Farming, Droughts and Covid-19: The Creation and Maintenance of Community in a Time of Hardship and Forced Social Restrictions

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Abstract

In the summer of 2019-2020 the Hawkes Bay farming community of RD9 was faced with extreme drought conditions. To further compound the droughts effects on the RD9 community, they were also made to abide by the strict social restrictions required to limit the transmission of Covid-19 throughout the community from March to May of 2020. As farmers are already required to live in physical isolation due to their profession, the Covid-19 isolation period compounded the pre-existing tensions between the farmers of RD9 and the wider New Zealand community and New Zealand government. In this thesis I argue that more needs to be done in order to help New Zealand farmers with the environmental, social and economic issues that farmers face at an increasing level. From the increasing frequency of droughts, the constant government restructures impacting on the agricultural sector at both at the ground level and industrial level, and consistent and persistent social and physical isolation experienced in rural living, New Zealand farmers are having to deal with many events that are out of their control. As such, I argue that it is crucial to consider how to help farmers maintain a sense of wellbeing, connection and belonging during a period of hardship in periods of hardships such as the situations that unfolded in 2020.

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1. Drought Impacts to the RD9 community of Hawkes Bay New Zealand

Figure 1: Farmers having fun with alternative feed placement. Photo by Martin Jones in 2020. Supplied.

When discussing a drought, it is often the environmental impact that first comes to mind. While this is understandable, the impacts of a drought are much more expansive than just the environmental impacts that they create. For the rural RD9 community of Hawkes Bay, New Zealand, the impacts of a drought period go much further than just the environmental damage that they cause. For this small rural community, droughts impact social connections, financial decisions and the bonds and ties which hold a rural community together and situate them within the wider New Zealand community.

How people engaged with their daily lives in New Zealand dramatically changed in 2020. With the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, New Zealand implemented a nationwide lockdown in March of 2020 to combat to spread of Covid-19 in the local community. Much of the public eye was placed upon how people created and maintained comradery in a period of hardship, isolation and uncertainty. For some communities both in New Zealand and internationally, the Covid-19 pandemic was not

the only widespread potential disaster that some communities were facing. In 2020, numerous areas of New Zealand were facing extreme drought conditions. The impacts of Covid 19 management in some cases exacerbated the challenges brought on by the drought. In 2020, rural communities and New Zealand agricultural industries were forced to deal with severe drought conditions alongside the restrictions enforced due to Covid-19.

In this thesis, I firstly aim to provide my methodological approach towards conducting this research. With this, I will cover the decisions made in regards to my participant pool, style of interviewing decisions made and my use of autoethnography. Secondly, after establishing my chosen methodology I will then discuss the relevant literature and concepts regarding farming in three main categories, economic, environmental and social values. Following this I will then establish my three core chapters on the RD9 community of Hawkes Bay, how the 2019-2020 drought period and Covid-19 restrictions in 2020 affected farming production, how environmental and financial stress was managed and how the RD9 community attempted to maintain bonds of the community during a period of intense and uncontrollable hardship.

This research project aimed to answer three main questions. Firstly, how do drought periods affect social connections in RD9? I explored the way that social boundaries were created and maintained, how people understood what constitutes a community member and how the community maintains its social connections in a period of enforced physical isolation. Secondly, what are the financial impacts of the recent drought in the RD9 community and what are the repercussions of these financial impacts in a neoliberalist global market? In New Zealand, farming is closely associated with New Zealand's two largest exportation sectors. This is not the case for many other countries, making New Zealand an interesting case study, meaning that farming in New Zealand is particularly tied to international market conditions. What was the New Zealand governments response to the environmental and financial crisis in 2020 in the context of a neoliberal market? And lastly, I aim to explore how did the RD9 community was impacted by and responded to the effects of the 2019-2020 drought and the Covid-19 lockdown restrictions.

1.1 Methodology

When considering which type of research method would be best suited for this project, I decided that an ethnography would be best suited. For this research project, it was important to use a research method that would provide me with the most qualitative and relevant data. As such, it was decided that the most effective research method for this anthropological research project would likely be the ethnographic research method. Ethnography is a research method that can be used to ascertain qualitative data and is a popular research method used in Anthropological research projects (Holstein & Gubrium 2003).

Ethnography provides a pathway for the researcher to immerse themselves in the lives of the participants when conducting field research. Ethnographies not only allow for better immersion but also allow for a researcher the opportunity to capture the various behaviours a participant can have with the different contexts of everyday life that they experience which was a vital aspect to this research project (Gullion 2016) As aspects of the desired data for this project were meant to allow me to understand the more emotional side response to a period of dual hardship, the decision to gather ethnographic style qualitative data over quantitative data was made to enable this research project to gather the most relevant data in association to aspects of community and connectivity. As said by Gullion,

> Our job as writers of ethnography is to express that meaning to our readers through our texts. To illuminate the drama of events, to embrace and express the emotion, rather than distance ourselves from the researched through percentages, tables, and graphs. Ethnographers are the witnesses. We listen to and retell stories—like oral historians before us, we are the keepers of the stories. We keep them alive. We honor the people and places and things in our ethnographies. (Gullion 2016, 8)

I think that this is both valid and poignant as to why ethnographies are a vital tool for an anthropologist. This decision was ultimately made to allow for me as a researcher the capacity to seek to figure out what has been left unspoken and the ongoing effects that could presently be affecting some of the participants. As this research project attempts to display to others both the complexities within the hardships this community

has faced, It is also vital that I can portray a sensitive representation of this community to others, which cannot simply be done with statistical data. While statistical data can provide some benefit to this research project, it was ultimately decided that the primary data used in this research project would be qualitative.

To translate the livelihoods of any participants to others outside of the community, Gullion (2016, 7) suggests that a researcher such as myself needs to have some experience within the community or situation they are researching. While I do already have experience within this community and this type of livelihood, I did not experience this instance of dual hardship and I cannot expect to write about it with any success without talking to those who still live within the community.

Due to my personal experience within the community I am studying, I will be using autoethnography. Autoethnography is using personal experience and self-reflection to help provide a wider context to my research field, research participants and chosen research community. As stated by Ellis (2004) Autoethnography is a method which "connects the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social and political," it is a way to tie in personal experience and understanding into the observations found in ethnographic research. While the main form of research in this thesis is traditional ethnography, I also relied upon my own experience and history with the community as will be later discussed in the coming chapters.

After deciding on the style of research method to use for this research project, the next decision that was decided was the participant parameters that would be used for finding potential research participants. For this research project, I decided that participants would be interviewed from a pool of participants that meet the following criteria.

1. Be 18 or older (as of March 25th, 2020).
2. Have Citizenship or Residency in New Zealand.
3. Lived in the RD9 District for 1 or more years.
4. Live in the RD9 District (Hawkes Bay).
5. Situated in the Hawkes Bay RD9 District area from the 25th of March to May 13th, 2020.
6. Are situated on a farm that is associated with the sheep and beef industry. (as of 25th of March to May 13th, 2020.)

7. Considers farming to be their main/primary occupation. (as of 25th of March to May 13th, 2020.)

This set of criteria was decided upon to ensure that the scope of data obtained was narrow enough to provide conclusive data from the small number of participants. This research project could have encompassed all rural areas of Hawkes Bay or anyone associated with the Hawkes Bay farming community. I decided that a smaller participant pool would provide an in-depth way to look into the functionality of the community in a rural setting. The majority of the other criteria for this research project was decided upon to find participants who would be more likely to be long term community members or had the intention to remain long term community members.

This research project conducted 12-15 semi-structured interviews with participants who reside in the RD9 district of Hawkes Bay, New Zealand. Initially, these interviews were only going to be strictly one-on-one interviews. However, during the search for participants and the strict time schedules held by my participants, I decided that group interviews would also be conducted with the participants who were happy to do so. All group interviews conducted for this research project were conducted with people who lived and/or worked in the same household unit both currently and in the period of interest to this research. This decision led and allowed me as the researcher to see the family dynamics that could have been in place during the Covid-19 lockdown period.

When considering which format would be best suited for these ethnographic interviews, I ultimately decided that interviews would be conducted in both an online and off online capacity. This decision was made in light of the potential restrictions that could be enforced due to another Covid-19 outbreak, as a change in covid restriction levels in New Zealand would have made interviews more difficult and potentially impossible to conduct in person. This decision was also made to provide the participants more flexibility with the interview time and allowed for me to interview participants that would have been too busy otherwise. Unexpectedly, this proved to be a rather popular option as half of the interviews conducted were conducted via the video conferencing application Zoom.

This could have been the case due to the lack of availability and flexibility in the participant's daily work schedules as all online interviews aside from one were conducted at 6 pm or later. One of the main concerns I initially had with conducting interviews in an online capacity was the potential for connectivity issues. In the case of my participants, however, those who knew they had a lack of knowledge in how to operate online conferencing platforms or knew the limited capacity of their internet connection opted to conduct their interviews in person. While this decision did not allow me to fully immerse myself into the setting of where my participants live, it did still provide me with a good avenue to view my participants' visual responses to the questions I asked. As said by Ferrandiz, Stapleton and Carlin (2020, 6) an ethnography requires the researcher to be present within the field that they are studying. For this research project, providing both an in-person and online option to my participants allowed for me to have ethnographic interviews while still obtaining the amount of data needed for this project.

The reasoning behind this chosen methodology method was to provide me with the most in-depth data possible within the time constraints, in line with ethnographic research principles. While I could have ascertained more factual data by conducting a survey, to discover aspects of community and the struggles of farmers during the level 4 and 3 lockdowns of early 2020, this type of method would be unable to provide me with all the desired data. In ethnographic style interviews, I believe I was able to ascertain the feelings and emotions of a participant much easier than conducting a survey.

As said by Jay Hasbrouck (2017, 16), ethnography is a research method that can obtain a perspective of someone's everyday life, and this is much more difficult to obtain through a survey. Alongside this, I believe participants were more likely to not edit the responses they provided and, their body language or what was left unsaid and prompt different lines of conversation. When seeing participants in a face to face manner it was much easier to engage with my participant on an emotional level. Alongside this, an in-person interview also allowed me to gauge if it was appropriate to ask to follow up questions for potentially sensitive topics. As said by Ferrandiz, Stapleton and Carlin (2020, 86) being able to decipher when it is most appropriate to listen, talk, or ask are vital aspects when it comes to conducting a successful

ethnography. Because this project explores a period of hardship, face to face and open-ended interviewing seemed especially appropriate.

To both understand rural communities and contextualise the data in a way that makes sense to others, I argue that more emotive based data is needed to get this across to those who have never lived in a rural surrounding. While on the phone interviews were a possible option to provide to participants, the additional data obtained by face to face interviews were much more vital to obtain. As said by Holstein and Gubruim (2003), While phone interviews do provide much easier and direct access to participants than in-person interviews, in-person interviews allow for an interviewer to obtain more accurate data due to the contextual naturalness that occurs in in-person interviews. Alongside this, Holstein and Gubruim (2003) also state that in-person interviews are a much better form of interviewing for sensitive topics. As my research topic concerned a period of dual hardship that likely could have involved both environmental and emotional hardship, being able to read social cues and body language if a participant was uncomfortable with any questions would have been nearly impossible to decipher on a phone call. In doing an Ethnography research method, I believe I was able to provide a better look into the complex and intricate issues that rural farmers face and continue to face following 2020.

Each interview conducted for this research project were conducted in a 30 to 90-minute timeframe. This decision was made to allow participants to provide as much depth to their responses as they were wanting to give and also allowed for these interviews to be conducted during their lunch or afternoon breaks. For all interviews conducted in this research project, participants were provided additional information, consent forms, and a broad outline of the interview questions within the 48-hour window before their interview. This was done to allow participants an opportunity to look over the questions, veto any they did not wish to answer, and provide the participants with a greater scope of the topics of interest that would be discussed during the interview process. For both online and in-person interviews, participants were given the option of signing a physical consent form or providing their consent aurally via a recording device.

Before the conduction of all interviews for this research project, participants were walked through the main aims of the research project and through the consent

form to ensure that the participants were well informed and understood the questions posed within the consent form. Alongside providing consent for the conduct of the interview, participants were also asked if they would like to view the transcripts of the interview, receive a copy of the findings, consented to record the audio of the interview, and if they would like to remain anonymous in any data or work published in association to the research project. These options were provided to provide the participants control over how the data was recorded and displayed in the research project.

To work with the busy schedules of Hawkes Bay farmers during the summer season, the data from these interviews were obtained from December 2020 to February 2021 rather than in a smaller time frame. Each participant was asked a series of 10 or more questions that were pre-organized and may have also been asked follow up questions depending on the information provided from their responses and the openness of the participant. With the consent of the participants, a majority of the interviews were recorded with the use of a dictaphone. Using a dictaphone within the interview process allowed for me to only record the audio of the interviews conducted while also allowing me to pay more attention to face and body cues during the interviews and appeared to be the least distracting format for recording my participants. The decision to use a Dictaphone was also primarily made so that the transition from audio data into a digital transcript was as seamless as possible.

After obtaining the required data for this research project from an interview, data was then uploaded to a portable hard drive which was stored in a locked drawer only to be taken out for the process of transcribing data and annotating transcripts as locations, names and potential data which could identify a participant who wished for anonymity will be visible in these recordings and documents. Once initial data has been obtained from a participant, with the use of a pedal transcriber, the digital audio data was transcribed to provide a cloud format to analyse the data obtained. During this process, I also began to write the initial themes, quotes and responses of interest which could be of further interest when it came to analysing the data for this research project. When all the transcripts were created, I began the process of analysing the data by annotating the transcripts and creating a visual data map listing the commonalities and abnormalities found within the data. Once this was done and some quotations were

chosen I was then able to begin writing up my findings and results of this research project.

1.2 Literature Review

Pastoral farming as an industry and as a livelihood traces back as far back as the second millennium. For anthropology, farming, the practice of farming, rural communities and the rural way of life have been a field of interest for anthropologists since anthropologists first began to study people. When studying both the past and present-day, farming has played an integral role in the functioning of many societies. Aside from providing a product, farming also provides a job, a livelihood and a way of life from land to purchaser, from grass to plate.

In the field of anthropology, there are a few key aspects of farming that anthropologists regularly and routinely engage with which I would like to expand upon. Taking inspiration from Ofstehage's three categories of study (2020), I would like to explore the anthropology study of farming by considering four main aspects of farming. Firstly anthropologists like to explore the dynamics of farming in regards to economic and financial aspects. Secondly, anthropologists also regularly explore the associations with farming values, practices and how constructions such as gender operate in farming practices and farming communities. Thirdly, anthropologists also frequently explore farming on the environmental level, from how they interact with their natural environment to how the natural environment is affected by various forms of farming. And lastly, I would like to expand these conversations further by exploring the more and mental and psychological side of farming by exploring the emotional impact of financial change and loss, understandings of obtaining and maintaining a sense of place and lastly, the turmoil felt in the face of uncontrollable change through the concept of solastalgia.

The Economics of Farming

Conceptions of capital and power are heavily intertwined in many of the daily aspects of farming. The reasons and contexts surrounding the intensification of agricultural practices is an aspect of farming that anthropologists have taken great interest in particular in regards to unwanted interventions. Agricultural intensification does not exactly encourage community unity, but rather encourages competition and division, as someone else's success and mean for your financial failure. Agricultural intensification

is a daily reality for many farmers across the globe, from the production of newer and more "successful" genetically modified seeds and animal breeds, to keep up with the ever-increasing need to achieve more, farmers are needing to expand and explore less traditional productions of farming to maintain their farming and farming lifestyle.

This changing industry is driven by capital and is a key theme of discussion in regards to farming and rural scholarship. Anthropologists such as Stensrud (2019) explored the effects of neoliberalism on quinoa farmers of Peru, and O'Connell, Motallebi, Osmond, and Hoag, (2017) explored the economic reasoning behind farmers' willingness to engage with the water trading markets of South Carolina, USA.

In the case of New Zealand, this shift towards neoliberalism has also been investigated for its effects on farming. One New Zealand anthropologist, Carolyn Morris has explored this by researching how the prospect and advancement of land tenure affected Highland Farmers in the South Island of New Zealand (Morris 2009). In this research, Morris (2009) suggests that since the beginning of the land tenure process which started in the 1990s, highlands farmers have displayed growing dissatisfaction at the growing prospect of losing the land (that they consider home), to the Department of Conservation (DOC). Morris (2009) argues that this turn of events in the land tenure review is illustrative of the overall governmental swing towards a more environmentally conscious country and its movement away from agriculture as New Zealand's main form of economic profit. This turn of events in association with the land tenure process occurring in the South Island highlands is reflective of New Zealand's larger economic neoliberal shift. This push towards the free global market system, while profitable for some has led to a growing dissociation between farmer and purchaser, purchaser and product. Since the 1980s, New Zealand has made developments towards a more neoliberal economy. As stated by Harvey (2005) Neoliberalism is:

> A theory of political economic practices that proposes that human wellbeing can be best advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free market and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve

> an institutional framework appropriate to such practices (Harvey 2005, 2).

