

Women in Business in Rural and Remote Australia: Growing Regional Economies



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Australian Government
**Rural Industries Research and
Development Corporation**

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 - Great diversity of businesses
 - Significant local economic impact
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Aims

Project funded by Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation

Aimed to:

Identify ways of supporting female business operators, intenders and current, thereby increasing their industries' and communities' economic, business and employment opportunities

Methodology

- Literature review
- National online survey
- One-to-one interviews
- Focus groups

Almost 200 respondents

Carried out in late 2003 and early 2004



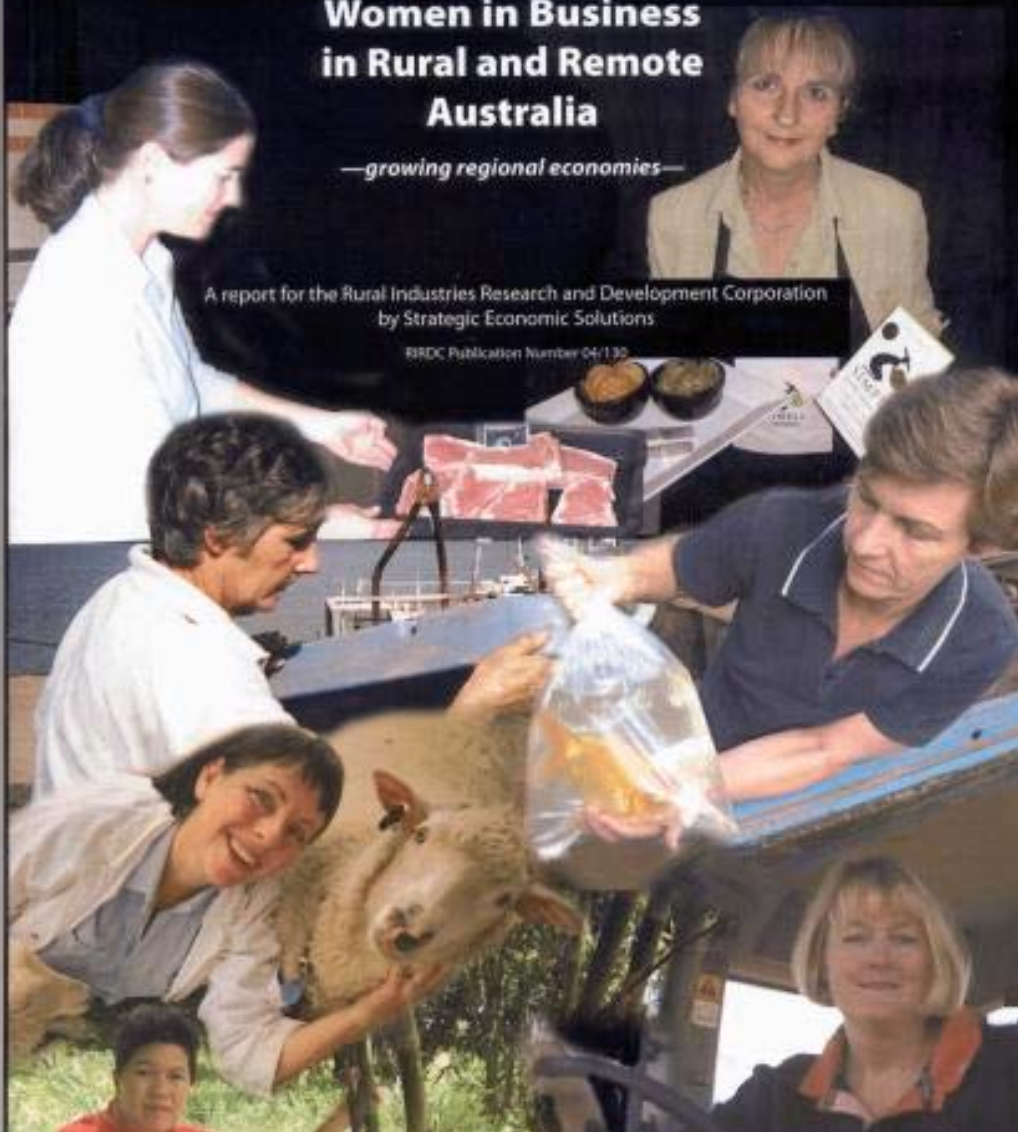
Australian Government
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Women in Business in Rural and Remote Australia

