

UNPACKED:
VICTORIA'S ANIMAL
ACTIVIST AGENDA

2024 VFF GRAINS
CONFERENCE SUCCESS

VFF DISASTER
RELIEF FUND

CUTTING THROUGH THE
SUPERMARKET SMOKESCREEN

Victorian Farmer

AUTUMN EDITION 2024

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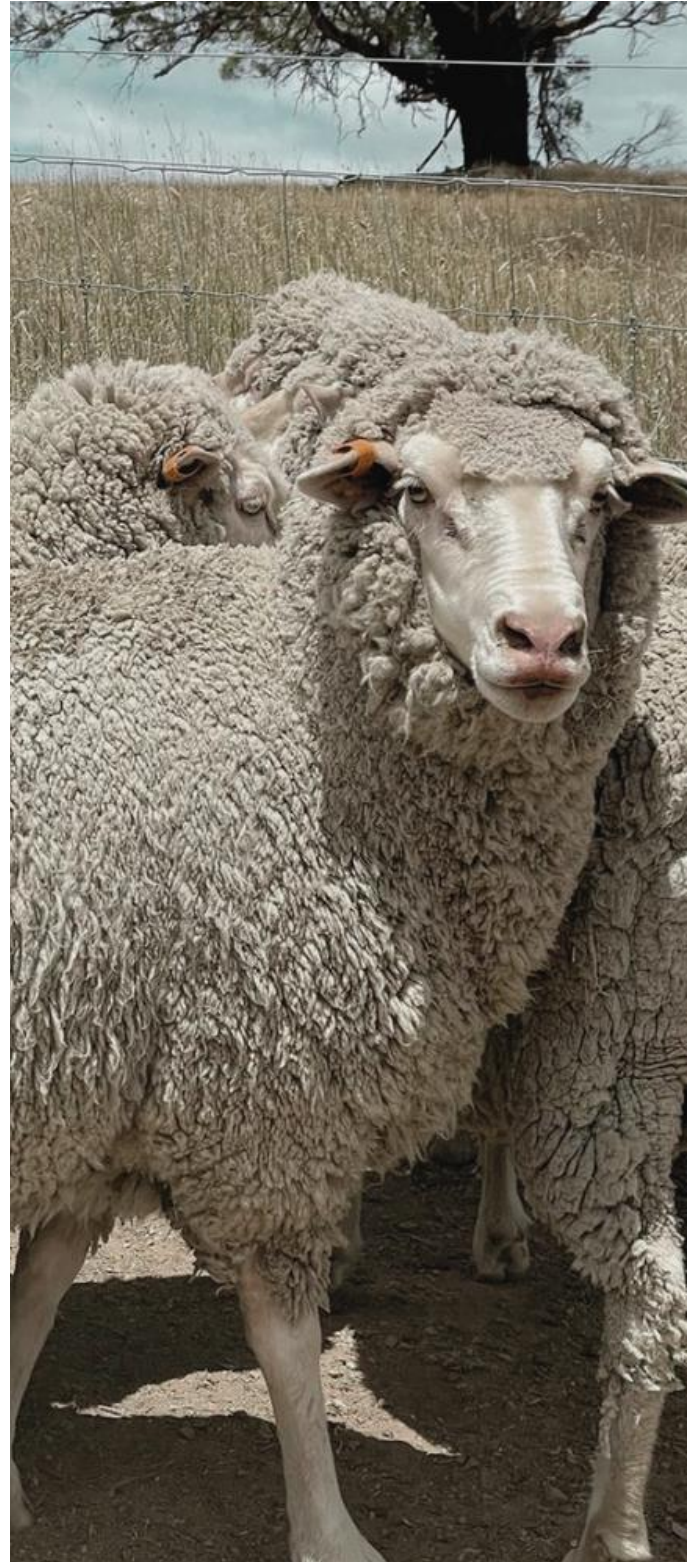
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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Hi everyone,

Can you believe we're nearing the halfway mark of 2024? It's flying by and here at the VFF we've been flat out covering a whole heap of issues on the Victorian farming agenda. A lot of this is covered in this edition of our magazine, but before you get to that I wanted to update you on some of the pressing issues keeping us on our toes.

As I'm writing this, it's budget time. Both our federal and state budgets have been handed down and I think for us in agriculture, the word underwhelming sums up both. Here in our state, we're drowning in government debt and this government must find a way to claw their way out of it. That's a huge opportunity for us. Victorian farmers contribute more than \$19 billion dollars to the economy through our food and fibre production and we can do more...we just need the government to get behind us. Our role at the VFF is more important than ever before as we pitch our industry as a major player in Victoria's economic roadmap.

Regarding the federal budget, the investment into 'Resourcing Australia's prosperity program' poses a significant threat to Australian farming, with investment into minerals exploration, the big build, battery storage and the race to renewable energy – all of these things are going to happen on our farms!

Unless we get the Land Access agreements right, farmers are fairly compensated for their contribution to public good and we understand food security implications of these issues, we as a Nation could be on a hiding to nowhere.

There's plenty of opportunity for farmers on the horizon, but we're also hell-bent on protecting our industry's interests. We've got huge challenges on a number of fronts. Our team is busily meeting with the government, the departments, the Members of the upper house cross bench and major stakeholders to ensure your voice is being heard.

It's a marathon, not a sprint and we'll update you as we progress the issues. There's no shortage of issues and topics that we're getting stuck into.

Despite the headwinds our industry faces, the renewal of the VFF has us incredibly well-placed to represent our industry and respond effectively to all of these matters. For the first time in a long time, the VFF stands equipped with a Policy and Advocacy Strategy to enable us to tackle whatever comes our way and act as the trusted voice for government to listen to when it comes to Victoria's entire agriculture industry.

For now, sit back, grab a coffee and I hope you enjoy the latest edition of our magazine.

Happy farming.

Emma Germano
VFF PRESIDENT





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Farmers over 60 the focus of the VFF MOFS team

The VFF's Making our Farms Safer project (VFF MOFS) is aiming to reduce the over-representation of farmers aged 60 and over from dying on Victorian farms with the release of its new handbook, *Stay Farming Longer and Safer: A practical guide for older farmers and their families*.