In research conducted by Haggerty, Campbell and Morris (2009) it was discovered that New Zealand's push towards the neoliberal economy, agricultural intensification and clean green imagery for New Zealand, is in its self very contradictory. According to Haggerty, Campbell and Morris (2009), this has allowed for two possible trajectories for pastoralism in New Zealand: the best environmental practice, or to intensify production. As to which trajectory farmers will decide to take, Haggerty, Campbell and Morris (2009) state that influences such as differences generational understanding, values about what makes a 'natural' or 'real' farmer, and the potential for environmental and animal health consequences are some of the factors shaping farming practices.

What Constitutes Good Farming Values and Practices

For anthropologists, exploring ideas surrounding what constitutes good farming, how gender comes into play in a rural landscape and how racial and nationalistic thoughts can affect farming are significant areas of interest for research. For rural communities and the farmers who inhabit them, is it not uncommon for some farming practices, customs and even their choice of feed to be scrutinised by others within their community. This idea of good farming can be used by anthropologists to explore how farmers constitute their identities and how farmers claim legitimacy in their wider community.

Community is not always easily founded nor it's a sense of community maintained without some effort. In current anthropological research, there have been some enquiries into discovering how the formation and maintenance of community occur within farming regions. Namely about how we can better support rural communities and what would be the most effective form of support that could be provided to rural communities (Ravenscroft, Moore, Welch & Hanney 2013). Rural communities, like urban communities, often cover a more expansive and varied population demographic. Although interestingly stated by Redfield (1989, 6) unlike urban populations, the rural populations also do not typically have a social centre, there is no town or physical embodiment that could be considered a social centre for a rural

community. This may be one of the reasons why both myself and other anthropologists find rural communities both intriguing and puzzling areas to conduct our research.

Another particularly interesting avenue of rural anthropological literature is concerning the isolation experienced by the community. Researchers such as Drazin (2018), Dudley (1996) Shisler, and Sbicca (2019) have all explored communities in regards to isolation. To be able to function in association with a community, having a community that is not only isolated from the rest of their region but also between themselves can be a taxing situation to be in. Understanding, contextualising and abiding by the social values of a community can be a process that is not always easy. The development of a sense of place can play an important role in how one understands their self and an understanding of the wider community. For some, having an intense connection to physical space can lead to an individual choosing to stay in a volatile landscape which was the case for participants in Chinese participants in research by Xu et al (2017).

Developing a sense of place is sometimes what individualises some people from others. Time is a factor here: the longer people stay in one place, can affect the development of roots and an emotional connection. Convery, Corsane and Davis (2012) state that rural landscapes are endowed with personhood and agency, which can often shape the construction of individual constructs of self and the wider community. In the instance of rural pastoral communities, Woods et al (2012) take the sense of place discussion further by placing this literature within the context of rural farmers in the United Kingdom. It is of Woods et al's (2012) understanding that place is integral to rural concepts of sense of place. In addition to this, Ngo and Brklacich (2013) discuss how those who relocate to a rural location attempt to become integrated into the rural community through their case study on Southern Ontario. It is suggested by Ngo and Brklacich (2013, 64), that new farmers appear to be between belongings. With this, new farmers from an urban background often appear to be developing a sense of place which is uneven and differentiated. In summary, these studies suggest that a sense of place can often be how we come to see ourselves and our community as different from those that surround us, with time we are capable of eventually developing an emotional connection and tying our identity to the landscape we regularly interact with.

In association with a sense of place, anthropologists have also frequently explored how constructions of gender come to fruition in farming landscapes. Farming is in many parts of the world (but not all), and arguably a male-dominated industry that has many practices which are regularly associated with displaying masculine attributes. Farming is often associated with terms such as toughness and many female farmers who work and engage with farming often find gendered barriers when it pertains to success in farming.

In current anthropological literature, Contzen and Forney (2017) have researched how gender contracts play out in family farms in Switzerland. In their research it was discovered that gender inequality is still occurring within the Swiss agricultural sector. Alongside gender, ideas surrounding race and nationalism are also avenues that anthropologists are becoming more and more interested in researching. In the case of minority communities versus larger commercially owned farms and a non-indigenous government, it is fairly common for the communities that are inhabited by minority populations to find it difficult to obtain financial success and independence. This was such the case in the case conducted by Stensrud (2019) who discovered that many of the indigenous populations of Peru were effectively engaging in a lottery to try and achieve farming success in an environment where obtaining financial success is both volatile and heavily orchestrated by the outside neoliberal market forces.

Farming and the Environment

In recent years anthropologists have been exploring the connections between relations between plants and animals, the interconnection that occurs between ecologies and humans, and changes of relationships with a changing climate. Multispecies literature is interested in how humans and non-human interact, affect and change each other over time (Kirksey & Helmreich 2010). such as Hansen (2014) who explored multispecies relations in dairy farming in Hokkaido Japan. Alongside Hansen, Anthropologists have also. Expanding into the multispecies debate and considering animals and plants as agents in systems of production, arguably rejects the idea that only one side changes over time, but rather that during this interaction plants and animals can change human action and thought during this process.

Researching and analysing how humans react to and are integrated with ecologies and seeing animals and plants as agents in systems of production also allow for anthropologists to explore the spiritual and emotional aspects of farming practices. It has also proved room for anthropologists to explore areas that were previously considered to be beyond anthropological research such as soil (Kawa 2016). One other major avenue of research that anthropologists are also focusing research is the effect of changing climates. It has become apparent in recent years that climate change is an ever-increasing and unavoidable aspect for farmers to accept into their daily reality. For some communities, this can mean changes to traditional practices to continue to thrive or in other cases to slow down the effects of climate change in their region. Currently, research is being conducted concerning multispecies ethnographies on dairy farms in Hokkaido Japan (Hansen 2014) and research has also been conducted into the effects of climate change on the agricultural sector such as the effects of climate change on rural farmers in rural Zimbabwe (Mabeza 2017), the impacts of climate change on pastoralism (Cassidy, 2014), and Nomadic pastoral farmers in Mongolia (Marchina 2021).

Farming, Mental Health & Solastalgia

Unexplained and unexpected change is difficult to come to terms with, Environmental change is no exception. Environmental change, especially negative environmental change, is both a difficult and taxing period for those who live and experience it in their local community. In anthropology, researchers examining the negative effects of environmental change can sometimes neglect to discuss the mental and psychological effects of environmental disasters have on people who have a long-held connection to areas which is directly affected. In 2003, Glen Albrecht, introduced the term, "solastalgia" to identify this distress (Albrecht 2019). Glen Albrecht (2019) coined the term solastalgia to provide a term to describe the feeling that is felt by those who are forced to experience drastic and extreme environmental changes in their surrounding landscape.

Solastalgia primarily refers to the feeling that is experienced when faced with the environmental change of a landscape one is closely connected to or would refer to as their place, their home (Albrecht 2019). The term solastalgia is derived from the term

nostalgia, a reference to the homesick like feeling experienced by those who see their surrounding landscape change into an area that is now identifiable from the land they used to heavily connect with, and in effect place-based distress (Albrecht et al. 2007). Askland, Bunn, and BV (2018) take this a step further and suggest that place-based distress should be understood as ontological trauma.

Solastalgia has been extensively researched with coal mining communities in New South Wales, Australia (Albrecht et al 2007). With solastalgia, it is suggested that this physical disruption to the fabric of place disrupts the sense of being that is associated with the place (Askland, Bunn, BV 2017) making for that sense of nostalgia like feeling even though someone has not left the area itself. Anthropologists such as Kent and Brondo (2019) have explored solastalgia concerning ecological loss and devastation on the island Utila of Honduras.

Moving Forward in Anthropological Farming Literature

While it is clear that anthropology does have an interest in farming, it is also clear when consulting anthropological literature and farming and rural communities that there is still a significantly notable absence of literature on farming and the concept of rural. During my period of exploring the literature for this research project, there was a notable absence of anthropological literature on western farming communities and practices. Rather, communities and societies that are considered to be more foreign, exotic or unique were at the forefront of anthropological farming literature. It is undeniable that anthropology has always had a significant interest in the other and the exoticness of communities unknown to us, it is no wonder that western rural communities are not frequently researched by anthropologists.

This is a lapse when it comes to farming and rural communities in western countries and not isolated to New Zealand anthropology. I only really found a small proportion of anthropologists that have looked at New Zealand rural communities and even then, for some of those who said publish scholarship on New Zealand rural communities, this avenue of research was not their primary research interest, but rather their third or fourth field of interest. For a community that already feels marginalised from the rest of the country, this lack of scholarship hit home just how arguably

insignificant this area and population is to those who have not had direct engagement with it.

2. The Structure and Fractures of the RD9 Community

Figure 2: The Waiwhare Community Centre, Previously Waiwhare School. Taken January 2021.

The Community Centre: A Community Hall Without its People

One of the main hubs for the people in the RD9 community is the Waiwhare community centre, inhabiting the buildings that were once the Waiwhare school. Situated at 31 Waiwhare Road, sit a small cluster of buildings waiting for the next community function. A typical day for this community centre likely involves the constant flow of beer, wine, and chatter. Sometimes this is stimulated by community-run functions or just the weekly happy hour. Children are often found playing tennis on the outside courts, playing tag around the property, or even attempting to create their own song on the donated piano in the spare room. While parents sit down with a jug of beer, a plate of mini assorted pies, and enjoy the company of friends while listening to an assortment of music or the running commentary of a rugby match. With the occasional kid obtaining a sugar high from a few too many candies obtained from the bar, or a couple standing up to dance to the music, the constant laughter, and overall sound views and sounds of enjoyment are easily seen.

The Waiwhare community centre is normally a hub for creating and maintaining bonds with fellow community members. However during the Covid lockdown restrictions of 2020, there were no cars parked outside, no children running around the property. The lack of laughter of friends enjoying an evening away from home for such a long time is both unusual and eerie. No longer do guests write their name upon the guest book at the entranceway, but rather dust instead gathers upon the unused glasses that were ready and waiting for the next community function to occur. Who knew at that time how long it would be until those glasses were used once again? A place where hollering, laughter, and banter was regularly thrown around in response to rugby scores and the emergence of cheap mini pies from the oven seems to be a faraway world from the listless and airy community centre that stands on the side of the road, waiting for the returns of regular patrons.

Gasps of "how have you been?!" and the updating of one another on the small changes in our lives no longer occur, and even at their initial return, the typical hugs, handshakes, or physical closeness shared in these moments do not appear alongside with the typical greeting of a friend long not seen. Now in late 2021, the community pool is being prepped for summer, a Christmas market is being organised and a general way of life has returned to this community. It is however unknown for now if this community centre will be left empty again with the future uncertainties that lay ahead not only for this community but for this region, country, and world.

When first looking at this rural New Zealand community from the outside, it may not appear to be any different from other rural communities that can be found across the New Zealand landscape. When talking with the people, learning the history and devolving yourself into this district, just the opposite may however be discovered. With many families having spent generations upon their land and having been shaped by both the geographical and historical background of the land. This community is nestled in between two rivers with the closest town being anywhere from 30 minutes to over an hour away. This community is the focus of this chapter and those that follow.

In this chapter I aim to firstly explore the Historical Background RD9 by covering the origins of the term RD9, the settler history and the geographical outlay of the RD9 area. Secondly, I will introduce a more contemporary and present image of the RD9 community, from its areas for social engagement, social media use, and what

constitute a “real community member” in the eyes of RD9 pastoral farmers. And lastly I will explore how the impacts of RD9’s perceptions of community members, the reliably of social media constructs of a community, and their apparent dissociation from social media.

2.1 Historical Background of RD9

Figure 3: Pits at Pukekautuku, the Stronghold of the Ngati Ruapirau. n.a, n.d. From West to the Annie, By the RD9 Historical Committee

The area in which the RD9 postal courier services, is an area of land which is made up of numerous land holdings that were formed by Māori settlers and resettlement of Māori during wars that occurred after the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi on 6 February 1840 (RD9 Historical Committee 2002, 4 & 51). This area is also referred to as the "Gentle Annie" after a descendent of Ngamatea station, who often embarked on the treacherous track to journey into town (RD9 Historical Committee 2002)). Since the first signs of Maori occupation in the 1400s, this rural area of Hawkes Bay has been subject to various landowners and occupiers. It is believed that the Ngati Ruapirau (Stronghold location pictured above in Figure 3) were the first to settle in between the Ngaruroro and Tutaekuri, to be closely followed by the chief, Tamatea Pokaiwhenua,

who set out to journey up the Ngaruroro river sometime between 1400-1450 (RD9 Historical Committee 2002, 36-37).

Figure 4: Thomas Tanner, one of Hawkes' Bay first prominent colonial figures, who came to own, and eventually sell a significant portion of Hawkes Bay land. From https://teara.govt.nz/en/photograph/1947/thomas-tanner

For many decades now, Hastings has been known as a small city located in the middle of the Heretaunga plains which is mainly known for its fertile lands and diversified exports (Boyd 1984, 1). Since the initial purchase of Hastings from Thomas Tanner (as pictured above in Figure 4) when the Napier country district emerged for European settlers (Boyd 1984, 3), Hastings has undergone many changes to both its general population and export ventures. The Heretaunga plains mainly consist of the plains which have developed over time between the Ngaruroro, Tuki Tuki and Tutaekuri rivers.

Figure 5: A Traction Engine at Sherenden Transporting Wool. n.d, na. In West to the Annie, by The RD9 Historical Committee, 2002.

The Hastings District, while it has undergone many events since its initial founding, this area has been involved in the agricultural sector, the wool industry, thoroughbred breeding, viticulture, and meat exports since the 1880s (Boyd 1984). In this research project, I will often refer to this community as RD9. To put it simply, RD9 stands for the postal route which services the rural community that lives between the Ngaruroro and Tutaekuri rivers in Hastings, Hawkes Bay. As to the area that is encapsulated by the RD9 postal route, this is an area that has primarily been used for farming in the sheep, beef and dairy sectors.

How did the term RD9 come to be representative of this small community? It is a community that is founded from shared experiences in livelihood, isolation, common hardships and regional laws which are unique to this area. This could be in part due to this community not being a part of the same school zones, postal service or other widely shared systems, as other rural districts may have more access to. While many other communities in New Zealand may also be shaped by their respective school zones and various facilities that they own, the RD9 communities and likely other rural

communities do not have many other systems or institutions that help to form boundaries in their communities. For RD9 in particular it seems to be a mixture or history, geography and school zones that outline the community from surrounding communities.

2.2 Social Othering Within Contemporary RD9

At the beginning of my interview process, it was evident that I would need to analyse my perception of the community, my own expansive connection that I came to feel, while also answering what exactly is RD9. For this research, I was fortunate enough to have fairly extensive experience within the community. Having spent the majority of my childhood and teenage years in the RD9 area, returning to the RD9 district had some unexpected outcomes that I was not anticipating. I had initially expected some of my interviews to be a little awkward. Looking back now, I hadn't completely comprehended the level of connection I still feel to the area and the people who are still residing there. Prior to my interviews, I automatically assumed that I would not feel a very strong connection to the area as I had used to. This was in large part due to the slow progression of leaving the community. From a young age, I was spending every second weekend away in Napier with my father. At age thirteen, I started attending high school and spent five days of the week in a boarding house, meaning that I was only in the RD9 community every fortnight until we eventually moved into the city in 2016.

On returning to RD9, my family had been largely distant from the community for the last 5 years, so I had automatically assumed that it may take me a while to feel as though I was a part of the community once again. Surprisingly, the feeling of returning home overwhelmed me in the first few interviews I had. Maybe this was because I had known some of my participants to some capacity as I was growing up. For instance, one Friday morning, as I drove up the Napier Taihape road, I was immediately struck with a sense of comfort and excitement. I had not driven up this way in quite a while but it almost felt like I was returning home.

