Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry in the Cairns region of Queensland, 2013

Charlene Trestrail, Peter Martin, Kristen Corrie, Ian Frakes and Kasia Mazur

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About my region 13.25
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1 Regional overview

The Cairns region is located in the north of Queensland (Map 1). The region comprises the three local government areas of Cairns, Cassowary Coast, Yarrabah, and part of the Tablelands local government area, and the major regional towns of Babinda, Cairns, Lucinda and Port Douglas. The region covers a total area of around 21 300 square kilometres or 1 per cent of Queensland’s total area and is home to approximately 224 400 people (ABS 2011).

The total land held by farm businesses was estimated to be 1 million hectares in the Cairns region in 2010–11. Agricultural land in the region was mainly used for grazing (855 096 hectares) and cropping (115 974 hectares), with small amounts of forestry (703 hectares) also taking place. In addition, 28 840 hectares of land held by farm businesses was set aside for conservation (ABS 2012).

Map 1 Cairns region of Queensland

Employment

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) census data from 2011 indicate that around 102 900 people were employed in the Cairns region. The Cairns region accounts for 5 per cent of total employment in Queensland and 9 per cent of all people employed in the Queensland agriculture, forestry and fishing sector.

Health care and social assistance (12 249 people) was the largest sector in terms of employment (Figure 1). Retail trade was the second largest employing sector (11 976 people) followed by the accommodation and food services sector (9764 people). Other important employment sectors in the region were construction (9171 people), education and training (8066 people) and public administration and safety (7818 people).
The agriculture, forestry and fishing sector employed 4896 people, representing 5 per cent of the region’s workforce. Of this, 84 per cent were employed in agriculture, and 7 per cent were employed in support services for agriculture, forestry and fishing. The fishing, hunting and trapping sector and the aquaculture sector each accounted for 3 per cent of the total agriculture, forestry and fishing employment. In addition, an estimated 1544 people were employed in food product manufacturing and 357 people were employed in wood, pulp and paper product manufacturing in the region (included in manufacturing sector employment).

Figure 1 Employment profile, Cairns region, August 2011
2 Agriculture sector

Value of agricultural production

In 2010–11 the gross value of agricultural production (GVAP) in the Cairns region was $687 million, which was 7 per cent of the total gross value of agricultural production in Queensland ($9.5 billion) for 2010–11. This is the most recent year for which data are available from the ABS on GVAP for this region.

The Cairns region has a diverse and important agricultural sector. In 2010–11, the Cairns region accounted for around 97 per cent of the total value of Queensland banana production, 96 per cent of the total value of pome fruit production, and 45 per cent of the total value of potato production.

The most important commodity in the region, based on the value of agricultural output, was fruit (Figure 2). In 2010–11, fruit contributed 46 per cent ($318 million) to the total gross value of agricultural production in the Cairns region, with the major crops being bananas ($274 million) and avocados ($15 million). Sugar cane accounted for 27 per cent ($185 million) of the total gross agricultural production, and cattle and calves contributed 7 per cent ($51 million).

Figure 2 Value of agricultural production, Cairns region, Queensland, 2010–11

ABS data indicate that in 2010–11 there were 2060 farms in the Cairns region with an estimated value of agricultural operations of more than $5000 (Table 1). The region contains 7 per cent of all farm businesses in Queensland.
Table 1 Number of farms, by industry classification, 2010–11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry Classification</th>
<th>Cairns region no.</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Queensland no.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sugar cane growing</td>
<td>615</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3,108</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beef cattle</td>
<td>489</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>12,708</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruit and nuts</td>
<td>386</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1,712</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetable</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1,086</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dairy</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>665</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurseries, cut flowers and turf</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>455</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other livestock</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2,383</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6,284</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Agriculture</td>
<td>2,060</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>28,401</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Where the estimated value of agricultural operations is more than $5000.

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

Farms are classified in Table 1 according to the activities that generate most of their value of production. Sugar cane growing (615 farms) was the most common, accounting for 30 per cent of all farms in the Cairns region, and 16 per cent of all sugar cane farms in Queensland.