VFF Vice-President and Chair of the Making our Farmers Safer Committee Danyel Cucinotta said the free handbook is available to all Victorian farmers, and offers practical safety tips, information and advice that are critical to save lives.

"In 2022, over 40 per cent of all deaths on farms were tragically people aged over 60. Everyone deserves to go home safely at night, and this handbook is a step in the right direction."

Ms Cucinotta said the much-needed handbook fills a hole within the industry. It has been written for farmers, by farmers, while keeping front of mind the unique challenges that living on a farm presents.

"This handbook has been created with the goal to prompt thoughtful consideration of changes, both big and small, that can enhance safety outcomes that is led by farmers, for farmers."

Want to know more?
Visit the VFF MOFS website at makingourfarmssafer.org.au



Port truck tax a blatant cash-grab

We've called out the tax on truck movements at the Port of Melbourne as a blatant cash-grab is urging the government to re-direct its focus to rail and high-capacity freight to lower its goal to cut emissions.

The misguided approach by the government risks costing farmers millions and Victoria's mantle as Australia's largest food and fibre exporter by value.

In response, we're calling on the government to develop an agricultural freight strategy to help get our produce moving more efficiently to drive productivity and to lower emissions.

That strategy must focus on smarter and targeted infrastructure investment, improved supply chain efficiency, better planning, coordination and regulation and better freight location and performance data.

Want to read more? Visit the news tab on the VFF website.



New VFF advocacy leaders welcomed

We're thrilled to have in place new leaders responsible for cross-industry policy and advocacy for the next two years.

VFF President Emma Germano said the appointments to the VFF's Issues Advisory Committees play a key role in helping to shape guide the VFF's policy direction on a wide range of farming issues.

"It's fantastic to welcome such experienced and knowledgeable advocates for agriculture and our regional communities. Their specialist knowledge and skills will help us tackle the policy issues that impact every farmer in Victoria."

Please welcome:

- Katherine Myers: Planning, Environment and Climate Change Committee
- Daniel Meade: Farm Business & Transport Committee
- Andrew Leahy: VFF Water Council
- Nathan Free: Workforce & Social Policy Committee
- Danyel Cucinotta: Farming Systems Committee

A huge congratulations to you and we look forward to working with you.

THE VFF DISASTER RELIEF FUND: A LIFELINE FOR FARMERS FACING NATURE'S FURY

WORDS

Tali Mason, Digital Content Advisor – Lead Designer

PHOTOGRAPHY

CFA



Australia's agricultural sector is no stranger to the capricious whims of nature. From scorching bushfires to relentless floods, farmers often find themselves at the mercy of extreme weather events that can wreak havoc on their livelihoods. In these challenging times, the VFF Disaster Relief Fund emerges as a vital lifeline, offering essential support to farmers facing the aftermath of natural disasters.

Finding Resilience Amidst Devastation

When disaster strikes, the immediate aftermath can be overwhelming. Homes destroyed, crops scorched, and livestock lost – the toll on farmers and rural communities is immeasurable. In these dire circumstances, the VFF Disaster Relief Fund springs into action, providing urgent assistance to those in need.

Whether it's distributing emergency fodder to feed starving livestock or delivering essential supplies to families displaced by wildfires, the fund ensures that help reaches those who need it most, when they need it most.

Empowering Farmers on the Road to Recovery

Recovery from a natural disaster is a long and arduous journey, marked by challenges and setbacks. Yet, with the support of the VFF Disaster Relief Fund, farmers can take the first steps toward rebuilding their lives and livelihoods.

The fund offers financial assistance to cover the costs of repairing damaged infrastructure, restocking herds, and replanting crops. Moreover, it provides invaluable guidance and resources to help farmers navigate the complex process of recovery, empowering them to emerge stronger and more resilient in the face of adversity.

Fostering Community Resilience and Solidarity

In times of crisis, the strength of community support becomes abundantly clear. The VFF Disaster Relief Fund not only provides practical assistance but also fosters a sense of solidarity and camaraderie within the farming community.

Through collective action and mutual aid, farmers, rural communities, and generous donors come together to support their neighbours in need, embodying the spirit of camaraderie that defines Australia's agricultural landscape.

In 2024 alone, the fund has seen approximately \$2,300 in donations, a testament to the unwavering support and commitment of individuals and organisations to helping farmers overcome adversity.

Together, they stand united against the forces of nature, resilient in the face of adversity.

Investing in a Resilient Future

As climate change exacerbates the frequency and intensity of natural disasters, the importance of proactive disaster preparedness cannot be overstated. The VFF Disaster Relief Fund is committed to investing in initiatives that enhance resilience and mitigate risk within the agricultural sector.

From promoting sustainable farming practices to advocating for robust disaster response strategies, the fund seeks to build a more resilient future for farmers and rural communities across Victoria.

2024 VFF GRAINS CONFERENCE RECAP

The Victorian Farmers Federation 2024 Grains Conference, held on Monday 26 February at the Horsham Golf Club and attended by over 120 members, proved to be an exceptional gathering that not only addressed crucial issues in the grains industry but also celebrated the spirit of collaboration.

The event commenced with a memorable cocktail party organised by the Wimmera Branch on Sunday night, which was sponsored by GrainCorp and Pacific Global Sprouts, setting the stage for the conference on Monday.

Throughout the conference, outstanding guest speakers delved into key topics that are pivotal for the industry's growth. The sessions covered strategies for overcoming sustainability challenges and maintaining market access, emphasising the importance of profitability and environmental stewardship.

Discussions also revolved around the imperative of keeping grain moving, focusing on the development of more efficient freight networks to enhance the overall supply chain and fixing regional roads.

The spotlight was also on the future of farming, with engaging talks on artificial intelligence and emerging technologies in the grains industry. Guest speakers shared insights on leveraging cutting-edge technologies to enhance productivity, sustainability, and innovation in farming practices.