As I arrived at my participant's residence, I was reminded of the childhood experiences I had in their garden as a kid. From swinging on the clothesline to snowball fights in the winter, I had many childhood experiences that only seemed like they were yesterday. As soon as I arrived, I was sat down with a hot cup of tea, a freshly cooked cheese toasty and a genuinely warm atmosphere. I was welcomed with open arms and friendly conversation. As simple of a welcome, this may have seemed, it felt like I was returning home. The welcome was so casual yet warm it was almost as if I had never truly left this community at all. For me, this small experience is indicative of how the RD9 rural community is like, this is what RD9 means to me.

So what is the history surrounding the term RD9? How do I explain RD9 to someone who has never experienced it as I have? At the beginning of my interview process, it became relevant early on that I would need to be able to answer what exactly RD9 is in relation to these questions. In asking this question and asking about the RD9 Facebook group page it became evident that even the community itself while feeling connected also saw themselves as being distinctly divided in two particular capacities. The people within the community itself also seem rather unsure as to whether or not they identify with the label of RD9. As participant Brian, whose family lived and grew up in the RD9 and who has lived on and off in the community until 2020 himself, said, "For whatever reason people cling to it (RD9) as being a community," when discussing what RD9 means to him. Arguably it can be said that the label 'RD9' is both new and not entirely accepted. Firstly, it denotes a large expanse of area, and secondly, it is the name of the community Facebook page.

Local Understandings of 'RD9'

The participants in my research described a sense of othering that marked who belonged and who did not. In this othering, strong importance was given to schooling districts. These schooling districts generate community self-identification and differentiation from those that surround it. In the case of the participants, I spoke with for this research project, there appeared to be fairly distinctive lines drawn between the schooling districts, not excluding past schooling districts that have since closed which is

illustrated by both current and past schooling districts namely Pukehamoamoa, Sherenden, Crownthrope and Waiwhare.

Unlike in urban areas, it appears that the Schooling system is the primary factor in community division in the RD9 as there is no other significant social or community buildings that can be used. While a significant proportion of participants I spoke with lived in Sherenden or further up the Napier Taihape road, it was pretty stark that there was a significant amount of discussion surrounding how the RD9 Facebook group page was not a true reflection of what they believe or even who they know within the community. Alongside this, there was significant discussion surrounding what constitutes for some being a fully fledged member of the RD9 community. As such, I believe that the process of othering is present within the RD9 this society, especially in relation to who each community member sees as the social values of the community and of farmers.

Farming communities do not necessarily have a physical representation of social hub like urban areas outside of the schooling districts and the remnants of old schooling districts. For example, the Waiwhare Community Centre I described at the beginning of this chapter used to be the Waiwhare School. It has all the same buildings and many of the same facilities, even down to the old classroom chalkboards While this is a location for social meetings, the Waiwhare Community Centre is only open on Friday nights. Aside from the occasional larger events such as the Melbourne Cup and Hunt and Gather competitions, there are not many if any people who went community centre on a weekly basis aside from the those who were licenced to be the bar keep. While I cannot speak to the last two years or so, by looking at the online Waiwhare Community Centre notice board, and talking to my participants, I do not believe there has been significant change in the habits regarding communities use of the Waiwhare Community Centre.

For RD9 there is no township or a foundational centre within a rural society (Redfield 1989). Instead, I propose that a rural community such as RD9 is fractured into smaller subgroups that are orientated around the schooling districts and expected farming social values. According to Drazin (2018), even bus routes can greatly influence how one would interpret mutual belonging within a rural community.

> Even as rural populations have increased, expectations of socialising with people 'like oneself' mean connections of mutual belonging may stretch across longer distances. Within this social landscape, the bus routes profoundly change the sense of distance, such that distances can become rhythmic intervals in time (Drazin 2018, 246).

In regards to a powerful othering towards outsiders, all of the participants I interviewed had implied or directly noted that they did not find lifestylers to be a part of the farming community. It appears that the farmers of RD9 regards lifestlyers as informal members who did not meet the full criteria to be a full-fledged member of the community they understood themselves to be a part of. Ngo and Brklacich (2013) suggest that people from an urban community can and do have the ability to integrate into rural societies. As suggested by Hunt (2009) however, there is a desire to maintain a distinction between farmers and lifestlyers. This appears to be in line with what other New Zealanders who live and work in the agricultural sector said in the research conducted by Hunt,

> …The kiwifruit industry is well structured to support a lifestyle that involves as much work as a person is prepared to do, with it being possible to do the rest on contract, by leasing the orchard or handing its management over to someone else. This distinguishes these people from 'lifestylers' who wish to move to the country for its lifestyle while commuting to the city to earn their 'real' incomes (Hunt 2009, 112).

It appears that in the eyes of those who live in a rural community in RD9, there are two main factors that dictate whether an outsider can become and be recognised as a full member of the community.

2.3 Who is a "Real" Community Member

For the RD9 community, in particular, I argue that there appear to be two distinct forms of othering that are occurring which reflect who the community determines to belong. This can be illustrated in the community's response to being labelled as RD9. Firstly, I

propose that the RD9 community draws distinct lines of inclusion and exclusion along the school zones. This I suggest, is done due to the absence of a township or a social hub. In discussing with the participants, what RD9 means to them, the schooling districts were routinely suggested to be an important aspect of the community by my participants. In a broader context, the school districts are where many of the current farming families children attend or the farmers attended themselves in the past. This was a sentiment shared by Darcy, who grew up in the RD9 District and works with her partner on a family-owned property. Darcy shared with me that for her the schools are one of the main foundations that allows for community members to interact with one other, both during their period of schooling and when they become adult members of the community. "It's a great community to live in, everyone is… I guess a lot of us have been here a long time, so there's that base layer of some key relationships."

Schools are an environment where we learn skills and become educated in how to integrate with our society. According to Bourdieu (2010), todays schooling systems function as a way to teach and reproduce the social dynamics of its surrounding community and wider national belief systems (Nash 1990). While the schooling systems are placed to learn skills such as reading and writing, the schooling systems is also an area where we learn how to navigate social environments, learn who is "similar" to us and how to interact with people and peers who are from different cultures, backgrounds and family dynamics. As said by Linda, who has lived and worked on the same property in the RD9 community for than 20 years with her partner Peter, and has been a close family friend since my early childhood stated "I think the school is the hub of the community". With more than one of the schools within the district having celebrated their centennials in recent years, it is reasonable to assume that the school zones have either created new boundaries or reinforced old ones over generations.

One of my participants Laura, who lives with her partner Nick on a sheep and beef farm near Pukeamoamoa and have a combined 23 years of farming knowledge between them quickly stated "the school" when asked in regards to her main form of keeping a connection to the community, saying the RD9 district has "Good school community. You do find that your friends with parents of your local school, that's your hub really." Nick also noted that it depends on where it is you are in terms of isolation affects how you see community, "it [isolation] definitely [increases] further up the road!

The crowd gets a bit more different the further up the road you go." Interestingly Laura and Nick used to live further up in the RD9 community, and were able to provide a unique look into how there is a slight distinction between the two areas and who in the RD9 postal route is an active and accepted close member of their community circle.

While I did not actively go into much discussions surrounding the impact that Covid-19 had on the families in relation to schooling that I interviewed. For those who did mention this, such as Laura and Nick, the impact Covid-19 had on schools meant that they felt "spread thin" across their responsibilities even more than they were originally. I suggest that if the RD9 were made to undergo a longer period of social isolation like that was seen in England for example, there would have been much clearer impacts to community morale and community displacement when it comes to the schooling systems in RD9 as the period of isolation undergone in the Covid-19 lockdown could be likened to a summer break in terms of its overall length of time.

The extent of the isolation both from the urban populous and from each other may be a significant factor in how the RD9 comes to understand its self and who is in it. As suggested by Drazin,

> An alternative interpretation of isolation recognises it as an experience which is produced by shifting historical conditions, which result in dissonance and possibilities for new social meanings. This is an interpretation of isolation which is more about how relatedness and belonging are manifested, different for each generation according to a changing politics of alterity (Fontein 2011: 720; Drazin 2018, 546).

In terms of the isolation which occurs in the RD9 community, I draw on Drazin's (2018) argument on how different historical expressions of isolation would create new social meanings, new social values. In the case of RD9, there appears to be distinct connection that is made being made in association to school zoning and level of isolation found from Hastings, the closest urban city when it comes to which of the smaller brackets of the RD9 community you closely connect with. To put this in perspective, Pukeamoamoa, the closest school district to Hastings is around 16kms from Hastings,

while Waiwhare is almost 44kms away and even then there are RD9 residents who live even further away from Hastings.

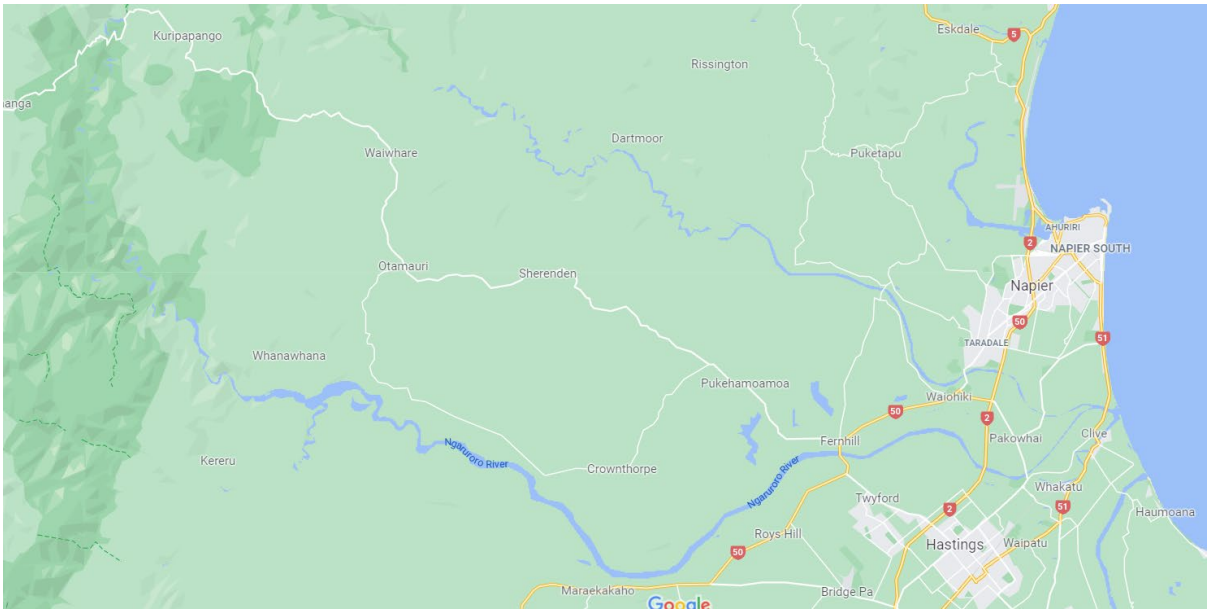

Figure 6: Map of the RD9 District and the two neighbouring cities, Napier and Hastings. (Google Maps 2021)

For the RD9 community, it can also be argued that the level of isolation a member has in reference to their neighbours and the urban community also plays a significant role in community ties. In commenting on isolation in rural America, Dudley stated:

> We are thought to "choose" between being more or less individualistic or communitarian, as if the values of "individualism" and "community" were mutually exclusively personal preferences. There is no room in this approach for the possibility that a sense of community may be founded on individualistic principles, nor that communitarian sentiments may threaten a shared sense of moral order (Dudley 1996, 55).

With this, there appears to be a duality in how isolation can both divide and reinforce community. With the participants I spoke with, there is both a staunch individualistic way in which farmers operate as independent alongside a sense of a bounded community that shares in the same social values and hardships. This duality does not

only apply to the geographical location but also to the farming occupation an individual is engaged with. When considering this in relation to the RD9 community, I agree with Dudley (1996) that the independence and individualistic principles associated to farming livelihoods and farming practice are a significant factor in the formation and maintenance of rural communities. Shared experiences, such as isolation can play a significant role in how social events are experienced and appreciated.

Secondly, I propose that the RD9 community distinguishes itself in reference to their primary occupation (that their farm is a part of). In this, it appeared that my participants saw the community as two distinctive groups, farmers and lifestylers. While my participants stated that they had no negative feelings towards lifestylers, it was evident from my interviews they had concluded that people who lived on a lifestyle block and did not consider farming to be their primary occupation did not fully grasp what it is like to live in a truly rural farming livelihood. One participant Rachel, who I interviewed alongside her partner Mark and son Reece, who have lived rurally all their entire life, recounted this from her family's lockdown period,

> "A lot of the lifestylers just have no idea. I had one next door that was telling me I needed to feed my bulls with a bucket for each animal. Like she was doing with apples...she was just going on about apples, so I went home, talked to the boys, and the boys worked out how many equivalents of apples were we feeding to palm kernel at the time and it was 124-144 bins." she also went on to say "When I was listening to her and going on, and you know when your just in the middle of that, you know… just you know it was tough at times, it was tough, and all I wanted to say to her was that we don't have enough buckets...you know you can't feed 1400 bulls with buckets."

It was recounts of experiences with lifestlyers combined with the way in which my participants discussed the RD9 Facebook page (see below) that illustrated the farmers' understanding that there are people living in RD9 who are not considered full community members due to their lack of farming experience and their financial independence from farming. While it is not unexpected that there would be some diversification would occur within a community such as the RD9 community and

broader rural communities (Busck 2003), it does appear that this specific distinction unsettles those who have spent most of their life farming on a daily schedule.

2.4 The RD9 Label and its Connection With Social Media

Social media was a key area in which RD9 community cohesion and division played out. I argue these divisions in contemporary RD9 are not something that is new to the community. Rather, an othering that is occurring in this society in contemporary forms of social media has long-standing roots in the community.

Even the label RD9 appears to be a label that many recognise for their community but not necessarily one which they neither agree with nor fully accept. For a number of the participants that I spoke with from the community there appeared to be dissociation from the label 'RD9' regardless of whether that was blatant or inherent in our conversations. Community member Rebecca, who was the participant who lived the furthest up the Napier Taihape road, has lived in the community for 15 years and is someone whose family I have known well over the years said, "RD9 isn't what I would refer to when talking about my community."

As such I suggest that the RD9 community tends to focus more on what isn't a part of this rural community rather than what is. From my interviews it became clear that participants could more readily discuss their dislikes, frustration and dissatisfaction of something or something that they did not fully comprehend in RD9. As such, most of my participants spoke more about their dislikes of the Facebook group page as a way to dissociate from the image it constructed and thus assert their own identity as more narrowly defined.

The ever-continuing expansion of social media has become a space whereby farmers and people within the RD9 district can interact with people who live in both close and distant proximities. Currently, there is very little available literature that explores how rural communities engage with social media and to what extent it affects rural communities. When I was living in the RD9 community during my childhood, social media and the internet did not play any significant role in my life for the majority

of the period I live in the RD9 community. This was not necessarily out of choice I might add. Up until I was around 11 years old, my family long used dial-up to access the internet, and even then, we used a mobile T stick with only 8-10 gigabytes until we moved into the city in 2016. I also did not have my own cell phone until I left for high school and would need to routinely walk up our driveway or the hill to gain even one bar of cell service in the three years of owning one.

While I was not completely isolated from the internet during my early childhood years, the majority of my experience with the internet and social media was through our school or at other relatives' homes. Today the RD9 community has access to much better internet technology than dial-up, but compared to what is available in urban areas, some parts of the community have internet capacities that would make any social media addicted teen shiver in horror. In recent years however, online groups such as the RD9 Facebook page have appeared primarily as an alternative online format to discuss and engage with the RD9 community. From posts regarding dangerous drivers, roaming cattle, missing dogs, community events, and even the monthly visits from Shan's food truck, the RD9 Facebook page has an interesting assortment of post history and community information.

Currently, the RD9 Facebook page currently has over 1,500 members and has been active since 2013. The RD9 Facebook page arguably has an expansive array of people not normally located in RD9 due to having members who currently live in nearby communities and past community residents like myself. As suggested by Erikson (2017, 5) social media and social networks can provide a way to close the gap between people within a community.

In recent years and during my thesis project, I have been a causal fringe observer of the RD9 Facebook page. With this, I have noticed three trends. Firstly, that I do not know the vast majority of the posters and commenters on the page. Considering I lived in the community for 17 years and still see friends and attend social events in the area when possible, I would expect to at least recognise a quarter of the members considering the number of joint school events, social community events owing to the amount of time I lived in the community. Secondly, that the posts can be split into main categories, informative, information-sourcing and gossipy or "bitchy". When looking at the posts that popped up on my feed or when scrolling through the page discussions, while there

was a large number of posts and respect comments that were either informing or asking the community about things such as social events, wandering cattle and road closures; many of the social media posts that I found had a tone of angry and/or disdainful gossip that is best described, at least in New Zealand, as "bitchy". From posting complaining about regional policies, dangerous drivers, unknown vehicles, cyclists, trash abandonment at the recycling depot, and poor roads, the people of RD9 appear to use their online community space as a way to complain and vent frustrations.

