

Victorian  
Farmers  
Federation

**VICTORIAN  
FARMERS  
FEDERATION  
ANNUAL REPORT  
2021/22**







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# President's Message

Hello members, on behalf of the VFF Board of Directors, I am pleased to present my report for the 2021-2022 financial year.

Once again it's been a year of challenges for us both as a farming industry and as an organisation.

The events of the recent past and their continued impact cannot be understated. We can't kid ourselves into believing that 'things have gone back to normal'.

What we can say with confidence is that it is time that that we got serious about moving forward and doing business and advocacy in a new manner. Doing the same thing over and over and being disappointed with the results requires a fresh approach and new thinking.

Interestingly, we have consultant reports from more than 12 years ago warning us that if we did not change, we would decline, and yet we are mulling over those same decisions that needed to be made then. We must make those decisions now including changes to the membership framework and developing new policy and advocacy strategies that will culminate in the need to review the constitution.

Farmers rightly do not want their membership dollars propping up debt. Likewise, you don't want your hard-earned dollars being squandered by ineffective operations. Every time we have asked members what you want, you have been clear. You have asked us to put our resources into issues that affect all farmers across Victoria and to ensure that our national councils and the National Farmers Federation are effective and accountable.

We find not only ourselves as Victoria's peak agricultural farm advocacy group, but similar organisations like ours at a crossroads and pivotal time in our history.

COVID-19 may have catapulted why we exist



and how we operate as an industry into the spotlight. However, the stark reality is that some advocacy organisations such as ours have been facing a steady decline and increasing headwinds for many years.

Dwindling membership numbers, arguably declining influence, increasing operating costs and a turbulent business landscape have combined to form the situation that the entire ag-advocacy landscape is staring at today. Change or die.

It's the major reason under my leadership as VFF President since December 2020, the VFF has been putting the building blocks in place for us to become a modern, efficient and forward-thinking operation primed to tackle challenges that will no doubt present in the coming years. Has it been straightforward? Absolutely not. Has there been resistance? As expected.

Change doesn't happen overnight, and it takes even longer to see the benefits of it. It is uncomfortable, but entirely necessary.

As we head into what's shaping up as a volatile and unpredictable time, the VFF is readying itself. Today's environment is complex and requires us to be agile. That means pivoting resources when needed to ensure we remain competitive in the market and continue to deliver for our members.



It's imperative that we continue to be vigilant and financially responsible. Continued emphasis on further reducing our losses to ensure we can fund our own operations without the reliance on financial and property assets in the future is critical and will be a major focus of the organisation over the coming years. Our investment returns should be utilised for projects that enrich our organisation and the farming community, not for 'business as usual.'

Our Strategic Plan for 2021-2026 that was developed by member feedback is well underway as we transform to a united voice for Victorian farmers to represent and support you our Members.

Our mission is clear and the VFF is progressing a new, modern way that best enables us to deliver on our promises. It allows us to always represent, protect and progress Victorian farmers' interests.

I would like to thank the dedicated staff who believe in our vision, and have been steadfast in their commitment to reform the organisation. The farmers of Victoria are very lucky to have you at our service.

I would also like to thank Steve Harrison and Ash Fraser, former board directors and Livestock and Grain group presidents respectively, for their dedicated and passionate service to the organisation and to the farmers of Victoria. Likewise, I'd like to welcome our new board members Craig Dwyer and Peter Star to the service of our board.

As always, I thank the members for your enormous efforts and belief in what we do, for the time you give to the organisation, and for choosing to be part of a community of farmers who stand together to represent our industry for the benefit of our entire community.

I invite you to read this Report further and ask any questions that you may have in our upcoming Annual General Meeting, or email [vff@vff.org.au](mailto:vff@vff.org.au) at any time should you have any feedback or queries. The organisation belongs to you, and I am committed to presiding over it with full transparency and accountability.

Happy Farming,



**EMMA GERMANO**  
President



# CEO's Message

I am pleased to report a solid end to the 2022 financial year result following revaluation of assets that will necessarily continue as the VFF re-establishes membership, partnership and sponsorship revenue following the exit from COVID-19.

Like many businesses, the VFF managed through and supported the Victorian agricultural industries, farmers and regional communities. We especially engaged with all levels of government to ensure your voice was heard and that food and fibre production and supply chains were maintained. For the VFF as a business, emerging from COVID-19 has provided many challenges, and like the entire agri-food supply chain and the broader economy, our operating environment has shifted dramatically. Looking forward, the VFF has entered a phase of review, strategic change and development. Matters about which you will continue to hear about in a series of refreshed updates and through reinvigorated networks and committees

During COVID-19, the VFF pivoted the way we do business. The Board and Committees shifted online, as did our policy, advocacy and project activities. The internet of things and social media have forever changed how we communicate and the VFF adapted and adopted.

