

A woman with blonde hair tied back, wearing a green button-down shirt, is smiling and looking down at a large pile of white wool. She is wearing a watch on her left wrist. The background is a light blue wall.

SUMMER 2025

Victorian Farmer

GROWING THROUGH GRIEF

Balancing grief, motherhood and a seventh-generation farm, Rachel Parsons proves that resilience can flourish even through the hardest seasons.

LEGALISING VIRTUAL FENCING IN VICTORIA

An example of the VFF's advocacy and policy approach

DROUGHT HIT FARMERS SUPPORTED

Celebrating National Ag Day with VFF's Ag Day Farm Shop

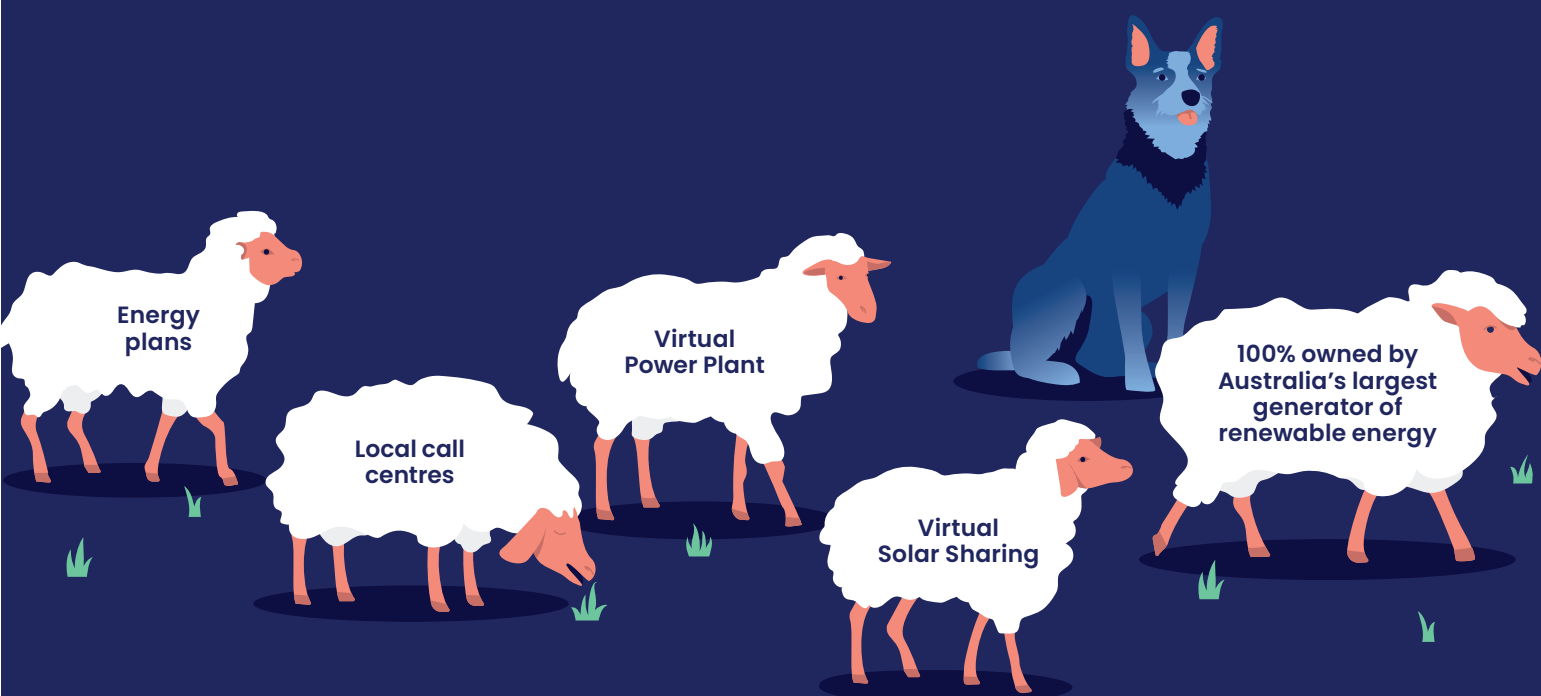
HAVE YOU GOT YOUR CHRISTMAS HAM SORTED?

Australian Pork has supplied some scrumptious recipes to cook up a feast on Christmas Day

We've rounded up the best energy solutions for farmers.