Due to my observations of the RD9 Facebook page, I was very much interested in exploring what role social media had within rural communities and how beneficial or detrimental it is for rural communities. Especially since decent internet access is much more available in the RD9 community in recent years in terms of both broadband and mobile data. For my participants, it is important to note that I do believe that like much of the general public aged 30 and older, social networking sites like Facebook are what comes to mind when being asked about social media. As such, in my exploring social media I focused on social media applications that prioritise social networking.

Many people in RD9 explained they were on social media without actively engaging or "speaking" within it. I understood this as I too am an infrequent reactor at best when it comes to Facebook and Instagram and could probably count the number of comments I have posted this month on one hand. I found this approach to social media was shared by many of my participants. As said by Darcy, "No I never post or comment, though I do like looking at Facebook comments!" This enjoyment appears especially true if the comment section is heavy in debate and sass. Much like Darcy, I too, also find myself doing this, oftentimes spending more time reading the comments as opposed to reading the article they pertain to. Also, much like Darcy, all of the participants that I interviewed could easily be classified as silent social media users. Therefore, while most of the content on the RD9 Facebook page was negative or complaining in style, there was a distance between the expression of that negative content and my participants who were "readers" instead of active "posters".

The Impact of Social Media on Rural Perceptions and Emotional States

In terms of my participants, regardless of their level of online activity, appeared to feel the effects that social media had on the perceptions and general mood. Interestingly,

this occurred regardless of their level of active engagement as all of the participants I interviewed who used social media all stated that they are a silent observer on the social media platforms they use. it appeared that those who are partially active, while still albeit silent on social media did think that social media had a large effect on their perception. Interestingly, most participants instead were more eager to discuss how the RD9 Facebook page was not reflective of the RD9 community that they knew than the Hawkes Bay drought page or the benefits of the RD9 page. One participant Marie who has lived in the community for over 30 years in the community with her partner and has been farming for an equal amount of time stated "I don't know any of the people on there", Marie was not alone in this sentiment. Other participants like Darcy and Rachel also stated they neither recognise nor do they really connect with a majority of posters on the RD9 Facebook Group Page.

While saying this, many of the social media users in my participant pool also surprisingly spoke about the RD9 Group Page and the Hawkes Drought Facebook group page in a fond manner when it came to the period over the 2020 Covid Lockdown period. While again all of my social media active participants did not comment or post on either page they all did note the Facebook pages were a helpful reminder that the community undergoing a shared hardship and that they would get through this together. In a period of hardship, talking and engaging with others can help to alleviate people out of negative feelings. Often talking and engaging with others can be a direct reminder that someone is not alone and has a support system in place. For many people, our supports systems have a combination of friends, family and even work colleagues. During the Covid-19 Lockdown of 2020 however, this was much more difficult to engage with an established support system, for many of the general New Zealand public maintained connection through calls, video chats, texting and social media. For many also in RD9, it was easy to find solace and general support through online avenues, even in an unspoken capacity. So I was very surprised to find that none of the participants of directly interacted in any capacity with their community on social media beyond reading posts made by others.

The unspoken connectedness which was felt by the RD9 community members could simply be explained by the expansive connections that social media and facilitate

and the Covid-19 lockdown could have merely reminded and reinforced this. Lupinacci says that,

> Importantly, social media promise not only a connection to the 'world out there' and a general sense of community and belonging at (inter)national scale, but also the possibilities of interacting immediately with those who matter most, beyond para-social engagements (Baym, 2015). They are, at the same time, platforms for mass and interpersonal communication – or masspersonal communication (O'Sullivan and Carr, 2017) – blurring even further the boundaries between what matters at societal and individual levels (Lupinacci 2020, 276).

It is important to note however that a number of participants also spoke about how the RD9 Facebook page while in some circumstances helped them feel a part of the community and unified in this struggle, the RD9 Facebook page also had its drawbacks. Because the news regarding Covid-19 and the drought were continually on their mind and on their social media feeds it easily could become too much at times. As stated by Darcy she at one point had to stop looking at Facebook, the RD9 group page and the drought page because it was affecting her negatively, "at first it was really good… the more that time went on, I couldn't look at it (Social media)." This is an issue with social media and the connectedness it provides that Lupinacci (2020) also addresses stating that,

> In spite of these punctual initiatives, what we generally have is the reinforcement of always-on connectedness and engaged, active attentiveness under the pressure that, at any time, something worthy of attention – something eventful – might happen, and that social media are the best available resource for us to keep track of this ongoing informational flux. The continuous flow in itself – most obviously materialized in the now widespread structure of the infinite 'stream' – helps to produce unsettledness, foregrounding this idea of incessant movement and making the present contingent and fluid (Weltevrede et al., 2014; Lupinacci 2020, 277).

It is important to note that many of the participants that I spoke with felt connected to both their direct community and broader rural community through social media during the Covid-19 lockdown period in 2020. While social media did have its positives initially for a number of participants it definitely appeared to affect the morale of some of my participants has time went on. It appears that for many of the RD9 community seeing the hardship that seeing others in their community undergoing the same or similar hardship can begin to minimise the legitimacy their own struggle. While this was not openly stated by my participants, there move towards not engaging with social media during this time period is telling. I speculate that this distancing from social media that occurred is to the psychological impact began to have on my participants. While arguably someone is always going to be in a worse condition than your own, with social media, however, my participants were openly and repeatedly confronted with this to their faces, likely to a degree that has not been previously seen due to the enforcement of social distancing that has not be seen or experienced in prior years.

With the option to share photos, it is much harder to disregard if someone's struggle is worse than your own. For those in my study, it appeared that viewing posts online during the Covid-lockdown period was a difficult wager to gamble with. For some like Darcy, this appeared to become more and more daunting every time she endeavoured to look at social media.

Dissociation From the Online Community

From my participants' own admissions, they did not feel that the RD9 Facebook group page displays are a truthful representation of the community they know. Similarly, the term RD9 services a wide expanse of geographical areas and multiple schooling districts that appear to be significant signifiers as to which area of the community they most closely identify with. The dislike of the term RD9 could in fact expand much wider than the small circle of RD9 residents that I interviewed. The slight animosity against the RD9 term could be part of participants of removing themselves from the narrative that is presented on the Facebook page.

It is also possible that this is also tied to the communities perception of government policy and wider New Zealand public viewpoints on farming and farming

communities. For example, one participant Peter, spoke about his 10-year environmental plans for his property while also later recounting the frustration of how farming is often portrayed in a negative light environmentally in the media. As Peter stated

> "One of thing good things to come out of Covid was that farming's not so bad after all. Before that we were getting absolutely slammed. We were the ones that were destroying environment and we were this and we were that and tourism was going to be the way forwards and one would really care if the farm land was planted in tree cause you know tourism was going to be were all our money was going to be from. And all of a sudden bam, it basically changed overnight didn't it?"

Peter and others also spoke about how they felt like the rural farming community only really mattered to the government when it came to election periods. It was within these conversations where I felt there was much tension in regards to the government and government policies, especially given the mental and physical strain people in the RD9 community and the wider Hawkes Bay were under with the 2019-2020 drought and Covid restrictions they were subjected to in early 2020.

It is possible that the research participants chose not to engage with the social media platforms, especially the RD9 platforms is part of their direct rejection of the image or ideal of community that has developed on the community Facebook page. It is possible that the participants I spoke with are inherently making a point to not post comments unless absolutely necessary in order to not engage with a narrative they do not agree or associate with. Darcy recounted "I do not count the Facebook page, the Facebook page is full of lifestylers." The absence of commentary or active engagement on social media from the women I spoke with during my interview process may also just simply be an active and point silence in order to demonstrate that they do not consider the Facebook page to be their community and as such, there is no need to engage with it.

It is also important to recognise that it wasn't just the posts in regards to the drought which would have had an effect on how often those in the RD9 community

viewed and engaged with online platforms. During this period most people in New Zealand had a flood of Covid related posts on their social media feeds. I myself recall not being able to go through more than five posts on Facebook without seeing something related to covid. For a community that was more affected by the drought and concerned with the daily weather reports and photos of severe droughts conditions that were further worsened with Covid-19 restrictions on farming procedures and processes that would normally be available, seeing the overwhelming media reports and social media statuses regarding covid could have further driven the RD9 Community off social media.

In the RD9 community it also appears that the absence of external media and commentary during this time period also took a toll during this period. For a number of my participants, only seeing their own community posting in regards to the extreme hardship that they were undergoing made the RD9 community feel separated and ignored by and not a part of New Zealand “team of five million”. To add to the fact that the farmers from the RD9 area have distinct community boundaries related to the schooling districts and divide themselves from those who live on lifestyle blocks it is clear that some if not the majority of the RD9 postal route do not associate their ideas of community with the label of RD9.

3. RD9's Shared Environmental and Economic Hardship.

Figure 7: Sheep stuck in dried out dam while trying to find water. An example of the extreme environmental changes occurring in RD9. Photo by Martin Jones in 2020. Supplied.

The summer season is arguably the busiest and toughest period for most New Zealand sheep and beef farmers annually. This is especially true for areas in the North Island such as Hawkes Bay. While the winter period can also be as difficult, the level of difficulty during winter periods is directly correlated to how dry the summer periods are in New Zealand. In Hawkes Bay, it is not uncommon for droughts to occur during the summer period. Oftentimes droughts are a repeated yearly experience for the Hawkes Bay community. For the rural RD9 district, these drought periods can be correlated to an expected financial loss. In situations as serious as the drought during the 2019-2020 summer season, the New Zealand government provided governmental assistance through the Hawkes Bay Drought Relief Fund.

In this chapter, I aim to discuss the realities of government assistance during periods of drought. This will be done by looking at the application process, discussing the experiences of assistance fund applicants and the general response from farmers in the RD9 district to national government assistance and aid during the 2019-2020 drought period. In doing so I will explain the farmer's displeasure and frustration towards the New Zealand government and the eventual protest which occurred.

This chapter begins with an outline of the economic impacts of droughts on RD9 farming communities. Secondly, I then outline the environmental and economic standing of RD9 at the beginning of 2020. Thirdly, I illustrate what the governmental response was to the environmental and potential economic disaster that was occurring in the RD9 community and wider Hawkes Bay both before, during and after the Covid-19 lockdown that occurred between March and May of 2020. Finally I will analyse the participants experience with finding financial assistance and their overall response to the government's attempt to help Hawkes Bay in 2020.

3.1 The Economic Impact of Droughts

The economic impact of a drought period was often be described by my participants can have profound and long-lasting effect on their lives and the lives of other rural farming communities. From the original onset of a drought period is it expected by RD9 farmers that there will be financial impacts. Owing to restrictions placed on relief funds however, I found that farmers believe that the New Zealand government perceives that financial impacts of a drought are relatively short term.

In the case of the RD9 community and likely many other rural areas of New Zealand however, it is not always the case that financial impacts of droughts are short term. There a number of factors which can play into the long-term financial impacts of a drought period. Firstly, the frequency in which farmers make income. Farmers do not have a weekly, biweekly or even monthly salary. A vast majority of farmers in the sheep and beef industry in New Zealand work on a year to year basis. While there may be small cash injections throughout the year most sheep and beef farmers make a

significant portion of their money when it comes to selling off their stock to other farmers for breeding purposes or to the slaughter houses.

Oftentimes RD9 farmers will not know if they have had a good economic year until their stock is sold off. For sheep and beef farmers, one bad period of drought can affect farming for multiple years. Droughts can often force farmers to buy more feed for their stock, sell their stock at a less profitable age or condition, sell in a non-profitable market, and in some cases result in the loss of stock genetics that have been fostered over many years. It is issues such as this and the economic setbacks that droughts and place on future economic years can mean farmers are stuck in an unending financial loop which may be difficult or even impossible to escape for many years unless a drastic action is undertaken. For some farmers, in order to continue their farming lifestyle they may resort to selling off a portion of their land, moving away from sheep farming entirely, or even selling up and moving to a different region or a smaller farm.

New Zealand's Economic Restructuring

In the 1980s, the New Zealand government made structural changes that resulted in a more neoliberalised economy (Hunt et al 2013). Prior to the neoliberal changes, New Zealand farmers were provided more subsidies and significant tax concessions (Hunt, et al 2013). With decision to reform the agricultural sector came new reforms. As stated by the Ministries of Primary Industries (2017) this included,

> . . . the removal of all price support payments for farmers and the exchange rate was adjusted from its overvalued state. Reforms had immediate and widespread effects on agriculture and the rural economy. Farm incomes fell, as did farm profitability and land values, and farm input costs and debt increased. Some farmers were forced to abandon farming. The rural hardship was compounded by low international prices for agricultural products during the middle and late 1980s and by the cost burden of increasing interest rates. The reforms were difficult. A number of rural businesses stopped operating, unemployment temporarily

> rose and some small rural towns experienced reductions in population (Ministries of Primary Industries 2017, 3-4).

The removal of price supports and other neoliberal adjustments required New Zealand farmers to expand and explore different farming techniques, practices and technologies to obtain any form of financial success. Notably, farmers were now more directly competing against their peers. For some this as meant taking on a secondary occupation for financial stability, trying out new grass seed varieties, trying out pregnancy scanning on stock, harvest automation services, and even seeding robots. In my experience, and according to Hunt (et al 2013) farmers now see their occupation as business people, rather than just farmers.

Neoliberal market ideologies typically stress the independence of the market from government intervention. As suggested by Ganti (2014) neoliberalism is much more than just a financial change,

> neoliberalism is an ideological and philosophical movement – what economic historians refer to as a "thought collective" (Mirowski & Plechwe 2009) – that emerges at a particular historical moment and can be traced to the networks of specific intellectuals and institutions in post-World War 1 Europe and the United States. The aim of these intellectuals, mostly economists and philosophers, was to oppose what they saw as a rising tide of collectivism, state-centered planning, and socialism and to develop an agenda that was distinct from classical liberalism (Ganti 2014: 91).

In the case of New Zealand farming in places such as RD9, following neoliberal structural adjustments, the community can no longer function as a collective without some form of financial strain in times of environmental disaster due to the governments agricultural reform that occurred in the 1980s.

New Zealand's Current Economic Connection to Farming

Currently, New Zealand's two primary exports are meat and dairy products, with red meat alone making up 16.2% of new Zealand's total exports (Beef + Lamb, MIA 2020). For New Zealand farmers who partake in the sheep and beef industry, around 88% of beef and veal and almost 95% of lamb and mutton meat the is produced in New Zealand is being exported overseas as of 2020 (Beef + Lamb, MIA 2020). In this, a majority of New Zealand farmers are frequently encouraged to continue expanding and streamline their farming processes to provide profits for both themselves and for New Zealand's overall economy. In a New Zealand context, not only is the sheep and beef farming industry reliant on large investments of capital for its success financially, it is also heavily governed by a profit strategy that favours agricultural intensification instead of more traditional practices.

Unlike other farming sectors in areas such as Australia, the New Zealand government does routinely provide assistance during environmental disasters such as droughts and floods for farmers. The New Zealand government's position of providing financial assistance in a natural disaster scenario is arguably directly reflective of its growing environmentally conscious positionality. As stated by Morris (2009), alongside New Zealand's move neoliberal market adjustments, there has also been a notable shift towards "cleaner, greener" policies. Not providing any assistance in a natural disaster like a drought (which has likely been further enhanced by global warming), would arguably not assist in displaying this clean green image to those the New Zealand government is attempting to appeal to in order to pull in the tourism industry. As further stated by Haggerty, Campbell & Morris:

> there has been a great deal of public attention within New Zealand paid to the environmental costs of intensive farming practices (PCE, 2004). Collectively, these changes have put sheep farmers and their export companies on alert about the need to protect a "clean, green" image both domestically and abroad." Compared to the horticultural industry – and the kiwifruit sector in particular – pastoral farming in New Zealand is only a relatively recent entrant into the new neoliberal politics of private market governance, market access threats, and the compelling new demands for qualities like auditable

> and measurable animal welfare claims around food products (Haggerty, Campbell & Morris 2009, 771).

Due to the need to maintain a competitive stance in the external markets, while still supporting the tourist sector, the New Zealand government places pressure on the rural sectors to both intensify product while still being environmentally conscious. New Zealand government policy and private business strategy also aims toward diversifying the country's economy and its main contributing industries especially in the case of tourism.