While an online approach to business isn't something we're all used to, it is the way of the future especially for younger people and those of us living in rural and regional areas. It also highlights the need for critical infrastructure such as telecommunications, transport and food. While relatively new for the VFF, the shift to an online world has allowed us to have an impact.



Through 2021-22 we had 8,109 media mentions where the VFF led or provided critical input on important issues that has had a real impact and we are the go to contact for media related to farming and food security where VFF media mentions have roughly doubled since 2020. Our combined social media sites have over 64,000 followers across the VFF network with 504,756 page views by users, while our websites had 66,800 users with 497,756 page views. Additionally, the VFF's YouTube channel had 122,676 views. Clearly, the VFF is reaching many more people and places, and is influencing the community that provides our license to operate.

While our media presence and social media continues to influence public opinion and government, it's fair to say that member services struggled during COVID-19 as our traditional ways of communicating in regional areas with branch meetings and events have been curtailed. This has impacted all of us, including the VFF staff where there have been significant changes. Throughout next year look out for refreshed member services and networking activities- both online and in person- something we are all looking forward to.



Thank you to the VFF partners that offer discounted products and services to members. These valuable member benefits target parts of farm business where even a small discount can help your profitability and productivity. I also thank our sponsors that assist in covering the costs of events and other activities so they are cheaper for members. The partner and sponsor contacts are on our website - please continue to support them.

I thank the various committees and members that remain an important way for the VFF to collect and communicate contemporary issues to develop policy and assist members. Along with the VFF branches, these forums are the life force of the VFF and have taken a hit through COVID-19. However, given the quiet strength and powerful motivation we share as farmers - we will rebuild and reinvigorate these critical VFF functions – please reach out to the VFF members services team with your ideas.

As astute readers you will detect, our need to both cut costs and deliver a refreshed strategic approach to redevelop the VFF after COVID-19. While these sound contradictory, the strategy relies on our skilled staff and use of technology. During 2022, we enhanced the membership database and transferred the historical records through the infamous data migration. The new database has a range of functions that we will continue to develop and roll out over the coming months, along with new ways for members to easily find the information you need.

Congratulations and thank you to all VFF staff for their commitment to the organisation and members during 2022. It has been a complex year with lots of rapid change and the flexibility of our staff and their dedication to both the VFF and ensuring that challenges were overcome and opportunities realised whenever possible has been fantastic. There have been some staff changes and I thank those that have sought their next adventure for their contribution and wish them the very best. Ahead lies a period of consolidation and development for the VFF as we implement a series of operational strategies to focus on communication and delivery of services and key advocacy outcomes.

Finally, thank you to the Board and each Director for their steady hand in monitoring and encouraging the delivery of our 2021-26 strategic plan. I have especially appreciated the Directors enthusiasm and commitment to the VFF and on a personal level, thank the Board for their trust in asking me to lead the VFF on an interim basis.

I commend to you the 2021/2022 VFF Annual Report.

**DR BRENDAN TATHAM**

Interim CEO





# 2021/22 Financial Year Review

## Financial Overview

The result for the financial year ending 30 September 2022 was a surplus of \$7.9 million. The key driver of this being the upward revaluation of Farrer House by \$13.5 million to \$48.5 million.

At an operating level, the deficit increase of \$0.6 million was primarily due to the difference from the previous financial year where government COVID payments of \$280,000 were received and the VFF received proceeds from the sale of NFF House, and in this financial year, unexpected costs such as legal fees. Management have introduced initiatives to minimise costs especially in areas of information technology and telecommunications and these will bear fruit in 2023.

The \$900,000 difference in debt was due to unexpected expenditure that required a draw down of the loan. The final net asset result offset this, but included a decrease in equity values and an increase in the value of Farrer House.

## Revenue

Membership revenue and subscriptions for FY22 of \$3.4 million was below the previous year of \$3.6 million at the time of reporting. Understanding that member numbers change on a monthly basis and at the time of reporting we have 4,195 members.

Rental income from Farrer House rose as a result of work done to obtain new tenants, resulting in an increase in building occupancy rates.

Project income has been fairly steady and is reflective of the project work completed during the year.

Commercial and other revenue has slightly increased from last year and the one off income from the disposal of shares in NFF House was only received in FY21.

## Expenses

Employee costs have remained relatively stable compared to the prior year. Budgeted increases were deferred as part of the cost saving program.

Apart from the increase in once-off legal expenses and an increase to project related expenses all other expenses on the whole have been relatively stable.





## Projects

Grant revenue from Projects stood at \$2 million and was slightly lower than the prior year figure of \$2.1 million.

During the year the primary project development was delivery of the "Making Our Farms Safer" (MOFS) initiative.