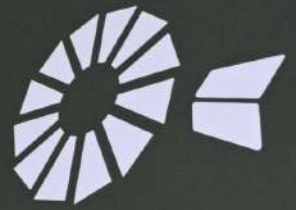
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What a huge year it's been for us farmers and our industry in general. We've faced a historic drought, pushed back on unfair policies including the fundamentally wrong Emergency Services Volunteers Fund, and backed our farming communities in the face of large-scale energy development and mining on their land.

To say it's been a big year would be an understatement. The issues I've mentioned just scratch the surface in regards to the issues facing some of us.

When things get tough, that's where the importance of the Victorian Farmers Federation shines though. We've been working frantically behind the scenes to get outcomes for farmers throughout Victoria.

It was encouraging to see that our advocacy led to a new drought support package that helped keep many on their feet. It won't fix the drought, but it's something, and a recognition that times are tough and that as an industry, we matter.

It's a similar scene when it comes to the Emergency Services Volunteers Fund. We fought hard for a pause to the ESVF levy, but there is so much left to do and we want it scrapped for good.

When it comes to ensuring farmers have a voice in the midst of large-scale energy and mining developments, it's so important to know that someone has their back. That's what we've been doing, backing our farmers when they need it most.

As we head into a Victorian Government election year, you can be sure that we'll continue doing just that.

Victorian farms are the most productive in our Nation, nearly eight times more productive than the National average. We contribute \$20b to the local economy and indirectly employ more than 150,000 people. Imagine what that could become with some forward thinking and investment in the right places?

As much as we're facing currently, we have so much to celebrate as an industry and so much to build upon. This election represents a huge opportunity for us.

Our farmers are world-class producers supplying markets that are hungry for high-quality Victorian food and fibre right around the globe.



With the right policy settings and investment, our farmers can do what they do best and we can grow our reputation as Australia's rural and agricultural economic powerhouse.

I can't wait to help give our regional communities and farmers a voice in what promises to be such a crucial year and I look forward to talking with many of you to help share the future of Victorian farming.

In closing I just want to thank each and every one of you for your support of the VFF team throughout 2025 - it's been noticed and greatly appreciated. As we look forward to 2026 I want to wish you all a Merry Christmas and hope and pray for a successful and prosperous 2026 for all Victorian farmers. If anyone needs to contact the VFF over the Christmas period then always feel free to give me a call directly, 0427 593 051 and I'll do my best to help.

Meanwhile, enjoy this edition of VicFarmer and let's catch up again soon...

Brett Hosking
VFF President

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Petition to protect farming land takes off

Thousands of Victorians have already signed our petition to help protect Victorian farmland from inappropriate development.

It's a huge response to a huge issue. VFF President Brett Hosking said Victoria's farmland represents an asset that needs protecting.

"Our farmland is an economic powerhouse that underpins more than 150,000 jobs and contributes in excess of \$20 billion to the Victorian economy each year."

"Victoria is Australia's food bowl and our farmland is a National treasure, producing almost a quarter of the Nation's food, from just three per cent of arable Australian land."

"It's time we looked at our Victorian farmers and rural communities as an icon to be celebrated for all they provide to our economy, community and environment. I'm asking you to join us and help celebrate them with me," Mr Hosking said.

Victorians can support the campaign and sign the petition at <https://www.vff.org.au/help-protect-victorian-farmland/>

Road safety urged during peak harvest time

With harvest and silage season in full swing across Victoria, we're calling on all road users to take extra care and show patience as heavy agricultural vehicles move between paddocks, silos and storage sites.

VFF Grains President Ryan Milgate said patience can make a major difference in keeping everyone safe during one of the busiest times of the year.

"We are asking everyone, including farmers to take it easy on the roads this harvest season. Patience and sharing the roads is key."

VFF Livestock President Scott Young urged all drivers to make safety their number one priority.

"No matter how tempting it is to run the risk, coming home safely at the end of the day must always be our top priority."

"As farmers we understand we're driving oversized vehicles on the road. Where possible, we'll make as much room as we can, we're just asking others to slow down so we can all stay safe," Mr Young said.

Water woes drain farming communities

After news of more water buybacks in the Murray-Darling Basin, VFF Water Council Chair and Murrumbidgee dairy farmer Andrew Leahy continues to call out the Federal Government.

"The government can't continue to ignore the evidence, ignore the people on the ground, and destroy communities under the guise of environmental virtue. These buybacks are not sustainable, not fair, and not responsible."

"As we move towards the 2026 Basin Review, we must remember that river health is about more than just adding water."

