

## Retiring to the farm

**Louise Manwaring**

This is the story of two retired principals – Louise and Peter Manwaring – and their post retirement farm adventure.

Peter had been a secondary principal in metropolitan Sydney for over 16 years, as well as a principal support officer in Bridge Street state office. In 2004 I had been a principal for 8 years in a Wollongong high school. An opportunity to move to the country was very attractive when I was looking for a new challenge. At the same time Peter had to choose to go back to a school or retire. I knew Peter wouldn't be content with a small backyard and walking to pick up the paper each day after the hurly burly of running big schools. Spending the next ten years before my retirement in mundane activities was never going to work. A position came up so we moved to beautiful Mudgee, me as the new principal of the high school, Peter as the newest tree changer. The farm was the perfect choice because it gave us direction for the future.

In choosing to move into farming several issues were of importance. These included having room for friends and family to visit and something attractive to entice them away from the coast occasionally. It also allowed us to develop a shared enterprise for our future health and wellbeing over the next twenty or more years. Being in Mudgee meant there were many of the lifestyle advantages of a prosperous community, including lovely restaurants, a local arts scene and major performing arts events such as music festivals. It's a reasonable drive to Sydney and there is the option to fly if needed. It's a beautiful environment with weather that suits, not too humid and a short cold season for sitting around the fire.



For ten years Peter largely ran the farm himself with weekend and holiday backup from me. It gave him new challenges and certainly kept him fit. The advantage for me included credibility with the members of the community who don't live in town. The small community where the farm is located is a good one for getting involved. There's the RFS, a pub, a tennis court and hall which provide regular community gatherings – very important for becoming part of the new place. To help manage the farming challenge we both took an online course through TAFE on running a small farm. This ensured we had some grounding in basics like fencing, mustering, soil and weed management. Peter went on to complete a Cert III in agriculture.



Initially we focussed on cattle, seeking and taking advice wherever we could from neighbours, stock and station agents and teachers who were also farmers. The cattle are still the most profitable enterprise but in the past six years we have branched out into alpacas. Lovely friendly animals with a really committed support group in the Central West and something special for the grandkids when they visit.

Eleven years later I have finally retired and now I'm full time on the farm. We have our shared interest and enterprise. I have joined the local craft group and book club but haven't managed to fit in weekly tennis yet. We would never want to move back to the city, traffic and overcrowded streets and neighbours on your back fence seem quite negative now.

We would highly recommend retiring principals consider a small acreage. You can create your own world, live a sustainable lifestyle including plenty of room for a garden, growing vegetables and if you love animals, enjoy fiddling with machinery or like to be hands on, a farm offers so many possibilities. A consideration we would recommend is to have the farm for some time before you actually retire. That way you know if you like it and can build up new friendships and develop new skills.

Of course it's not all rosy. There are times when the weather is a sore trial, drought, flood, heat, flies and blistering winds would challenge the best of us. This is balanced by the beauty and tranquillity experienced most of the time. It can also be hard being further away from family but you may find they love to visit especially at first when you need them most. You may also find that over time so many family members move interstate, to other cities or overseas that if you stay in the metropolitan area for them you might be sadly lonely after a few years. Because it's a shared lifestyle we have grown closer, rather than drifting apart once we both stopped work as so many couples seem to do.

If you are prepared for a new challenge, are fit and want to stay that way and want to have something to do that keeps you fully engaged to the extent you want, then a small farm might be for you when you retire. Happy to chat to anyone interested in finding out more.

#### **Contributor details**

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