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## The demographic transition of the Australian farm sector

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### Abstract

Data from six successive Australian Censuses of Population and Housing were used to estimate patterns of entry to and exit from Australian agriculture. These estimates were then used to build a demographic model of the farm sector to SLA level and project possible future farming population structures.

Australia's farm sector is in the midst of a demographic shift that, when it stabilises, will leave a permanently older and smaller population. The major factors behind this shift are reduced recruitment of younger persons and delayed retirement. There was a rapid decline in the entry rate of young persons during the 1970s and 80s. Factors contributing to this include longer years spent in education, later marriage and economic pressures in the farm sector. During the 1990s increasing numbers of farmers have chosen to continue to farm on rather than retire. Over two decades these trends have dramatically changed the age profile of the farmer population. Since 1976 the number of farmers aged 20 to 29 has declined by over 60 per cent. The number of farmers aged over 55 has changed little. These trends are more pronounced in some industries and landscapes than in others. The dairy and cropping industries have maintained a relatively young age profile, the two most populated age classes in the beef industry are 50 to 59 and 60 to 64. The sheep industry appears to be in a progression towards an older population profile similar to the beef industry.

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