"We need to look at smarter, more holistic solutions that protect both the environment and the communities that feed this Nation."

More: <https://www.vff.org.au/federal-government-drains-basin-communities/>

What's on in 2026



Annual General Meeting



VFF Grains Conference



VFF Dairy Conference



VFF Conference



VFF Livestock Conference



Governor thanks drought affected farmers

On Friday 5 December, almost 100 Victorian farmers joined Her Excellency Professor the Honourable Margaret Gardner, Governor of Victoria on the Government House lawn for a Christmas BBQ.

We know the drought isn't over and the recovery will take years, but this was a much needed day away from the farm for many.





Stronger, together.

Join. Renew. Upgrade.
Make your voice count.

Why be part of VFF?

- ✓ Advocacy that gets results
- ✓ Expert support, when you need it
- ✓ Savings with leading brands
- ✓ Connection and community
- ✓ News that keeps you informed

Real outcomes for members

- ✓ Delayed the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund tax
- ✓ Secured improved drought support
- ✓ Defeated Federal Biosecurity Tax
- ✓ Legalised virtual fencing
- ✓ Pushed back on unfair council rates increases

But there's much more to do.

We're working to protect biosecurity, push back on land use conflict, prevent new taxes and stop harmful regulation.

With so much at stake, a strong and united VFF has never been more important.



Join today from
\$1.20 per day*

☎ 1300 882 833

🌐 vff.org.au/membership-packages

📱 Scan the QR code
to join



*T&Cs apply.

Working together, delivering results

Turning advocacy into outcomes for Victorian agriculture.

WORDS

Charlie Thomas, VFF CEO

As we look back on 2025, this has been an exceptionally tough season for many.

A devastating drought has gripped much of the State, compounded by policy headwinds that have left too many farming communities feeling forgotten by decision makers.

But I hope we will also look back on 2025 as an important inflection point for the VFF. This year we have set ourselves a clear mission: to grow this organisation, deepen its connection with members, and expand its voice on their behalf. That work is underway, and the results are starting to show.

Advocacy wins can often feel abstract. The return on a dollar invested in membership is not always easy to quantify. But let me tell the story of this year with a few numbers...

VFF members collectively contribute around \$2 million in membership fees each year. Using that investment, we have delivered some significant outcomes in 2025 alone. The defeat of the proposed tax on unrealised capital gains in superannuation will save Victorian farming families roughly \$35 million per year in additional tax that would have been levied on assets they never intended to sell.

The deferral of the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund levy for three years represents more than \$89 million that has stayed on farm this financial year rather than being stripped out by this unfair tax.

The legalisation of virtual fencing technology has unlocked tens of millions in productivity gains for livestock producers who will now access tools that have been available in other states for years.

The success of our long-running campaign for a 'right to repair' farm machinery will provide cheaper, more timely repairs to keep farm businesses running when time is money.

And our sustained advocacy helped secure more than \$100 million in State government drought support, including the Duties and Fees Relief Package that is putting cash directly back into the pockets of farmers doing it tough.





On that handful of wins alone, the maths is striking: more than \$200 returned for every \$1 members contributed this year. That's around \$25,000 in benefits delivered to every farm in Victoria.

That figure does not capture the harder-to-quantify work that happens every day. VFF staff and farmer representatives engage constantly with policymakers, regulators, researchers and project proponents to create outcomes for farmers that are fairer, faster, and more practical.

Just this year, that's included deep engagement in land use conflict so that communities are not simply bulldozed by energy projects or mining approvals. We've sped up kangaroo permits, shaped new animal welfare laws and agvet chemical regulations so they reflect the realities of modern farming, to name just a few examples. This work rarely makes headlines, but it shapes the environment in which every member farms every day. The 200:1 return also ignores the work we do to leverage each membership dollar through external funding.

This year we secured extensions to highly regarded programs like Stock Sense and Making Our Farms Safer, and gained a new financial capability support service to help farming families navigate the financial pressures of drought. These projects bring millions of dollars in additional value and services that members can access. We then build on that with sponsorships and partner benefits, which can put more than the value of a membership back into every member's pocket.





But perhaps our most exciting progress this year has been in amplifying our collective voice. Our reach in traditional media and our social media audience have grown rapidly. We have done this by driving a relevant, member-led agenda and showcasing farmers as the best advocates for their own industry. This has delivered the VFF nearly 10,000 new, signed-up supporters who are now bolstering our numbers and backing the agenda of our members.