—growing regional economies—

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Findings

- Real businesses, real business issues, real business operators
- Great diversity of businesses
- Significant local economic impact
- High level organisational skills
- Depth of business skills

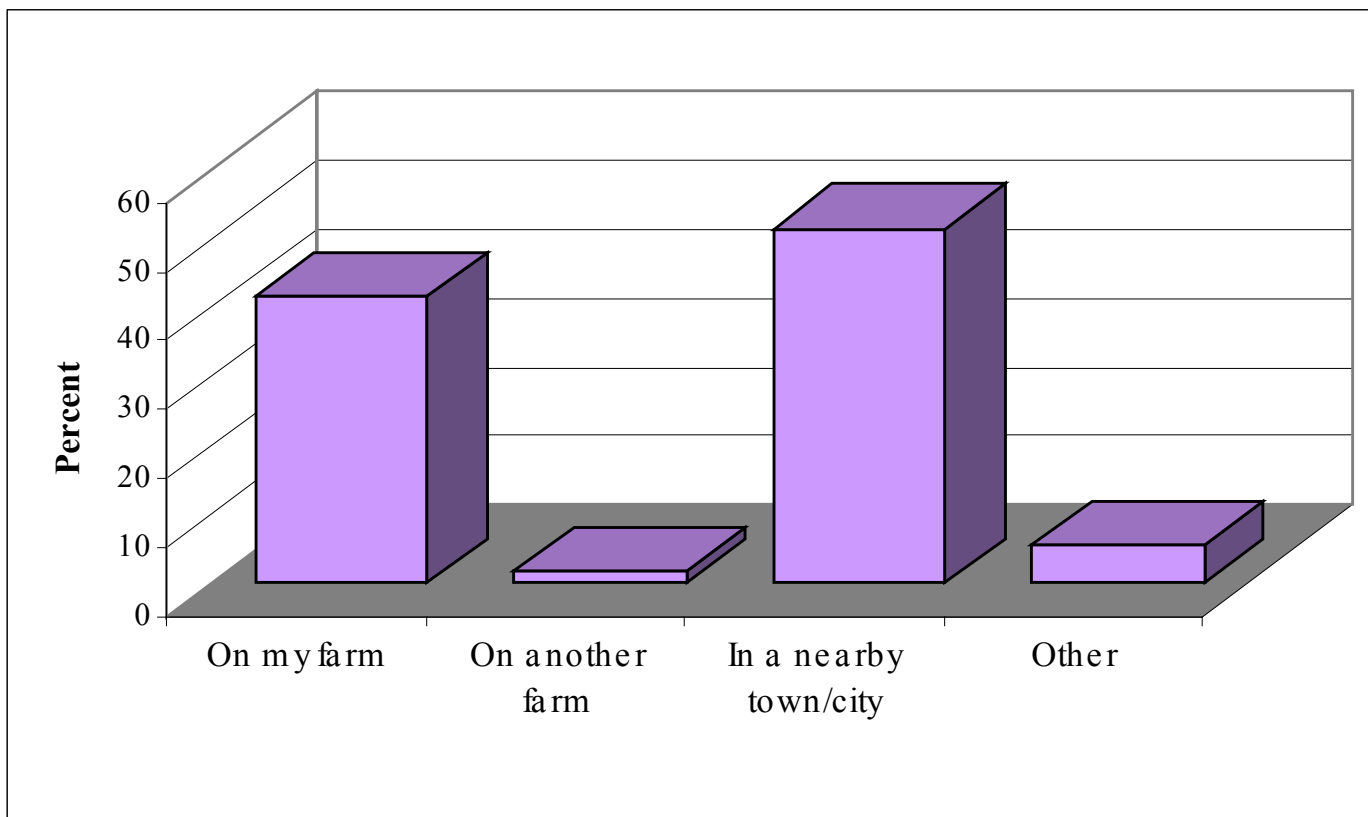
1. Real businesses

Age of business

	Survey	ABS 2003
Less than 1 year	17	14
1 to 5 years	41	35
5 to 10 years	22	19
Over 10 years	21	22

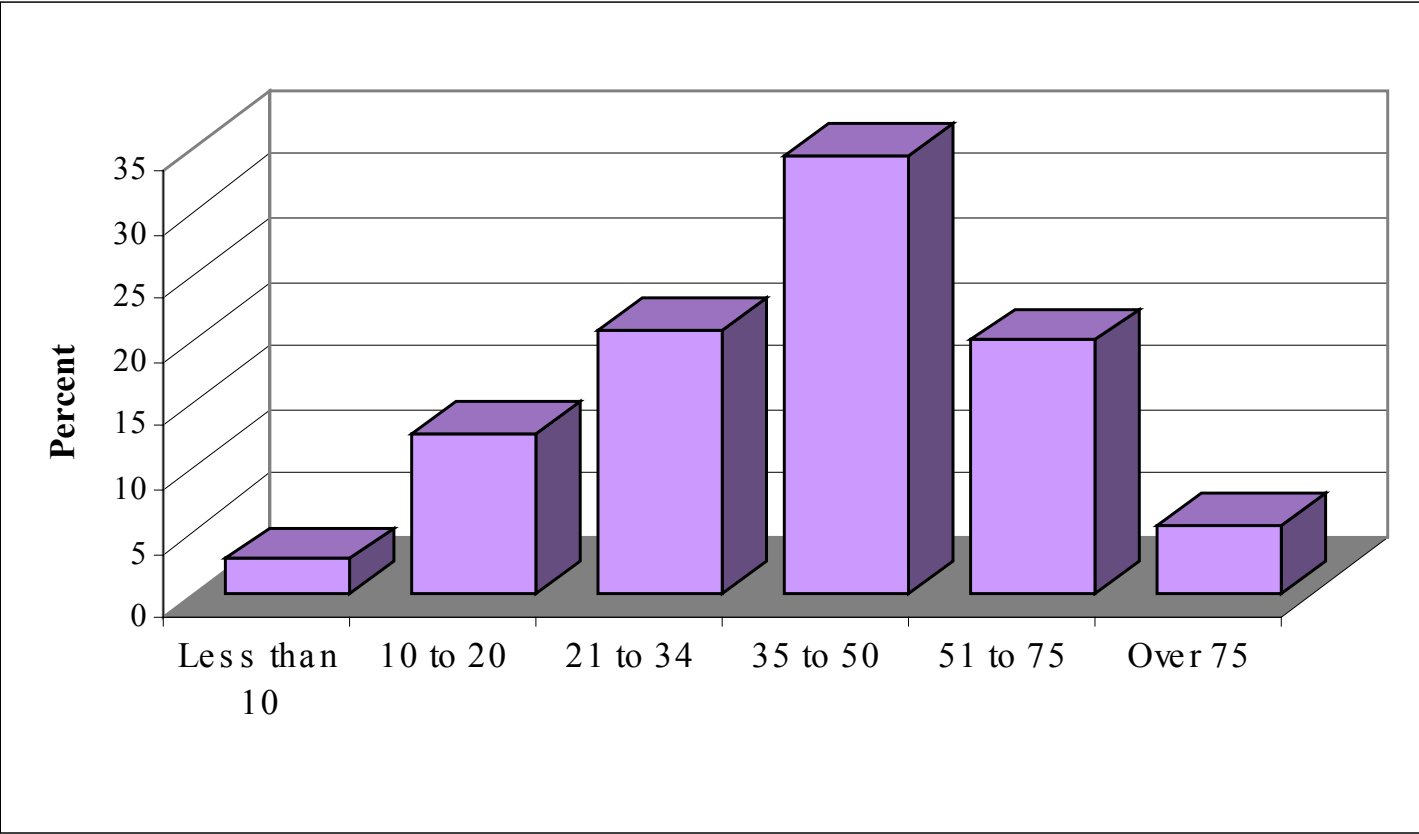
Real businesses (2)

