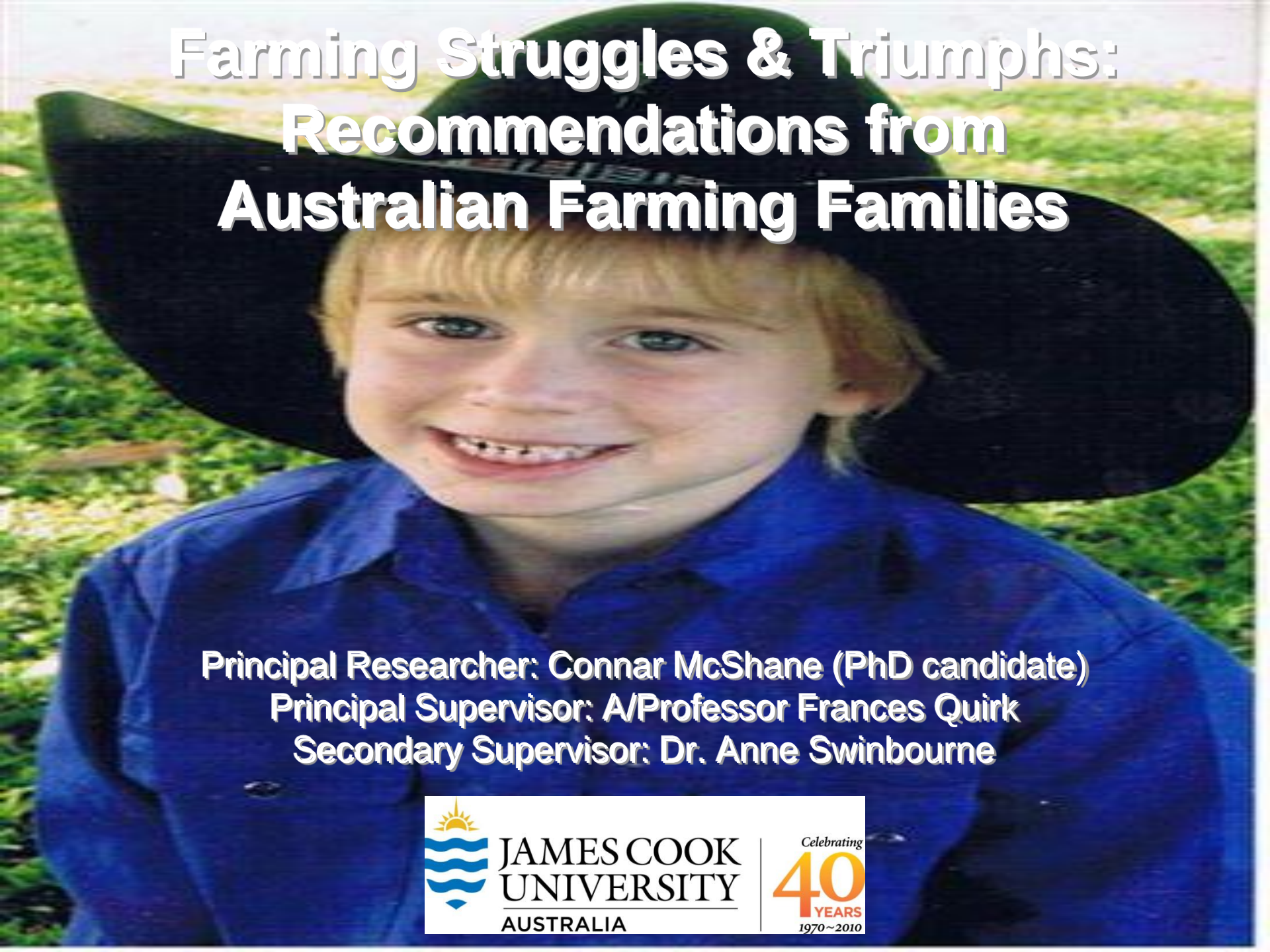
Farming Struggles & Triumphs: Recommendations from Australian Farming Families



