



PEOPLE & RELATIONSHIPS



LEARNINGS FROM WRITING THIS REPORT

When we conducted our case study interviews, it highlighted how good working agreements are based on solid relationships, clear communication and people working together towards a common goal. We also found how variable each situation is and that there is nuance in navigating any relationship.

Getting to the negotiating stage will require honesty and transparency on both sides for everyone to gain a clarity relating to the needs and expectations. This section offers hints and tips to help you navigate this process effectively and includes wisdom gleaned from our case study participants about what they have discovered contributes to solid working relationships between tenants & landowners.

Review your goals

Before entering negotiations it is crucial to have a clear vision of your farming goals and how a lease or share farming arrangement will support them. Get clear about what you bring to the table and what the 'deal-breakers' are, so you can effectively communicate them in conversations and negotiations.

Research and prepare

Knowledge is key in any negotiation process.



- Research the local market, networks and online forums to understand fair rental rates and common lease terms in your area.
- Familiarise yourself with different types of leases and consider which model suits your situation best. Refer to the previous section on lease arrangements.
- Understand the landowner's perspective. Ask questions to understand if they have specific concerns about land stewardship, property maintenance, or how your farming practices will impact the land.

Being well-prepared allows you to present a coherent and compelling case which will more likely achieve the best possible outcome.

Communicate openly

Relationships are built at the speed of trust - open and honest communication is essential for everyone involved. Approach any negotiation in the spirit of collaboration, with respect, and work together towards shared goals.

Clearly outline your needs, such as access to water, buildings, or specific time frames for planting and harvesting - everything you've learnt in the business planning and site evaluation stage. Be prepared to discuss how you intend to maintain the land and address any concerns the landowner might have. Building a positive relationship with the landowner can lead to more favourable lease terms and potentially pave the way for future opportunities.



Photo Credit: Libby McKay



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Hypotheticals

Using hypothetical situations when you are building new relationships or progressing negotiations can lead to more thoughtful, thorough, and resilient lease agreements.

They allow everyone to explore potential scenarios and outcomes without committing to them immediately and can help:

- Clarify expectations: for example, asking, "What if we experience a severe drought?" can lead to discussions about water usage rights, crop insurance, or rental adjustments. This helps ensure that both parties understand and agree on how to handle such situations.
- Identify potential challenges: try posing "what if" scenarios to discover potential conflicts or misunderstandings before they become problems. For example, "What if you decide to sell the property during the lease term?" can prompt discussions about rights of first refusal or how the lease will be handled in the event of a sale. "What if we decided to grow exclusively in polytunnels" might uncover aesthetic considerations.
- Build a collaborative relationship: hypotheticals encourage open dialogue and can help to foster a more trusting and cooperative relationship. Try questions to open up a conversation about potential shared goals and to gauge compatibility in partnerships or to identify mutual interests.
- Test the flexibility of any agreement: they can allow both parties to see how flexible the lease agreement is and whether it can adapt to various situations. The inclusion of more comprehensive clauses that cover a wider range of possibilities, can make an agreement more robust.



Photo Credit: Anna Brozek

Dig Into The Detail

It is important to uncover any firm expectations or hidden agendas that extend beyond the typical lease agreement. Examples of this might include control over farming practices, future development plans, access to share of crops or farm produce, or influence over business decisions. Vested interests can impact autonomy, flexibility, clarity and achievement of long term farming goals.

- Ask direct questions: during negotiations, the farmer should ask the landlord about their expectations of the farming operation. Questions like, "Do you have any preferences for how the land is used?" or "Are there any restrictions or specific conditions you'd like to include in the lease?"
- Past agreements: if the farmer or landlord has leased before, it might be helpful to ask about those experiences. Ask why previous leases ended or what challenges arose can provide insights into expectations.
- Long-term plans: ask about future plans for the land so you can gauge whether your long-term plans align with theirs.

Listen For Misaligned Language

A lease is two parties agreeing that something is fair for both parties. Look out for language like 'I'm giving you' or 'you're getting a great deal'- a lease does not contain favours, it should be clear to everyone what is being offered. If you do hear language that makes you feel like there might be an imbalance - it may indicate a mismatch in expectations. Slow things down, ask more questions, take your time.



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Values Alignment

Acknowledge where your values are aligned and be ready to communicate them. Think about the questions you can ask to help you understand theirs. Some of our case study participants felt it was very important to find a landowner who had values that were directly aligned with theirs. Others said they would prefer leasing from someone who wasn't embedded in land management allowing more autonomy. How flexible are you?

Compromise

There may be times where you find land available for lease that scores highly on site assessment.

Water may be abundant, there is the necessary infrastructure in place, and the location is perfect, but your values might not quite align with the landowner. You should ask yourself, is there *enough* alignment?

You may lease land to rotationally graze cattle from a landowner that doesn't use chemicals on the farm, but historically set stocks and doesn't understand the need to do daily moves.

The landowner might think you're crazy, but ultimately doesn't mind as management practices will be completely up to you. Your values might not exactly match, but it's not likely to be a deal breaker. Are you confident to go your own way?

You might find the perfect location with close access to your target market, but the land owner lives on site and in early conversations is indicating they would like to be involved in the decisions of any business operating there.

How will being in the same place, with likely regular interaction effect you? How much autonomy over your farm business is important to you?

Understand Your Value

It is important to consider any value of any kind, that you might bring to a property, local community or landowners existing brand. Consider how your presence on the land supports local food systems, contributes to rural development, positions the landowner as a supporter of the next generation of farmers etc. These associations could enhance the owners reputation within the community. Be curious and ask questions about any potential involvement in the area of promotion, like photos, social media, events, or media coverage related to your farming activities. You will need to understand any expectations and identify if you can/want to meet them. These contributions can add value to any future agreement.

Mentors

Mentors offer real-world experience, transfer practical skills, and provide emotional support in difficult times. They can have insights that textbooks or TAFE can't match, helping especially new or young farmers to avoid costly mistakes. Having non-farming folks in your corner is advisable too. People who are removed from the farm detail may offer different and useful insights on the business or other elements of a proposed agreement.

How do I find a mentor?

Begin by identifying someone whose farming or business practices align with your values and goals. It's important to be clear about what you hope to gain from the mentorship - being open about your ambitions and what guidance you're looking for can help the mentor feel invested in your success. You can pave the way gently, asking for advice on a specific matter and identify if long-term mentorship is likely to become an option. Trust takes time: show appreciation for their generous sharing, and maintain regular communication.

Ask For Help, Surround Yourself With Mates

Ask for close friends, family and trusted colleagues to be available during your search. We all need other people to help us see our blind spots and validate our strengths - now is the time to lean into your networks.

Expect To Go Through The Process Multiple Times

Not all negotiations will result in a signed lease or share farming agreement, but going through the process will help you learn and refine your needs. Repetition is how we hone skills.