Location of business



Real businesses (3)

Hours worked each week



2. Diversity of businesses

- Well beyond the stereotypes of jams, jellies and doilies
 - Value adding local products like tea tree oil, essential oils, alpacas and their wool, knitwear produced from own wool and exporting (some direct to export, by-passing local markets)
 - Non-traditional products (including captive breeding of sea horses for export)
 - Web-based sales of art, craft or distributed goods
 - Personal services including psychology, leadership training, health, physiotherapy, life coaching (not just the preserve of metropolitan areas), immigration advice;
 - Professional services and business services including graphic design, occupational health and safety, web design, outsourced call centre services, business consulting, management and coaching services,
 - Professional rural services including rural development consulting, agronomy consulting.



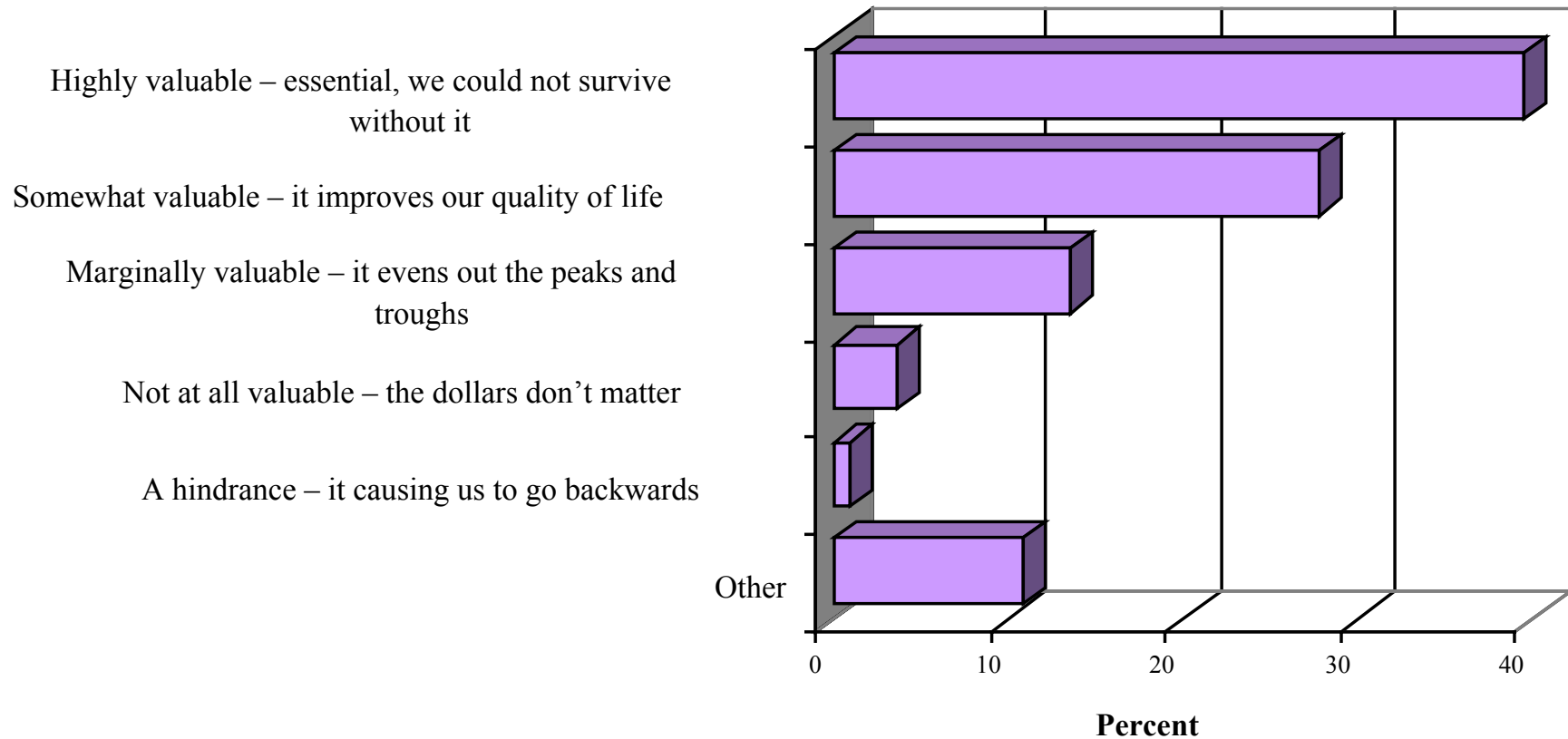
3. Significant local economic impact

- Income derived by regional businesswomen across Australia is in the order of \$1.2 billion per annum.
 - Equivalent to value of sugar exports
- Majority (77 percent) said they would **not** swap their business for a job

‘We wouldn’t have the farm without income from the business’.
- Many also ‘doing the books’ on the family farm