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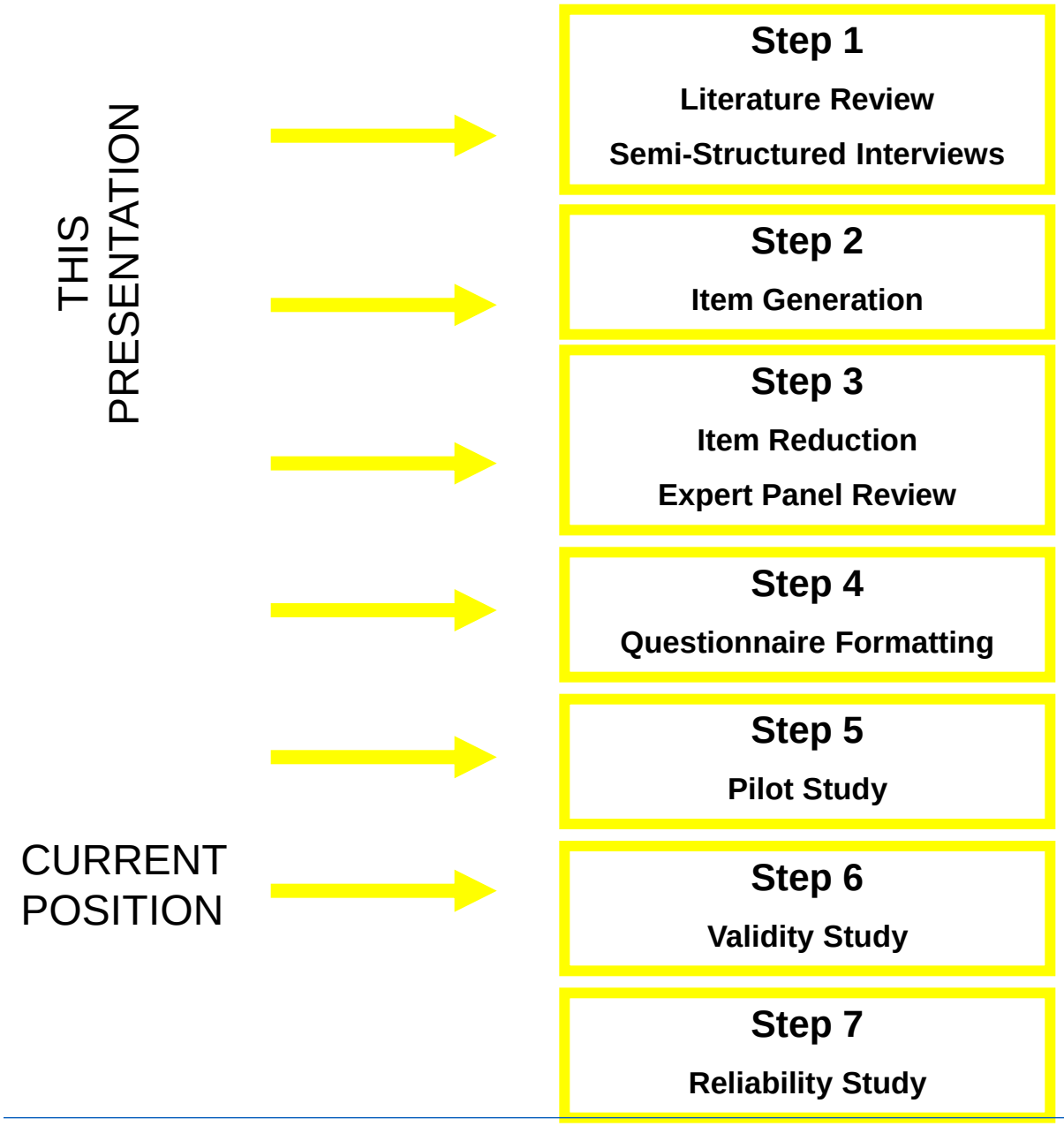
Research Aims