The Conference culminated with a dinner, where thanks to Grain Producers Australia, all the guests were entertained by guest speaker, former Australian Cricketer, Brad Hogg who focussed on how farming communities can come together to drive positive mental health outcomes.

We'd like to thank all our sponsors, GRDC, Telstra, WFI, Prime Super, Momentum Energy, Ritchie Bros, Emmetts, Gas N Go, Powercor, Mitsubishi Motors and Morgans, who played a vital role in making the conference a reality. We also extend appreciation to our outstanding guest speakers for their valuable contributions. Their expertise and perspectives enriched the discussions, leaving a lasting impact on all attendees.

In the spirit of collaboration, the VFF 2024 Grains Conference laid the foundation for a resilient and innovative future for Victorian agriculture. Thank you to everyone who played a part in this success, and here's to continued growth and progress in the grains industry.

WORDS

Anthony Trainor, Business Development & Membership Manager

PHOTOGRAPHY

Charles Everist



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CUTTING THROUGH THE SUPERMARKET SMOKESCREEN

WORDS

Glen Hepburn, Senior Policy Advisor – Economic and Rural Affairs

PHOTOGRAPHY

Sourced

Cost of living concerns are at the forefront of everyone's mind at the moment. Prices are up and many are struggling to make ends meet. But who or what is to blame?

Politicians have been quick to point the finger at business, in particular the major supermarkets, Coles and Woolworths, with allegations of 'price gouging' where prices and profit margins are thought to be higher than they should be in a competitive market.

This has prompted three public inquiries at the national level - the Senate Select Committee on Supermarket Prices, the review by Dr Emerson of the Food and Grocery Code of Conduct and the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's (ACCC) Supermarkets Inquiry.

It is important to cut through the political smokescreen and focus on what can be achieved to ensure a fair outcome for farmers in the face of supermarket dominance.



Profits, prices and politics

In its submission to the Senate supermarket inquiry, the VFF pointed out that what the supermarkets charge at the checkout and what the farmer receives is extremely complicated.

"People point to the difference between farm gate prices and those paid in the supermarket and argue that the difference between the two is evidence of abuse of market power and 'price gouging'. In some cases, this may be the case with large supermarkets using their market power to hold down prices paid to suppliers."

"However, it may also be due to the supermarkets ability to buy at scale and diversify its sources of supply. There are intricate and complicated determinants of market prices which include factors such as logistics, product specifications, volumes and timing as well as the interplay between major fresh markets and the supermarkets."

"Disentangling the impact of abuse of market power and superior commercial negotiations can be difficult and not straightforward."

There may be some merit in these concerns and the ACCC inquiry, with its broad powers to collect data will be able to shed some light on the issue.

The focus on supermarket profits however is being used as a political smokescreen to take the public's focus away from the impact of government policy on cost of living pressures, and the cost of doing business.

The VFF wants to focus on the broader drivers of food and grocery prices. The market power and behaviour of the large supermarkets may be a factor, but the VFF considers that there are other drivers of price increases that are more directly affected by government policy changes.

These cost drivers include:

- Energy, water and other input costs.
- Government regulation and red tape.
- Policies increasing labour costs and reducing labour flexibility.
- Lack of investment in key infrastructure leading to lower productivity and blockages in the supply chain.

These cost drivers affect not only the large supermarkets but also feed into higher costs through the supply chain from producers, transport, wholesaling and to other smaller retail outlets – pushing up prices for all.



VFF Life Member and Dobie sheep producer Charlie de Fegely submitted to the Senate inquiry saying that rather than focussing on supermarket prices, government needed to focus on the impact it has on the producers' bottom line.

“The greatest problem for our enterprise is not the prices received but the massive increase in costs in the past 12 months. Some of these are influenced by the government. In particular labour, insurance and energy prices.”

“Whilst prices have increased the greatest factors that could enhance our business are better roads and communications. Our freight costs have increased due to damage to trucks freighting lambs to slaughter from the poor state of our roads.”

“The other opportunity missed is poor internet communication. The gain from increased genetic performance is lost through poor communication which prevents us from adopting some of the new developments in IT, i.e. facial recognition and pedigree management,” Charlie said.

Treatment of suppliers

The focus on so called supermarket ‘price gouging’ not only distracts from the conversation about costs, it also distracts from important conversations about how market power is exerted on farmers.

The treatment of suppliers by the major supermarket chains is a major area of concern. This is particularly the case for suppliers of fresh produce, where limited shelf life puts pressure on suppliers to bend to supermarket demands.

For example, the VFF has heard of cases where:

- Supermarkets implement ethical sourcing policies for products they sell, but the cost of these policies is pushed back onto suppliers who have no option but to accept lower margins.
- Similarly, supermarkets may specify quality standards in supply agreements, which suppliers are required to meet. However, supermarkets will arbitrarily vary the standards if it suits them even though suppliers have invested to meet the conditions set.
- Supermarkets set requirements for product packaging, for example, in terms of sustainability or ability to be recycled. Suppliers are not consulted in the setting of these standards and the cost of complying with them is pushed back onto the supplier.
- Concerns around transparency when a product is rejected. A consignment of product may be rejected by a retailer, but the reason is not always clear – it may be because of concerns around the product, though anecdotally we have been told that ‘rejections’ often occur when the market price has dropped on a line of produce and the retailer wants to avoid paying a previously agreed higher price.

Whilst there are several questionable practices by the supermarkets in their dealings with suppliers, we also shouldn't lose sight over the positive aspects of these relationships.

As a direct supplier to Woolworths, Charlie de Fegely reflected on the importance of the relationship with the supermarket to the senate inquiry.



Solutions

We have to be realistic about what can be done to address the power of the large supermarket chains. Breaking up the large chains or directly regulating food prices are not viable policy options. There may be other options to increase competition and price transparency, which could be explored by the ACCC inquiry.

However, the ACCC is not due to present its final report to government until February 2025 and then it will probably take the government some time to respond to the inquiry's recommendations.

The bottom line is that the government needs to act now to support producers and consumers and not wait for the outcome of another inquiry.