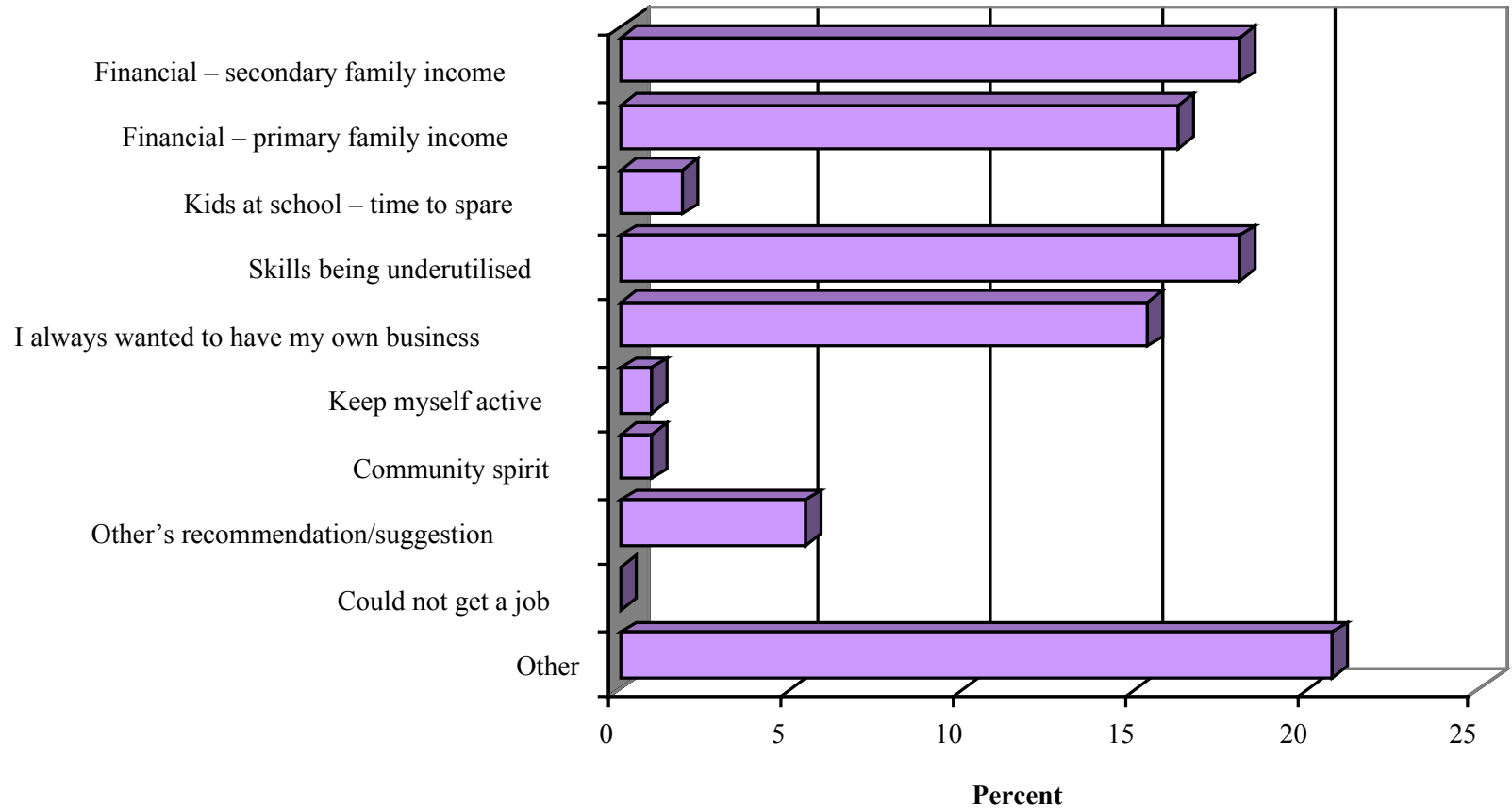


Impact (2)



Impact (3)

After 25 years in teaching I want independence and I want to be creative



4. High level organisational skills

Multi skilled and managing a challenging mix of responsibilities including:

- Family life
- Caring for children
- Assisting on the farm
- Providing support to community activities
- Participating in networks
- As well as running a growing business.

'I did not manage in the past, [am] managing better now, better planning, prioritising and delegation. Stress can be a big concern for me. I use massage for relief and put in effort to find relaxing activities.... Time is so valuable, I feel guilty about the amount of time spent on business over that spent with kids'.