- To adapt, develop & validate scales of role conflict, stressors and coping strategies specific for farmers and farming families of Australia
- To investigate farmers & farming families:
  - Farming working environment
  - Well-being & life satisfaction
  - Personality & values
  - Stressors
  - Coping Strategies

Projected Outcomes

- Help identify and communicate effective means of surviving stressors
- Benefits of lifestyle – encourage new entrants to industry
- Identify successful strategies of working with family and managing w-f-c to use as recommendations for other Australian Farming Families (FF)
- Identify predictive factors of risk of suicide or decreased mental health status
  - High suicide rates
- Bring issues to the public eye and government
  - Raise awareness of needs of the Australian FF

Project Direction



Why this research?

- Findings from previous research
  - Unique work-home interface; no culturally-specific measures for Australian farmers and farming families
- Limited research
  - Re: impact of domain conflict on farming families well-being
- New stressors and challenges
  - Climate change, decrease in N of farming families
- Health status of farming population
  - High suicide risk, lower diagnostic rates
- Valuable industry to Australian economy
  - e.g. GFC

Today's Focus

- Despite the increase in number of challenges present in the primary industry, a number of farming families continue to persevere…….Why?
  - What drives them to continue - what keeps them on the farm?
  - What do you need to survive in this industry?

Participants-Interviews

Sample	31 Interviews 53 Participants (M=28, F=25)
Age	M= 50.44 F= 49.33
Location	84.9% Queensland
Years Farming	M =27.6 years F= 24.4 years
Product Type	Cattle (58%) Sugar Cane (34%) Horticulture (23%) Cropping (23%)
Intergenerational Farm	Currently (53%) Previously (5.3%)
External Employment	M = 25% F = 20%

Method

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1. Participants were recruited through Investigators attendance at field days, rodeos, festivals, advertisements, and media coverage.

2. Target sample was all farming types, all produce types, and primarily Queensland and South-Eastern Australians.

3. Investigator and participants determined appropriate time and date for interview.

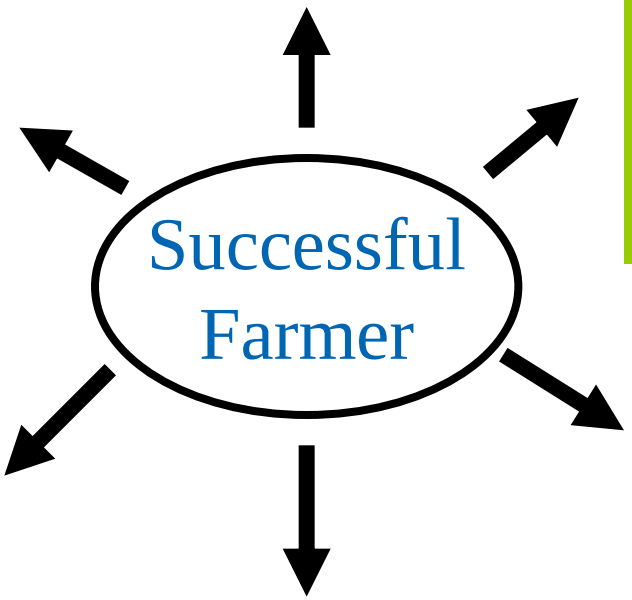
4. Interviews were conducted in person, with the Investigator travelling to farm locations, or over the phone. Participant locations ranged in Qld from Far North, North-West, South-West, and the South-East and in NSW the North Coast and Central Tablelands.

5. Interviews on average were 73 minutes in duration. Interview transcription averaged 3 hours and 40 minutes in duration.

6. A combination of grounded and content analysis, specifically relational analysis, was used using NVIVO 8. Items were sorted into predefined major categories though subcategories were generated purely on findings from interview content.

7. Items were then assessed for degree of commonality amongst farming families and then were assessed for gender differences.

