



THE VOICE OF THE COUNTRY SINCE 1869

## STEP BY STEP

Laura Healey with sons Leroy, 2, and Reid, 1, on their Bayles property in Victoria's West Gippsland region, where the young family is building a grass-fed, paddock-to-plate beef business from the ground up.  
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Picture: Zoe Phillips

## Growers cull unprofitable crops as food security in balance

# Crunch time for farmers

KATE DOWLER, FIONA MYERS and NIKKI REYNOLDS

Major vegetable growers are on the brink of "ploughing in" instead of harvesting some crops while broadacre irrigators say rice and grain crops offer "no commercial reality", as skyrocketing fuel and fertiliser costs bring Australia's food security into question.

Victorian Farmers Federation grains president Ryan Milgate said growers nationwide were "super concerned" about inputs.

"The government has got to ensure farmers (have the fuel to) plant and harvest their crops, it would be a travesty if there is a shortage of fuel later - it just cannot happen - but I am not sure they are taking food security seriously at all," he said.

"Agriculture absolutely must be considered an essential service - what is more essential than food?"

The federal government has failed to deem agriculture essential in its four-stage fuel plan, which nominates life support services, utilities and emergency services as critical sectors.

Leaders this week continued to call for calm as the Middle East war rages, with Attorney-General Michelle Rowland downplaying the need for fuel rationing, noting new arrangements with Japan and Singapore to

secure supplies. It comes as many major southeastern cropping regions enjoyed an early autumn break and the start of sowing. But in other regions in the Western District of Victoria and in NSW, north of Wagga Wagga, in the central west and New England, farmers are waiting on decent rain.

On Monday, diesel was selling at fuel stations for just above \$3 a litre, which was 10-20 cents cheaper than before the fuel excise cut was introduced.

Farmers report urea is hovering at \$1300-\$1400 a tonne.

In Western Australia, York farmer Rhys Turton said while parts of the Wheatbelt received a good break, it felt like "unprecedented times".

Mr Turton said crops were being sown, some programs were being changed on the run and some paddocks would not be sown at all as growers worked out what "might break even and what could end up being too big a loss".

NSW rice and grain grower Chris Morshead, of Yenda, said at the moment "there is no commercial reality in some of the decisions being made to grow crops".

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# Laura telling 'a really cool story'

Three years in to a grass-fed, paddock-to-plate beef enterprise, Laura Healey is laser-focused on connecting farmers with consumers.

The Lot Twelve business owner has grown to a collective 67ha between Bayles and Labertouche with her husband Brandon and their two young sons, featuring their farming experiences online.

Laura and Brandon, a full-time plumber, initially started rearing bull calves from local dairies for five years, to manage the grass at their Bayles property while owner-building their home. They manage a plumbing and excavation business alongside the farm.

They later decided to build the herd into a paddock-to-plate business when Laura was pregnant with her first son.

"I went from a career in banking that was very connected, community focused, talking to lots of people and I went on maternity leave and it was probably a bit quiet," Laura said.

"I had this time on my hands, looking after a little boy but I needed to fill my days a bit more ... So I had a steer processed who was a monster named Steve, we kept his hide as a rug."

Steve, a Shorthorn steer bought with profits from the bull calf sales, went into single cuts for their family and friends.

"Everyone loved it," she said. "I did a bit more research and identified Shorthorns had great eating quality, they were a bit unique."



Laura Healey on her Bayles property. Laura has developed a paddock-to-plate business called Lot Twelve, supplying meat boxes. Picture: Zoe Phillips



## Laura and Brandon Healey are determined to show the reality of farming, writes RACHEL SIMMONDS

The now manage 60 breeding cows, with both Shorthorn and Angus breeds. They diversified into Angus to secure a market premium.

Laura said they focused on good feet, structure, marbling and ease of calving, before accounting for above-average 400-day weights and strong growth traits.

Laura and Brandon officially launched Lot Twelve Beef in late 2023 and have had nine sales since, working from a quarterly model.

They started selling single cuts before moving to curated boxes sold from their website, as well as to Tassie Fine Foods.

Cattle are processed through Radfords at Warragul. The business gained its name from the subdivided property's initial title, which was formerly an asparagus farm.

"Everything we did here was just us," she said.

Laura grew up on a hobby farm with 10-15 cows and calves, while her grandfather was a primary producer and also sold beef.

Brandon's family were flower growers.

She said Brandon used his soil knowledge for pasture management, while she focused on administration, herd genetics and management.

They just purchased their

first seeder, and will sow a rye and clover mix this year on both properties. "We've only just had an autumn break," Laura said. "It's hitting us now, it's definitely still tight, the ground is still warm so Brandon is starting to plan out what he's doing from a pasture point of view."

Meanwhile, Laura recently became part of the 2026-27 Graeme Acton Beef Connections cohort, a 14-month mentoring program around a topic of choice.

The Graeme Acton Beef Connections Program is an initiative of Beef Australia, in memory of the late Graeme Acton, who was one of Queensland's leading beef industry figures, Graeme was renowned for supporting young people in entering the agriculture sector and generously do-

nated his time and extensive knowledge to supporting the younger agricultural generation. Laura hoped to focus on her social media and online presence to better connect the agricultural supply chain.

"There's this real perception about what farming is, and it couldn't be any further away than what it actually is," she said.

"We're not just farmers, we're plumbers and administrators ... We're complex but it's a really cool story."

Applications for the mentoring program opened in February and called on up-and-coming leaders in agriculture.

Laura was one of nine in the 2026-27 cohort.

"The Graeme Acton Beef Connections Program will provide rising industry leaders with a comprehensive mento-

**'There's this real perception about what farming is, and it couldn't be any further away than what it actually is'**

### LAURA & BRANDON HEALEY

#### LOT 12 BEEF, BAYLES

LAUNCHED a paddock-to-plate business in 2023

SELL curated meat boxes through their website

LAURA was named in the 2026-27 Graeme Acton Beef Connections cohort

RUN 60 Shorthorn and Angus breeding cows



ring experience designed to strengthen their leadership skills, expand their hands on industry knowledge, and support the development of a project aimed at benefiting the Australian beef industry," Beef Australia chief executive Simon Irwin said.



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