It is this dual push for farming intensification and clean, green practices by the New Zealand government that I argue is the reasoning behind the limited financial assistance that was provided for the 2019-2020 drought. While there is public support for farmers to some degree, it is hinged upon the urban public being made aware of rural struggles. During recent elections in New Zealand for example, most of the major policies that were broadcasted are social policy and environmental based. If it was not for New Zealand wanting to grow and covet its clean green image for tourism and its exports, I believe it is unlikely that the New Zealand government would have donated the $500,000 to Hawkes Bay during the 2020 drought.

I argue that the New Zealand government's decision to donate $500,000 to the Hawkes Bay relief fund illustrates, firstly, the government's lack of forethought into where this significant portion of the money would have been best suited for. Secondly, I argue that the lack of knowledge surrounding how to access this government donation also illustrates the lack of consideration or understanding by national politicians and bureaucrats about the reality in Hawkes Bay. Lastly, I will argue that Jacinda's visit to Hawkes Bay and the absence of media concerning the drought also further illustrates that both the government and the New Zealand public in general, failed to fully recognise the impacts of the 2019-2020 drought on the farming industry and farming communities. I further argue that the Covid-19 Lockdown further exacerbated these issues.

3.2 How the Events of 2020 Caused Significant Financial Loss

Figure 8: An almost cloudless day, A daily occurrence during the 2019-2020 drought, causing a high likelihood for financial and psychological stress. Photo by Martin Jones in 2020. Supplied.

In the summer season of 2019- 2020 Hawkes Bay, the Hawkes Bay drought in tandem with restrictive social conditions that have not been seen or experienced before in recent years. The drought experienced in the 2019-2020 period has been likened to a particularly bad drought period in 2013. According to the Ministry, the drought conditions experienced in 2013 for the North Island have not been seen since 1978 (Ministry of Primary Industries 2013). For central Hawkes bay, the drought in 2012-2013 was the second only to the drought experienced in 1997-1998 (Ministry of Primary Industries 2013). For example the total average expected rainfall for May in Hawkes Bay is usually around 400mls, for Hawkes Bay in 2020 however there was only 297mls of rain recorded (Teaomaori, 2020). This average rainfall for Hawkes Bay was also not evenly distributed across the region either.

Participant Marie, who is married to my other participant Darren, who have both lived and farmed in the RD9 community for more than thirty years stated in reference to the drought of 2019-2020, that "we in our 33 years of farming have never ever had a drought like that before". Participant Mark also stated, "That's farming in Hawkes Bay a bit, they (drought) come around every 10 15 years or something, but that one [2019-2020 drought] was one in a hundred years." On an environmental level, due to the severe lack of rainfall over several months this drought period was never going to be an easy experience for farmers, as the longer the drought period continued, the higher the likelihood that it would affect pasture growth moving into the winter season. For the RD9 community the additional governmental changes and restrictions that were implemented during the level four Covid-19 lockdown in the autumn of 2020, made this environmental period of hardship much more difficult on a financial, social and psychological level than initially anticipated for many in the RD9 community.

How the 2019-2020 Drought Period was Unique

Unlike prior drought periods, farming communities both within Hawkes Bay and New Zealand as a whole were required to be under many social restrictions during the 2019-2020 drought period. The communities also faced the direct and indirect impacts of restrictions placed on business such as meat processing restrictions. With the emergence of Covid-19 in the New Zealand public in February 2020, the decision to mandate and enforce strict restrictions were put in place from March 25th until May 13th (Unite Against Covid 19 2021). With the enforcements made during this period, many of the normal facilities that pertain to the rural sector were very limited or stopped together during this time period. In the RD9 community, the local schools were closed, community functions cancelled and some farming contractors such as fencers were unable to continue under the initial level four restriction in 2020. While this may not necessarily seem like it would have had much of an impact in terms of environmental and economic stress, this in combination with the worsening effect of the drought created a period of hardship previously not seen in a drought period.

Alongside this Peter also mentioned how frustrating the media coverage was, and was especially annoyed at the under ending cycle of hope and disappointment surrounding the weather forecasts and weather predictions.

> "I think one of the most frustrating things going with the drought was that they were telling us we were going to get rain like in May and stuff like that you know? Say oh you, you're gonna get rain, you're gonna get rain, and you it didn't eventuate, it didn't come, and you that probably, what at least 10 times…one time it looked so promising I said right Linda, we'll get out and put some nitrogen on our new grasses, this is our best chance, worked all Friday, got in Saturday night and got it all finished, got in[side] in time to see the forecast… it all fizzled out and we out 1ml. That was gut wrenching you know?"

For some participants having this economic and environmental stress placed upon them was further exacerbated by the lack of media and governmental attention on their current and worsening situation that was occurring in RD9 and in Hawkes Bay. My participant Darcy went explained that "I was so disappointed with the media…I was gutted with the media. And it took all that time, It wasn't until poppy's page (Hawkes Bay Drought Page) had a thousand followers before it was even a blip…I think we were in a drought officially until October or November."

For many farmers in RD9 during a drought period, there are typically two primary options when it comes to dealing with the current stock they have on their property. Firstly, farmers may try to find feed to sustain and maintain the health of their stock or secondly, they will book in to send their stock to the stockyards or to the abattoir. When a drought period occurs, there can often be an influx of farmers trying to offset their stock, leading to a price drop in the value of their stock and can also lead to a large increase in feed prices. This can be significant if farmers are not prepared for this financial loss as farmers cannot often predict how the sheep and beef industry fluctuates. With this, farmers are generally required to take an initial financial loss by selling off their stock or take the gamble of buying feed and waiting for stock prices to increase.

It is also important to consider that the age of stock also play a significant role in prices. In order to be sold at the stockyards to the abattoir, stock must be a certain age, and above a certain weight to qualify for slaughter. The age, weight and overall life conditions of sheep and cattle and have a significant impact on the grade they are

awarded at slaughter. The visual physical condition of the stock also plays a role to the value stock has in these markets. During the national Covid-19 lockdown of 2020, meat processing plants were deemed an essential service. However, during the 2020 Covid-19 lockdown, in order to keep in compliance and protect their employees most abattoirs were running at half of their capacity and at times only 30% of their normal capacity (New Zealand Herald 2020). With this and the issues that some farmers faced in obtaining stock feed, there were inevitably going to be many financial and environmental implications for farmers that would have not been as significant without the influence of Covid-19.

The Influence of Covid-19

The Influence that Covid-19 had also went far deeper than the social restrictions as the Covid-19 situation appeared to move all public and government views away from anything that was non covid-19 related. This was something that was worsened the perceptions that farmers had against the government in office for 2020. Peter said that

> "One of things that made me really wild was Jacinda Arden came to Hawkes Bay after lockdown and she never even visited any farms… and she said there was no money for the drought and she gave 1.7 million for the arts. You know that made me really wild. She didn't even acknowledge that [drought], and she was in Hawkes Bay. She could have taken a couple hours or an hour to go and just acknowledge it you know?"

When looking into this, at the time of Jacinda Ardern's visit to Hawkes Bay she announced that the government will be spending 175 million to boost the arts due the effects Covid-19 had on the industry (Stuff 2020), for farmers like Peter this increased the level of frustration felt at Covid-19, the New Zealand Government and the New Zealand media. As stated by Linda, "We were sick to death hearing about Covid. Sick to death of it."

3.3 The Governmental Response to the 2020 Hawkes Bay Drought

The impact of the 2020 drought in Hawkes Bay was felt across the region. There were many among the Hawkes Bay regions who felt the impact of the drought financially to the extent of asking for outside assistance. One such avenue that farmers were able to access for financial assistance was the "Hawkes Bay Relief Fund". Initially, the four mayors from Hawkes Bay who set up the relief fund were aiming to raise 2 million NZD for the Hawkes Bay relief fund (RNZ 2020). In the end, this relief fund totalled just over one million after numerous donations. A majority of the funds for the drought relief were donated by the minister of agriculture, Damien O'Conner on the behalf of the New Zealand Government (RNZ 2020). Alongside the $500,000 from the New Zealand Government, there were also donations from the Hawkes Bay Regional Council ($200,000), Central Hawkes Bay District Council ($50,000), Centralines ($50,000), the Hastings District Council ($200,000), and the Digging Deep Give a little ($10,000) (Hawkes Bay Regional Council 2020b).

The Drought Relief Fund

According to the Hawkes Bay regional council (Hawkes Bay Regional Council 2020a), the main aim of the drought relief fund was to primarily fund the transportation of stock feed. Farmers were eligible for a one-time grant depending on the size of their property. For farmers who owned land between 20-150 hectares were entitled to $1000 and anyone with over 150 hectares was entitled to $3000. These funds were accessible to farmers from the period of March until September 30th, 2020 (Hawkes Bay Regional Council 2020a). Interestingly, in the final weeks of the fund's accessibility, there was still around $233,000 still unclaimed by Hawkes bay farmers (Hawkes bay Regional Council 2020a).

Other Forms of Financial Aid

Aside from the Hawkes Bay Drought relief fund, there was also a national drought relief package which was announced at the beginning of March 2020 (RNZ 2020a) and the

Drought Recovery Advice Fund (Ministry For Primary Industries 2020). The drought relief package was primarily aimed to deal with three main issues; firstly was the ability to respond to an immediate need such as the delivery of water, stock welfare and sanitation. Secondly, the package aimed to extend the outreach of the rural assistance payments, and thirdly to support farmers and growers following the classification of a large-scale drought in areas of New Zealand (Beehive.govt.nz 2020). With the "Drought Recovery Advice Fund", applicants were entitled to a maximum of $3,500 to assist with obtaining professional help for a variety of drought-related and technical advice (Ministry For Primary Industries 2020).

The Issues With Relief Funds and Relief Packages

One of the main issues expressed by my participants regarding these packages and funds was that they were typically available and applicable for a short period of time. Of the three different assistance funds that I looked at with this research project, most, if not all, had a very restrictive application submission timeline. Alongside this, both the Drought Recovery Advice Fund and the Hawkes Bay Drought Relief fund had stipulated that farmers could only apply for assistance with certain matters. For example, the Hawkes Bay Drought Relief Fund only provided assistance in only the transportation of feed, rather than the cost of feed itself. Both of these financial assistance funds also had a cap of $3,000-$3,500 to each individual applicant.

These limitations on amount of financial assistance farmers were able to claim, among other limitations, not only fail to truly reflect the economic loss that many of the farmers within Hawkes Bay had experienced, but they also fail to correctly assist with the economic complexities a drought creates that can be different for each and every farmer. Due to the restrictive period of time that you could apply for these funds, many farmers who were pre-emptive in getting rid of the stock early were not eligible to apply for these funds and grants even if they still took an economic loss from the decision they made. I argue that this lack of forethought into what the stipulations were for these relief funds dramatically affected how many farmers actually applied for financial assistance.

Having these numerous requirements surrounding qualifying for these financial assistance funds, the small amount that was claimable and the short time span that you could be applicable for fund assistance demonstrates the lack of forethought and rural voices within the decision process procedures that are in place for drought relief funds and the New Zealand government. For a significant number of farmers it is not necessarily the initial financial hit they take during the drought period, it is actually the flow on financial affects for the following seasonal periods and following years that is their main concern.

This is not the first time in New Zealand history where New Zealand farmers have faced uncertainty surrounding their long-term viability of farming and the lack of government compassion for the people involved in the farming sector. In the 1990s, the New Zealand government put highland farming locations up for land tenure (Morris 2009). In this process, farmers were effectively dealt with on an individual case by case basis waiting to find out the future of farming the highland location that was previously protected due the lands connection to the crown.

> With tenure review, a previous identity, grounded in place and legitimated through a particular relationship with the Crown, is under threat (or is at least being destabilised), as one of the key modes through which that identity has been authenticated is being removed. Changing land tenure, in reordering the connection between farmers and the State, is producing a new form of farmer subjectivity, and an oppositional subjectivity (Morris 2009, 96).

As stated in chapter one, I believe that the RD9 Community has felt immense dissatisfaction with the policies that both the regional and national government have placed on the agricultural sector. Morris (2009) argues that farmers have been stripped of their guardianship, stripped of their financial security since the 1980s. I agree with Morris that new Zealand's move towards a cleaner, greener imagery, has opened agricultural sector, to more direct public and governmental scrutiny in terms of its climate change and environmental impacts such as impact on waterways. Based on my research, I see New Zealand's farms being effectively ignored in regards to their financial and environmental hardships they face unless it is an election year.

When considering the cases of the Southland Highland sheep farmers and RD9's sheep and beef farmers, the negative and dissociative views of the government, it helps to explain why farmers appear to have increasingly decided to take on additional debt or looked within the rural community for hardship assistance rather than availing themselves of government assistance programs.

Participant Experiences with Aid Assistance

Out of the participants I interviewed for this research project, there was one notable couple who engaged with the aid assistance process during the 2019-2020 drought. Unlike other participants who did not apply to the Hawkes Bay Drought Fund, this farming couple directly applied. This couple, Darren and Marie, as stated in chapter one, has lived and been involved in farmers in the RD9 community for more than thirty years. Like some of the other participants in this research Darren, Marie and their children are people who I have known since childhood. From events at the RD9 community centre, Pet Day at Sherenden and Districts School, and even summer days spent in their backyard pool catching frogs, Darren and Marie are people who I encountered regularly during my childhood.

Darren and Marie's Experience with Relief Funds

Like many others during the 2019-2020 drought, Darren and Marie faced issues on their property namely, accessing the additional feed. After hearing of the government's donation to Hawkes Bay farmers, how to access this fund, and surveying their need for additional feed Darren and Marie decided to apply. Darren and Marie recounted,

> "It was to go-to advisors. The only way we got any benefit from it (governments donation) is if we consulted an advisor about how to run our business... we did it because we wanted to find additional feed and we thought it was the only way we could find additional feed because we couldn't do it personally. We thought we had to go

through these advisors and they would put us on a list and they would help find additional feed."

From this recollection from Darren and Marie, it appeared that applying for assistance from this fund was more of a last resort than their first. It was also not due to dire economic hardship, but rather the difficulty in sourcing the feed needed to maintain the stock on the property as Marie stated "We were totally prepared to pay for it we didn't want it given to us." Darren and Marie also went on to say the process for applying to this fund had many hoops to jump through and in the end they were quite upset with the end result as there is no use in having money to buy feed if you can't find anywhere to source it from. "All he told us was how much feed was required to keep us going...Which we knew that already. And he didn't source us any feed."

Figure 9: Delivery of alternative feed. Photo by Martin Jones in 2020. Supplied.

Fortunately for Darren and Marie, they were able to eventually source feed through a number of connections and were later given money for the cartridge of the feed they needed for their property from the Hawkes Bay Drought Relief Fund. For Darren and Marie, it appeared that applying for financial assistance and talking to advisors was a confusing, and frustrating, endeavour that left rather bitter feelings. For while Darren and Marie were able to eventually find the feed that they needed for their farm, the advisors they had actively sought out to gain contacts for where to buy feed from, did not provide them with any list or place to begin when it came to sourcing feed. Fortunately, while they were able to eventually access what they needed, the structures and assistance were not in place to help provide an avenue to get what they needed. They were still required to fall back on community connections to the source feed. With

this, it is important to note that it appeared that while the Government did provide $500,000 to Hawkes Bay to help with the fund, the stipulations for the money and the amount of accessible money for each individual, in addition to the required particular circumstances for qualifying for access meant that aid was inaccessible for a number of farmers.

The Growth of Farmer Independence

I argue farmers in RD9 articulate a strong sense of financial, social and political independence in large part to due to the cultural and practical roots of pastoral farming in New Zealand alongside the effects of neoliberal market adjustments. The RD9 community appears to increasingly pursue community and individual independence. Prior to the installation of neoliberal policies in the 1980s and 1990s, the New Zealand rural societies had a more collective character in comparison to today. In the past there were larger and more expansive farms requiring the use of additional farmhands and shepherds. This created economic and social interdependence. Owing to how the New Zealand market was restructured there was less of a push to diversify and have alternative forms of income. At that time, the income of a farmer was much more stabilised than it is today. I argue that the change towards competition among neighbours placed stress on the local and national sense of community.

In the case of finances and economic success, farmers now increasingly concern themselves as individual businesses based around a small family unit rather than a rural collective. In a paradoxical fashion however, these circumstances have appeared to have push New Zealand farmers like the RD9 community to rely on each other when sourcing resources and aid in periods of hardship. It appears that farmers have learnt that they cannot rely on their national government for assistance, including situations that are out of their control and were caused by environmental factors such as drought. In the case of RD9, it appears that the move towards neoliberalism has further isolated farmers from their connection to the New Zealand government and society as a whole, and created feelings of mistrust.