Active projects during the year included:

- Making Our Farms Safer
- Educating Kids about Agriculture
- Stock Sense
- Cattle Underpass Scheme (CUPS)

Projects promote a very positive image of the Federation throughout regional Victoria and assist in our marketing and positioning strategies with industry and government.

## Farrer House

Rental income from Farrer House increased by 13% during the year. This was due to both increased rental rates and increased occupancy. Although the costs in maintaining the building have reduced from last year, the age of the building and its infrastructure continues to be a risk that needs to be managed closely.

This year's independent building valuation has the previous year's Covid Caveat removed and we have booked the resultant uplift of \$13 million in these accounts, with the corresponding increase in Members Funds.

## Investments

Consistent with movements in the general share market over the past year, the market value of our share investments also fell. However, the portfolio continues to deliver stable annual income from dividends.

## Balance Sheet

Net assets at 30 September 2022 were \$48.7m compared to \$38.5m at 30 September 2021.

## ANDREW DIX

Director / Chair of Finance & Audit Committee





# VFF Group of Companies

## Victorian Farmers Federation and its controlled entities Statement of financial position as at 30 September 2022

	2022 \$	2021 \$
<b>Assets</b>		
<b>Current assets</b>		
Cash and cash equivalents	502,360	470,074
Trade and other receivables	1,232,790	454,702
Other financial assets	9,339,856	10,517,779
Other current assets	78,724	46,846
<b>Total current assets</b>	<b>11,153,730</b>	<b>11,489,401</b>
<b>Non-current assets</b>		
Investment properties	41,112,657	30,886,969
Property, plant and equipment	8,209,105	6,106,399
Right-of-use assets	111,684	233,649
<b>Total non-current assets</b>	<b>49,433,356</b>	<b>37,227,017</b>
<b>Total assets</b>	<b>60,587,086</b>	<b>48,716,418</b>
<b>Liabilities</b>		
<b>Current Liabilities</b>		
Trade and other payables	1,052,759	1,101,960
Contract liabilities	1,916,574	2,138,329
Borrowings	8,108,613	6,105,222
Lease liabilities	68,371	120,355
Provisions	237,260	232,888
Other current liabilities	367,003	367,004
<b>Total current liabilities</b>	<b>11,750,579</b>	<b>10,065,758</b>
<b>Non-current liabilities</b>		
Lease facilities	46,873	118,111
Provisions	71,592	67,743
<b>Total non-current liabilities</b>	<b>118,465</b>	<b>185,854</b>
<b>Total liabilities</b>	<b>11,869,044</b>	<b>10,251,612</b>
<b>Net assets</b>	<b>48,718,042</b>	<b>38,464,806</b>
<b>Equity</b>		
Reserves	15,727,945	13,412,202
Retained surpluses	32,990,097	25,052,604
<b>Total equity</b>	<b>48,718,041</b>	<b>38,464,806</b>



**Victorian Farmers Federation and its controlled entities**  
**Statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive**  
**income For the year ended 30 September 2021.**

	<b>2022</b> <b>\$</b>	<b>2021</b> <b>\$</b>
<b>Revenue</b>		
Member income	3,381,125	3,646,248
Project related income	1,987,835	2,075,273
Rental income	1,631,110	1,443,432
Investment income	274,543	272,249
Commercial and other revenue	1,803,386	1,764,103
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>9,077,999</b>	<b>9,201,305</b>
<b>Expenses</b>		
Employee expenses	(3,863,088)	(3,897,995)
Project and operational expenses	(4,455,896)	(4,088,148)
Building and depreciation expenses	(1,191,221)	(1,243,465)
Investment expenses	(146,258)	(11,168)
Other expenses	(349,293)	(165,977)
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>(10,005,756)</b>	<b>(9,506,753)</b>
<b>Operating deficit before revaluations</b>	<b>(927,757)</b>	<b>(305,450)</b>
Net fair value gain / (loss) on revaluation of financial assets	(1,360,438)	1,660,812
Net fair value gain on revaluation of investment properties	10,225,688	-
<b>Surplus before income tax expense</b>	<b>7,937,493</b>	<b>1,355,364</b>
Income tax expense	-	(2,103)
<b>Total comprehensive income for the year</b>	<b>7,937,493</b>	<b>1,353,261</b>

*This is an extract from the full VFF Financial Report that can be viewed at the VFF website (see P7).*



## Independent Auditor's Report

To the Members of Victorian Farmers Federation and its controlled entities

### Report on the audit of the financial report

#### Opinion

We have audited the financial report of Victorian Farmers Federation (the Company) and its controlled entities (the Group), which comprises the consolidated statement of financial position as at 30 September 2022, the consolidated statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income, consolidated statement of changes in equity and consolidated statement of cash flows for the year then ended, and notes to the consolidated financial statements, including a summary of significant accounting policies, and the Directors' declaration.

