”*
- *“Our community has set up a child care service for one day a week. The service has been operational since October 2003. We can only access State funding as we do not have the numbers of children to be eligible for Federal Funding including the Child Care Benefit. We have an average attendance of 10 – 12 children one-day per week (this is all the funding allows). We have had several days of 21 children attending. If parents could claim their child care fees or the service access Childcare Benefit, parents would send their children more often and our numbers would increase.”*

Experience has highlighted that the cost of all human service delivery to rural Australia will be greater than to urban centres due to distances and the isolation of the communities. The view that it costs more to deliver children’s services in rural areas is supported by Gain (1996, pages 21-22), Sturmey (1996, page 64) and Tallangatta Community Education Centre (1994, page 24). Gain suggests also it is necessary to factor in such things as “it costs more for someone outside a major centre to access a centre-based service because they have to travel further or communication costs increase with distance.”

One consultation participant articulated their concerns as:

“There is a need to raise a further awareness with Government of the uniqueness in needs for ‘rural and remote’ to facilitate a different perspective when allocating funding.”

When asked about opportunities for improvement:

“The simple answer is more ready access to services which carry the CCB or an equivalent funding option to cover the costs of service provision. Simply providing more child care options for farming families will not solve the child care problems if families cannot afford the service.”

The announcements as part of recent redevelopment (2004) of the FACS Child Care Support Program, of sustainability assistance for small services in areas of need and support for services in areas of identified need that face barriers to receiving Child Care Benefit or have viability problems due to low utilisation may be assisted by these measures.³⁴

It is further to suggested child care arrangements designed to specifically meet farming family requirements will need to be viewed holistically to accommodate location and farming population variables with sufficient flexibility in funding arrangements to allow for child care programs that are:

- reflective of the community; and
- adaptive to changing needs.

³⁴ Source: National office DFACS email 29 July 2004

In many instances this may be an individual budget that determinates with funding formulae based on **provision of service rather than the number of children**. Gain L (1995, page 21) highlights that a “focus on planning for rural communities needs to be on characteristics of the whole community... not just on a per head of population basis”.

The Department of Family and Community Services have indicated that in response to some gaps that were identified within the DFACS Child Care Support Program, changes are being implemented that will benefit families and children in rural and remote Australia including sustainability assistance for small services in areas of need, including non-metropolitan areas.³⁵

To accommodate the realities and ensure flexible service delivery with ongoing viability and sustainability, many farming child care service solutions may require a budget-based funding arrangement based upon service delivery rather than the numbers of children. A budget-based approach potentially may also need to incorporate an ‘**rural factor**’ to meet the costs of staff employment, travel ,accommodation, utilities, community development, administration, rent and the maintenance and support of any additional outpost bases including carers based in regional areas.

Responsive child care services targeting farming family child care needs be funded on an individually determined base rather than calculated from existing child care service type formulae. The announcements by DFACS as part of the redevelopment of the Childcare Support Program of budget-based funding to support some rural services may hopefully accommodate these measures.

Such funding would enable the services autonomy to determine a scale of fees, reflective of the service provided and family socio-economic situation. For example, an alternative to a full fee structure could be the provision of the carer’s board and/or travel costs in lieu of fees.

In summary, when considering the funding formulae for responsive child care programs for farming families it is recommended that service allocations reflect the true costs of service delivery with an additional monetary ‘**rural factor**’ percentage incorporated. To accommodate the realities of rural service delivery and to ensure flexible service delivery with ongoing viability it is recommended that...

- Child care services receive a budget based funding arrangement.
- Funding arrangements be based on service delivery rather than the numbers of children.
- The costs of staff employment, travel and overnight accommodation, utilities, community development, administration, staff release and training hours, rent and the maintenance of any additional outpost bases be incorporated within the budget funding arrangement.
- Rural and remote child care services sponsors have the autonomy to determine a scale of fees reflective of the service provided and family socio-economic situation. An alternative to a full fee structure could be for example, the provision of a carer’s board and/or travel costs in lieu of parent fees in the family home.