The VFF believes that the focus of government policy should be on addressing the drivers of cost increases in the food and grocery supply chain.

These are government policies that directly increase the costs of doing business for farmers, wholesalers, and retailers.

It is critical that farmers work to hold government to account for bad policy settings that add to the cost of farming. In any event, there are solutions that can be achieved without having to wait for the outcome of the various inquiries currently underway.

The treatment of suppliers by the major supermarkets must be improved. The VFF is particularly concerned that fresh produce suppliers are particularly vulnerable to unfair practices by large supermarkets.

Perishability of the product means that suppliers are forced to accept conditions offered by the large supermarkets because there is not time to find and negotiate supply agreements with other retailers before the quality of the produce degrades.

Improving relationships between suppliers and the supermarkets does not require government intervention.

The Food and Grocery Code of Conduct by Dr Emerson may provide an opportunity to consider improvements, but farmers need to take the lead and have conversations with the supermarkets directly.

This is of course difficult for an individual farmer, but through a united front, fair outcomes can be achieved.

The VFF is seeking to engage directly with the large supermarkets to ensure that they are aware of how suppliers are treated and to work cooperatively to find solutions.

How you can help

The VFF encourages members to provide examples of their experiences when dealing with the major supermarket chains.

Both positive and negative stories are welcome and help to build an understanding of the issues and to guide the VFF's advocacy.





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THE GENERAL ENVIRONMENTAL DUTY – WHY YOU NEED TO ACT NOW.

WORDS

Lisa Gervasoni - Senior Policy Advisor Land & Planning

PHOTOGRAPHY

Sourced



In recent months, the VFF has become aware of increased enforcement action by the EPA on farming operations across the state, particularly in areas that are adjacent to urban development. In many cases, these issues have arisen out of poor planning decisions and not because the farming operations have been unreasonable.

The VFF is advocating to the government and the EPA to ensure that enforcement of the general environmental duty (GED) is reasonable and does not create unfair burdens on existing farm operations. However, given the current risks to farmers surrounding enforcement, it is important that they understand what the GED is and how it must be considered.

What is the GED?

Since July 2021, the Environment Protection Act 2017 establishes a proactive general environmental duty which requires that 'a person who is engaging in an activity that may give rise to risks of harm to human health or the environment from pollution or waste must minimise those risks, so far as reasonably practicable'.

This duty represents a departure from the previous iteration of the Environment Protection Act which was focused on a reactive and punitive model where environmental harm was dealt with after the fact.

Farmers need to be aware of their GED and the potential impacts of their operations on environmental and human health, otherwise they could fall foul of breaching this duty under the law. The VFF strongly recommends that all farmers consider their GED and document what actions they take and why. This helps prove that you are meeting your GED.

How is farming an environmental risk?

The new Environment Protection Act is focused on controlling environmental risks which includes human health. Farming activities create dust, noise, odour or emit green house gas emissions. Throughout the implementation of the new GED agriculture was an unknown unknown. EPA did not have a lot of exposure to agriculture industries or RDCs, and farmers had very little exposure to general duties.

Assurances were given that as farming did not have a history of significant pollution and that a healthy environment (soil, air and water) was important to the farm sector that it would be unlikely that a farmer utilising sound production systems would be impacted by the GED.

The VFF is becoming concerned that there is not enough understanding of agriculture within the EPA to properly determine the human health or environmental risk of an emission and the ability to eliminate or reduce that risk. You can breach the GED even if there has been no environmental harm caused.

When minimising risks of harm, the Act requires a person to:

- first eliminate the risks of harm to human health and the environment so far as reasonably practicable; and
- if it is not reasonably practicable to eliminate the risks, reduce those risks so far as reasonably practicable.

What is a risk? What do I need to do?

Every farming operation would have at least one activity that creates noise, odour, light, dust or would use chemicals or would emit green house or other emissions.

Humans can make noise and emit odours or greenhouse gases. If the trigger is I can see dust or I can smell odour so that must mean there is a risk to the environment or health then everyone would be breaching the GED.

If you haven't considered what the potential risks of your operations are, and can demonstrate the actions you take to minimise that risk, then it will be harder to demonstrate that you are meeting your GED.

The situation is complicated by the EPA defining dwellings, schools etc as sensitive uses that must be protected. A dwelling located adjacent to a pump shed or near a broiler farm is to be protected from the noise of the pump or the odour from the broiler farm if that is deemed to be an impact to human health or the environment.

What can I do?

- Think about where your risks are.
- Document the current actions you take that manage the risk.
- Look for new opportunities or research that might help.
- Demonstrate why a risk cannot be eliminated or why reducing that risk is impractical.
- Talk to your council so they understand what the risks to your operations are if they approve sensitive uses near you.

What actions might I already be doing?

Doing a plan for your GED might be a bit like doing your fire plan. Most farmers know what actions they take to respond to predicted levels of risk, or to a fire in the area. Use the EPA template and guidance documents to think about your risk and what you do.

Then think about what you could be doing. Are there reasons why you don't want to, or can't take that action?

Just like reviewing your farm fire plan. Looking at a document might prompt you to think about something you heard about that might be a good idea for the environment, and for the business bottom line or your safety.

- When you apply chemicals – you read the label. You consider withholding periods, you ensure that they are applied in the right climatic / weather conditions. You store your chemicals in a lined shed and have processes to deal with spills.
- You have an effluent system at your dairy and a maintenance program.
- You have your pumps in a housing.
- You have a stock containment area to protect soil (flood, drought, fire etc).
- You minimise stock access to waterways.
- You use a sustainability or greenhouse tool from your RDC.

Where can I find out more information?

The EPA has a range of guidance documentation to assist you to understand your GED and the actions you should take. All documents can be found under the publications page on the EPA website – www.epa.vic.gov.au

The following documents are the most relevant for farm businesses:

- 1819.1: Agriculture - guide to preventing harm to people and the environment
- 1695.1: Assessing and controlling risk: A guide for business
- 1741.1: Industry guidance: supporting you to comply with the general environmental duty
- 856: Reasonably practicable

The best place to start is the specific guide for agriculture. This includes information on how the EPA sees risks from air contaminants; chemical spills; dust; water contamination; odour; reusable materials; noise; waste; and wastewater. It also has a simple action plan template that can help you prepare a GED and identify any opportunities for improvement.