A large proportion of farms in the region are small in terms of their business size. Estimated value of agricultural operations (EVAO) is a measure of the value of production from farms and a measure of their business size, and is somewhat similar to turnover. Around 39 per cent of farms in the Cairns region had an EVAO of less than $50 000 (Figure 3). These farms accounted for only 3 per cent of the total value of agricultural operations in 2010–11. In comparison, 19 per cent of farms in the region had an EVAO of more than $350 000 and accounted for an estimated 73 per cent of the total value of agricultural operations in the region in 2010–11.

Figure 3 Distribution of farms by estimated value of agricultural operations, Cairns region, Queensland, 2010–11

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics
Farm financial performance—Queensland

Each year, ABARES interviews Australian broadacre and dairy producers as part of its annual survey program. Broadacre industries covered in this survey include the grains, grains–livestock, sheep, beef and sheep–beef industries. The information collected is a basis for analysing the current financial position of farms in these industries and expected changes in the short term. This paper uses data from the ABARES Australian agriculture and grazing industries survey (AAGIS) and Australian dairy industry survey (ADIS) to compare estimates of financial performance indicators (Box 1) for broadacre and dairy farms in Queensland.

Box 1 Definitions

**Major financial performance indicators**

- **Total cash receipts:** total revenues received by the business during the financial year.
- **Total cash costs:** payments made by the business for materials and services and for permanent and casual hired labour (excluding owner manager, partner and family labour).
- **Farm cash income:** total cash receipts – total cash costs
- **Farm business profit:** farm cash income + changes in trading stocks – depreciation – imputed labour costs
- **Profit at full equity:** return produced by all the resources used in the business, farm business profit + rent + interest + finance lease payments – depreciation on leased items
- **Rate of return:** return to all capital used, profit at full equity * 100 / total opening capital
- **Equity ratio:** Farm capital minus farm debt expressed as a percentage of farm capital

**Industry types**

- **Grains:** farms mainly engaged in producing broadacre crops such as wheat, coarse grains, oilseeds and pulses, and including farms running sheep and/or beef cattle in conjunction with substantial broadacre crop activity.
- **Sheep:** farms mainly engaged in running sheep.
- **Beef:** farms mainly engaged in running beef cattle.
- **Dairy:** farms mainly engaged in milk production.

Performance of broadacre farms—Queensland

Farm cash income for Queensland broadacre farms is projected to increase from an estimated average of $95 500 per farm in 2011–12 to an average of $101 000 per farm in 2012–13. If achieved, the 2012–13 farm cash income would be around 25 per cent above the average farm cash income recorded for the 10 years to 2011–12 (Table 2, Figure 4).

The projected increase in average broadacre farm cash income is mainly a consequence of increased crop receipts, particularly in central Queensland, combined with increased receipts from sale of beef cattle in some regions.
Overall, production of winter crops in 2012–13 is estimated to have been similar to 2011–12, but production of summer crops is projected to decline significantly. However, the reduction in overall crop production is projected to be more than offset by higher grain prices to result in crop receipts increasing, on average. Significant differences are expected across regions with the largest increase in crop receipts occurring in central Queensland.

Figure 4 Real farm cash income, broadacre industries, average per farm

Note: p Preliminary estimate. y Provisional estimate.

Receipts from beef cattle typically account for around 70 per cent of average total cash receipts in Queensland. Overall receipts from beef cattle are projected to decline slightly due to lower saleyard prices and despite an increase in turnoff in most inland regions resulting from drier seasonal conditions and increased availability of sale cattle following above average seasonal conditions in 2010–11 and 2011–12.

Table 2 Financial performance, Queensland broadacre industries, 2010–11 to 2012–13, average per farm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance indicator</th>
<th>units</th>
<th>2010–11</th>
<th>2011–12</th>
<th>RSE (%)</th>
<th>2012–13y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total cash receipts</td>
<td>$</td>
<td>375 150</td>
<td>360 400</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>365 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total cash costs</td>
<td>$</td>
<td>287 450</td>
<td>265 000</td>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>263 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm cash income</td>
<td>$</td>
<td>87 700</td>
<td>95 500</td>
<td>(9)</td>
<td>101 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farms with negative farm cash income</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>(13)</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm business profit</td>
<td>$</td>
<td>32 160</td>
<td>33 800</td>
<td>(26)</td>
<td>23 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profit at full equity - excluding capital appreciation</td>
<td>$</td>
<td>80 940</td>
<td>80 200</td>
<td>(12)</td>
<td>66 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm capital at 1 July a</td>
<td>$</td>
<td>5 131 190</td>
<td>5 255 200</td>
<td>(7)</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm debt at 30 June b</td>
<td>$</td>
<td>585 060</td>
<td>569 700</td>
<td>(10)</td>
<td>573 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equity ratio b</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate of return - excluding capital appreciation c</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>(12)</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-farm income of owner manager and spouse b</td>
<td>$</td>
<td>23 650</td>
<td>30 400</td>
<td>(11)</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: a Excludes leased plant and equipment. b Average per responding farm. c Rate of return to farm capital at 1 July.

