

Media Release



3 August 2020

Farmers continue to feed Victorians

The Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) held emergency talks today to implement necessary steps to protect agriculture and the state's food supply chain from the impact of Victoria's coronavirus crisis.

VFF President David Jochinke said the agricultural industry is one of a few that is permitted to continue.

"The VFF recognises the gravity of this responsibility. We understand the trust that has been placed in our sector and that we are accountable for keeping Victorians fed during this state of disaster," Mr Jochinke said.

"We have been in constant talks with government to advocate for farmers and ensure that decision-makers understand the importance of keeping the food supply chain open and those discussions have ramped up over recent days.

"The VFF developed a detailed COVID-19 action plan for our industry which resulted in \$410 million in additional Australian and Victorian Government expenditure which has enabled the agriculture industry to continue to operate."

Mr Jochinke said farmers are becoming increasingly concerned about restrictions to their business and business interruption, labour shortages, freight and logistics problems along with issues around access to inputs.

"We know that continuity of business is emerging as a big concern for farmers which is why our discussions with government have focused on four key principles: bipartisan and comprehensive approach to border issues, smoother flow of goods and services intra state and interstate, strategies to enable the movement of the agricultural workforce and regulatory change to ensure that agriculture and its supply chain is classified as a critical service," Mr Jochinke said.

"The VFF today wrote to our members to reinforce the importance of implementing COVID-19 action plans, which are critical to keeping the agriculture supply chain open.

"Our clear guidance to farmers is to be extra vigilant as COVID-19 reaches our doorstep. We must implement the best protective measures for our businesses and our workers: face coverings or visors for employees, ceasing communal gatherings, installing screens/curtains, furloughing of staff, physical distancing, cleaning and disinfection measures and insisting on personal hygiene and use of sanitizers, minimizing the number of people coming onto your farm."

Mr Jochinke said the agriculture sector has the potential to be a major contributor to our economic recovery both for our regions and our state.

"While this will be inconvenient, if we get it right and we do the hard yards, then it will only be for a few weeks and our businesses will continue to operate," Mr Jochinke said.

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“Victoria is Australia’s food bowl. We are Australia’s largest producer of food and fibre and the nation’s largest exporter.

“We all know how important small business is to our economy. I don’t think Victorians realise that agribusiness together with forestry and fishing is the highest value add, employs the highest number of people and ranks number five by dollar value in Victoria.”

Background:

Victoria is the nation’s food bowl.

We are Australia’s largest producer of food and fibre and the nation’s largest exporter.

Victorian farmers are responsible for:

- 43 per cent of Australia’s sheep and lamb meet
- 64 per cent of Australia’s milk
- 32 per cent of Australia’s horticulture products.

We export the most dairy (77 per cent), fruit (60 per cent), nuts (51 per cent) and prepared foods (32 per cent) compared to any other state in Australia. To put it into context, half of Victoria’s the total exports come from the agricultural sector.

Agriculture supports 200,000 Victorian jobs – that’s almost as much as mining.

That means agriculture is a major employer in the regions and that has ongoing multiplier effects on employment and industry in regional towns and centres especially in areas such as logistics, transport and other professional services with most of these business and jobs located in regional Victoria.

Agriculture is the lifeblood of regions and rural communities and the economic driver of the \$78 million regional economy.

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