The EPA also has a four step guide about how you assess your risk and identifying hazards. There is also a guide on how to identify your state of knowledge. Think of that as rules that you are meant to know, or actions you should be aware of. For agriculture that may include information from your industry RDC – from what you do to manage mastitis to the environment and climate reasons behind why you are building a covered feed pad.

There is also a guide to what is reasonably practicable. This can be a key issue for farming. A low-level odour, with limited control options and an expensive option that may have little benefit might not be practicable. Finding asbestos on your farm would have a high risk of a serious consequence and action would be required.

What is the VFF doing to protect your right to farm?

- Advocating for continued engagement with agriculture sector before publishing guidance and prior to taking GED actions in new areas.
- Elevating concerns with implementation to EPA and the Minister for Environment
- Offering solutions – recognition of existing industry guidance.
- Discussing opportunities to improve information available to different commodities.
- Directing producers to existing resources and tools to help them address their GED.

VICTORIA'S ANIMAL ACTIVIST AGENDA – DEFENDING ANIMAL WELFARE LAWS FROM IDEOLOGICAL ATTACK

The discussion surrounding animal welfare has gained significant momentum, sparking debates across various sectors of society.

WORDS

Charles Everist, General Manager -
Policy & Advocacy

PHOTOGRAPHY

Sourced



Amidst this discourse, the VFF finds itself at the forefront, advocating for the interests and concerns of farmers in the face of proposed legislative changes by the Victorian Government.

As the voice of farmers across the state, the VFF stands firm in its commitment to ensuring that any laws concerning animal welfare are pragmatic, fair, and reflective of the diverse needs of farming communities.

Disappointingly however, the move toward new animal welfare laws doesn't seem to be based on what is pragmatic or fair.

Instead, the driving force behind new laws comes out of the efforts of animal activists who trespass on farms and break the law in order to push their ideological dogma.

They push the conversation about animal welfare to the extremes of debate which risks governments taking action purely in response to short term political imperatives driven by the 24-hour news media cycle.

At the 2018 Victorian State Election, the Andrews Labor Government committed to reforming the state's animal welfare laws to replace the existing Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act with a new Animal Care and Protection Act.

After six years of development, farmers are now grappling with the new laws about to come before the Victorian Parliament.

Sound animal welfare laws are needed to underpin food production and food security. The risk Victoria now faces is whether new laws will be pragmatic and fair, or will they allow for ideology to run roughshod over responsible farming practices.

Exposing the ideological agenda

At the end of 2023 the Victorian Government released its draft Animal Care and Protection Bill for public consultation.

At the very same time, the Victorian Parliament was gearing up for a public inquiry into the welfare of pigs across the industry.

This inquiry came off the back of animal activists breaking into abattoirs and collecting footage of the use of carbon-dioxide to stun pigs prior to slaughter which was aired on the ABC's 7:30 program earlier in the year.

Whilst the creation of the inquiry was an attempt by activists to try and influence new animal welfare laws, it also gave farmers the opportunity to expose animal activists' minority views, their ideological bias and the risks posed by their agenda.

These concerns were highlighted by VFF President Emma Germano when speaking at the inquiry's public hearings in March this year.

“Of the people who are vegan, which research suggests is anywhere between 1 and 2 per cent in Australia, some 35 per cent say that the reason they choose veganism is because of animal welfare concerns.”



“My maths says that we are talking about a particular ideology that represents somewhere between 0.35 per cent of the population and 0.7 per cent of the population, so we would need to be very careful that there is not a kneejerk reaction here as presenting an industry that has lost trust.”

Emma said basing animal welfare considerations on the views of animal activists would lead to poor outcomes, especially for food security.

“To have a conversation that has become a spectacle without any regard to the impact that it would have on the community is frankly quite disturbing. It actually highlights the fact that there are a bunch of rich people sitting around dictating what happens to people who perhaps cannot afford to make the food choices that they need to make to feed their family.”

“When I say ‘rich people’ I mean people who have not had the unfortunate experience of being concerned as to whether they have enough money in their bank account to feed their children before they go to bed.”

So we have to be very, very mindful that the rich can afford their ideology but there are implications to the rest of the society that we live in when we make decisions based on ideology which I have argued is of a very small subset of the community right now.”

The risks of such a very small subset of the community having a say over animal welfare laws moving forward is very real.

The government’s draft laws will create a complex regulatory framework to govern animal management and husbandry practices for each species of farm animals.

Whilst the process for creating these regulations requires significant industry consultation, animal welfare groups and animal activists also have a place at the table.

This creates the risk of ideological viewpoints dictating what on-farm practices would be acceptable under the law.

Speaking to the inquiry, Emma said there was a risk of rushing the work to create these regulations which could lead to ideological views dictating their final form.

“We have concerns around the fact the draft animal welfare legislation is sitting before everybody at the moment and has a two-year commencement date, but there is some notion that all of the regulations will be drafted in that period of time.”

“We know that these things take serious consideration, so we have to be really sure across the whole community, as I said, that that framework actually works, and I think more transparency and education around how it operates would be helpful for everybody.”

Matter of trust

The animal activist agenda seeks to undermine the community’s trust in farmers and how they care for their animals. By doing this, they aim to show that changes to the law are required to curtail

animal management practices to uphold or restore trust.

Taking aim at prominent animal activist Chris Delforce’s ‘Dominion’ campaign, Emma Germano highlighted that the attempted undermining of trust in farmers comes from a distorted view that presumes that farmers try to exert power over animals, rather than caring about them.

“Dominion is a notion that is posed in the Bible in the second creation story in Genesis. Dominion is put into that story that God gave humans dominion over the earth and over the animals. If you take dominion to be power, you are projecting an image of God, I suppose, that seeks to be cruel to the earth and to nature and to the animals and to the plants.”

