

# Rural revival for \$1 week

Christine Weston

## **Cumnock has taken an innovative approach to reinvigorating the town.**

*Cumnock is a small town in central western NSW with a town population of 295 (or 550 including the farming communities).*

*The Cumnock and District Progress Association is offering four farm houses for rent for \$1 a week to families prepared to move to the area, renovate the houses and contribute to the community. The houses will be rented on two or three year contracts. Progress Association member Christine Weston explains.*

I had seen news reports about escalating home loan interest rates and the high cost and low availability of city rentals. People were queuing to look at a rental house, real estate agents were being bribed and abused, and here we were with empty houses on our farm just three hours from Sydney!

Last year, I watched the men busy feeding stock, spraying burrs, agisting stock and experiencing another year of total crop failure. They were working longer and harder in the

drought and there was no way they were going to find time or money to fix old farm houses once occupied by farm hands.

I bought some second-hand building materials and decided I would try to renovate one, but with three children under five years old, I soon realised it was an impossible task.

Our twin boys started school this year and I realised with a shock that the school's enrolments had dropped from 105 to 35 students in 20 years. Our little precious rural reliant town was in a downward spiral.

In July this year I saw author and ex-Orange Agriculture college student Rachael Treasure on television. She was promoting her farm house for rent in Tasmania for \$1 a week to save the local school where enrolments had dropped to 12 students. The story inspired me so much that I called her and spoke at length about the similar issues faced by our two small rural towns. About the 'rent a farm house' concept, Rachael said:

1. You will not be able to cope with the number of phone calls.
2. You will not be able to persuade the older generation.

3. You will be pleasantly surprised by the caliber of skilled applicants.

4. You will find that most of the local rentals and land for sale will go too.

I spoke to neighbouring farmers, local community groups and developed partnerships with reputable organisations. With this support I realised this concept could work. There was certainly a lot of criticism and doubt, but I think if you feel passionate about what you want to achieve then you just have to go for it. I think many of us in the country have great ideas but the fear of failure slows us down, as well as the financial strain if an idea fails.

After some research, I was surprised to find one doesn't need to understand 'goobeligook' internet language, complete a Computer Science degree and spend a lot of money to create a website. For one month, after the kids had gone to bed, I worked on a website, uploading photos and typing in text.

The website has been a tremendous success, thanks to promotion through traditional

---

*If you feel passionate about what you want to achieve then you just have to go for it.*

---

– Christine Weston

---

media which has included television and print. The website was finished on a Wednesday, the television program *A Current Affair* filmed a story about the project on a Thursday that went to air on a Friday!

Just ten days after launching [www.rentafarmhouse.com.au](http://www.rentafarmhouse.com.au), the website had 3500 visitors. To date, we have received 110 rental applications and 95 subscribers to our newsletter! We are overwhelmed with the response.

A shortlist of families will be interviewed in December and January to allow the selected families to settle in before the school year starts.

### **More information**

Rent a farm house  
PO Box 22 Cumnock NSW 2867  
[rentafarmhouse@yahoo.com.au](mailto:rentafarmhouse@yahoo.com.au)  
[www.rentafarmhouse.com.au](http://www.rentafarmhouse.com.au)



One of the farm houses for rent in Cumnock



Christine Weston and her family