

Media Release



5 April 2020

VFF still supporting Bushfire affected farmers

The spirit of mateship and camaraderie among our farmers and the Victorian community was palpable during Victoria's bushfire crisis.

VFF President David Jochinke said the Fodder Drive was a team effort that stretched the length and breadth of Victoria.

"We had literally hundreds and hundreds of farmers and truck drivers rise to the occasion to donate their fodder, time and transport".

"On behalf of the fire affected farmers and the VFF, I want to thank them for their generosity".

"In what was another Team Australia moment, our farming community and transport sector along with the corporate sector and Victorians more broadly, came together to give a helping hand to farmers in crisis," Mr Jochinke said.

Mr Jochinke said this generosity enabled the VFF to facilitate the delivery of 16,540 bales of hay to bushfire affected farmers in East Gippsland and Upper Murray and 113 tonnes of pellets which fed 80,000 animals including cattle, horses, sheep and alpacas.

"Our immediate response was to provide fodder to 440 farmers in need, coordinate cow parking and agistment for displaced livestock," Mr Jochinke said.

Dairy farmer and Biggara CFA Captain Gordon Nicholas was one of the 440 farmers who fed his animals via the fodder drive.

Seventy of Gordon's heifers perished in the fires but thankfully his dairy cows survived.

"Being able to feed them would have provided some small relief during an extremely stressful and traumatic time", Mr Jochinke said.

Mr Nicholas, who is also a United Dairyfarmers of Victoria regional representative, said he was humbled by the donation.

"I have been overwhelmed by people's generosity and I want to thank them and pay particular tribute to the drivers who transported the fodder during this difficult time," Mr Nicholas said.

Mr Jochinke said the VFF received up to 400 calls a day and acted as an important conduit between farmers and the support they required such as counselling, animal welfare services and government assistance.

“Our response to the 2020 Bushfire was the most comprehensive in VFF’s history and we worked closely with many organisations and individuals such as Agriculture Victoria, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, Country Fire Authority, Lions Club, Australian Defence Force, Victoria Police, Riordan’s Transport, HW Greenham & Sons, local Councils, Rural Financial Counselling Service, Multiplex, Delta Transport, K & S Freighters, Commonwealth Bank and Livestock and Rural Transporters Association of Victoria and the media,” Mr Jochinke said.

“The finalisation of the Fodder Agreement with the Victorian Government means that all payments will be settled as soon as possible. The majority of payments have already been made. While we thank volunteer drivers for their patience, the scale of this natural disaster meant that this was not a normal commercial freight arrangement. In these circumstances it can take time for the funding and administrative paperwork to catch up,” Mr Jochinke said.

With the fodder drive now closed, the VFF is shifting its operations from immediate emergency response to longer term recovery.

During the bushfires the VFF accepted donations into the Disaster Relief Fund which is a charitable fund that provides financial relief to farmers and rural Victorians who are affected by a natural disaster such as fire or flood.

From next week, fire affected farmers can apply for a grant of up to \$3000 (excluding GST) for infrastructure items such as fencing, pipes, troughs, seed, fertiliser and cattle yards.

There are a range of other grants available through the state and federal Governments to assist producers with recovery including fencing, veterinarians, fodder, transport and infrastructure.

Fast facts:

- 16,540 bales and 113 tonnes of pellets donated and delivered to bushfire affected farmers
- 80,000 animals fed including cattle, horses, sheep and alpacas
- 61,390 cattle (beef and dairy), 11,308 sheep, 303 goats, 222 horses and 24 Alpacas fed
- 440 farmers assisted
- Up to 400 calls a day to our Bushfire Recovery Team over the past three months

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Media Contact:

David Jochinke, VFF President, 0427 834 524
Amelia Bitsis, VFF, 0439 827 604