



Department of
Primary Industries



UNIVERSITY OF
CANBERRA

Supporting farmer mental health through resilience interventions:

Measuring, monitoring and building resilience

National Centre for Farmer Health Conference
12 September 2018

Dr Jacki Schirmer^{1,2}, Liane Corocher³

¹Health Research Institute & ²Institute for Applied Ecology, University of Canberra

³Rural Resilience Program, NSW Department of Primary Industries

The importance of resilience

Farming is unpredictable – at the best of times

Climatic variability, market change, pest & disease outbreak, technology change, shifting social license...

Resilient farmers are more successful in their business – and happier and healthier in their lives

Resilience – a process

The ability of a person, household or community to successfully adapt to adversity and to capitalise on opportunities

A process in which individuals adapt and move forward in a positive direction despite experiencing adversity

The NSW Rural Resilience Program & University of Canberra collaborated to identify approaches to measuring & monitoring farmer resilience in NSW

Resilience processes

To monitor resilience effectively, we need to measure:

1. Exposure

- To one or more stressors

2. Resilience resources

- That are draw on to cope & adapt
- Which are most important?

3. Resilience outcomes

- What was the outcome of the resilience process?
- Health & wellbeing
- Farm performance

Exposure to challenge/s

A farmer experiences changes such as drought, market downturn, pest outbreak, illness or other stress

Use of resilience resources to adapt

Multiple resilience resources are drawn on to help the process of coping with and adapting to change

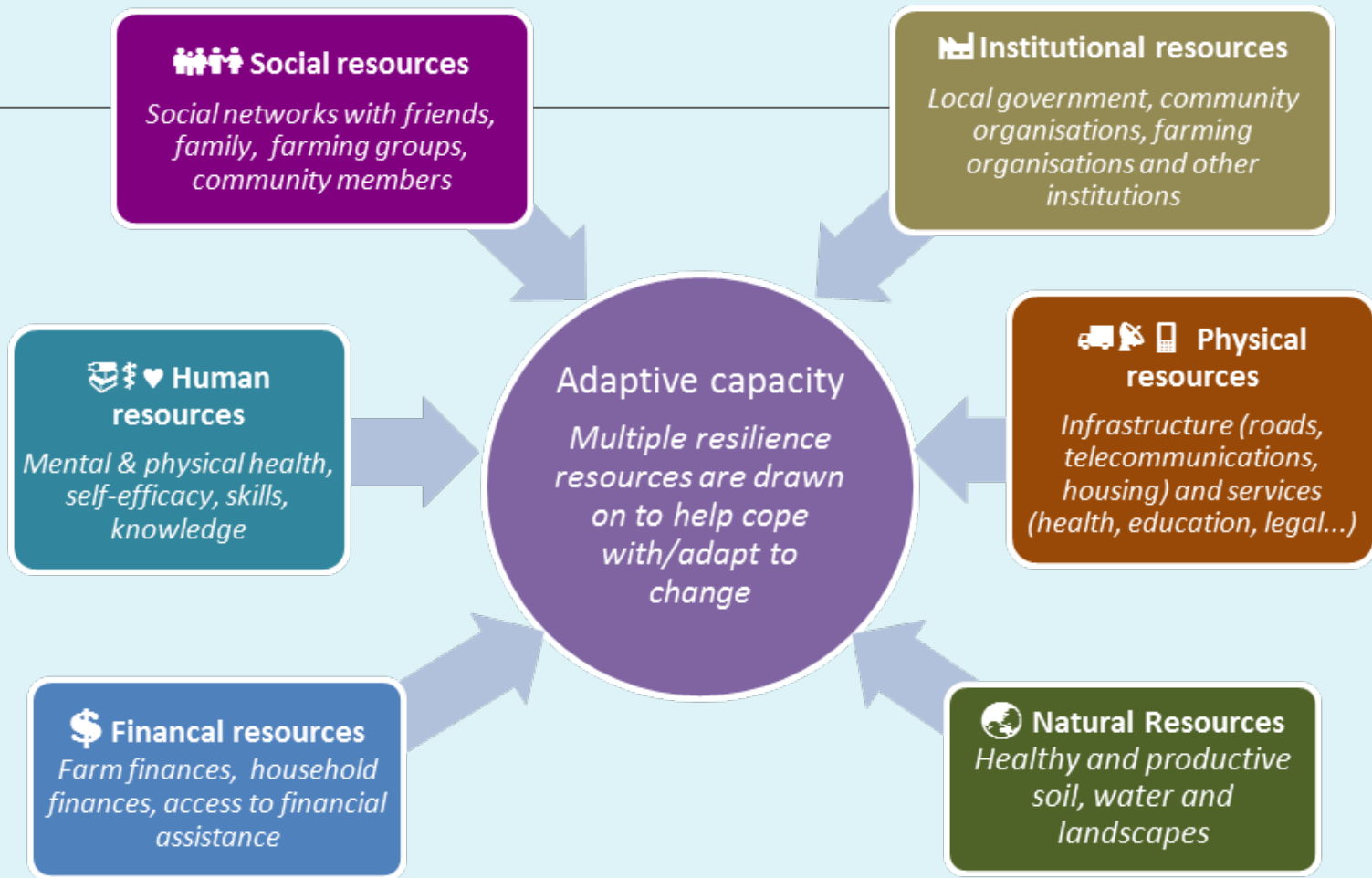
Farmers learn from experience, helping them build their resilience resources & adaptive capacity

