

## **Drought – the catalyst for change!**

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Rob Rendell spoke at the 2002 BCG-WFS Main Public Field Day on coping with adversity, reacting on emotion and bringing about change. The following article aims to capture the essence of his presentation.

Drought events, or any incident of great adversity, are often catalysts for change.

The 1982 drought is the worst drought in living memory for most involved in Victoria's rural communities. It is also the single biggest landmark from which major grain industry shifts have occurred.

1982 was the deathknel of livestock in the Mallee (or at least a significant reduction), the start of "continuous cropping" and the beginning of the "Mallee Crisis". The Mallee crisis peaked in 1986 resulting in a very large shakeout of farmers - a painful process for many but it has resulted in fewer but more viable farmers.

Other key changes in the grains industry that occurred in the aftermath of '82 were: the wide scale adoption of "feeding grain" in the dairy industry which created a new market for the grain industry; and the increased activity of the "women-in-agriculture" movement - a fantastic improvement to regional Australia.

On an individual farm basis, there are many monuments such as new fences, grain sheds and equipment acquisitions that can be traced back to the 1982 drought. Some individuals got off-farm jobs only to learn that they were happier off-farm, while for others it reinforced their desire to return to the industry and make a significant contribution.

What changes will this season's drought be the catalyst for?

Change is essential to our society and agriculture is no exception. For change to occur there are a number of elements necessary: discontent; vision; plans; and resources.

Strange as it may seem, change cannot happen unless there is some discontent. This discontent may be as simple as "his tractor is faster than mine". Clearly the drought is a major source of dissent. A drought can therefore be the catalyst for change.

The question is do you have the vision, the plan and the resources to respond to the drought?

Looking passed the frustration and hardships of this season's drought there are opportunities. Time is something a drought provides grain growers (graziers can of course have less time because they are constantly feeding animals). At the end of the drought it is important to have something to show for the EXTRA TIME.

The challenge is to utilise this time in a positive and productive manner so that it stimulates you and those you come in contact with. Possibilities include going for a thorough health check; reading to kids at school; a course or learning; a holiday; build something (machine, shed); or participate in a community project.

Droughts can also lead to bargains if you are able to take advantage. Remember if you can afford the property or the machinery in tough times, you will probably buy it right.

Work out what you could have done to prepare yourself better for the drought. Don't beat yourself for not doing it but rather try and learn for the next drought (or flood!).

Lastly sharing issues can help a lot. Many people will create new lasting friendships out of this drought.