³⁵ Source: National office DFACS email 29 July 2004

The Department of Family and Community Services has produced some publications to assist current and prospective operators of long day care centres in rural and remote areas of Australia including ‘A study of viability factors for small long day care centres in rural and remote areas’ and ‘A guide for operators considering the establishment of small long day care centre in rural and remote Australia’. Both documents can be accessed on the Department’s website at www.facs.gov.au

6.2 Inconsistency of Licensing Regulatory Legal Framework – developing responsive child care services for farming families

Funded child care services are required to meet a range of child care regulations and licensing processes. These are administered by State and Territory Governments with varying requirements in each location. For example, out of school hours services including vacation care are regulated in each State and Territory except NSW. Services for school-aged children in New South Wales adhere to a Voluntary Code of Practice.

This legal framework irrespective of the service type is implemented to ensure the safety, health and well being of children in the care arrangement. Generally, factors such as the type of service or programs that can be offered, hours of operation, child ages catered, the number of children that can attend a service, minimum child/staff ratios, staffing qualifications, criminal record checks, child care venue, layout, facilities, play areas, fencing, safety and occupational health and safety all form the basis of the regulatory framework.

Flexible child care options are generally introducing new concepts or methods of operating within an existing system. In the need for flexible service delivery, child care services by definition may not fit into the existing legal framework. If this is the case, then some child care concepts will require the relevant State Government Departments recommendation followed by State Ministerial approval before they will be licensed to operate.

This approval may not necessarily be granted. For example, a family day care pilot project of sharing care was cancelled because the Western Australian Government’s licensing laws did not accommodate shared care arrangements.

In the development of child care options for farming families an approach is needed to ensure that the resulting child care service offered maintains the best interest of the child and family.

The ability of child care options to fully respond to some farming families child care needs may be limited due to requirements such a finding suitable venues, staffing and hours of operations.

Finding suitable venues to provide child care service

In some cases, the establishment and maintenance costs required for the licensing of a Family Day Carer is a major inhibitor to the recruitment of carers. Mobile child care services utilise under-utilised community facilities to offer programs. Finding suitable facilities that can be adapted to meet licensing requirements can be a challenge.

Respondents commented that the biggest barriers to setting up and operating the child care service included:

- *“The challenges in finding suitable venue - understanding day to day service delivery, attracting professional staff, distances to be travelled by families and limited access to other services like early intervention, training and supports in rural areas.”*
- *“Child care will begin to operate from the existing kindergarten but building works to extend the kindergarten and create a proper functional centre will not commence until late this year (we’re hopeful). A major obstacle will be the operation of the child care and kindergarten while the works are undertaken. They are likely to be at least four months. Being a small country town it is difficult to find a suitable location to relocate the children especially considering the Department of Human Services requirements for such facilities.”*

As a way forward to assist in the establishment and operation of child care services for farming families it is recommended that Farmsafe and relevant farming sector agencies encourage and support...

- State-based reference groups with a particular focus upon atypical and the flexible child care services concepts for rural and remote families may be a way forward;
- Representatives of the Department of Family and Community Services to maintain ongoing discussions with the State-based Children's Services Licensing Departmental representatives in relation to legal framework issues which may be currently inhibiting the establishment of responsive child care services.

6.3 Recruitment and retention of child carers – trained and untrained workers

The difficulties of attracting trained, untrained and experienced staff to both manage children and provide the child care services in rural and remote areas is acknowledged. Whatever the type or location of rural and remote childcare service, attracting and retaining appropriate staff will be paramount to the success of the service.

Nationally, recruitment and retention of child care staff is an issue and rural children’s services have been affected by this problem. Family Day Care reports similar difficulties in recruiting Family Day Care carers as do farming families that are required to find their carers as part of an in-home child care solution. This dilemma is evidenced on a national basis.

Comments received indicate that this issue is affecting farm families ability to access child care.

Insufficient family day carers and in-home child carers was mentioned time and again as the main reason for not utilising child care. Some families with more than one child needing care had difficulty in being able to get them into care at the same time defeating the purpose.

“Real shortage of child care in our region – there is no child care centre and only a handful of family day carers and so places are hard to come by. Those living and working in town are able to access these easily because they book regularly.”

“Places in town with Family Day Care difficult to obtain as there are few carers – particularly with three children.”

On-farm care is an ideal service option for many families as it eliminates the travel and time constraints for families. However, farming families indicated that limited places and few carers available for on farm care options limited the scope of this option.