“In fact, dominion is supposed to be about stewardship and caretaking of the planet that we are living on and the animals that we are consuming as part of our survival.”

Despite their attempts to undermine trust in farmers, Emma said the arguments made by animal activists were a long way from reality.

“Research absolutely demonstrates that that is not the case and that 74 per cent of people that were interviewed as part of an independent piece of research that was done do absolutely trust farmers. In fact we were up there with the same level of trust that the community has in the science and engineering fields.”

“People are still consuming animal products, and they do so trusting in Australian farmers, the systems that we use and the very principle that we care about our animals, because if we do not care about our animals then we do not have a business.”

It's not just farmers that animal activists take aim at. By calling themselves 'whistle-blowers' to justify their unlawful activities, animal activists also attack trust in the institutions that underpin sound animal welfare laws.

This point was also reflected on by Emma in her contribution to the inquiry.

“People who have appeared before you have criticised Agriculture Victoria, they have criticised the regulator and they have criticised the very laws that we are all actually abiding by. We are talking about a subset of the community who actually want to be the police and want to be the watchdog.”

It is not appropriate for any group in the community who espouse a very particular ideology to see themselves as being the police of an industry.”

“I am concerned about the notion of this group of people wanting to be the watchdog, because it undermines the faith in the whole food sector when we have the spectacle that we are seeing at the moment. Having trust in the food sector for any person in Australia I think is really important to mental health and wellbeing. It talks about your security, about living in a society.

You want to feel like you are going to have access to clean, green, ethical food and that you do not have to feel guilty about the choices that you are making to feed your family.”

The risk for animal welfare laws

The VFF has been engaged as a primary stakeholder with the Victorian Government as it continues to refine its new animal welfare laws.

Throughout the process the VFF has held serious concerns about how the new laws could be used or manipulated by animal activists to further their agenda. This is in part due to the government seeking to give itself broad powers to impose licences and enforce compliance on farm businesses overnight.

In its submission to the government on the new laws, the VFF highlighted these concerns.

Chief among our concerns are the broad discretionary powers being sought by the executive government which create risk of executive and regulatory overreach, potentially leading to onerous impositions on food production without adequate justification.”

“We are concerned there is inadequate clarity provided in the draft Bill (including in the most fundamental areas of proposed change, i.e. licencing). At best, this leaves the government, our industry and other stakeholders with no meaningful parameters within which to operate. At worst, it places government in a position where it is establishing a framework for

what should not be permitted to become a political issue.”

The VFF has also highlighted the danger of government's being reactive and having the power to unilaterally change rules on the back of animal activist campaigns.

Examples of this include the Albanese Government's recent decision to phase out the live export of sheep and the Gillard Government's suspension of the live cattle trade to Indonesia in 2011.

“Specifically, the draft Bill enables further material rule-making via regulations, which depending on the political imperatives of the day, could result in an additional (entirely uncertain) layer of regulation of on-farm practices. It cannot be the government's intention to expose the agriculture industry to a new or different licencing regime whenever it feels or changes its mind. It is in the interests of all stakeholders that all licences be defined in the legislation and subject to direct parliamentary oversight,” the VFF said.

With the laws now in their final stages of development before being approved by Premier Jacinta Allan's Cabinet, the VFF is making a concerted effort to see a legal framework that is pragmatic, fair and gives the community trust in the way farmers manage their animals.

Even if those laws can be achieved, farmers will need to continue to be at the table opposite activists to soberly dispel their radical ideological agendas.



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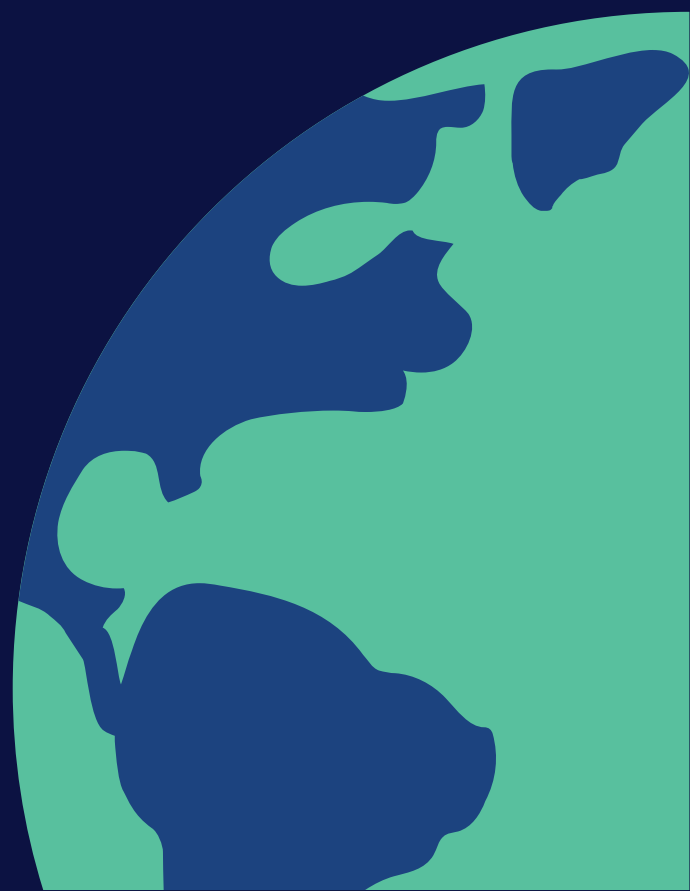
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STOCKSENSE INSIGHTS

WORDS

Tegan Divitcos, VFF Stocksense Project Manager

PHOTOGRAPHY

VFF Stocksense

The VFF Stock Sense team consisting of three full time staff members, have made a considerable impact educating producers and livestock owners on livestock health, welfare and biosecurity. Funded by both the Cattle Compensation Fund and the Sheep & Goat Compensation Fund, Stock Sense is using this funding to protect the livestock industry as a whole, with a particular focus on biosecurity and educating new and small landholders on their responsibilities when it comes to owning livestock. Less than 50% of attendees at workshops have a farm biosecurity plan and this highlights the need for Stock Sense to continue their work.