Themes-Successful Farmer



"Accept Limitations"
M: the ability to accept that you might not know everything, the ability to accept advice and accept that when you go outside that things may not work out the way that you planned it for the day

"Adaptable"
W: …you have got to be able to take on new things, and have an open mind and be prepared to change with the times as best you [can]..., you don't have to have new machinery but you have to be savvy enough to know what will do the job for you.

"Education & Experience"
M: ….those that are running and operating successful farms and growing are those that have continued to learn, and whether that is through tertiary education or… just expanding and continuing to learn through… fellowships or…Even if its just working with your local agronomist and going to field days and exposing yourself to new ideas.

"Hard Working"
M: prepared to work when you've got to work, just knuckle down and get into it, just the blood sweat and tears sort of thing to get the job done, but at the end of it you actually do reap the benefits at the end of it as a whole.

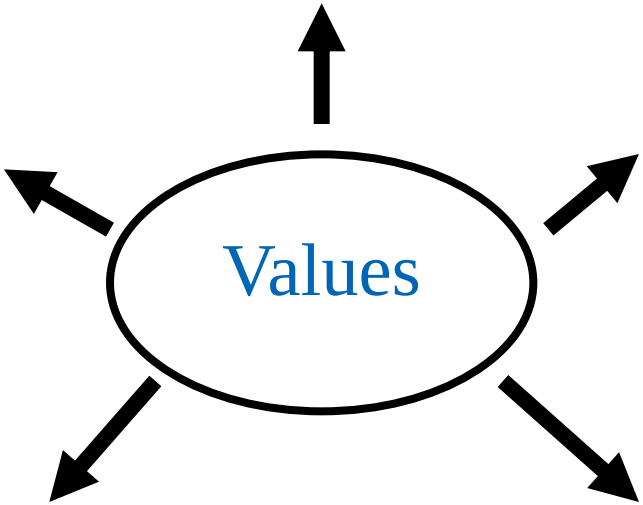
"Respect Land & Environment"
W: *respect the land, be responsible to maintain it in good order, don't throw your chemicals don't pollute…. look after the environment.*
M: *My idea of being on the farm, my view, is that its not the sugar that gives me my income, it's the land, so I've always respected my land*

"Manage for Future"
W: [what] I think is very important is to not actually show flash in the pan trends but to produce a more long term view of what you want to do and what you want to achieve in your farming life.

Themes-Values

"Work Ethic"
W: But if they [children] were going to do something they had to do it well, they couldn't cop out or anything
M: they couldn't pull out half way through if they decided [they didn't like it]
W: if they started something they had to finish it

"Enjoy Life/Be Happy"
W: …so that's what I value is [being] healthy, make sure they [the children] are healthy and happy. Live life to fullest I spose, live every day, that's how I take it.



"Hard Working"
M: …. Even in the office I feel guilty that I'm not outside, stupid really because its got to be done anyway because if you want to run a business its got to be done properly

"Family"
M: and try to do your best by your family and friends more then anything, that's number one looking after your family. Any decision that is made on most farms is making sure that their meeting the needs of their family now and their meeting the needs of their kids and grandkids.

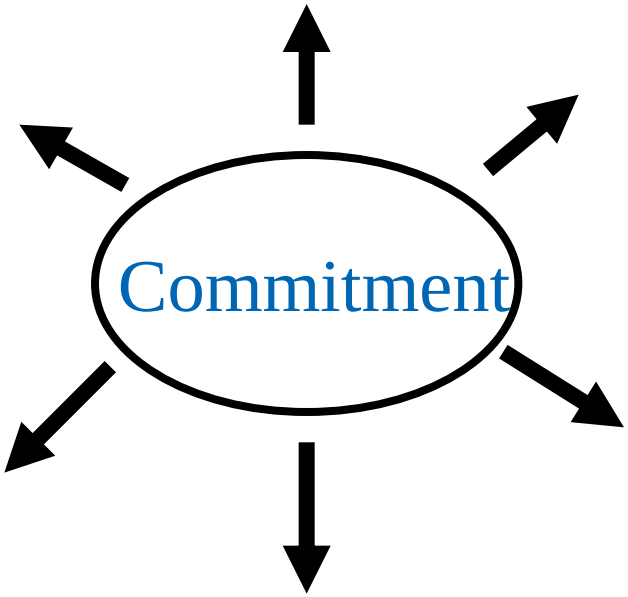
"Honesty"
M:… Like have a joke with them [buyers/agents], and tell them when they are way off the pace, just tell them straight, you don't keep too many secrets from them really.
W: which most people appreciate if you tell them straight if they are a long way off the mark, they usually appreciate don't they?