p ABARES preliminary estimates. y ABARES provisional estimates. na Not available. RSE Relative standard errors, expressed as a percentage of the estimate provided.
Average total cash costs are projected to decline around 1 per cent in 2011–12, mainly due to a further reduction in beef cattle purchases expenditure combined with lower expenditure on interest payments.

Despite an increase in average farm cash income, average farm business profit is projected to decline as the rate of increase in beef cattle numbers slows and as stocks of grain on-farm are reduced relative to those held in 2011–12.

**Performance of grains industry farms—Queensland**

Average farm cash receipts increased, on average, for Queensland grains industry farms in 2011–12 as a result of larger summer and winter crop harvests. Total cash costs also increased in 2011–12 due to higher expenditure on fertiliser, crop chemicals, fuel and costs associated with harvesting a larger crop compared with 2010–11. Average farm cash income for grains industry farms in Queensland increased to around $107,600 per farm in 2011–12 (Figure 5).

In 2012–13, average farm cash income for grains industry farms in Queensland is projected to increase further to average around $139,000 per farm in 2012–13, around 63 per cent above the industry average for the previous 10 years (Figure 5).

While Queensland’s winter crop production is estimated to have remained largely unchanged in 2012–13 compared with 2011–12, the area planted to summer crops in Queensland is forecast to decline by around 11 per cent in 2012–13, reflecting the very dry start to the summer cropping season. With lower yields also expected, total summer crop production is forecast to fall by 14 per cent. However, lower overall crop production is expected to be more than offset by higher grain prices to result in a small increase in average cash receipts for grains industry farms. The increase in crop receipts is expected to be only partly offset by increased cash costs, mainly resulting from increased expenditure on repairs and maintenance, fertiliser and hired labour compared with 2011–12, and despite a reduction in interest expenditure.

**Figure 5 Real farm cash income, grains industry, average per farm**

Note: p Preliminary estimate. y Provisional estimate.
Performance of beef industry farms—Queensland

In 2011–12, beef cattle turnoff was reduced on Queensland beef industry farms and cattle numbers increased. Average beef cattle receipts declined by 5 per cent despite an increase of around 2 per cent in average sale prices received for beef cattle. The decline in farm receipts was more than offset by a large reduction in expenditure on beef cattle purchases as cattle purchase numbers were reduced from the very high numbers in 2010–11. This reduction, together with reduced interest payments, resulted in average farm cash income for beef industry farms increasing slightly to an average of $95 700 per farm in 2011–12 (Figure 6).

In 2012–13 drier seasonal conditions and high beef cattle numbers in northern Australia are projected to lead to an increase in beef cattle turnoff and a slowing in the rate of increase in herd sizes in Queensland. Lower average sale prices for beef cattle are projected to more than offset the increase in turnoff to result in a decline in average beef cattle receipts for Queensland beef industry farms. However, further reductions in expenditure on the purchase of beef cattle together with lower interest expenditure is projected to more than offset the reduction in beef cattle receipts and result in average farm cash income for Queensland beef industry farms increasing slightly to average $96 000 per farm in 2012–13. If achieved this would be around 17 per cent above the average for the previous 10 years, in real terms.

The slow-down in growth of beef herds resulting from increased cattle turnoff will reduce the build-up in trading stocks on Queensland beef industry farms. As a consequence, farm business profit for the Queensland beef industry is projected to decline from an average of $32 800 per farm in 2011–12 to $26 000 per farm in 2012–13.

Figure 6 Real farm cash income, beef industry, average per farm

Note: p Preliminary estimate. y Provisional estimate.