Through initiatives like our AgDay Farm Shop, we are reconnecting with decision makers, journalists and the public to celebrate the positive story of Victorian farming. We are working to communicate that agriculture is not a relic of the past but a critical part of Victoria's future, an industry that punches above its weight and leads Australia in high productivity farming.

With a Victorian election looming in 2026, we need to keep building on this momentum. The next twelve months will be critical for making sure every party understands what Victorian farmers need: investment in rural roads, fair treatment on land use, investment in farming communities, and much more.

This is your organisation. Our strength comes from your membership, your involvement, and your voice. If you are already part of it, including the hundreds of new members we've welcomed this year, thank you. If you have been thinking about getting more involved, now is the time. Victoria needs a strong VFF. And together, we are proving that a strong VFF delivers real results.

How to prepare and stay connected during a natural disaster

As wild weather looms, we're preparing for another season of potential bushfires, floods and cyclones. You should be too: here are our best tips for getting ready.

It's important to remember that during a natural disaster, our network and other infrastructure like electricity can be affected which may interrupt your service.

Mobile phones and portable equipment

Invest in an alternative charger.

If you don't already have one, purchase a phone charger that isn't dependent on a power outlet. A popular choice is a 'power bank' battery pack that can be charged from a power outlet prior to an event and used if grid electricity is unavailable, or a portable solar panel charger or in-car charger.

Back up your data.

Store your important data, like contact information and personal photos, in the cloud using an online service. If you have an Apple or Google device, these smartphones have automatic backups that you can enable to make sure your photos are always saved. You may also consider saving your essential documents down as having electronic copies can save you time, worry and stress – check out ePrepared – a free online self-help tool we have launched with Justice Connect.

Know your emergency numbers.

Store a list of essential contact numbers for your local Police, Fire, SES teams as well as friends and family on your phone and as a non-electronic, ideally waterproofed, backup. Make sure you include our dedicated disaster assistance number – **1800 888 888**.

When you have your list of essential numbers, make sure you make a printed copy to keep in your wallet, purse or bag, and keep a version in your car as well. Power can go out for a week or longer during a disaster. Keeping a printed copy means that if your phone is out of battery and you need an important phone number, you have it handy at all times.

Consider satellite messaging for remote areas

Telstra Satellite Messaging is Australia's first satellite-to-mobile text service, allowing eligible Telstra customers to send and receive text messages when our mobile network is unavailable – ideal for regional and remote areas. Using Starlink's Direct to Cell capabilities, compatible devices automatically connect when outdoors with a direct line of sight to the sky.

To read more on how to be prepared, scan the QR code.



Telstra Satellite Messaging is not designed to be an emergency service, especially as you cannot text Triple Zero directly. It will mostly benefit people who live or travel outside mobile networks in regional and remote parts of the country, for example to let loved ones know you're okay, or for road trippers experiencing a flat tyre and needing to reach out for help.

Explore a repeater device.

Like any mobile network, coverage on the Telstra mobile network depends on where you are, the mobile handset, tablet or mobile broadband device you're using, and whether an external antenna can be attached. It's important to understand that different devices have different capabilities.

Legal network coverage extension devices amplify the network signal your mobile device receives, which extends the area that your device can work in. These devices can help you connect to the Telstra mobile network from further away than normally possible, or in areas where signal may struggle to penetrate – such as indoors, or in hilly or dense terrain.



It's important to note that boosters are illegal to own or operate on any network in Australia, and they can disrupt or even prevent others from making calls to emergency 000.

Legal wireless network coverage extension devices, such as the Telstra Mobile Smart Antenna and Telstra Go, are also known as 'repeaters' as they repeat the signal from one location to another.

You can also take a look at our range of repeaters and extenders to see if one suits your needs.

Fixed line phones and nbn®

Home phones on the nbn® are different.

Since the nbn® carries your home phone line, it will be unavailable during a power outage. It's best to have a mobile phone handy for this instance, especially in remote areas.

Enable Wi-Fi calling so you can call for help.

If the cellular network signal is down during a disaster, you can still use your mobile phone to make and receive calls and text messages, provided it supports Wi-Fi Calling. Wi-Fi Calling provides basic voice-calling capability on compatible devices when you're connected to a supported Wi-Fi network and can't connect to the Telstra Mobile Network.

We've also switched on SMS over Wi-Fi, allowing you to receive texts via your fixed line connection when you're in Wi-Fi coverage. Here's our FAQ on how to set it up in case you haven't already.