The Benefits of Social Connections

Alongside difficulties with the financial and general aid assistance routes, farmers in RD9 were in some cases continually being faced on social media with the imagery and stories covering the hardship that others in the community were experiencing. This may have also played a significant role as to why most of my participants did not apply for any assistance from the number of funds that were available at the time. They instead relied on their personal connections from rural communities.

My participants Laura and Paul, were another example of those who also relied on their community connections to get through the drought period. Laura and Paul were fortunate to be able to obtain 300 bales of baleage from outside the region, and also had the opportunity to send 600 ewes to some friends who were willing to take and graze them for Laura and Paul.

In my experience, finances are something that is not openly discussed in the rural community. Although it is also fair to say that discussing finances and financial difficulties openly are not something that New Zealanders are also comfortable with, rural farmers may arguably discuss finances to a lesser extent as many farms are essentially family businesses. Arguably, this may again be due to the sense of independence that has begun to be a core aspect of neoliberal farming in Hawkes Bay and potential New Zealand as a whole. My findings are in conclusion with others that argue that rural farmers tend to rely upon social capital and rural networks more openly than governmental support (Sampson, Goodrich & McManus 2011).

The Growing Disappointment Surrounding the Governments Response

Alongside the funds that were allocated towards Hawkes Bay during the Covid lockdown, another notable response from the New Zealand government was Jacinda Arden's visit to Hawkes Bay after lockdown travel restrictions were lifted May 2020. As noted by a number of my participants, while the Prime Minister did appear to come to Hawkes Bay in part due to the effects of the drought, it was noticeable that Ardern did not speak with any farmers directly during her say. When looking at past new articles and media reports (As seen in figure 10 above) covering this Hawkes Bay visit,

it also appeared that Jacinda Arden did not, in fact, meet with any rural farmers during her stay in Hawkes Bay, even if Arden did so off-camera, the absence of any media surrounding this appeared to have left a bitter taste with a number of the farmers I spoke about this with.

Figure 10*:* Tukituki MP Anna Lorck, Ikaroa-Rahiwiti MP Meka Whatiri and Prime Minister Ardern got a behind the scenes look at one of Hawke's Bay's largest employers, Heinz-Wattie's. By Schwanecke. 2020. Sourced https://www.nzherald.co.nz/hawkes-bay-today/news/pm-spills-the-beans-during-heinz-watties-factory-tour-in-hastings/KWI7KDWCLYU5BJ3VG6IJ2734OQ/

One family, I spoke with, Rachel, Mark and Reece, expressed how the government appeared to not recognise the importance of keeping farms running during the initial Covid lockdown, “We were a tiny bit nervous it would stop the ships from coming in. We were nervous though. Because there was one stage there where the government weren’t too worried about farming and they realised, hey hang on we actually need to eat”. When Rachel Mark and Reece were asked if they obtained financial assistance they stated they in fact drew from their mortgage to during this time period to cover the cost of bringing in additional feed, “We drew from the mortgage. Drought often adds almost half a mill to the mortgage.

Overall, while both government and regional council assistance typically appear to state a desire to be helpful to farmers when it comes to helping those in need, however the rural farmers I spoke with were not inclined to apply for assistance programs, but instead, tended to rely upon rural connections in a period of hardship. I have argued that this could in large part be due to the rural community feeling unheard and very much separated from the general New Zealand public and because they were not understood and cared for by the New Zealand Government. Moreover, similar to the case study by Haggerty, Campbell Morris (2009), the farmers in RD9 appeared to be forced into diversifying and intensifying their farming practices to make a profit, in the face of neoliberal market restructuring. I argue that this development of a neoliberal market and the pressure to succeed economically is a significant contributor to the fractured appearance of the RD9 community. The dissatisfaction at the lack of action, consideration and understanding from the government has undeniably caused a negative association with governmental processes that directly affect farming communities and farming practices.

For many farmers in RD9 it appears that they hold a growing distrust towards the New Zealand government. A sense of being ignored and misunderstood, by the government appears to have led to the farming population of RD9 and the wider New Zealand farming communities to feel unheard, misunderstood, and ignored when it comes to policies that directly affect their livelihood. From the lack of initial governmental and media coverage of the impact of the 2019-2020 drought, the seeming lack of forethought as to how to best provide strategic government assistance to the rural community, and the ignorance of how much droughts affect farmers in the long term, many the farmers I spoke with expressed disappointment and resentment. For the Hawkes Bay rural community this was both resentment in regards to how the 2019-2020 drought was dealt with and a growing resentment towards the wider community and New Zealand government for their lack of understanding and compassion in regards to the effects of the drought on the farming sector.

3.4 The Tipping Point for Farmers Frustrations

Figure 11: Hundreds gathered at the Hastings A&P Showgrounds for the Groundswell Howl of a Protest event. Marty Sharpe, 2021. From https://www.stuff.co.nz/business/farming/300359263/howl-of-a-protest-nz-being-taken-down-a-socialist-plughole-organiser-tells-hastings-crowd

In the autumn of 2021, the New Zealand government came to propose a levy on non-electric cars. In early 2021, the clean car discount was proposed. With this, people who own or purchase an electric car will be able to claim a rebate. In order to do this, it has been proposed that fees will be attached to high-emission vehicles in order to pay the rebates (New Zealand Herald, 2021). According to Stuff (2021), imported cars could have a fee as high as $5175 for a brand new car and $2875 for a used import. This change is due to be initiated in January 2022. The introduction of this levy appears to have brought long-held tensions to the surface within the rural community of Hawkes Bay and the New Zealand rural community as a whole.

For RD9 farmers, this levy was introduced soon after an announced increase in dog fees against rural dog owners in May 2021 (New Zealand Herald 2021b). The combination of these taxes appeared to bring many people "over the edge" and lead to a protest event named the "Howl of a Protest". The Howl of a Protest's stated aim was protesting against the levy on non-electric cars. Hawkes Bay farmers do not view electric cars as currently viable on farming properties. Currently there are not many charging stations here in New Zealand, and it is likely the rural community will be the last to receive them. Secondly, farmers state there is the lack of availability of electric

vehicles that suit farming terrain. Currently there is only a small number of brands which are selling an electric ute, with an even smaller number currently available in New Zealand.

The government's introduction of a form of taxation on people who don't currently have a green option available for their business seems appears to have been the last straw for a fair number of farmers according to media reports and farmers testimonies (New Zealand Herald 2021). As one farmer stated in an interview, "There is a long list of things that the Government has done to rural New Zealand. We've had enough" (New Zealand Herald 2021). He also went on to note that, "The mental stress of being told constantly that you are polluters, that you are bad for the country…I really feel for the younger generation of farmers. It's pretty tough" (New Zealand Herald 2021).

This feeling of being unheard or glanced over seems to have been growing for a long while in RD9 and New Zealand's farming communities and when looking at my findings I would not be surprised if the lack of direct governmental help in the 2019-2020 drought contributed to the groundwork for this eventual protest. Juan and Hänze suggest that "countries affected by harsh environmental conditions such as droughts may exhibit higher risks of conflict because scarcity triggers an increase of social capital within affected groups as well as increased polarization towards other ethnic groups within the same country" (2020, 154-155). This could very much be the case for the people of rural Hawkes Bay as the meaning behind the initial protest quickly spun out of control with a small number of protestors taking this event as a place to display their anger at other matters that are much more controversial.

In the case of some protestors, they took they howl of a protest as an opportunity to also state their misogynistic and racist opinions on the government and wider New Zealand community, with signs stating, "We Live in New Zealand not Aotearoa! Stop ramming Māori Language down our throat", "Black Utes Matter" and "Jacinda, Kiwi's do not want communism" (as shown in Figure 12 below) (News Hub 2021).

Figure 12: An example of some of them more controversial protester opinion found in the national Howl of a Protest. Matt Adams, 2021. From https://www.newshub.co.nz/home/politics/2021/07/live-updates-farmers-take-to-their-tractors-in-nationwide-protest.html

This build-up of animosity against the regional council and New Zealand government, likely speaks more for how the rural community no longer feels that they are a part of what the New Zealand government has famously called the "team of five million New Zealanders". To farmers like those in RD9 there appears to be a general absence of rural opinions and input when it comes to policies that may directly affect them, especially on an economic level, even though the government has pushed for farmers to effectively become independent businesses. For RD9 and the Hawkes Bay rural community, the fact that both the regional council and New Zealand government both appear to recognise, but also blatantly ignore the long-term financial hardship that drought brings to the rural sector is increasingly frustrating for them.

The fact that both on a regional and national level grants and donations provided towards helping the rural community during the 2019-2020 drought were tied up into relief funds that had barriers and limitations appear to have put off a significant number of my participants, with people this family seemingly opting to add to their mortgage or get a loan rather than find financial assistance. I again suggest that a significant underlying factor in all of this is the changing public perceptions of farmers in relation to the New Zealand society and New Zealand government. As a result of the change towards the neoliberalisation of market policy in New Zealand, farmers have begun to change in the eyes of both the government and the New Zealand community.

The Changing Status of Farmers in New Zealand

While New Zealand farming contributes a significant portion to New Zealand economy, farmers such as the ones in the RD9 community appear to merely be a small business within a long chain of production. Farmers no longer have governmental security and nor to do they feel understood by the wider New Zealand community. The rural communitys' experiences are not often in the eyes of the New Zealand public. Because rural communities are rarely a destination for people without a rural connection, they often appear to be an aspect of New Zealand that is recognised but it also increasingly misunderstood and ignored. Farming has undeniably become a powerhouse in the New Zealand export economy, but with this farming has been displaced and is now merely seen as a cog in New Zealand's economy rather than the national community. In this my interpretation and research are in line with Morris (2009) who states,

> This represents a radical change from times when farmers were considered to be the economic and symbolic backbone of the nation. Farmers and farming are no longer understood in this way. Increasingly, they are regarded as an ecological threat to the nation (their gas-emitting cows are contributing to global warming, fertiliser run-off is polluting rivers and lakes and so on) or as simply businessmen, motivated purely by profits, with discourses about farming as a morally superior way of life increasingly ringing untrue (Morris 2009, 106).

As suggested by Morris (2009), farmers are no longer considered guardians in New Zealand. I agree with Morris and suggest further that farmers have begun to feel like the forgotten or invisible community of New Zealand. Farmers like those in the RD9 community, have increasingly become people who now live in fractured and isolated communities that feel more and more like forgotten and ignored communities in regards to their relationship to the larger population.

It does appear that farmers, especially in the RD9 community, now think of themselves as businesses helping businesses. I see value in further research that examines the factors have contributed this this disconnection from their land and their identity as community farmers. Farming has become an economic sector in the eyes of

the government and arguably the public as well. I however do not see it in this way, and also I do not believe that the farmers of the RD9 community and other rural areas of New Zealand want to think of farming in this way only. The emotional levels at which my participants spoke when discussing the 2019-2020 drought are very illustrative of this. For the farmers I spoke with, the social element of farming is crucial. The social, human element of farming is however being increasingly removed and ignored from the perspective of policy and public image and is instead now just seen as the first cog in an economic machine for New Zealand's economy.

4. Finding Solace in Community

Figure 13: The last roads at the end of the RD9 postal service route. 2021.

As with many other townships, and areas, the rural farming sector in RD9 in Hawkes Bay, appears to come together as a community in times of need and hardship. In talking with my participants as well as reflecting upon my own experiences, I suggest that the farmers of RD9, use both community and informally run events to maintain their relationship with their friends and neighbours. I suggest this is because these events have become increasingly vital in ensuring social connections and mental health is maintained in a period of shared hardship.

In a harsh drought period, a farmer is unlikely to have anything close to a 40-hour work week, let alone have a full day off with absolutely no work activities to attend to. In the current generation, farmers have become increasingly more independent and autonomous in comparison to previous generations. I suggest that it is this changing structure of the typical farming household that drives the growing importance of community events, including those both formal and informal.

In this chapter, I will firstly discuss the social changes and social background of the RD9 community. This will be done by exploring how the typical farming

household dynamic currently looks like within the RD9 community, and what were the environmental factors impacting the RD9 community during 2020. Secondly, I will discuss how the concept of solastalgia highlights the effects of this environmental impact on farmers' mental health. Thirdly I will discuss my personal experiences with the social event held in the RD9 community to describe the social interactions and social events in the RD9 community. And lastly, I will discuss how initiatives such as the Collective Hug and the Drought Shout are illustrative of how the RD9 community uses community-run events to help maintain good mental health, social connections and combat feelings of solastalgia.

4.1 The Social and environmental Changes Occurring in RD9

In New Zealand the rural landscape is continually changing and so are the households that belong to rural farming communities. With time, new job opportunities and financial avenues have opened up in the rural sector creating a dissonance between farming generations, with fewer people choosing farming as a life career. More and more farmers are having to sell off small plots of land to remain financially viable. For people with previous farming experience, these lifestyle blocks are not appealing unless you want to move only for the location rather than having a livelihood of a farmer. Alongside selling land for financial stability, farming plots also appear to decrease in size generationally. This could be in part due to a change in family inheritance norms in the rural New Zealand farming communities, or other external pressures as suggested by Merlan and Raftery,

> In all of this, it is important to recognise the ambiguity and variability of the term 'rural': take note of comments of the form, 'national distinctions between rural and urban are arbitrary and varied' (IFAD 2001:17). There is nevertheless agreement that what is referred to as 'rural' spaces are undergoing rapid and continuing change, including a continuing decline in the proportions of populations resident rurally and engaged in agricultural production, a rise in occupations that are non-agricultural in origin (though sometimes with links to agriculture) and increasing vulnerability to

> extra-local forces (Ray 1998). There is no doubt about the reality of some of these trends. To adopt a 'calamity' view of rural change, however, would be to abdicate the effort to critically engage with these diverse and novel intersections of social, economic and cultural phenomena (Merlan & Raftery 2009, 3).

Available avenues of opportunity are not keeping newer generations interested in rural farm life. The small number of people in New Zealand who move from an urban lifestyle to a rural one is much less common than those who leave the rural lifestyle. RD9 is no exception to this. In the case of the rural Hastings district of RD9, I have personally seen several farming properties sell due to not having a younger family member be interested in taking over the family farm, a lack of financial success, or lacking funding to buy out all of the shares that were divided among family members after the last generation passed on. In some cases, I have seen some farmers decide to sell off a small portion of their land to be able to continue to live on their property due to the lack of financial success achieved in farming ventures.

The total result is that community farming, that is, a farm that is run with the help of a shepherd and multiple farmhands is becoming less and less common as a majority of farming properties are now too small to employ staff to help assist or manage the farm on behalf of the owner. As said by Peter, “A lot of young people, the family they don’t want to go farming.” When asked about this Jane, said in response "And do you blame them? There are so many more opportunities and farming's hard work now. It's getting harder and harder." From the people I went to school with, only a small fraction of my peers have gone into farming, instead usually opting to go into an agricultural-related field rather than farming itself.

Environmental Changes to the Rural Landscape

For the RD9 community, the 2019-2020 drought period affected farmers in a variety of environmental ways. Rather than having tall green grass for acres, in a drought period, it is not uncommon to only hills with brown lifeless grass, withered to the soil all around you. These signs of the drought are something that the farmers see and work within on a day to day basis, which can wear on a person's sense of hope and optimism. From

aspects as small as grass production to major concerns for stock health, the environmental strain put on rural land during a drought can moreover, have long and potentially disastrous effects. For a rural community like RD9, drought can cause a variety of environmental impacts. From impacting the growth production of grass and alternative feed, the water levels of dams, the need to push into different grass breeds and crops that affect soil could affect future soil quality, and even lower birth rates of both cattle and sheep, droughts can impact a wide variety of farming practices.

Figure 14: The very dry conditions in RD9 during the beginning of 2020. Photo by Martin Jones in 2020. Supplied.

For farming communities such as RD9, many of the potential impacts of drought if severe enough can affect a farm on an environmental level that could impact them until the next summer period or even further. As stated by Peter, “We were concerned about how late we got rain, it may have been too little too late.” What Peter is referring to here is the delayed impact that drought periods can have on grass growth. For farmers like Peter, one of the primary concerns that can be had in a drought period is how long the drought period goes for. As stated by Darcy “We didn’t think that the drought was going to be that bad, I don’t think anyone did.” If a drought period lasts too long in the autumn periods, it can mean that the grass does not have enough time to grow before winter sets in, and this can lead to a lower grass production that can affect stock weights, stock health, and the health of stock offspring.