Resilience outcome

Overall change in key areas of life such as farmer's wellbeing, farm financial viability

Resilience resources

Which resilience resources can be important to maintaining health, wellbeing and farm performance in challenging times?



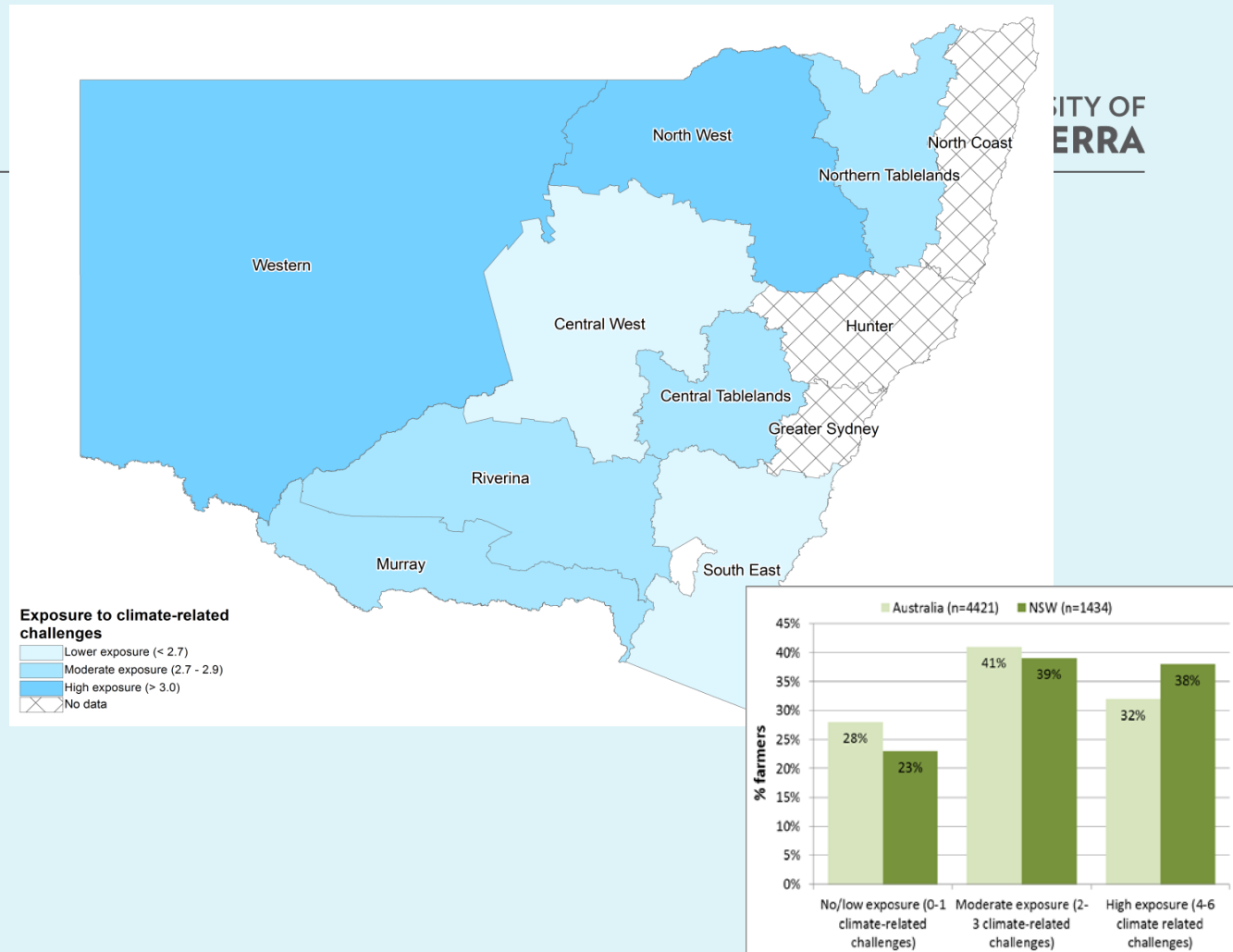
Measuring exposure

We need to measure cumulative exposure

Climate-related exposure:
Bushfire, drought, cold snap,
heatwave, severe storm, flood