In our opinion, the accompanying financial report of the Group is in accordance with the *Corporations Act 2001*, including:

- a giving a true and fair view of the Group's financial position as at 30 September 2022 and of its performance for the year ended on that date; and
- b complying with Australian Accounting Standards AASB 1060 *General Purpose Financial Statements - Simplified Disclosures for For-Profit and Not-for-Profit Tier 2 Entities* and the *Corporations Regulations 2001*.

#### Basis for opinion

We conducted our audit in accordance with Australian Auditing Standards. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the *Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Report* section of our report. We are independent of the Group in accordance with the *Corporations Act 2001* and the ethical requirements of the Accounting Professional and Ethical Standards Board's APES 110 *Code of Ethics for Professional Accountants (including Independence Standards)* (the Code) that are relevant to our audit of the financial report in Australia. We have also fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with the Code.

We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

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### Information other than the financial report and auditor's report thereon

The Directors are responsible for the other information. The other information comprises the information included in the Group's annual report for the year ended 30 September 2022, but does not include the financial report and our auditor's report thereon.

Our opinion on the financial report does not cover the other information and accordingly we do not express any form of assurance conclusion thereon.

In connection with our audit of the financial report, our responsibility is to read the other information and, in doing so, consider whether the other information is materially inconsistent with the financial report or our knowledge obtained in the audit or otherwise appears to be materially misstated.

If, based on the work we have performed, we conclude that there is a material misstatement of this other information, we are required to report that fact. We have nothing to report in this regard.

### Responsibilities of the Directors' for the financial report

The Directors of the Company are responsible for the preparation of the financial report that gives a true and fair view in accordance with Australian Accounting Standard – *AASB 1060 General Purpose Financial Statements - Simplified Disclosures for For-Profit and Not-for-Profit Tier 2 Entities* and the *Corporations Act 2001*. The Directors' responsibility also includes such internal control as the Directors determine is necessary to enable the preparation of the financial report that gives a true and fair view and is free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial report, the Directors are responsible for assessing the Group's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless the Directors either intend to liquidate the Group or to cease operations, or have no realistic alternative but to do so.

### Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial report

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial report as a whole is free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with the Australian Auditing Standards will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of this financial report.

A further description of our responsibilities for the audit of the financial report is located at the Auditing and Assurance Standards Board website at: [http://www.auasb.gov.au/auditors\\_responsibilities/ar3.pdf](http://www.auasb.gov.au/auditors_responsibilities/ar3.pdf). This description forms part of our auditor's report.



Grant Thornton Audit Pty Ltd  
Chartered Accountants



A J Pititto  
Partner – Audit & Assurance

Melbourne, 14 December 2022



# Member Engagement & Events

With COVID-19 restrictions still in force at the beginning of 2022 the race was on for business owners to secure Rapid Antigen Tests (RATS) to meet requirements set by the Victorian Government. The VFF partnered with Fruit Growers Victoria and Food and Fibre Gippsland to distribute over 56,000 RATS across the state to farmers within the space of two weeks.

Emerging out of the COVID-19 pandemic, VFF members looked forward to participating in a range of engagement activities and events in 2022.

Our branches set about reorganising themselves with many meetings and events held across the state that were well attended by members and VFF staff. Online events remained a feature of our engagement activities with the Foot and Mouth Disease Webinar held in collaboration with Agriculture Victoria in July 2022 attracting over 1,000 participants.

## VFF Symposium

The VFF Symposium was held at the Sofitel Melbourne on 14 October 2022 and proved to be the premier event for members and stakeholders to come together and hear from expert speakers.

The Symposium was compered by television personality Georgie Coghlan and featured presentations from Leader of the Opposition the Hon. Matthew Guy and Shadow Minister for Agriculture the Hon. Peter Walsh ahead of the Victorian state election. Members were also treated to an entertaining presentation from MLA Lambassador Sam Kekovich.

Other guest presenters included:

- Jane Bunn - 7 News presenter and meteorologist
- John Blackburn AO - National security consultant
- Prof Richard Eckard - Climate scientist
- Tanya Barden OAM - CEO Food & Grocery Council
- Warren Davies - rural mental health advocate

A rollicking dinner was enjoyed by all with comedian Tommy Little as compere. Members who arrived the night prior to the event took part in tours and tasting sessions at the Colonial Brewing Company and Starward Distilleries.

An important focus was placed on community engagement activities throughout the year, with the VFF seeking to engage with consumers so they better appreciate the importance of Victorian agriculture. Key activities included the Behind the Farm Gate social media campaign, development of the Victorian Farmer magazine and the VFF's presence at the AFL's Country Round, Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show and the Melbourne Royal Show.