Performance of dairy industry farms—Queensland

In 2011–12, average farm cash incomes declined slightly for Queensland dairy farms, mainly as a result of increased cash costs and despite an increase of around 1 per cent in average milk prices received. Overall, average farm cash income for Queensland dairy farms averaged $106 200 per farm in 2011–12 (Table 3, Figure 7), around 19 per cent above the industry average for the previous 10 years.
In 2012–13, a reduction in average farmgate milk prices received of around 5 per cent, combined with a reduction of around 3 per cent in milk production, together with an increase of around 3 per cent in total cash costs are projected to result in reduced financial performance. Farm cash income for Queensland dairy farms is projected to decline to average $58,000 per farm, around 40 per cent below the average for the 10 years ending 2011–12.

Figure 7 Real farm cash income, dairy industry, average per farm

Note: $ Preliminary estimate. y Provisional estimate.

Table 3 Financial performance, Queensland dairy industry, 2010–11 to 2012–13, average per farm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance indicator</th>
<th>units</th>
<th>2010–11</th>
<th>2011–12p</th>
<th>RSE (%)</th>
<th>2012–13y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total cash receipts</td>
<td>$</td>
<td>477 210</td>
<td>482 700</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>444 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total cash costs</td>
<td>$</td>
<td>361 560</td>
<td>376 500</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>386 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm cash income</td>
<td>$</td>
<td>115 650</td>
<td>106 200</td>
<td>(16)</td>
<td>58 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farms with negative farm cash income</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>(51)</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm business profit</td>
<td>$</td>
<td>15 500</td>
<td>20 400</td>
<td>(81)</td>
<td>46 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profit at full equity - excluding capital appreciation</td>
<td>$</td>
<td>36 550</td>
<td>45 300</td>
<td>(34)</td>
<td>23 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm capital at 1 July a</td>
<td>$</td>
<td>3 307 960</td>
<td>3 125 700</td>
<td>(9)</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm debt at 30 June b</td>
<td>$</td>
<td>220 330</td>
<td>272 500</td>
<td>(15)</td>
<td>270 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equity ratio b</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate of return - excluding capital appreciation c</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>(38)</td>
<td>-0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-farm income of owner manager and spouse b</td>
<td>$</td>
<td>10 680</td>
<td>7 500</td>
<td>(32)</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: a Excludes leased plant and equipment. b Average per responding farm. c Rate of return to farm capital at 1 July.
p ABARES preliminary estimates. y ABARES provisional estimates. na Not available. RSE Relative standard errors, expressed as a percentage of the estimate provided.
3 Fisheries sector

Cairns is a key commercial fishing port in Queensland. It is the fourth largest home port for the Commonwealth Eastern Tuna and Billfish Fishery and a home port for the Commonwealth Northern Prawn fishery. The diverse range of wild-caught species in this region include: prawns, barramundi, coral trout, Spanish mackerel, tuna and lobster. The East Coast Trawl Fishery is the largest of Queensland’s commercial fisheries operating in the region targeting mostly prawns, but also harvests bugs, squid, and other species.

In 2010–11, the far north area of Queensland — an area comprising the Cairns region — contributed $19.4 million (22 per cent) of Queensland’s total value of aquaculture production ($86.3 million) (Wingfield 2012). The Far North area produced 2115 tonnes of aquaculture production in 2010–11 accounting for 30 per cent of the volume of Queensland aquaculture production, utilising 238 hectares of ponds. The aquaculture industry in the area employed approximately 131 persons in 2010–11. Aquaculture species produced in the Far North area include barramundi, jade perch, prawns and pearls.

Recreational fishing is a popular activity in far north Queensland. The proportion of residents in this area that fish at least once each year is 23 per cent, significantly higher than the Queensland average of 17 per cent (Taylor et al. 2012). Fishers from the Cairns region fish mostly in the local coastal waters and adjacent reefs within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park from boats, or in the central coast catchment to the south from the shore and from boats. Common species caught by fishers are coral trout, pikey bream, tropical snapper, barramundi, trumpeter whiting, mangrove jack, Spanish mackerel and mud crab. The number of barramundi caught by fishers in the far north is about twice that of any other fish species although it is not the most common fish harvested, due to the high proportion of released fish. This region is a popular destination for fishers travelling from other regions of Queensland, elsewhere in Australia and overseas.

In 2010–11 the total value of Queensland’s fisheries production was $271 million, a decrease of 16 per cent ($51 million) from 2009–10. Queensland contributed 12 per cent of the total value of Australian fisheries production. In value terms, the wild-catch sector accounted for 70 per cent ($188.5 million) of the state’s total production and the aquaculture sector accounted for the remaining 30 per cent ($82.5 million).