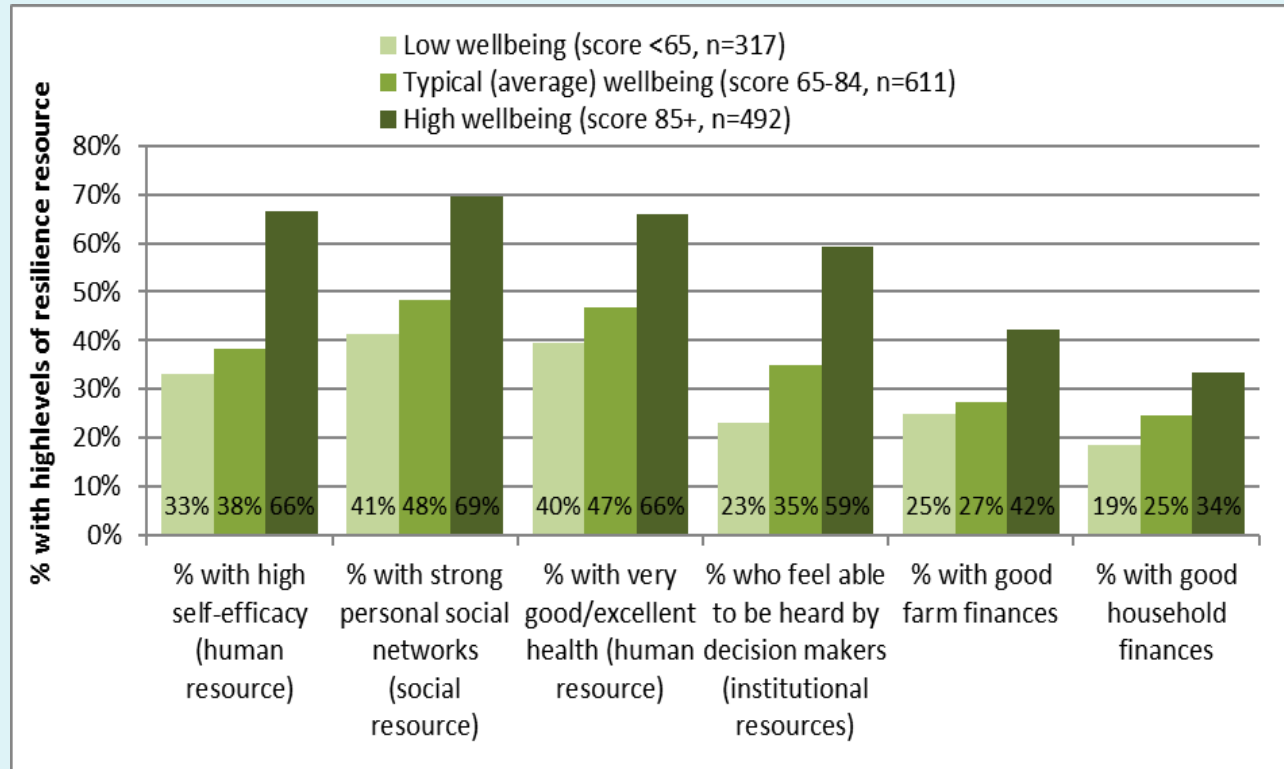
Most NSW farmers in 2015
had experienced 2+ climate
challenge since 2010,
particularly:

- 40-54 year old farmers
- Dairy, mixed beef/crop,
fruit & nut growers



Which resilience resources were most important for wellbeing?

1. Human resources – self efficacy
2. Social resources – strong social networks
3. Institutional resources – being heard by local decision makers
4. Human resources – health
5. Financial resources – farm and household



Wellbeing measure: Global Life Satisfaction

Which resilience resources were most important for farm performance?

1. Financial resources, self-efficacy and social resources all important
2. Farmers had higher farm financial resilience if they engaged in:
 - Drought preparation
 - Risk strategy development
 - Discussing farm plan with others
 - Actively monitoring outcomes on the farm



Monitoring and evaluation needs

1. **Rapid assessments** – early identification of exposure and emerging stressors
 - Needs to produce robust, rapid information
2. **Monitoring** – of access to resilience resources
 - Does not need to be rapid; does need to be regular (e.g. every 1-2 years)
3. **Intervention** – to support farmers to build resilience
 - Use rapid assessment & monitoring to identify key intervention needs; use monitoring to evaluate effectiveness

How has the Rural Resilience Program applied the research?

1. Working with irrigators, particularly dairy farmers
2. Expanding activities to focus on human (self-efficacy) and social resources (social networks)
3. Trialling a rapid assessment tool