

Australian agriculture

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1. Become landscape literate.
2. Pay for ecosystem services.
3. Address market failure.
4. Replan the paddock.
5. Build new industries, not just new crops.
6. Use native flora and fauna.
7. Create new partnerships.
8. Foster farmer-driven innovation.
9. Unlock tools for change.
10. Put the whole package to the test.

Introduction

Five years have passed since our 2008 version of this chapter, when we wrote:

It is possible to redesign agriculture in Australia in such a way that ensures resilience of both the industry and ecosystems on which it depends. To do this requires more than fiddling at the edges of the current system. It requires a commitment from everyone in the sector to rethink their approach, to re-envisage the farm, and to re-engage with each other in learning from the landscape itself. This is the challenge as well as the opportunity’.

This call for transformation has been echoed by many others before and since. The good news is that we are making progress, thanks in no small part to the efforts of thousands of farmers, other individuals and organisations who have been working to improve the sustainability of farm systems. The bad news is that we are still fiddling at the edges – not because of the lack of effort, but because we are working within a flawed framework that does not recognise the complexity and interconnectedness of our food and agricultural systems. The farm is not the only site of decision making. Producers, policy makers, retailers, manufacturers and consumers all make decisions that influence the agricultural landscape and the settings in which farmers operate. We have the opportunity for dynamic and innovative renewal of the sector, but farmers alone can’t make this happen. There is a need for greater leadership, pragmatism and attention to detail across the food system. Change requires more than idealistic notions or vague policy settings. Until we improve