Queensland’s wild-catch fisheries sector provides a range of fisheries products. The highest contribution is from prawns, which account for 35 per cent of the total value of wild-catch fisheries with a value of $65 million, followed by crabs (16 per cent; $29 million), coral trout (14 per cent; $26 million) and bugs ($13 million; 7 per cent). Over the last decade the value of Queensland’s wild-caught fisheries products has reduced from $337 million (2000–01) to $188 million (2010–11; in 2010–11 terms). Prawns and coral trout, showed the largest decline in the real value of production over the past decade, reducing by $43 million and $54 million respectively. A large proportion of prawns and coral trout are exported and the appreciation of the Australian dollar since 2000–01 has had a significant effect on the value of exports of these products. Competition from imported prawns in the domestic market has also placed significant downward pressure on prices in recent years.

The value of Queensland’s aquaculture production has declined by 17 per cent from $99 million in 2009–10 to $82 million in 2010–11. Prawn and barramundi farming account for the largest share of production by value, with prawns accounting for 67 per cent, and $56 million of production, followed by barramundi (26 per cent; $21 million).
Commonwealth fisheries active in Queensland include the Commonwealth Eastern Tuna and Billfish fishery (mainly supplying export markets with tuna), the Coral Sea Fishery, and the Northern Prawn Fishery in the Gulf of Carpentaria. The Torres Strait fisheries for prawns, finfish, prawns and beche-de-mer and trochus are also active in the Queensland region.

In 2011–12, Queensland's fisheries product exports were valued at $143 million. The main export products include live and fresh, chilled or frozen fish, prawns and rock lobster. Hong Kong, Japan and the United States are the major destinations for Queensland fisheries exports, accounting for 53 per cent, 20 per cent and 7 per cent of the total value of exports in 2011–12, respectively. Other major export destinations include Vietnam (5 per cent) and China (4 per cent).

Recreational fishing is popular in Queensland, with approximately 700,000 Queenslanders going recreational fishing, crabbing or prawning in the 12 months prior to July 2010 (QDAFF 2013). Total expenditure in the sector was estimated to be between $350 million and $420 million in 2008–09 (DEEDI 2009). The tropical waters of Queensland are also a key area for tourism, attracting anglers from around the world and Australia. Popular target species include crabs, prawns and a range of finfish species including cods and groupers, coral trout, red throat emperor, rosy snapper, and mackerel. For freshwater activity some key species caught include barramundi, eels, silver perch, and yabby and blue claw crayfish.
4 Forestry sector

In 2010–11, the total plantation area in the Cairns region was approximately 16 300 hectares, comprised of around 400 hectares of hardwood plantations, 8100 hectares of softwood plantations and 7800 hectares of other plantations. In the Northern Queensland National Plantation Inventory (NPI) region the main hardwood species planted are Dunn’s white gum (*Eucalyptus dunnii*) and teak (*Tectona grandis*). The main softwood species planted are Caribbean pine (*Pinus caribaea*) and hoop pine (*Araucaria cunninghamii*). Total log supply from plantations in the Northern Queensland NPI region is forecast to increase to 298 000 cubic metres a year for the 2015–19 period, producing mainly softwood sawlogs (80 per cent).

In 2008, there were around 1.5 million hectares of native forests in the Cairns region, comprised mainly of rainforest (586 000 hectares), eucalypt medium open (371 000 hectares) and eucalypt medium woodland (320 000 hectares) forest types. The majority of the native forests are managed for national conservation (614 000 hectares), around 488 000 hectares are leased forests and approximately 117 000 hectares are multiple use forests available for timber production. Major timber processing industries are sawmills located at Ravenshoe and Mareeba.

Queensland’s forest and wood product industry generated around $4 billion of sales and service income in 2010–11. Most of the income was generated from the sale of wood products (such as structural wood and woodchips) estimated at around $3 billion. The remaining $1 billion was generated from the sale of paper and paper products. Despite being Australia’s largest wood product export state, Queensland is a relatively small exporter of woodchips. In 2010–11, Queensland exported 63 000 tonnes of woodchips, valued at $11 million. In 2011–12, woodchip exports from the state declined to 52 000 tonnes, valued at around $8 million.
References