Themes-Commitment

"Lifestyle"
M: But it's the lifestyle, you are out in the country everyday, you are out in the open air, you are not imposed upon by other people, you are your own boss…

"Enjoy Work"
W: I think he's, its in his blood, he likes to do the work
M: I enjoy it, I don't know why, I hate it and I enjoy it

"Pride in Product"
M: there is no other reason that any other farmer is on the farm other then the fact that they love primary production, that they are growing things, that they are producing things.



"Encourage Children to Leave (-)"
W: my main priority was for them to be educated and find a life away from the farm. And if they wanted to come back to the farm well they could do that as long as they had qualifications so they could have external work if they wanted it…..not to be trapped

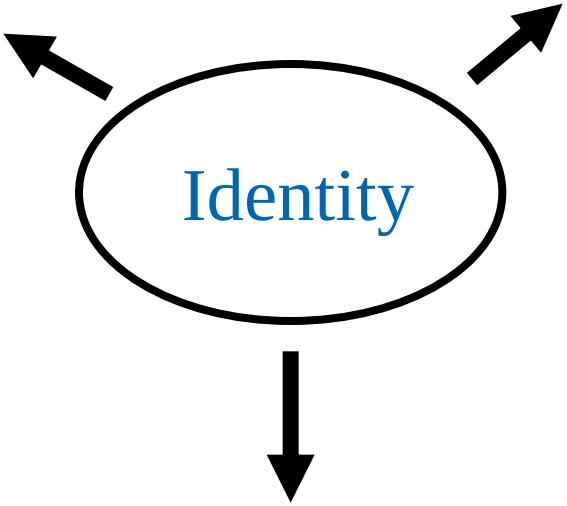
"Who I Am"
M: I honestly don't know anything else, and I honestly not wanted to do anything else.

"Here with Partner (-)"
W: I always question why you put so much into [something] that doesn't make money, that just – like I think there is a mental problem. But that's his choice that is what he wants to do so we just go along

Themes-Identity

"Enjoy Work"
M: well some people just like working with their hands and working and getting their hands dirty, dirt under the fingernails and that sort of thing

"Pride in Product"
M: just gives you a lot of pride, you are proud of what you can achieve.



"Who I Am"
M: it's just natural, its what we've done all our lives, that's who we are, I don't think I could have been anybody else…
W: born and bred to it….

Implications

- Understanding why people farm, why its important to them, and what they value may help:
  - Program implementation/health promotion
  - Implementing policy change
    - Bridging the gap between farmers and policy-makers
  - Identifying at-risk groups for poor mental health and well-being
  - Succession planning

- Understanding what skills and values contribute to a successful farmer may help
  - Retain people within the industry
  - Assist in training and educational programs

Current Study Update

- Item pool of N=519 reduced to N=95 items
- Reduced through quantitative and qualitative methods
  - item reduction study, expert panel review, pilot study
- Measures generated:
  - Farming Family (FF) Stressor Scale (N=29)
  - FF Coping Scale (N=25)
  - FF Role Impact Scale (N=18)
  - FF Buffer Scale (N=12)
  - Intergenerational Farming Impact Scale (N=11)

Current Study Update

- Item pool of N=519 reduced to N=95 items
- Validity study in progress
  - Farm stress and role interference significantly predicts psychological distress, burnout, and dissatisfaction with life
  - Level of Commitment & Identification relates to level of coping
  - Coping is related to satisfaction with life
  - Well-structured intergenerational farming families are less likely to experience role impact/conflict

Thank you

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