One rural Mobile Child Care Service Manager that provides care arrangements for farming families commented that *“finding qualified professional staff (and in our case also supporting casual/relief staff) to run the child care service is a ongoing issue otherwise we run into trouble very quickly.”*

A number of activities have been instigated to seek to address child care workforce recruitment and retention issues. The Minister for Family and Community Services convened a National “Think Tank” with resulting ongoing processes around this issue. Individually, some State-based studies and initiatives are also attempting to explore this further. It is recommended that Farmsafe Australia, those associated with the National Strategy for Child Safety on Farms and rural farming Peak agencies maintain an active interest in these strategies and endorse any measures as appropriate that relate to the rural child care workforce.

Wage increases and incentive based employment contracts inclusive of a salary that parallels service management responsibilities may be one solution to attracting suitable qualified staff. The provision of readily accessible and cost effective training to support them in their role would also assist.

A recent Industrial Relations Commission (13/1/2005) seeking to address wage increases for child care workers found in favour of the LMHU (Child Care Union) to award significant wage increases for Victorian and ACT child care workers. A similar case is to be heard in NSW.³⁶

To enable a child care service management of such costs will require sufficient funding provisions within the service budget otherwise the costs will be born by the families.

Some regional child care options such as family day care and in-home child care support care arrangements for farming families that are at a significant distances away from the service base and infrastructure. The ability to support and monitor the care arrangements are limited due to the distance factor. As an example, a Western Australian Family Day Care provider shared *“I had a carer based three hours drive from base. This makes a stop over night necessary as you need to spend time with the carer. By the time you pay for fuel, accommodation, meals and staff wages you are looking at roughly \$500-600 per visit.”*

³⁶ Source: “Rattler” Community Child Care Co-operative NSW, Autumn Edition 2005

Future potential may exist in some situations for ‘sub-contracting’ localised supports to work in partnership with some service types. For example, Mobile Services inviting remote family day carers to participate in mobile play sessions or contracting of local people should they exist to travel on behalf of a service to visit and support a child care worker. For example, in Tasmania “*Coastal Family Day care flies to King Island to register the carer and then partner with the long day care centre to arrange support for the carer. This has worked well.*”

The Department of Family and Community Services have announced some Child Care Support Program funding changes designed to assist travel assistance for rural and remote family day care and in-home care services. It is hoped that this may better assist in the supporting abilities for remote are carers.

Without a training and support infrastructure, rural and remote child care workers and carers services face further isolation which in turn threatens the viability of the service. It is recommended that funds be put in place to ensure the ongoing support and training of these services including consideration to individual services’ budget allocation to purchase expertise as required.

Attracting and retaining appropriate management and suitably skilled staff will be paramount to the success of the child care services that are targeting farming families.

It is recommended that:

- Responsive child care services which target farming families be sufficiently resourced to enable the potential of the following to be achieved:
 - Incentive based staffing contracts inclusive of a salary which parallels the child care services responsibilities;
 - Accommodate any successful wage claims for child care workers;
 - The employment of an Administrator or Co-ordinating Manager separately to the services primary child care contact staff;
 - Budget allocations to enable the purchasing in of expertise as required.

It is recommended that:

- Farmsafe Australia, farming related organisations and those associated with the National Strategy for Child Safety on Farms maintain an active interest in these activities and endorse any measures, as appropriate, that relate to the rural child care workforce.
- Farmsafe and relevant rural peaks contact and work with TAFE divisions and other tertiary instrumentalities that may need data and evidence to support their requests for increased funding for child studies courses in rural areas.

6.4 Complex Accountability Requirements

The accountability requirements for Government funded flexible child care service types are intense and time consuming. Both the co-ordinating staff and the management committee will require a range of skills and time availability to complete all required components.

Throughout, it is recommended that child care options for farming and rural families services have an Administrator or Co-ordinating Manager with sufficient resources to fulfil this role. It is not sufficient merely to provide funds for a process to access Government Services, management infrastructure is required to maintain ongoing delivery. Related is the need for simplified and streamlined systems of accountability.