In Hawkes Bay and surrounding regions, in recent years, droughts have become a near yearly occurrence. For farmers who are unable to have successful grass growth from the previous year and go into another extended drought period, the problems, issues and financial strain can begin to snowball into a much larger issue that can further worsen. Similar to Peter and other participants in this research pool, while there were some concerns over water levels in dams and underground water reservoirs, it was their daily water used in their homes that was a major concern. Darcy and her family faced concerns regarding water in their home, having to eventually decide to purchase water, "We just didn't have any water, we had to get water tankers in for our own house water." For a fair number of farmers, the water used on the farm versus inside their private home comes from two different sources, with the water for their home primary consisting of rainwater. In these circumstances, the drought period can often consist of limiting personal water usage by changing being more conscious of daily habits and limiting excessive water usage as much as possible.

The Environmental Dilemma

For some farmers like Rachel and Mark, facing the environmental disaster that was the 2019-2020 drought meant they needed to consider alternative forms of feed. With this they choose to use palm kernel instead of other alternative feeds such a baleage or hay. For Rachel and Mark, the decision to use palm kernel for their main feed was chosen owing to both the accessibility, financial cost and how it fulfils the health needs of their stock. Palm kernel, however, is very much a scrutinized product owing to the environmental impacts due to its association with palm oil and the palm oil industry. Palm kernel is a by-product of the palm oil industry, consisting of the pulp that is left after the oil is extracted from the seed from the palm fruit.

The palm oil industry is associated with environmental impacts such as deforestation, growing greenhouse emissions and the loss of biodiversity due to the method used to create palm oil farms (World Wild Life n.d). For Rachel and Mark, the decision to use the palm kernel to feed their stock was primarily a financial one. However they did not feel positive about this situation and in fact, they acknowledged the negative associations to the palm oil industry and environmental stigma surrounding

the palm industry. As farmers, Rachel and Mark viewed their current situation as one created by an environmental disaster (drought) that outweighed the issues surrounding the purchase of palm kernel and the environmental loss that is associated with it.

4.2 Feeling and Combatting Solastalgia

Solastalgia can be used to describe the feeling people experience when a landscape that one feels and connection to drastically changes, or even become unrecognisable. According to Albrecht et al. (2007),

> Solastalgia refers to the pain or distress caused by the loss of, or inability to derive, solace connected to the negatively perceived state of one's home environment. Solastalgia exists when there is the lived experience of the physical desolation of home. Environmental change can create distressed environments inhabited by distressed people (Albrecht et al 2007, 96).

Figure 15: Sheep stuck in bog-like dam while attempting to reach water. Photo by Martin Jones in 2020. Supplied.

For many in the RD9 community, the period that was the 2019-2020 drought caused many to face physical environmental impacts that they experienced as a form of daily, accumulating stress. As described above, many of the environmentally-based issues that can occur due to drought can only be abated with rain. Having to face the daily

visual reminders of dry out dams, and dead grass is something that weighed on people as they worked on their farms and with their animals daily.

For New Zealand, the increasing push for a cleaner and greener landscape can often directly collide with meeting economic goals and the expansions of our agricultural sectors to meet exportation demands. These are heavy and complicated expectations to achieve for New Zealand farmers. Alongside this, there is the psychological impact of natural disasters and changes that occur via climate change is also a factor that needs to be taken into account. In more recent years, the effects of climate change and the environmental disasters associated with it are becoming more and more apparent. Solastalgia is one concept anthropologists use to communicate the effects of climate change on farming and rural communities.

In addition to experiencing the mental stress of the environmental degradation of the drought in 2019-20, the farmers of RD9 experienced social challenges as well. For communities such as RD9, finding solace for the difficult decisions made during a drought period and having people who recognize that hardships they endured and may continue to endure are vital for the continuance of the RD9 community. One way this is achieved is through community-run social events that are of both a formal and informal nature.

Using Social Events to Combat Feelings of Solastalgia

While the RD9 community is indeed fractured, I suggest that the people of RD9 often use formal and informal social events to combat the feeling of solastalgia. With the continual decrease of people returning to the district and the slow but arguably higher number of people coming into the RD9 from an urban background, it is my opinion that community-run events have become ever more important.

Community-run social events are becoming much more commonplace and needed for rural New Zealand communities. With the availability of lifestyle plots, more people from an urban background are also moving into rural areas, further driving the need for more community-run social events. In an area where there is no township or social nucleus, the need for community-run events appears to be more and more vital

in attempting to connect those within the RD9 district who may not have many commonalities between them aside from the location they live in. I argue that due to the absence of an official township in areas like RD9, community-run social events appear very appealing to the more urban demographic and the younger demographic that live in rural communities.

Unlike previous generations of rural farming, today there are fewer connections between the current and the previous generations within farming families and the families that surround them. Exploring the responses I gathered from participants alongside current research, I aim to demonstrate and further explain these potential reasons for the growing need for community-run and informal events in rural farming communities to combat feelings of isolation and solastalgia.

Running Rampant Rurally: A Country Bumpkins Social Calendar

I have taken part in many formal and informal events run in the RD9 community. My mother and her partner Ivan, along with my sister and I could often be seen driving on our quad bike over the hill to the community centre in my early childhood. My childhood memories often involved anything from making scarecrows from old worn clothes for the Guy Fawkes Bonfire to attempting to win first place in the egg toss contest at the yearly Waiwhare sports day. As I grew up on Waiwhare Station, my childhood home was situated on the same land as the Waiwhare community centre. Due to this, my family was often not only frequently attended social events run by the community but also often helped out at a fair number of these events. From the tractor pull and nail drive at the annual Waiwhare Sports day to being the bet commissioners for the Melbourne Cup raffles.

Over time, some community-run events have disappeared, others emerged or become much more popular with the local community. Understandably, to any outsider, rural farming communities can be difficult to understand due to the lack of a social nucleus that an outsider can easily join and assimilate into. Oftentimes, it can be hard to assimilate into a rural community if you do not have any linking to the rural community or farming experience. Without this understanding, being able to

contextualise the importance the community holds within a time of hardship is even more difficult to comprehend.

For this research, I was fortunate enough to have fairly extensive experience within the community. Having spent the majority of my childhood and teenage years in the RD9 area, returning to the RD9 district had some unexpected outcomes that I was not anticipating. I had initially expected some of my interviews to be a little awkward. Looking back now, I hadn't completely comprehended the level of connection I still feel to the area and the people who are still residing there. Before my interviews, I automatically assumed that I would not feel a very strong connection to the area as I had used to. This was in large part due to the slow progression of leaving the community. From a young age, I was spending every second weekend away in Napier with my father. At age thirteen, I started attending high school and spent five days of the week in a boarding house, meaning that I was only in the RD9 community every fortnight until we eventually moved into the city in 2016.

Who knew Scones and Dog Food Could Feel Like a Hug?

When facing such emotions and feelings as solastalgia, and isolation, I suggest that the RD9 community actively attempts to combat this by attending or creating social events. An initiative like the collective hug and the semi-annual Drought Shout appears to be more and more popular with the people of RD9 in recent years with many having growing participant numbers every year. With initiatives and events like the Collective Hug and the Drought Shout providing an open space for farmers to meet and socialize with one another, I argue these initiatives are vital in keeping the community grounded and in touch with the difficulties they face on a daily basis. With the size of individual farms becoming smaller and smaller with the very generation, the importance of these community-run events appears to be growing.

In the last few generations, the general layout and typical look of an individual farming household have changed. For many farms in the Hawkes Bay community, there is no longer the capacity to employ shepherds or additional help, rather, farmers appear to widen their skill sets and look to additional avenues of income. Alongside this,

growing technological advances and a push for more environmentally friendly farming practices have become the new normality.

The Collective Hug Initiative

Figure 16: Diana Greer's interview with a TVNZ Breakfast correspondent explaining and demonstrating how the Collective Hug Initiative showing some of the 1,200 bags that were given out during the initiative. Still from https://www.1news.co.nz/2020/07/14/woman-helps-organise-goody-bags-for-all-1200-hawkes-bay-farmers-doing-it-tough-amid-drought/

One event which stood out during a number of my interviews was an initiative called the Collective Hug. This initiative, run by Diana Greer (pictured above in Figure 16), as Hawkes Bay Local, was aimed to provide a small act of kindness to local Hawkes Bay farmers by providing small parcels containing anything from a freshly baked scone to dog food (One News 2020). With both locals and people from areas such as the Banks Peninsula and the Manawatu also making donations, this small initiative quickly grew into a rather large project that required 15 hours to organize the delivery routes and 55 individual drivers for their first delivery in July (One News 2020) (Food Awards 2020).

With numerous volunteers taking time out of their day to personally deliver these parcels, potentially as many as 1200 of the farms in Hawkes Bay were visited by the Collective Hug. As said by Diana Greer (2020), this small initiative that started from wanting to bake and raffle off a few simple cakes turned into something of a large collective hug from those who wanted to take part and help this initiative. For the people who took part in the initiative, being able to provide a smile to someone's face during the trying time's farmers were having in Hawkes Bay was something which Diana Greer herself found to be very rewarding for the effort that it took to run this collective hug food drive (Greer 2020). The efforts made by Diana Greer with the Collective Hug initiative was also later recognised when she was nominated and later awarded the Cuisine Local Food award in October 2020 (New Zealand Herald, 2020b) (As both pictured below in Figure 17).

Figure 17: Hawke's Bay woman Diana Greer has won the Cuisine Local Hero NZ Food Heroes award for developing the Collective Hug group. Diana Greer (right) and Poppy Renton (left). From https://www.nzherald.co.nz/hawkes-bay-today/news/hawkes-bays-drought-baking-hero-diana-greer-wins-award/FXZ6R536KHGOOL2VP4RHVIXKPQ/

Other Hawkes Bay locals also took it upon themselves to support the rural community during this period. Another Hawkes Bay local, Poppy Renton (Pictured above in figure 16) from Maraekakaho, created the Hawkes Bay Drought page,

eventually amassing over 5,000 members (NZ Farm Life 2020). According to Poppy, the idea about creating a local drought support Facebook page came from watching her parents struggle during the Covid-19 lockdown (NZ Farm Life 2020). For Poppy, one of the core reasons behind making this Facebook page was to help Hawkes Bay farmers feel less alone during this period of hardship.

As Poppy touches on in an interview, “Farming is always going to be mentally draining, especially for farmers who are very proud and passionate of their stock and land...Depression is something that everyone will have to deal with at some point in their lives, whether it is yourself or a loved one struggling” (New Zealand Herald, 2020). In recognition of her kind gesture and efforts during the 2020 Drought was also awarded a Local Hero award in Kiwibank’s Local Hero of the Year Awards (New Zealand Herald 2021a).

Out of the 14 participants which took part in my research, at least 8 of the participants recalled being visited by the volunteers from the Collective Hug. Some participants may have missed out owing to living on difficult to access properties or they were not actively at home during the visits from one of the 55 collective hug volunteers (One News 2020). All participants who were visited by the collective noted that while the parcel given to seem was nothing too extraordinary, it was the fact that the local urban community made a decisive effort to collect and personally distribute these parcels in-person to rural farmers which touched the hearts of many in the Hawkes Bay community.

Among those people I interviewed, for a majority of the farmers that were visited by a Collective Hug volunteer, it was the mere fact that not only had the community come to recognize the hardships that the rural community was under at the time, but the fact the parcels were personally delivered to their household. As said by Laura "It was greatly appreciated, we were so surprised! It was nice to know they [Hawkes Bay community/district] were thinking of us." It was the simple fact that their hardship during this period was recognised. For me, this physical recognition of rural hardship alongside other anecdotes made by other participants demonstrated that this outreach from the outside community was both very touching and for at least one of my participants did have many emotions attached to it.

Peter exclaimed, "aw it was great!" when asked about a collective hug and Rachel also stated, "It [Collective Hug] was such a marvellous idea" in our interview. It is indicative to note however, it did appear that there was a number of the participants I interviewed that also acknowledged or implied that they did not know about this initiative until a representative arrived at the door or saw the activity concerning it on social media at a later date. These participants also appeared to be thankful for the effort made Collective Hug initiative.

When taking into consideration the descriptions provided by my participants, it suggests that locally run initiatives like Collective Hug help in assisting in alleviating the widening sense of a rural-urban divide that is occurring both inside and outside of local communities such as in Hawkes Bay within New Zealand. RD9 farmers do not ask for much from the government or the local community, but they do long for recognition of their efforts and recognition of their hardships. I suggest that the act of giving that occurred with the Collective Hug initiative is a powerful practice that helps rural communities of New Zealand not feel displaced from their regional community.

As I indicated in the previous chapter, I also suggest that the lack of media coverage of drought issues for farmers had a negative mental and social effect in communities like RD9. During the 2020 Covid-19 lockdown period, there were live video announcements that were occurring daily, where New Zealanders were able to see any major developments related to Covid-19 that was hosted by the current New Zealand prime minister Jacinda Arden. Having the availability of daily media announcements from our prime minister but the lack of mention of the severe drought that was also occurring within New Zealand, I believe further impacted the mental and community morale of New Zealand farmers.

Farmers like those in RD9 appeared to be feeling displaced from their land due to the intense changes happening to their land following the severe drought conditions that were out of their control and resulting in solastalgia. In addition to this, farmers faced the impacts that the Covid-19 lockdown had on the farming procedures, limited access to farming productions and access to farming goods. Farmers further saw themselves as ignored by the government, the national body who was expected to help and who has been known to step up in when an environmentally associated disaster has

occurred in previous years, often donating and providing financial support to those directly affected or a financial assistance fund.

A majority of the RD9 farmers that I interviewed maintained that they either made atypical financial decisions or were under vast financial pressure either for or during the Covid-19 lockdown period. As stated in chapter two, many of my participants were under financial pressure at the time and some were still feeling the economic damage from the 2019-2020 drought period. Many of the farmers I had interviewed described or displayed frustration regarding the limited amount of government assistance that was provided during the period. Even more frustrating for them, the financial aid that was provided to the community did come with several stipulations. The stipulations were so extensive that a vast majority of the farmers I talked to did not want to engage with the economic assistance program at all. This is why I believe that the "Collective Hug" initiative was so well received. For the farmers of RD9, the Collective Hug initiative was recognition of their hardship by outsiders or people who were not enduring the same level of hardship.

The Collective Hug was perceived as a form of recognition that they, farmers, were not forgotten about. It was a physical demonstration that people in Hawkes Bay and New Zealand cared about how they were affected by the Covid restrictions and by the 2019-2020 drought. For the RD9 community and wider rural Hawkes Bay community, the Collective Hug initiative provided a sense of recognition when the rural community when they felt both abandoned and ignored during this period of intense hardship that did not impact the urban community in the same way.

For the New Zealand urban community, a drought would mainly impact the frequency at which you water your lawn, whether you should fill up your pool and if you should wash your car as frequently as would like to. For the urban community rain and wet weather, the day is not celebrated and looked upon in fondness as it is in rural communities like RD9. For the people of RD9, rain means that there are crops and grass will grow, their stock will be able to feed, and the home water supply will be replenished. For communities such as RD9, rain isn't just a change of weather that impact whether you can do your laundry, but rather represents, potential financial stability and community prosperity

The Drought Shout

Another community-run initiative that took place after the Covid-19 lockdown procedures were the Hawkes Bay drought shouts. This was a district-run initiative aimed at aiding farmers across Hawkes bay to get together, chat with friends, have a few drinks and snacks at no cost to them. The Drought Shout Initiative was another initiative that was also locally run and funded. The Hawkes Bay Drought Shout was held at four various venues on the 18th of June 2020. Farmers were allowed to go to a venue at Crownthorpe, Kereru, Tikokino or Otane, and potentially receive prizes and meet special guests such as Te Radar (pictured in Figure 18 below), David Kirk Greg Murphy. These events were sponsored by local and farming related sponsors.

Figure 18: Te Radar, Providing Comedic relief at one of the four drought shouts for Hawkes Bay. Warren Buckland. 2020. From https://www.nzherald.co.nz/the-country/news/bay-farmers-flock-to-drought-shout-events/4CY2AZ5MOZDSDKYA623CTBWRXE/

Drought Shouts have become a much more common occurrence in the last 10 years. With the increasing impact of global warming, areas such as Hawkes Bay, already known for having hot and dry summers, are now beginning to experience particularly dry summers that are leading to droughts or drought-like conditions (Farmers Weekly, 2020). At first, it looked likely that this farming tradition would not go through owing to Covid-19, but Hawkes Bay organizer, Sarah Von Dadelszen was

determined to make sure that the Hawkes Bay Drought Shout would run in 2020 (Farmers Weekly, 2020). For the participants who I spoke with, there was a consensus that the drought shout was a good chance to catch up with others that were under the same circumstances and catch up with other farmers that had a difficult time this drought season. The idea of a drought shout is not new, in the past, there have been many droughts shouts run all over New Zealand over the years. I recall attending at least one or two in past.

