

Farm

**BOOK
CLUB
NOTES**

the making of a climate activist

Nicola Harvey

BOOK CLUB NOTES

Farm

Dear Reader,

When people ask the obligatory question, ‘why did you write this book?’ I have a couple of answers. One is easy to deliver: when I left Sydney, I was burnt out and learning to farm in rural New Zealand gave me the excuse I needed to disconnect from my city life. But I didn’t recuperate. For years, I believed that being productive was the only measure of success. So instead of living slower, as I hoped I could, I worked harder. First, I was learning to farm and that required long hours of labour, research, experimentation, trial, and lots of errors. Then I became a new mum, which is an exhausting joy. And amid it all, I realised there was a huge story unfolding right in front of me about the fragility of our food and farming systems in the age of climate change. High on post-partum endorphins, I believed I was the best placed journalist to report it out. So, I wrote a book.

But the other answer is I was desperately lonely. I came to farming as an inner-city progressive with firm views on how society should act in the face of the climate and environmental crises, but my views were out of step with my new farming colleagues and family members. I’d start conversations about ways to change farming to make it less environmentally degrading and my words were met with derision. They assumed I was the problem (an un-informed leftie throwing accusations), and I believed they were the problem (conservative retrogrades who refuse to change).

The gulf that this opened exacerbated the isolation I felt. I started reporting, ringing people, visiting farms, and talking to experts to find like-minded people in the farming sector — all to feel less alone. In seeking the friendship of others and their stories I discovered wounds that run deep through the farming and food community; so many people feel wronged or misunderstood. That’s when I realised my experience was central to this book because I represented the cause of that perceived harm. And so, this book is as much about conflict, identity, relationships, and community as it is the impact of farming on the environment and climate change. I started this book thinking it might change the views and practices of others, but it ended up changing me.

I hope reading *Farm: the making of a climate activist* will also help to diminish, just a little, the anxiety that has washed over many of us in the face of the climate crisis — and that it gives you hope that we can change course. A wise friend told me recently that she considers hope not an abstract feeling but a series of actions. You work at hope, you build it. We were discussing the nature of activism at the time, and when you consider activism a responsibility or a duty, then it’s clear that the work of hope goes hand in hand. The time for anxiety-induced inertia has passed. My hope is fuelled by the prospect that we can work together to build something better for my daughter and your children and mokopuna (grandchildren).

Nicola x

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QUESTIONS

Farm is a deeply personal story, but it is grounded in research that intends to help readers understand complicated climate change and farming science. Is the science more accessible to the reader via a relatable personal story or through facts and figures? Discuss why.

The title of the book suggests that the author has transitioned from being a farmer to an activist. What constitutes activism when it comes to climate action?

How does the author deal with knowledge hierarchies in the book? Whose testimony is given weight, and why?

The book's central relationship is between the author Nicola and her husband, Pat. Each have different strategies for changing the status quo in farming. Whose do you most relate to and why?

Is the author's father — who is portrayed as an antagonist — a unique character in the story or representative of a collective viewpoint?

How does the author craft the 'farmer identity', and what do individual farmers risk when they break away from identity norms?

If the natural world is the source of humanity's most powerful metaphors, why is it also a space that many fear and try to control?

The author unpacks how 'Big Food' has long controlled how and what we eat in the West through tactical marketing campaigns. Why is food used as a tool to control and shame people?

How is the kitchen used as a site of resistance in the book? Are there techniques or strategies that the reader can adopt?

The author uses failure as a narrative device that drives her towards a new way of farming and living. Do you consider failure a source of empowerment? Discuss why.

What are some takeaways for climate action from this book?



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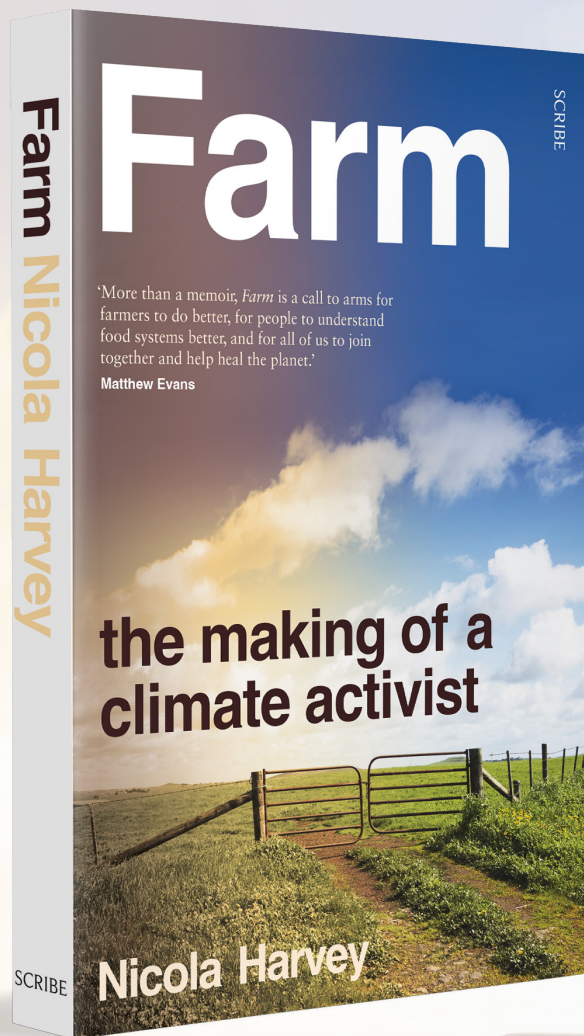
NICOLA HARVEY is a writer, producer, and a farmer. Previously with *BuzzFeed* as a managing editor, she's now a podcast producer, with credits under her belt including *Pretty For an Aboriginal*, *Debutante*, and *A Carnivore's Crisis*, the latter with Rachel Khoo.



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