(Butlin & Hall, 1994, page 11)

The complex nature of many services will require adequate staffing time from non primary contact duties including negotiating with Government representatives. Various funding sources and allocations inherently carry with them a variety of funding criteria and demands. Dual funding sources in the provision of rural and remote innovative children's services further complicates the funding process with some rural communities accountable to two levels of government.

The development of a simplified system of funding, accountability and administration, will ease pressure on Government Departments and enhance the ability of an organisation to focus on service to their farming community's children and families.

Equally, the complicated processes involved to obtain funding to establish a child care option is an inhibitor. Some farming family respondents indicated a desire to receive information about setting up a service. However, those who have been involved in setting up local services say that the accountability and paperwork involved have precluded local community members pursuing the establishment of a child care service or should a service be funded, local services providing the best service – the reason they were started and still supported by the local families.

Responses from farming families and organisations to the consultation question:

What are the biggest barriers to setting up a child care service in rural and regional areas repeatedly included comments such as...

“Bureaucracy“

“We looked at trying to set up a child care in our town when our children were smaller. The amount of red tape and the process involved was mind boggling and very off putting.”

“Understanding and complying with Government red tape and accountability requirements including State Government Licensing regulations.”

“A lack of business training and future vision were major issues on our Child Care Steering Committee.”

“Given how busy rural families are, it would be great to see some Government department people associated with child care come and spend some time in our town, gauge the need for a child care service and then stop around for a while and help the community get it up and running.”

“Business training/strategic planning/governance training are important to enable Committees to be more pro-active and focus on strong business application to enable childcare service funding.”

“We applied for State and Federal funding to establish the centre. The State application took three months and countless hours to prepare by a small group of five volunteers with the bulk of the work falling onto a small group of volunteers ... Council offered little assistance - right down to contacting and meeting with an architect and negotiating with the quality surveyor. After lodging a 10 cm thick funding application the Department notified were successful in obtaining \$250,000 to establish a child care centre which will include eight hours of child care a week.”

A viewpoint was also raised that that child care services could be managed in some situations by a parent group or Government source to take the pressure off the local community volunteer committees. Considering the amount of time and effort involved in planning and implementing, let alone managing a local service on top of farm and family responsibilities, establishing new services may be better placed in the hands of local government, established child care agencies or operators. Farming families are coping now with a plethora of new regulations from Government, primary industry related processors and customers as well as Workcover and insurance companies. To marshal their own time and talents along with those of their neighbours and communities would necessitate a long-term commitment and very likely result in even less participation in farm work for the duration. In cases where a local committee has set up a service, very few have said the opportunity cost was warranted.



SECTION 7

THE WAY FORWARD – SOME SOLUTIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES TO ADDRESS FARMING FAMILY CHILD CARE NEEDS

In general, rural family members are usually able to identify their child care needs. Overwhelmingly, farming parents in all States and Industries indicated a need for **more comprehensive availability of service**. No one deemed child care unnecessary.

Parents in general have limited awareness of available information and related supports. This belief has been reinforced by the Australian Government's (2004) Report on Parenting Information based upon Australian and International Research as well as consultation with parents and professionals³⁷. The Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (2004) highlighted in releasing the Report the importance of providing information that targets parents, professionals and the community. Acknowledgment was made that successful parenting cannot always be achieved by parent information alone.

This section provides summary of the types of funded child care option and information supports that farming families within this study identified.

7.1 Types of child care required by farming families

Two types of child care options were highlighted as most adaptable for farming families child care solutions. Centre-based child care services were not in the main raised perhaps as their application to address the distance, time, widely spread and often sparse population is limited.

The two aspects of child care arrangements identified that are most applicable and adaptable to farming families are:

Itinerant Child Care Service

A mobile child care service for children aged 0 – 12 years that moves from venue to venue as community need defines and utilises existing community facilities in geographically isolated circumstances where a stand-alone service is not viable.

Care on the Farm

Child care for children aged 0 – 12 years provided on the farm within the child's home for designated periods.

There was no significant difference in the needs of families in the different States or Territories as all showed the same preferences. Nationally, child care arrangements cited in order of preference by farming families were:

³⁷ Source: DFACS (2004) Parenting Information Project

- In-home care with carer staying with the family was significantly the most important need identified. Whether at end of financial year, peak work times or for new baby or illness/emergency, many farm families would like someone to come and stay when there is a need. The level of this response was:

At end of financial year or peak work times	=	111 respondents
Assistance when there is a new baby, illness, emergency	=	100 respondents
Ongoing child care requirements	=	104 respondents

Comment was made that although on-farm care would be a solution for many, given the distances a carer would be required to stay for a period of time in the family home or separate accommodation. For some, finding a room, having someone living with the family or the cost of separate accommodation was an issue.