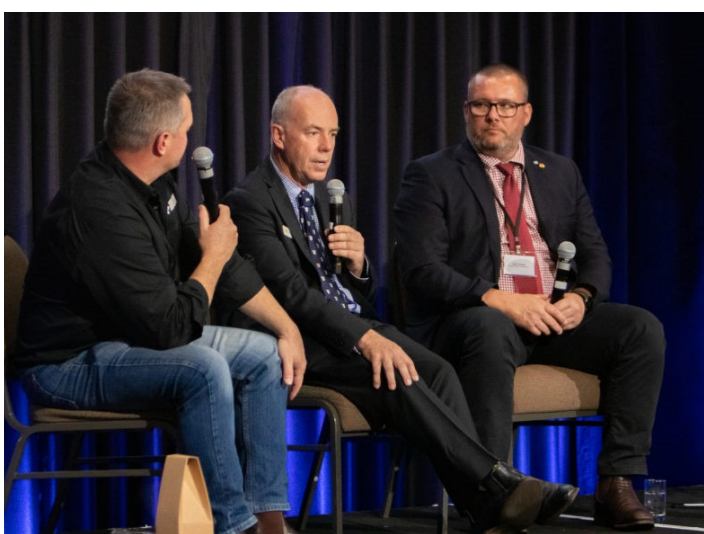


## Grains and Livestock Conference

The 2022 VFF Grains and Livestock Conference was held at the Mercure Ballarat on Tuesday 21 June 2022. The keynote address was provided by Donald McGauchie AO who called for a second green revolution to be backed by government research and development.

Members enjoyed hearing from panelists focusing on range of cross-sector issues including carbon neutrality, biosecurity, succession planning and supply chain resilience.

Following the conference, members joined together for the first Grain and Graze Conference Dinner with guest speaker Steve Moneghetti AM.



## UDV Conference

The United Dairy Farmers of Victoria Conference was held at Zinc Federation Square on 29 April 2022.

As well as engaging in policy discussion and debate, members listened to guest speakers and reports from Dairy Australia and Australian Dairy Farmers.

Minister for Agriculture the Hon. Mary-Anne Thomas MP joined members at the pre-conference social drinks and also delivered an address by video link to the conference.

Dairy industry ambassador and former AFL Premiership player Jonathon Brown provided an interesting reflection on his football career, as well as his passion for dairying communities.

Dinner was held following the Conference with members listening to an inspiring presentation from mountaineer and humanitarian Mark Squirrel OAM.





# Policy & Advocacy

In 2021/2022, the VFF's policy and advocacy work maintained a strong focus on engaging with key decisions makers across government at all levels.

A key element of the VFF's strategy has been to ensure we maintain our relevance with political decision makers across the state and federal parliaments. This focus was particularly important with state and federal elections held in 2022. The VFF has engaged strongly at these levels whilst also maintaining our position as a non-partisan organisation.

Key policy decisions are made by the VFF Policy Council which is chaired by the President and includes representatives from each Commodity Group as well as the chairs of the issues advisory committees. At the end of 2021, the Policy Council expanded the number of issues advisory committees to include the following: Farm Business, Farming

Systems, Planning, Environment & Climate Change, Transport & Infrastructure, Workforce & Social Infrastructure and the Water Council. All councils and committees collaborate to set the policy and advocacy priorities and objectives, with membership of these bodies constituted by elected farmer representatives. Policy councils and committees actively collaborate at a national level within the National Farmers Federation and amongst commodity peak industry councils.



## Policy and Advocacy Highlights

- New laws to help protect farmers from animal activist trespassers with tougher penalties for offenders.
- Additional funding for biosecurity in response to Foot and Mouth Disease and Lumpy Skin Disease threats.
- Stricter border controls, including personal meat importation bans for travelers entering Australia.
- Victorian Government's move to block the Fingerboards sand mine in East Gippsland.
- Exemption for rural zoned farmland that is rezoned to another rural zone from the Windfall Gains Tax.
- Federal Taskforce established to deal with Ad-Blue shortages.
- Additional water savings back to irrigators under the Connections Project in Northern Victoria.
- Feasibility study funding toward the Southern Wimmera - North East Pyrenees Water Supply project.
- Telehandler licensing reform agreed to by the Victorian Government.
- B-double truck access secured across local government areas in Northern and Western Victoria.

## Taking the Paddock to Parliament

The VFF descended on Spring Street on Wednesday 8 June to engage with parliamentarians at the first Paddock to Parliament event. The bipartisan event was sponsored by Minister for Agriculture The Hon. Mary-Anne Thomas MP and was attended by over 50 regional and metropolitan MPs from across all parties. MPs didn't go away empty handed, with each receiving a gift bag featuring the VFF's 2022 State Election Platform, a copy of the latest Victorian Farmer magazine and biscuits kindly supplied by Kookas Country Cookies of Donald.



## Fair Go for Regional Victoria

In June 2022, the VFF launched its Fair Go for Regional Victoria campaign ahead of the Victorian state election held in November. The commitments sought as part of the campaign included critical investment into regional road and rail, housing, healthcare, biosecurity, jobs and environmental management amongst a host of others.

