Letting go of the land led Ivan and Anne to independence and a new community at Golden Rise

For more than half a century, Ivan's working days were measured in seasons. The 85-year-old managed mixed farming enterprises across New South Wales and Victoria, running sheep, cattle and cropping operations before settling near Bridgewater with his wife, Anne. Then a series of strokes changed everything.

"I said that's it, my farming days are over, and I've got to make the most of it," Ivan said.

For families who have farmed their whole lives, letting go of the land can be one of the hardest transitions of all, particularly when the need for more support arrives suddenly. For Ivan and Anne, who had lived independently their entire lives, the question was how to hold on to that independence while living close to help.

Ivan sold the farm and equipment to one of his grandsons, keeping the land in the family, and in 2026 the couple moved into Mercy Health's Golden Rise Retirement Living village, a thriving suburb with a full range of conveniences, including a variety of shops, a wellbeing centre, pubs, cafes and access to caring staff.

For Anne, the move brought immediate relief.

"I was relieved when Ivan told me he wasn't going to be farming anymore," she said.

"Downsizing has been truly wonderful. We've moved here and we only have to push a button to get help. There's also less I have to clean and worry about."

Far from slowing down, the couple have thrown themselves into village life. Ivan has joined Mercy Health's iGen mentoring program, passing on a lifetime of farming and animal husbandry knowledge to local secondary school students. When he isn't mentoring, he is a regular at community morning teas and keeps his hands busy with woodworking, furniture restoration and practical projects around the village.

For Anne, a highlight of the week is her Wednesday visit to the hub, where she connects with like-minded residents.

With a blended family of six children, 11 grandchildren and six great-grandchildren, Ivan and Anne's story is one many farming families will recognise. It is also one that Mercy Health hopes will encourage others to plan ahead.

Mercy Health's Executive General Manager Residential Operation, Joanna Skonieczna, said retirement living plays a vital role in helping older Australians prepare for the years ahead, and in making sure the right care is there if their needs change.

"Retirement living gives people like Ivan and Anne the independence of their own home with the reassurance that support is right there when they need it," said Jo.

"It's also an important first step in a person's journey with us. If their care needs change, our retirement living residents have priority access to co-located residential aged care homes if a room is available. That means they can transition to residential care knowing they'll be looked after with the same compassion and kindness they've already come to know from Mercy Health."

Golden Rise is opening its doors to the community for an Open Day on Saturday 31 October. Everyone is welcome to come along, tour the village, meet residents and learn more about what Mercy Health Golden Rise has to offer.

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