
The Rural Recipe For Success (Or Not)

I grew up in a small country town called Wellington. At 14 years old I was already spending most of my spare time working for my father on the farm and, by 15, was running a small business picking up bales of hay for the neighbours (work for which I was remunerated seemed like logical diversification).

While studying full-time for my degree I worked three days a week at investment bank UBS, and five (often long) days during holidays. By the time I started as a graduate at Macquarie, I was well versed in the realities of the real world, unlike a few of my peers.

Country folk will tell you these are the benefits of growing up in the bush. You learn hard work, cyclical and entrepreneurship at a very young age. And now it's been proven that this is all a recipe for success.

The SMH yesterday explained why [Country kids are born CEOs](#). Of the CEOs of the top 100 companies, 38% of those born in Australia grew up in regional towns.

That is "well above the 10 per cent of us categorised as regional by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, raising questions about why so many country kids have risen to the top." One of the country kids come good, Wesfarmers CEO Richard Goyder, puts it down to "Tough times, plenty to do in terms of work and maybe a bit of resilience".

A lovely little story, isn't it?

Except that it's another piece of statistical bastardry. Let's deconstruct what has been written in the article. "38 per cent of [CEOs] born in Australia grew up in regional towns". This is then compared with "the 10 per cent of us categorised as regional by the Australian Bureau of Statistics", supposedly proving the point that country kids are outperformers.

It should be pretty obvious where the logic falls down here. We are comparing kids who grew up in regional Australia with the percentage of the population that lives there today.

Along with Richard Goyder and me, millions of fellow Australians grew up regionally but left for the big smoke in search of fame and fortune.

If you wanted to compare like with like, you should compare the 38% of Australian-born CEOs with the percentage of the Australian-born population that grew up regional areas. I have no idea what that number is, but I can assure you it's higher than 10%.

Perhaps country kids really are statistical outperformers. But we'll need a different set of data to prove it.