Keep a corded phone.

A cordless fixed line phone is convenient, but remember, most cordless phones rely on electric power to operate, so you may lose the use of your landline during a power outage. A corded phone draws its electricity directly from the phone line (excluding fixed line phones on nbn®) and can be used during a power outage.

Keeping in touch in a disaster

Set up a virtual meeting place.

If you have internet access, an instant messaging group chat with friends and family, or a social media site like Facebook or even Instagram, can give you and your loved ones extra information during a time of crisis.

Find your local payphone.

If mobile services have been impacted, find your local payphone. We have recently upgraded over 1,000 of them with free Wi-Fi and extended battery back-up so they are more likely to withstand disaster impacts and can be a huge help if you need to make a call or get online.

Know your evacuation locations.

Know where your local evacuation centre and emergency meeting spots are and what different routes you can use to get there as some roads may not be accessible during the disaster.

Download emergency services apps.

Official apps will give you the most up-to-date information on what's happening in your area, including natural disaster warnings.

Be alert to changing conditions.

Subscribe to services that will alert you to weather changes, road closures and updates from other service providers in your area.

Use local information sources.

Online, social media accounts for your local authorities and emergency services will share crucial information. Your local broadcaster will also share information over the radio – make sure you have a battery-powered radio or car radio to listen in on.

Helpful tip: Make sure your personal details are up-to-date in the MyTelstra app. That way we can let you know about any disaster support you are eligible for as quickly as possible. Tap the person icon (top right) and select 'personal details' to check or edit your info.



Growing through grief

Balancing grief, motherhood and a seventh-generation farm, Rachel Parsons proves that resilience can flourish even through the hardest seasons.

WORDS

Phoebe Doyle

“

“I see myself farming until retirement, I don't see myself ever doing anything different...”

- Rachel Parsons

Mansfield







MANSFIELD farmer Rachel Parsons is living proof that grief and growth can exist simultaneously, even in the toughest of circumstances.

It was seven years ago that Ms Parson's husband, Sam, passed away from melanoma, leaving behind their two sons under four-years-old, as well as 4000 acres of farmland they had only recently taken over from his parents.

"Sam was diagnosed with melanoma at about the same time (we took over the farm) but was quite ok, we were told everything was fine and we sort of went about life," Ms Parsons said.

"He'd waited all his life to take over the family farm."

Sam battled the cancer, which spread to his brain, for about five years, having multiple surgeries and rounds of radiation while continuing to work on the farm.

"He had coped with it pretty well, but then he went downhill quite quickly, and was put into palliative care on 1 December 2016, and we were told he might not make Christmas," Ms Parsons said.

"At which point I was like, I have a four-year-old and a one-year-old and this is going to be what they think about at Christmas for the rest of their lives."

While Sam made it to one last Christmas with his family by his side, he passed away on 17 January 2017.

"Then it was like, oh, what do we do now?" Ms Parsons said.

Although Ms Parsons had grown up on a farm near Spalding in South Australia's Clare Valley, she had never envisioned herself being a farmer. That was, until she was left with her late husband's seventh-generation beef and lamb farm.

"It's one thing to be the farmer's wife, it's a whole other thing to be the actual farmer," Ms Parsons said.

But packing up and walking away was never a consideration for her.

"I was really conscious of that fact that this was Sam's parent's house, they built it, it's their family home and their family farm, and I'm living their life for my kids because I made the decision to stay on the farm," Ms Parsons said.

"I could have easily walked away, I could have sold up and lived the high life.

"But I never wanted to, I don't want that life for the kids - they love it, and they want to be here."

Ms Parsons' decision was made somewhat easier with the help of her parents, who made the move from Spalding to Mansfield, with her dad, a former farm manager, now running the farm alongside her.

"I'd had discussions with people about what I was going to do, and obviously if Mum and Dad weren't here, I would have had to do something else," Ms Parsons said.

"Some people said just employ a manager or lease the farm. But I love this place, this is my home, and if I lease it, that changes the dynamic completely because that means the kids couldn't do what they wanted to, on the farm, and same with a manager."



"If I had to, that's what I would have done, but I didn't have to, thankfully. Dad and I have always said that we are just looking after this place until the kids are old enough to do it themselves."

Alongside her dad Vaughan and worker John, Ms Parsons assumed the role of full-time farmer and mother to her two boys, Angus and Ollie, all while learning to juggle the grief that came from losing Sam.