The VFF's strategy focused on being active across the state during the election period. The VFF was on the ground in marginal electorates pushing the message that regional Victoria deserves a fair go. This included candidate forums held in the electorates of Bass, Shepparton, Mildura, Ripon, Polwarth, Eildon and Euroa.

In addition, the VFF ran an online campaign using digital media to speak directly to voters in these seats, as a means to get politicians to respond to our message.





## Farm Business

Local government rates remained a priority issue for the VFF in 2022 as continued demand for agricultural land placed pressure on council rating strategies. Policy staff analysed rating movements and presented the case for rating reform to several councils through submissions on their budget processes.

In addition, the VFF opposed the Victorian Government's new Windfall Gains Tax citing it as a tax on regional housing. Whilst the tax passed through the parliament, the VFF was able to secure an exemption for land that is rezoned from one rural zone to another.

Farm crime was another priority with the Farm Business Committee developing a renewed policy position that was taken to the state election as part of our advocacy. There was continued engagement between VFF leaders and Victoria Police, with farmers sharing their insights directly with the Farm Crime Unit.

The Farm Business Committee also progressed renewed policy statements in the areas of tax, foreign ownership and investment. These statements will help guide future advocacy efforts on behalf of members and the agriculture industry.

## Farming Systems

The emerging threat of emergency animal diseases such as Foot and Mouth and Lumpy Skin Disease was put sharply in the VFF's focus in 2022. In response to the spread of FMD to the Indonesian tourist island of Bali, the VFF was one of the first industry organisations to take a leading role in educating holiday makers through the media and online forums about the risks associated with their travel, encouraging them to take precautions to help protect Australian livestock.

We also advocated for greater resourcing of Victoria's biosecurity system which resulted in a \$10 million government commitment to boost the state's capacity to respond to emergency animal diseases.

The VFF worked with Agriculture Victoria to deliver the new framework that allows for the prosecution of farm trespasses who breach a farm biosecurity

plan. This followed VFF's successful advocacy in bringing about new laws that passed through the Victorian Parliament in 2022 aimed at providing stronger penalties for animal activists who trespass on farms.

## Transport and Infrastructure

Regional road maintenance was the key focus of the VFF's advocacy strategy in 2021/22. The VFF consistently called on the Victorian Government to provide funding for maintenance of arterial roads, and for the reintroduction of the Fixing Country Roads program which provided critical funding to help local government maintain its network. Disappointingly, the government failed to provide the investment required in the 2022/23 State Budget.

To help alleviate pressure on the road network, the VFF partnered with GrainCorp in advocating for the Department of Transport a draft an agricultural freight strategy that provides industry with the long-term strategic vision and certainty needed to invest in regional infrastructure, enable economic growth and meet future challenges. Positive discussions with government have so far been held with further work to continue into 2022/23.

After extensive lobbying the Victorian Government approved the development for a High-Risk Work Licence (HRWL) specifically for telehandlers, encompassed in the existing non-slewing mobile crane licence. This provides telehandler operators with the flexibility to choose between obtaining a new telehandler HRWL by completing a new telehandler specific Unit of Competency or maintain the existing CN licence requirement. Telehandler operators would not be required to hold both licences.

In addition to these advocacy efforts, the Transport and Infrastructure Committee undertook a host of policy development projects with positions taken on issues including fuel security, low emissions vehicles, right to repair, autonomous vehicles on-road and high productivity freight vehicles.

## Workforce and Social Infrastructure

Following significant advocacy by the VFF, the Commonwealth Government announced plans for an Agricultural Visa Program in early 2022 with a memorandum of understanding signed with the Vietnamese Government to allow workers into Australia. Disappointingly the program was suspended by the incoming Labor government, although the commitment with Vietnam will be honored.

In response to critical issues with the availability of farm labour the Commonwealth Government established a new tripartite Agricultural Workforce Working Group following the Jobs and Skills Summit in September 2022. The working group was designed to bring employer groups, unions, and government together in the spirit of collaboration to address key workforce issues and will operate for the period of 12 months.

The Workforce and Social Infrastructure Committee has also undertaken a review of relevant VFF policies in a broad range of areas including agricultural education, rural healthcare and childcare, which will guide future advocacy activities.

## Water Council

In March 2022, the election of the federal Labor government signaled a significant change to national water policy, with the new government laying out plans for water buybacks and the recovery of the 450GL up-water target under the Murray Darling Basin Plan. The VFF has been a strong voice in opposition to these efforts and has continued its ongoing relationship with the Victorian Government to maintain its commitment to protecting irrigation communities.

A series of workshops were held for irrigators in Northern Victoria to provide information about spill risks and the impact on water accounts. These events also gave the VFF the opportunity to share with irrigators our work on Basin Plan advocacy.

