

Author, coach and motherhood studies practitioner Benita Bensch, on her farm at Moama NSW.

Author exposes rural mums' silent struggle

FIONA SHEEAN

Benita Bensch knows what it's like to feel invisible in your own life.

Now farming near Moama NSW with her husband, Adam, and their four sons, the author, coach and motherhood studies practitioner has spent years helping rural and regional women find their way back to themselves and her new book, Seen Again, puts that journey into words. It began years earlier on a Queensland farm, when her boys were four and under and she found herself in what she calls "the black hole" – a period she now recognises as matrescence, layered with postnatal depression.

Matrescence is the profound psychological, emotional and physiological shift into motherhood – as significant as adolescence, yet rarely spoken about. "I didn't even hear the word until 2021," Belinda says.

For rural and regional mothers, she believes that transition carries its own weight. Distance, limited support, patchy services and an unspoken expectation to simply cope can deepen the isolation – as can the invisible loads carried on farms, whether that's the person who always makes the sandwiches or the daughter-in-law without a seat at the decision-making table. Seen Again weaves Benita's own story with those of 18 other Australian women, moving through darker emotions like shame and grief towards joy, gratitude and connection. "I hope the women reading my book will feel seen and held, and know they are not broken," Benita says.

Beef map shifting

FIONA MYERS

Australian red meat exporters have defied punitive tariffs into two of their major markets to post September beef volumes down just 5 per cent year-on-year.

And there are signs processors might soon be gearing up to prepare beef stocks to target China and South Korea when trigger volumes reset on January 1 next year. Figures from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry show Australia exported 132,146 tonnes of beef last month.

Two countries took more than they did last September, with 43,463 tonnes sent to the US, up 4 per cent, to be Australia's biggest destination; while Japan re-emerged to take second position with 27,107 tonnes, up 19 per cent. Despite a 24 per cent tariff, exports to Korea totalled 17,927 tonnes. Meanwhile China, with its 55 per cent above-quota tariff, still took 7778 tonnes – but was well down on the 20,741 tonnes last September.

Expana red meat analyst Junie Lin said Australia's beef export map was shifting.

"Australia is still heading through 2026 at record export levels," Ms Lin said.

"But Q3 (July to September) tells a different story beneath the headline number with China shipments plunging 70 per cent year-on-year while Korea fell 39 per cent."

Ms Lin said Australian exporters pushed more volume toward the US and Japan, alongside growing outlets including Canada, Taiwan and the Middle East.

And despite Q3 exports falling 4.8 per cent year-on-year, Ms Lin said the year-to-date growth advantage over 2025 was still 7.3 per cent, though narrowed from 9.1 per cent seen earlier in the year.

All eyes remain on the US however, given the announcement in August that 300,000 tonnes of tariff-free beef would be allowed into Australia's biggest export customer. US-based Len Steiner from Steiner Consulting said many had been surprised that the supply of Brazilian beef had not been stronger. "It may be unrealistic but the 300,000 tonne quota announcement in late August created some unrealistic expectations," he said.

When the market moves, timing matters

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