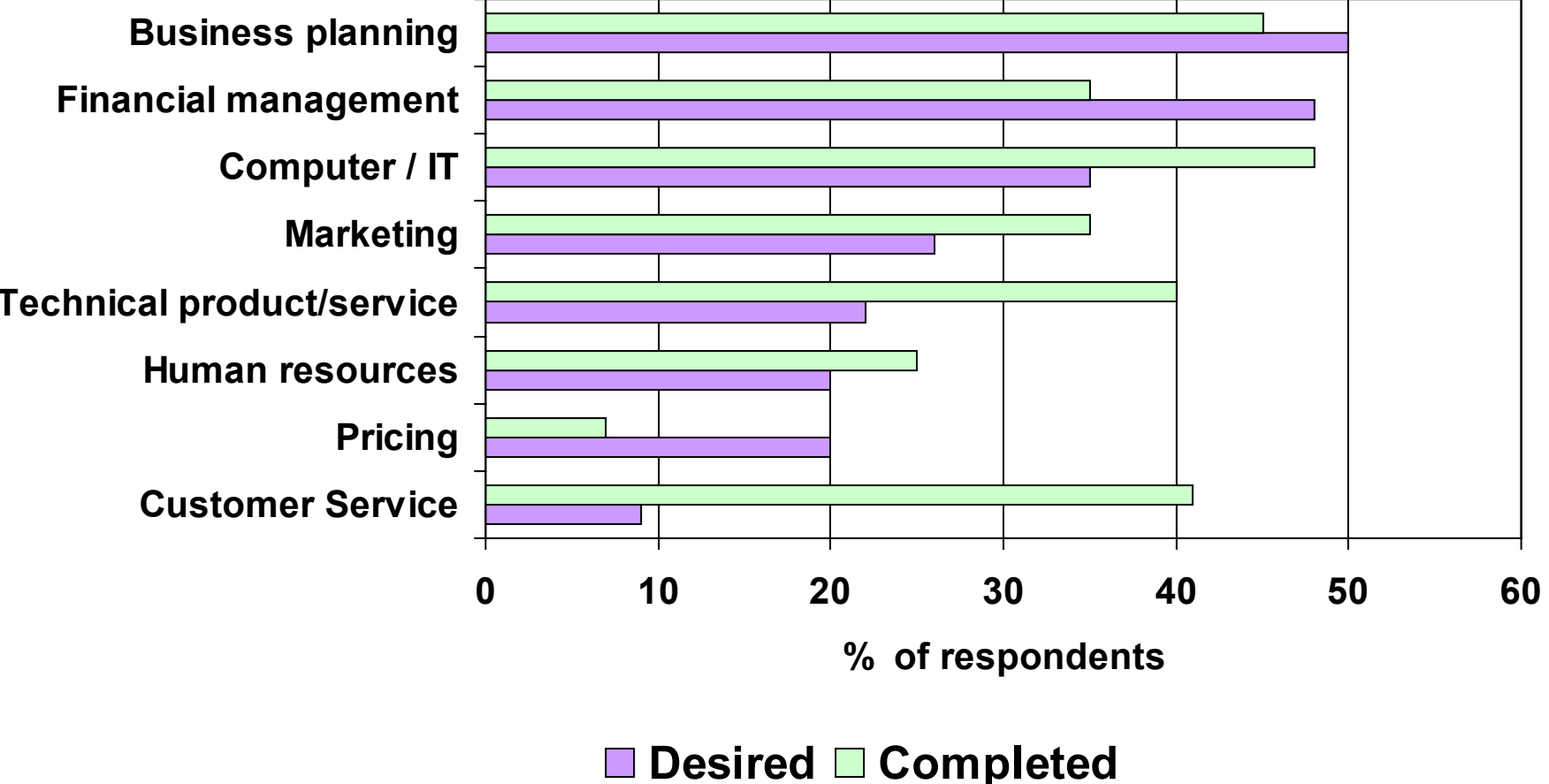
Organisation (2)

- Women looking to start a business told us they want to work *under* 35 hours a week
- Respondents in business reported working *well over* 35 hours per week
- Respondents who had closed a business said they were working over 50 hours a week
 - and cited family commitments as the main reason for closure—**not lack of sales.**

5. Depth of business skills

- Many have accessed advice and help, and completed training
 - Higher percentages than in other surveys of male/mixed businesses in metropolitan areas conducted by the project team
- Double bang for buck with doing the books on farm/partner's business.
 - '[Aim is]... business running smoothly, good income, fitting family with business...'*

Skills (2)



Skills (3)

- High demand for skills development
 - Particularly in financial, business and technology management
- ‘Opportunity entrepreneurs’ rather than ‘necessity entrepreneurs’
- Regional businesswomen discerning clients
 - want training that is high quality
 - cost effective
 - locally available



Skills (4)

- Focus group feedback
 - Businesswomen look for an emphasis in training focusing on creative, interactive approaches that emphasise inspiration, confidence building
 - More than a busy working woman constantly juggling family responsibilities.

‘It is all pitched at farmer’s wives and their “on-farm” businesses, as if there is nothing in the region but farming. There are plenty of other businesses around, they need training as well’.



Success Factors

- The capacity to manage growth
- Effective and unqualified family support
- Access to women's business networks
- Neutralising discrimination
- Control of property



Policy Issues

- Policies and programs must reflect characteristics
- Improve VET sector to better service business client base
- Design and deliver suitable approaches to learning and business support
- Overcoming the barriers of cost, location and accessibility
- Address perception that excluding farms from drought relief on off-farm income is discriminatory when women are most often earning that income.

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Report available from:

www.rirdc.gov.au/fullreports/hcc.html

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Presentation can be downloaded from:

www.smallbusinessfutures.com.au/presentations