In 2023, 211 livestock owners attended face to face workshops with the majority of these attendees, 81% never having attended a Stock Sense event before.

Tegan Divitcos, the VFF Stock Sense Project Manager, says Stock Sense is encouraged by the broadening demographic that they are reaching. Not only is the Stock Sense message reaching wider community circles, it is also positive to see the younger age group of 18-29 year olds present at events.

Stock Sense events aim to be practical and provide the knowledge and tools to develop your own farm biosecurity plan, ensure you have a Property Identification Code, understand the NLIS and NVD's as well as getting people thinking about other aspects, such as infrastructure required to ensure animal welfare and farm sustainability.

The year has kicked off with a number of webinars, firstly with a cattle webinar with guest speaker Elizabeth Bradley from Integrity systems discussing Stock in and out: PIC's to eNVD's. The team recently ran a six-week Farming Essentials webinar series which started from the basics of buying a property and guest presenters walked attendees through the key points to consider.

Nearly 150 people registered to attend this six-part webinar series and the recordings have had over 150 views since the completion of the event. This highlights how there is a huge need for basic information relating to starting your own farm and owning livestock. There is so much to learn and buying a property and owning livestock is a big responsibility not only for you personally but also to ensure you are doing the right thing by your neighbours and the wider agricultural community.

You can view the full webinar series on the VFF Stock Sense YouTube page.

In early February, Stock Sense also ran a joint Farming Fundamentals workshop in Bendigo with the City of Greater Bendigo and the Making our Farms Safer Project team. This was hugely successful with 25 attendees who also enjoyed a farm walk on a local property. Keeping the land healthy is all intertwined with ensuring you have healthy animals as well.

Stock Sense has a full calendar of events lined up including workshops, webinars and field days as well as producing factsheets and resources available online. Stock Sense teams up with professionals in the agricultural industry to facilitate and deliver quality educational events and resources and all this is free for anyone interested! You can view and register to attend these events on the VFF website.

THERE ALSO CONTINUES TO BE POSITIVE FEEDBACK ABOUT THE PROJECT ON THE POST EVENT SURVEYS:

'Enjoyable program, excellent intro to small scale farming.'

'Had a good time with good people. Thank you.'

'I just finished up watching the second webinar. It's a great program to be a part of as my husband and I grew up on farm and work on farms, and are making decisions toward buying our own land for us and our son.'





NEW HANDBOOK AIMS TO ENHANCE FARM SAFETY FOR OLDER FARMERS IN VICTORIA

WORDS

Tali Mason, Digital Content Advisor – Lead Designer

PHOTOGRAPHY

Tali Mason

The Victorian Farmers Federation's initiative, the Making our Farms Safer project (VFF MOFS), has launched a significant effort to address the alarming trend of fatalities among farmers aged 60 and above in Victoria. Their latest endeavour comes in the form of a comprehensive handbook titled *Stay Farming Longer and Safer: A practical guide for older farmers and their families*.

Danyel Cucinotta, VFF Vice-President and Chair of the Making our Farmers Safer Committee, highlighted the handbook's crucial role in providing practical safety guidance to Victorian farmers. Emphasising its availability to all farmers in the state, Cucinotta stressed the handbook's potential to save lives by offering essential safety tips, information, and advice.

Danyel cited concerning statistics from 2022, revealing that over 40 percent of farm-related deaths involved individuals aged over 60. Expressing the VFF's commitment to ensuring the safety of all farmers, she underscored the handbook's importance as a step towards addressing this pressing issue.

Acknowledging the handbook's significance within the agricultural industry, Danyel noted its unique approach, crafted by farmers for farmers. The handbook's content is tailored to the specific challenges faced by individuals living and working on farms, filling a crucial void in safety resources.

"This handbook has been created with the goal to prompt thoughtful consideration of changes, both big and small, that can enhance safety outcomes that is led by farmers, for farmers," said Danyel, outlining the handbook's purpose to initiate proactive safety measures within farming communities.

For those interested in accessing further information, the VFF MOFS website offers additional resources and support. Interested individuals can visit makingourfarmssafes.org.au to learn more about the initiative and its ongoing efforts to promote farm safety across Victoria.





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~NobleOak's Premium Life Direct Life Insurance premiums are more than 20 percent lower than the average premium of 15 comparable Direct Insurance products. Our analysis is based on premium rates available as at 30th September 2023, calculated by Plan For Life for Term Life Insurance cover offered directly through insurers (without personal financial advice). Premiums currently available for members include a 10% discount to our standard Premium Life Direct premium rates, and this discount has been factored into the calculations. The average savings quoted are applicable to males and females, smoker and non-smoker, from ages 30 to 60, with sum insured from \$100,000 to \$1.5m. Plan For Life is one of the leading independent suppliers of Australian Life Insurance and Managed Funds market information, relied upon for over 20 years by the leading life offices, analysts, dealer groups and government bodies.