The VFF took an active role in responding to the Victorian Government's Central and Gippsland Region Sustainable Water Strategy. Our lobbying efforts ensured the strategy included a greater focus on agricultural production.

## Planning, Environment and Climate Change

Right to farm issues continued to attract the VFF's focus in 2021/2022. In response to planning issues the VFF, maintained engagement on the Green Wedges and Agricultural Land process sought better consideration of agriculture in the Distinctive Areas and Landscapes work for Bellarine and Bass Coast, called for better consideration of agricultural impacts in Environment Effects Statements and, developed and delivered six professional development course on Agriculture and Planning so that decisions makers were better informed.

The VFF provided direct assistance to farmers who faced the prospect of camp sites being forced over their Crown licensed water frontages. In many cases, these efforts, combined with the VFF's lobbying in 2021 that forced the government to establish regulations, helped dissuade the government from forcing camp sites on these sites. The VFF will continue to monitor the implementation of the government's policy to make the case for future reform.

Following engagement with VFF members on a comprehensive climate change policy statement in 2021, the VFF signed onto the Victorian Agriculture Climate Change pledge developed by the Victorian Agriculture Climate Change Council. Through this process the VFF maintained a focus on the importance of recognising the efforts farmers have already made to contributing positively

As Victoria transitions to a greater reliance on renewable energy sources, the current plan to build traditional transmission infrastructure will have negative impacts on agricultural land and production. The VFF continued to support members who will be impacted by this development. VFF leaders stood shoulder to shoulder with farmers at protests in Melbourne and Ballarat against the proposed Western Transmission Network Project and joined in consultations with AEMO and AusNet.

The VFF Planning, Environment and Climate Change committee undertook significant reviews of the VFF policy positions with respect to pest plant and animal management, climate change, managing entry to farm and good neighbour principles. These positions consolidate much work by the VFF over the past few years and will guide future advocacy.



## Grains Group

In the wake of looming supply shortages threatening harvests in 2022, the VFF worked with national stakeholders to advocate for government support to guarantee domestic fertiliser supply. This culminated in a \$255 million commitment by the federal government to support a \$4+ billion urea plant in Western Australia. The VFF is pleased to report this commitment will be carried through under the new federal government. The VFF will continue to monitor the broader issue of input supply availability throughout 2023.

Following two harvests that saw the rollout of Falling Number Machines and the increased use of subjective grain quality testing methods, the VFF has taken a strong stance on behalf of growers to improve these systems to ensure consistent, reliable results across receival sites. The VFF has worked collaboratively with national bodies, other State Farming Organisations, GRDC and industry in working toward a better quality testing system in the future and price transparency. The VFF will continue to undertake this work across 2023.

The VFF consistently advocated to key players in the grains industry to find ways to enhance communication and simplify the ISCC. This will lead to safeguarding Australian farming methods whilst lessening the administrative load on growers.

The compounding issue surrounding the right-to-repair continues to be a constant frustration for growers. The VFF continues to work with key national stakeholders to advocate for better outcomes.

With a dramatic increase in agricultural land values during the COVID-19 pandemic, the issues surrounding on-farm succession planning have become more prevalent than ever before. The VFF played a key role in promoting awareness around succession planning throughout 2022, most notably demonstrated at the 2022 VFF Grains and Livestock Conference. This awareness campaign will remain a priority for the VFF into 2023.

## Horticulture Group

The Horticulture Digital Roadshow provided the VFF with a way to keep growers connected with relevant policy and advocacy initiatives during the COVID-19 pandemic. The roadshow featured three webinars focusing on different areas including, farm safety and workplace relations; harvest support programs and business plans; and the seasonal work program and health support services.

In addition, the HortThoughts Podcast provided members with important information on a range of supports to their businesses including commodity market insights and supply chain disruptions; workplace safety and workplace relations, mental health as well as information about the VFF's broader policy and advocacy services.

## Chicken Meat, Eggs and Pigs

In 2022, the Commonwealth Government released new Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for Poultry. In response, The VFF expressed concerns toward the proposed phasing out of conventional caged systems, which will have significant ramifications for existing farm businesses as well as for food security. The VFF was central in national media commentary on the issue, whilst also engaging in discussions with the Victorian Government on the options available moving forward.

The NFF was awarded a \$550,000 grant by the Commonwealth Government to undertake a project to develop a national code of conduct to identify solutions to improve pricing transparency across the poultry meat sector and help address bargaining power imbalances between growers and processors. The VFF is a partner in this project along with NSW Farmers. The VFF also welcomed the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's (ACCC) crackdown on chicken meat processors and any potential unfair contract terms in the industry.

With biosecurity threats increasing during the year, the pig producers maintained an active presence in all VFF discussions on biosecurity issues. Collaboration between the VFF and Australian Pork Limited has been maintained to ensure relevant and effective policy information is provided to producers.