A Mobile service operating within reasonable distance during peak times was cited as the next most appealing choice on the wish list. Mobiles child care visiting the region at peak times was indicated by 59 respondents. A further 11 respondents indicated they ideally would like a combination of options.

Other needs identified varied in their importance but were significant in the number of times mentioned as desirable within the wish list of the survey. They included:

- A carer to visit one home and share cost and with the neighbour(s) during peak times when all are busy;
- An availability of services where lacking in the region for off-farm care including a regular Mobile child care service, before and after school care, vacation care and occasional care;
- In-home care during school terms (for home schoolers);
- In-home support and assistance with home duties.

Some other ideas that were offered to solve farming families access to childcare included:

- Tax deductibility of Child care costs;
- Child Care Benefit more readily available for rural services with small numbers of children;
- A licensing process to enable using a shared carer;
- More funding resources allocated to mobiles to enable more services;
- Crèches available at kindergarten for school-based seminars and meetings;
- Seven day a week availability of child care service.

To assist farming families to balance work and family life, it is recommended that funding arrangements be supported to enable to evolve and expand child care options to best suit the needs of this sector. It is recommended that for both established and flexible models of child care continue to be funded. To respond better to farming family constraints to access including distance, time and farm working hours, as a priority, on farm child care and Mobile child care models be funded and supported.

7.2 Farming family child care information needs

Contact Inc. has 25 years of experience in providing information and support in the community for isolated families and care givers and reveal that no matter where parents and care givers live they:

- Seek information from trusted sources in the first instance;
- Access information from a variety of sources;
- Seek information that is simple easy to read and uses non-professional jargon and pictures or drawings they have an associate with their situation;
- Want children's services and child related information;
- Require guidance about how to access information and services.

Findings in this project further supported this understanding. As families relate to many people and seek information from sources they trust it is recommended that existing child safety on farm resources be available in newsletter article format so that child care peak agencies, health workers, women's organisations and related fields can take the message to their ongoing audience.

The project survey asked farming parents about the types of information they would like and how they would access this detail in terms of how families prefer to access information in order of priority:

- the need for simple fact sheets;
- then printed books;
- followed by website technology as the preferred source of accessing information.

The survey also asked for farming family input into the types of information they would find useful.

Feedback received indicated that there was a need for information and ideas about:

- Child development;
- What other farming families are doing in the absence of formal child care opportunities;
- Funded child care options and how to establish child care arrangements;
- Assessing the home and farming surrounds to improve home and farm child safety standard measures.

As a result, a series of four draft fact sheet print resources have been prepared in simple non-jargon style presentation. The draft series cover the following topics:

1. A ‘tip sheet’ containing details about child safety on farms ideas that families have developed in the absence of formal child care arrangements;
2. A home and farm child safety checklist;
3. Child care fact sheet containing a summary of types of services available, child care fee assistance available and how to find out more about the services including links to local services, the types of programs offered and fees;
4. Setting up a Child Care Service in your Region information sheet, what to do, who to contact and things to consider.

To assist farming families that have minimal or no access to alternate child care arrangements, it is recommended that should future funding be available that Farmsafe also consider the development of a resource document providing ideas for safe child-friendly environments that individual parents could develop in areas such as the wool shed, a facility adjacent to the dairy or other relevant areas.

Child Development

Many respondents are keen to access information about child development. This was included within the survey questions an area of choice so that if identified as a priority draft resources could be developed as to children’s developmental capabilities in relation to being taken into or near farm work situations. Responses received indicated a need for child development information not necessarily from a child farm safety perspective. Given the isolation of many families from supports and services, this suggests the families want advice and assurance that children are developing at appropriate milestones. A range of widely accepted child development resources already exists including the Contact Inc. “*Watch Me Grow*” series ©. The development of new resources may not be warranted. However, it is recommended that the promotion of existing resources occur through the Farmsafe website and other Farm and Rural Peaks. It is also recommended that existing resources such as the “*Watch Me Grow*” © resources be utilised to ensure that existing child farm safe resources contain sufficient information to support farming families.