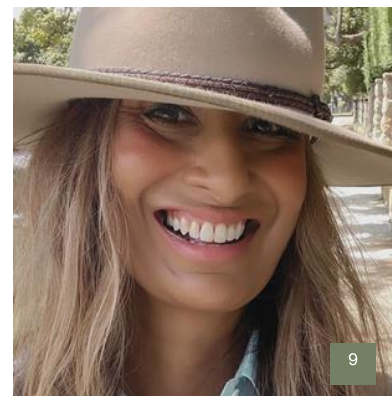
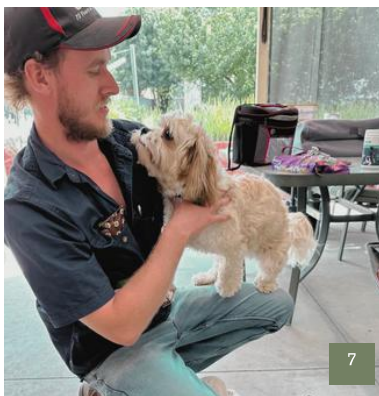
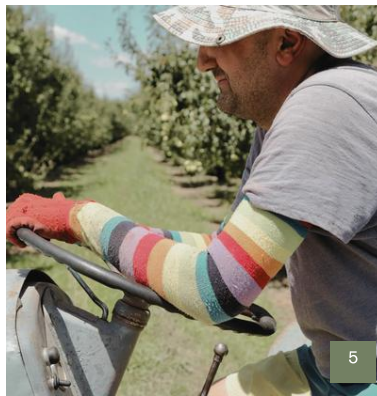
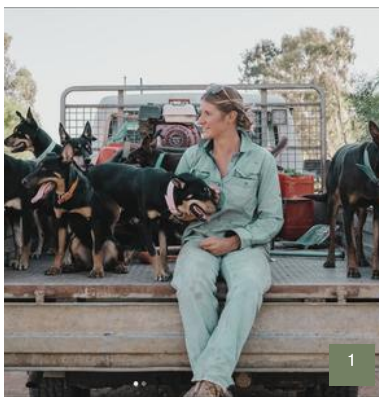
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CULTIVATING CONNECTIONS THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

Our social media presence at VFF has experienced significant growth in 2023 and 2024, with increased engagement and followers.

As the authoritative voice of Victorian farmers since 1979, we take immense pride in representing and championing the agricultural community. Through our dedicated efforts, we've become a reliable conduit for capturing the dynamic landscape of agriculture in Victoria. Our channels serve as a platform to share the diverse and evolving stories within the agricultural space, reflecting the rich tapestry of experiences and innovations that define farming in our region. It's a privilege to document and amplify the voices of Victorian farmers, fostering a collective narrative that resonates with the challenges, triumphs, and continuous growth of our vibrant agricultural community.

Join the conversation and share your story by using the hashtags **#vicfarmer** and **#victorianfarmersfederation** for a chance to be featured on our channel and upcoming magazines.



1. @leahbai.ley takes the spotlight at Telopea Downs
2. 2024 Harvest commencing with @radevskicoolstores
3. International Women's Day! @smith_and_jackson and @yarrowalla_vineyard - two of four women farmers alongside 15 men!
4. Stubble burning commencing! @bindiv_photos
5. The best dressed picker we ever did see at @radevskicoolstores
6. Beautiful Beurre Bosc pears grown right here at @radevskicoolstores being harvested
7. Buzz loves the farm. He even tried helping bale some wool in the shearing shed! @martinhavingacrack
8. Autumn came knocking on the door very quickly this year! @e.m.images_
9. 'Gratitude Is The Memory Of The Loving-Heart' says @selinawinpe

LAST WORD

WORDS

Tali Mason, Digital Content Advisor – Lead Designer

PHOTOGRAPHY

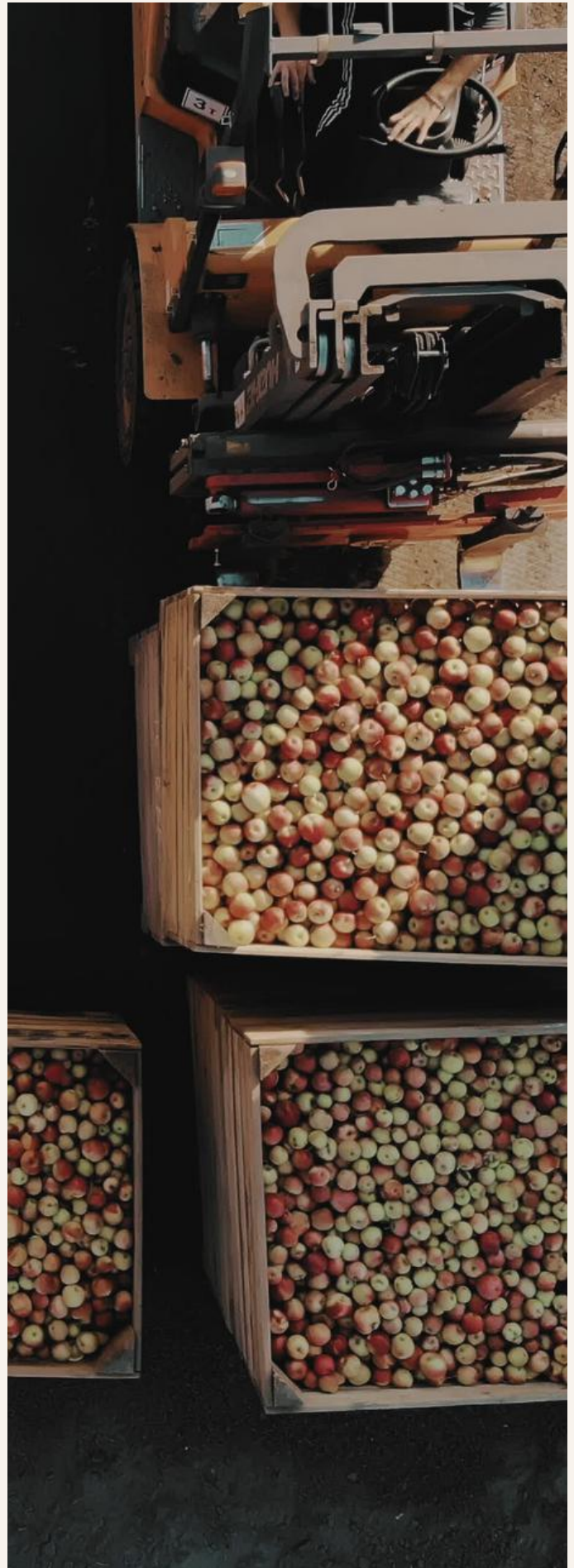
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In the tapestry of Autumn hues, we close this edition with gratitude for the stories shared and the resilience of Victorian farmers.

As the season transitions, may the pages of Vic Farmer continue to reflect the spirit and vibrancy of our agricultural community.

Until the next harvest of insights, thank you for being part of our journey.

Wishing you a bountiful season ahead.



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