## Livestock Group

The VFF continued to represent Victorian producers by participating in a range of national industry forums through its membership to WoolProducers, Sheep Producers Australia, Goat Industry Council of Australia and Cattle Council, which itself underwent the process of transforming into the new united voice for the grass-fed cattle industry, Cattle Australia.

The VFF took a leading role in advocating on behalf of producers on a range of biosecurity concerns including foot and mouth disease, national traceability reform and truck washes. The VFF's successful advocacy led to Agriculture Victoria being approved to conduct a review of the existing statewide network of publicly accessible truck wash and effluent dump facilities under the Livestock Biosecurity Funds Grant program.

Disappointingly, the Victorian Government made changes to the way future appointments to the Cattle Compensation and Sheep and Goat Compensation Advisory Committees will be undertaken. Despite the VFF's attempts to advocate on behalf of producers, we were ultimately unsuccessful in maintaining our right to put forward representatives to these committees which administer the levies that producers pay on the sale of livestock. The VFF was successful in securing the government's commitment that producers will still be represented on these committees and we will work with the government to ensure this happens.

Within industry, the VFF has been a leading voice encouraging producers to ensure they have on-farm biosecurity plans as a key preparedness measure in the case of an emergency animal disease outbreak.

## United Dairyfarmers of Victoria

VFF/UDV worked closely with Dairy Australia, the Environment Protection Authority, and the Victorian Government in undertaking a regulatory review of permissions relating to use of tyres in silage production. The VFF/UDV is pleased the need for licensing will cease and be replaced with a simplified registration system reducing time and cost and will begin on 1 July 2023.

VFF/UDV has maintained a key focus on issues with the Murray Darling Basin Plan and the impacts on the dairy industry in Northern Victoria. VFF/UDV has taken a leading voice in advocating for the industry, particularly in response to the Commonwealth Government's plans for water buybacks and recovery of the 450GL up-water target.

VFF/UDV also welcomed positive moves in milk prices in 2021/2022 in response to increasing costs across the supply chain. The decision of supermarket retailer Coles to lift the shelf price of its branded milk was particularly welcomed following years of discounting.

After continued postponement during the COVID-19 pandemic, the VFF/UDV Conference was held in May 2022 and proved to be a great opportunity to bring together members and industry leaders to discuss policy issues. Members were able to bring important issues forward for discussion and debate, with the UDV Policy Council given direction on a range of issues.



# Projects

## Making Our Farms Safer

The VFF's Making Our Farms Safer Project, delivered courtesy of the Victorian Government's 2018 Smart Safer Farms initiative, has had a profound effect on the Victorian Agricultural industry in terms of raising safety awareness and engagement with Victorian farmers with respect to the safety culture of the industry.

The \$3 million provided to the VFF has enabled the delivery of more than 250 farm safety visits by two Farm Safety Officers (FSO's), more than 100 speaking engagements, delivery of a dedicated farm safety website, 25 monthly safety newsletters (with a readership in excess of 2500) and multiple pieces of industry guidance created 'by industry, for industry'.

In the space of three years the MOFS Project team have established in credible level of engagement and trust amongst the Victorian farming community.

Demand for the free farm safety visits, available to all Victorian farmers, continues to be high with farmers becoming increasingly confident that the VFF FSO's are trusted consultants, genuinely interested in supporting their businesses and 100% committed to improving the industry.

The MOFS Team also continue to be in high demand for speaking engagements by industry bodies including Landcare Groups, Regional Shires and Councils, Best Lamb and Wool Groups, Grain Grower and Meat and Livestock Groups. In addition to the townhall events delivered by the MOFS project, VFF's direct face to face engagement with the industry, as the trusted source, has been extensive.

In delivering the 'Making Our Farm Families Safer Campaign', aimed at the safety of farming children aged 11-15 years, delivering on recommendations by the Victorian Coroner for an awareness campaign, the VFF has developed an important brand which can be leveraged to drive further safety improvements in the industry.

## Stock Sense .

Funded by the Cattle Compensation Fund and the Sheep and Goat Compensation Fund, Stock Sense helps producers adopt animal health and production practices that maintain and improve animal welfare and Victoria's biosecurity status. Stock Sense directly engaged over 300 producers in 2022 with a particular focus on peri urban landholders, including through 17 regionally based face-to-face workshops. Other producers have been engaged through webinars, a dedicated website, fact sheets, newsletters, Stock Sense Peri Urban booklets, industry talks and Stock Sense attending industry events and field days.

Stock Sense's total reach in 2022 comprised nearly 100,000 people at various field days and over 1,000,000 people through print, social and radio mediums.

Feedback from participants has consistently been very positive with 95% of attendees at the workshops indicating that they were likely to make changes as a result of the new information they acquired.'









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