For organiser Sarah Von Daelszen, the need for the Drought Shout in 2020 for local farmers seemed imperative when considering the potential long-term effects that the drought could have considering the lack of rain they had during this period (Daelszen 2020). One of the main goals for this community-run initiative was to get farmers away from the farm for a little while and provide and social space where farmers could chat about their situations and enjoy some comedy entertainment (Daelszen 2020). For many, the severe drought conditions have meant that a significant number of farmers have not been able to be away from their property for an extended period, alongside this, due to Covid-19 restrictions you could not invite others over to share the load or find relief in social interactions as many would normally do during drought periods (New Zealand Herald 2020).

For the participants I interviewed that went to the Drought Shout, the Drought Shout was one of the first events where they were able to meet and catch up with other friends which they had not seen in person since the beginning of summer. However, the day of the Drought Shout also meant rain for the Hawkes Bay district. It is common folklore among farmers in both the RD9 district and New Zealand alike that if you need rain during a drought period, hold a Drought Shout. Many of my participants who went to the Drought Shout noted how while the event itself was not an expensive or grand affair, similar to the Collective Hug Initiative, it was the recognition of the hardship that was most appreciated. Alongside this, all the participants who did go to the Drought Shout mainly focused on how this event provided them something to look forward to. As said by Peter, “It was really good cause all the businesses that were associated with farming, they all put in for it, all we just turned up, had a steak sandwich and a few beers and my partner got a prize”. Like Peter, many others expressed how nice it was

to be able to take time out to enjoy this event, the guest speakers and the company of other farmers from the community.

It was statements like these that further enhanced my opinion that community connection is vital when it comes to helping out isolated farmers during a period of hardship. For the farmers in RD9, having a connection to the community can help with the mental strain that can occur with being overworked, isolated, and the feelings of uncertainty that occurs during a drought period. For some farmers each day can be spent rigorously checking the weather forecasts and attempting their property and stock, often leading to continuous work, with little time to break. As stated by one participant, Nick, "We spent over 100 days feeding out…[during Covid-19 lockdown] I never left the property during lockdown." Nick was not isolated in this matter either. Participants like Peter and Mark also spoke about how they never left their property during the entire lockdown period.

In part, this was due to the taxing demands that were placed on them to feed out and monitor dams for stock that may be stuck in attempting to access water. It also appeared however that there was guilt attached to the idea of leaving the property and the inability to relax knowing the severity of their situation appeared to inhibit any desire to leave their property. In a period of hardship such as this one, farmers are faced with daily reminders and have daily tasks which further illustrate the extreme severity of their situation, from having to feed your stock, checking out dried out dams for stuck stock and even checking water levels.

Many of the daily actions of a farmer during a drought period serve as daily reminders of how serious the situation is. Peter stated, "We checked our dams every day for bogged sheep, it was something we had to do every few hours". Having a constant task such as this would reinforce that you cannot leave your property for a long time and place a significant amount of pressure on a farmer, as sheep can often suffer extreme injuries and even die when stuck in a dried-out dam. It is situations such as this that further illustrate that the many surrounding factors that would have led to feelings of solastalgia for the farmers of RD9. Had even their menial day to day tasks further reminded them or further contributed to the distress and degradation of their land, they would have experienced exacerbated feelings of stress, isolation and fear for their farms' future.

Although the likelihood of Covid-19 being in the RD9 appeared to dwindle rather fast in the first two weeks of the lockdown, it is important to acknowledge that the first few days of the lockdown period were swamped with the anxiety of not knowing what could happen, and how long this lockdown could last. For Hawkes Bay, 25 of the 44 covid-19 cases were directly linked to the Ruby Princess cruise ship (Ministry of Health 2020). Out of all of the farmers, I was able to speak to, none of the farmers listed Covid-19 as their main concern during the lockdown period. However indirect effects of the lockdown did create stress.

For one participant the lockdown affected the selling of their property, for the rest it was how they were going to be able to gather and maintain the necessary feed or get rid of stock within New Zealand's isolation restrictions. One other crucial concern that a majority of the farmers I also interviewed expressed was how this lockdown period would affect those within the community, especially for the people who lived alone or were the elderly of the community. In addressing these concerns, community members began to organise and attend boundary meetups with their fellow neighbours and friends.

Meeting at the Boundary

Boundary meetups or informal meetups are something that is not uncommon in the RD9 community but it is certainly extremely popular with farmers during the Covid-19 lockdown period. I can recall many times during my childhood where we would meet up with our neighbours and chat along the fence boundary. Sometimes these meetups would include the exchange of baked goods, gossip and the general 'how is life going for you', types of conversation. Although I was expecting the existence of these were meetups I could not have properly projected just how popular this type of meetup was during the lockdown period.

Originally, I was expecting to see at least two or three of my participants partake in boundary meetups rather than almost all. Unexpectedly, I found that this was a very popular meetup that occurred with a vast majority of my participants. Unlike the two other community-run initiatives that were held for the Hawkes Bay Community, the boundary meetups occurred during the Covid-19 lockdown restrictions. With this, the

dusting off of old camping chairs, filling up the chilly bin with ice and beer and breaking out the baked treats was a commonly seen site across coinciding boundaries. I can only imagine how nice these small breaks away from reality were for the farmers of RD9 during Covid-19 restrictions. In particular, many of the community members I spoke to organised these meetups because they were concerned for a nearby single household or their neighbours.

As with Drazin (2018)'s research, I have found within my research, that there is a resurgence of community-run initiatives that occur when the community is facing a period of hardship that increases the isolation for the members within a community. The surge of boundary meetups also suggests that maintaining a sense of place is also crucial when combatting feelings of isolation and solastalgia. In this case, the concept of solastalgia provides a way to describe how both environmental and social changes can cause further distress in drought situations, which was also demonstrated in research conducted by Albrecht,

> In the case of drought, we received testimony from farmers about how both social and environmental factors were implicated in their distress. My attention was drawn to the emotional burden on men and women as their farms desiccated, crops failed, animals perished, and the landscape became barren (Albrecht 2019, 53).

For a community like RD9 and the community studied in Albrecht's (2019) research, having to work with daily reminders of your failure and the dire situation that droughts present for farmers, it is clear that farming in a drought period would create a severe emotional burden on farmers. The extreme impacts of a drought are hard to ignore when a majority of the daily practices you are enacting on our farm are direct reminders of how it is impacting your land, family and community.

For the RD9 community, boundary meet-ups appear to have been one way to actively combat the social isolation that occurs during a drought period while still complying with Covid-19 restrictions. For many, this may have been the most effective way to regain a sense of belonging and combat feelings of isolation while minimising feelings of guilt as they remained on their property. With the RD9 community, there is a strong sense of pride and guardianship that is tied to their land. When uncontrollable

change is placed upon them, for this rural community the best venue to find solace and comradery is within their community, with others who are emotionally, financially and socially tied to the land as they are.

4.3 Why Socialisation is Important for a Rurally Isolated Community

For this community, that is, farmers of RD9, they felt that no one else would be able to fully comprehend the level of emotional turmoil and stress they were under during this period. The community appeared to have already been experiencing feelings of displacement from both the New Zealand government, the national image and the general New Zealand population. For this community, it appears that the only sources of solace they were able to access were limited to their community and regional run initiatives.

If there were more social initiatives run by the region and some run by the government I believe that the build-up of tension found that led to the Howl of a Protest may not have occurred. For the RD9 farmers, their responses concerning the Collective Hug and Drought Shout demonstrate how rural RD9 communities felt connected to their wider community. I argue that initiatives such as these are invaluable in helping ease the divide that appears to be occurring between rural and urban communities in New Zealand. Rural communities already feel the physical isolation that is between them and urban locations. Initiatives such as the Collective Hug and the Drought Shout help to combat the social isolation that people within the RD9 community felt in regards to several scales, the local and regional scales and the national New Zealand community.

5. Conclusion

In this thesis, I have argued that more focus needs to be placed upon rural communities when it comes to dealing with hardships caused by unforeseen crises whether they be financial, economic or public health crises. In the case of the RD9 community, I argue that the 2019-2020 drought placed significant stress and pressure onto the RD9 community which was then only furthered by the Covid-19 restrictions that were placed upon New Zealand in early 2020. The RD9 community (like many other communities) experienced financial stress and financial loss during this period. My research also sheds light on how deep the fractures within the RD9 community are deeply entwined with the lack of governmental and national recognition of their economic contributions and economic losses that are experienced by rural farmers in the context of the New Zealand government's neoliberal market policies.

I believe that the RD9 community in many ways reflects a situation experienced by most New Zealand farming communities, whereby the rural farming practices and rural farming communities have been subject to a radical transformation in recent years. New Zealand's neoliberal approach to the farming sector while encouraging the expansion and diversification into a different technology-based form of farming, has also contributed to farming communities such as RD9 becoming fractured and hostile to outsiders in light of change.

For a community such as RD9, this becomes apparent when exploring how the community responds to circumstances such as a drought. For the RD9 community, the drought period was very much a period where farmers expressed their displeasure and anger towards the unexpected changes that occurred within rural farming practices and the community overall. The RD9 community has continually undergone many unexpected changes out of their control both in the past and during this period. This and the forced change implemented by moving towards more neoliberal free-market principles has meant that farmers in RD9 and likely other areas of New Zealand have become continually dissatisfied at the lack of control they have over their livelihoods and the lack of a national safety net in the case of environmental disaster.

For the RD9 community, it appears that the 2019-2020 drought period was a catalyst for locals to voice their growing displeasure, as evidenced by the Howl of a Protest, against government policies, community changes, and public perceptions of

rural living. For the RD9 community the absence of accessible financial assistance, media coverage, and perceived attacks on rural lifestyles from their wider New Zealand community served to displace rural RD9 farmers from both the wider New Zealand community and RD9s closer knitted community. From my research, I argue that more thought needs to be put towards placing rural voices in market and management policy discussions that would directly or indirectly impact the rural sector.

New Zealand farmers were never given the choice regarding the neoliberalisation of national farming markets. While the decisions made liberalising New Zealand's agricultural markets had some benefits for some in New Zealand, I do not think it was an overall benefit for the individual farmers of New Zealand. Before the introduction of a neoliberal system, New Zealand farmers were not encouraged to actively compete against one another to obtain financial success. In this type of atmosphere, bonds of the community are arguably easier to establish, maintain and develop. With the move towards neoliberal market policies, New Zealand farmers have been pushed to actively compete with one another to maintain their lifestyle and obtain financial success. For the RD9 community the environmental disaster of the drought, and this plight being ignored in favour of news of Covid-19 lockdowns by both the general media and the government caused this rural community to reach a kind of collective tipping point.

For the RD9 community, in 2020, feelings of loneliness, loss, isolation, stress, fear, anger, solastalgia, and frustration emerged in the context of shared community hardship. In response, the RD9 community turned towards community and regional run initiatives that re-establish a sense of place within the community and on their unrecognisable land. For the RD9 community, in the past, they routinely turned towards community-run events to share and alleviate the difficult emotions, experiences and circumstances they have experienced in a period of hardship. Such community-based events however were not possible during the worst periods of the 2019-2020 drought. From participants' admissions, they felt disregarded, ignored and disconnected from each other, their regional community and New Zealand's team of 5 million.

For a rural community like RD9, feeling both physically isolated and socially isolated takes a toll. One of the easiest places to direct the anger felt in regards to their situation is the government and perceived outsiders. In my opinion, the anger and

comments regarding the lifestylers who live in the community are representative of how the community feels towards the government and the wider New Zealand community. For the RD9 community, I argue that lifestylers offer a kind of indirect representation of governmental policies within the community, at least in the eyes of the farmers who inhabit this RD9 community. For the farmers, RD9 lifestylers represent everything opposite, liberal, and urban. For those who move out to the rural sectors on a small plot of land which is unable to financially profitable for a lifestyle change, it is everything direct opposite to what RD9 farmers understand rural to be. For RD9, all directives of living and tending to their land are directly tied to their livelihoods. Their financial success and their ability to maintain a rural life depend on how they weather a situation such as a drought.

This is not to say that the RD9 community or rural communities within New Zealand have been forever changed due to the impacts of the 2019-2020 drought or the Covid-19 isolation restrictions, but I do believe that their perceptions of the New Zealand government have been further impacted by the lack of action taken by the government during this period. For New Zealand farmers and other New Zealand residents, the decision to move towards a neoliberal farming market was a decision that was made outside of their control. As New Zealand farmers are a part of an industry that is generally not a core industry in other countries, the New Zealand government has developed its unique way of engaging with the rural sector.

When considering the findings discovered in this thesis research, it does lead to other opportunities for further research. Due to the limitations of master level research, if I was to conduct further research, I would consider exploring how other major rural sectors are also directly impacted by droughts, such as dairy farming and viticulture. I would also like to conduct further research into conceptions of community within rural areas. As some New Zealand farming districts sometimes surround small townships, it would be interesting to discover if they maintain the foundations of their community similar to the RD9 community. I would also like to further explore how New Zealand farmers engage with lifestylers to learn more about the rural and urban divide that operates within New Zealand society at a larger scale.

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Appendices

Appendix One: Participant Information Sheet

THE UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

Phone: 0278357338
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UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
DIVISION OF ARTS, LAW, PSYCHOLOGY, AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

'Farming and Community: The Creation and Maintenance of Community in a time of Hardship and Forced Social Restrictions.'

My name is Erin Cheetham, I'm a Postgraduate student at the University of Waikato in the Anthropology Programme. For my Master's degree, I am conducting a thesis on the creation and maintenance of community within the rural Hawkes Bay farming sector. This thesis will primarily focus on how a sense of community and place was impacted/maintained from March to May of 2020. This research project aims to discover which ways farmers chose to engage with their community in this period of dual hardship. This project will aim to focus on farmers that were situated in the rural RD9 District in the Hawkes Bay Region from March 25th to May 14th, 2020. This research project hopes to uncover a deeper understanding of how a sense of community is fostered and maintained in New Zealand farming communities and provide a clear picture of what were the main concerns present both during and after this time of hardship.

The core questions that this research project aims to discover are:

1. In the rural RD9 community, were feelings of distress as a result of environmental change present and/or enhanced due to the social restrictions from COVID-19 lockdown procedures? What could this mean for the community moving forward?
2. What particular economic and social stresses did rural Hawkes Bay farmers experience from March to June 2020? In what ways did these stressors interact with one another?
3. From March to June 2020, did the way farmers engage with online internet services or platforms change due to COVID-19 restrictions?

Participants will have the right to withdraw their interest or participation in this research project for up to six weeks after the interview. I look forward to answering any further questions about this research at any time.

If you require any additional information or would like to take part in this research project please contact:
Erin Cheetham
Email: emc33@students.waikato.ac.nz
Phone: 0278357338.

Dr. Bronwyn Isaacs
Email: bronwyn.isaacs@waikato.ac.nz

Appendix Two: Participant Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
DIVISION OF ARTS, LAW, PSYCHOLOGY, AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Farming and Community: The Creation and Maintenance of Community in a time of Hardship and Forced Social Restrictions.

Name of person interviewed:_____

I have received a copy of the Information Sheet describing the research project. Any questions that I have, relating to the research, have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can ask further questions about the research at any time during my participation and that I can withdraw my participation for up to **six weeks** after the interview.

During the interview, I understand that I do not have to answer questions unless I am happy to talk about the topic. I can stop the interview at any time, and I can ask to have the recording device turned off at any time.

When I sign this consent form, I will retain ownership of my interview, but I give consent for the researcher to use the interview for the research outlined in the Information Sheet.
I understand that my identity will remain confidential in the presentation of the research findings. I understand that the data collected will be stored for at least five years before being destroyed appropriately.

Please complete the following checklist. Tick [✓] the appropriate box for each point.	**YES**	**NO**
I wish to view the transcript of the interview.		
I wish to receive a copy of the findings.		
I give consent for the audio of this interview to be recorded.		
I wish to be anonymous in any data or work published in association to this research project.		

Participant :		Researcher :	Erin Cheetham
Signature :		Signature :	
Date :		Date :	
Contact Details :		Contact Details :	emc33@students.waikato.ac.nz
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