7.3 Promoting Farmsafe Message – Other Opportunities

So that Child Care Peak Agencies, Health Workers, women's organisations and related fields can take the message to their ongoing audience it is recommended the draft child care for farming families resources prepared as part of the Project Brief be made available in newsletter article format and in a black and white master so organisations and agencies may photocopy and readily distribute to farming families as required.

For so many farming families to ask for child development information it also suggests there is an opening for workshops that focus on this topic and this could also facilitate an opportunity to further uncover the needs, issues and barriers faced by farming families including child farm safety.

Many families also asked for local workshops on child safety to hear how other experienced families cope and some families want to know how to write submissions to apply for a service in their area.

The Australian Agricultural Health Unit (AAHU) in conjunction with Farmsafe Australia offers the 'Managing Farm Safety' training course - an education program embodying industry best practice in farm safety management and meeting eligibility criteria for FarmBis support. Qualified instructors present the course at a time and venue convenient and specific to the commodity group. The course includes both the theoretical and practical and demonstrates how to meet legislative requirements. It includes checklists, audits and recommendations for appropriate action for areas such as:

- Farm workplace and residence;
- Children undertaking work that is developmentally unsuitable;
- Farming family expectations;
- Needs and aspirations;
- Lack of appropriate child care;
- Lack of access to accurate and appropriate information about child safety;
- Rapid cognitive and motor skill development;
- Child growth and development;
- Family needs and aspirations;
- Nature of rural economy;
- Education and training;
- Access to information;
- Scale of operations, new technology and diversification;
- Hazard identification, risk assessment and risk control.

There may be scope for some of the identified farming family information needs to be incorporated within or an expansion of the current 'Managing Farm Safety' training course to enable further discussions and awareness raising about child safety.

National children's service peaks and rural orientated organisations have expressed a keen interest to promote child and farm family safety messages and resources. An opportunity exists to harness this audience to promote farm child safe messages through Peak newsletters and sector conferences. Child accidents on farms can often be attributed to visiting children. There is a critical need to capture as many people as possible to promote awareness of child safety on farms. It is recommended that this interest be captured by ongoing dialogue coupled with the sector providing a supply of newsletter articles and promotion at sector functions.

It is recommended that Farmsafe explore the potential of:

- Regular feature articles that could be available to agency networks for inclusion in sector newsletters, journals and publications;
- Child and family sector conference presentations and promotions.

Many Peak Farming, Rural organisations and Children's Service Peaks contributed within this project and maintain a keen interest in farm child safety and child care. For example, ICPA created a portfolio for this area. Many voices and organisations individually have an ability to take up some aspects raised in their own sectors and advocacy work.

It is recommended that:

- The Final Report be readily available on the Farmsafe website so that parties may access the information and utilise details as relevant in their ongoing activities on behalf of farming families, children and communities, mobilisation of a group to advocate for research and provision of child care services.

This report represents another step towards raising the profile of the links between child care and child safety on farms. The availability of farm family information supports about child care options channeled through as many agencies that they may have an ongoing link is one way forward. Equally, raising the profile of the expressed needs of the farming family for child care, barriers and issues will assist it is hoped in future opportunities to viable and sustainable child care options to best meet their specific requirements.

Contact Inc. believes this document should be used as an opportunity for Farmsafe to lobby Government for the relevant Ministers such as the Minister for Family and Community Services to arrange meetings with rural-based family networks (ICPA, CWA, Rural Women's Networks) during agricultural shows or field days in order to gain an understanding of the barriers to child safety on farms.

It is further suggested that Farmsafe consider the potential of a Farming Family Child Care National Initiative (such as a summit) that would bring together key farming, child care, community and government representatives to proactively evolve strategies to progress issues raised within this Report.

Whilst ever barriers to employing workers on farms multiply – new OH&S regulations, Workcover premiums and excess penalties, costs of compulsory training for staff and much more, the women in a farm family will be forced to become farm workers.

Women's increased participation in the farm labour force coupled with child care services not being about to offer a flexibility of services to meet their working needs will place children at risk.