"I remember Pete, my Agronomist, calling me, Sam had died in January, and we were due to spread lime and fertiliser about then, but I didn't know what that meant," she said.

"It was about getting through each day and keeping the boys' lives normal. They didn't understand what was going on, especially Ollie as he was only 18 months old."

Now 13 and 10 respectively, Angus and Ollie are thriving on farm life, loving the space and freedom to do their favourite things such as riding motorbikes and helping their Mum and Pop on the farm.

Ms Parsons said coming into the full-time farmer role gave her a new perspective, and she began to question some traditional farming beliefs and practices.

"It's almost always the right way to do it, how they have been doing it, but I question it because I don't know and I want to know," she said.

"Farmers tend to think that the farm is the only thing in life, and that you're really tied to it. Well, I look back and I think family comes first. Yes, the farm is important, but we do not have to be tied to this farm 365 days of the year - there are ways that you can go on a holiday, and there are ways you can have family time. It can be difficult at times, but you have to make a really conscious effort to have that time."

The Parsons' welcomed new additions to their family in the past few years, with Blair being introduced as Ms Parsons' new partner in 2023.

"The first thing the kids had to know was what kind of cows he (Blair) had, what sort of car does he drive, and what footy team does he barrack for," Ms Parsons said.

"He is very good with the boys and has just stepped into the role and filled that little gap that they needed filled."

The family also welcomed baby Jimmy into the fold earlier this year - a true symbol of how Ms Parsons' has delicately managed hope and heartache to move towards the future without letting go of the past.

"Sam is very much still a part of everything. It's no secret, there is no "I don't want to talk about that," she said.

"His parents are obviously still around, and it was their farm, and my kids are eighth generation, so I need to keep it alive for them. It is just a fine balance with everything - you can't dwell on that, you have to be able to move forward, but you need to keep it alive."

Describing herself as an "an optimist", Ms Parsons said while it has been a difficult road at times, she is grateful to be in the position she is in today.

"I never thought I'd be here, it wasn't the path that I would have necessarily chosen," she said.


"I just wouldn't change it; it's how my life is. I can't put a word to it, but I just love it. I see myself farming until retirement, I don't see myself ever doing anything different, and I think about my kids in 20 to 30 year's time, and I think they will be ok."



Photos: Tali Mason and supplied by Rachel Parsons

National Farmers Federation





NFF focus is on farm level challenges

In his first month as National Farmers Federation President, Hamish McIntyre reflects on the challenges and opportunities shaping Australian agriculture - from net zero expectations and environmental law reform to trade, inputs, and the pressures on productive farmland. With a clear focus on farm-level outcomes and resilient rural communities, he outlines the policy priorities he believes will secure a stronger future for farmers Nationwide.

WORDS

Hamish McIntyre, NFF President

It's been a busy and rewarding first month as President of the National Farmers Federation.

I'm listening and learning to members and the NFF team and getting on with the job of delivering on a clear set of priorities that will strengthen farm businesses and rural communities.

I see agriculture reaching the \$100 billion farm-gate output goal ahead of our 2030 deadline. With the help of smart policy, diversified trade options, and letting farmers get on with the job, I believe a \$100 billion industry is just the start for our sector.

The NFF's role is to make sure policy settings keep pace with this ambition because our members, including the VFF, are driving that growth on the ground.

I'm passionate about increasing access to local inputs, having recently experienced limited access to imported fertiliser. Improving farmers' trade opportunities and making sure farmers are not burdened with unfair policy, taxes or red tape, is also essential.

Another high priority for my time as President is to get the right NFF membership structure securely in place. It's a complex issue, but we're almost there. I'm keen to finalise this for our NFF members, including the VFF.

Enquiries about the NFF's net zero position have dominated this first month and shows no sign of easing. We must remember that agriculture is an export-oriented industry and we rely on our overseas markets to keep farm businesses profitable. Our customers are demanding climate actions. The majority of our trading partners and competitors have net zero targets. net zero is not just an Australian commitment, it is a global goal.

We believe all sectors in Australia must play their part in adjusting to the ever-changing climate, including agriculture. But, this must never be to the detriment of our ability to profitably produce food and fibre. That's our highest priority.

This does not require net zero for agriculture and that's consistent with our view. Doing nothing is not an option, but agriculture cannot be expected to provide the easy solution to other sectors' challenges.

Agricultural production is under increasing pressure from prime land being sold to large companies for carbon and biodiversity offsets, as well as energy corridors, housing and critical minerals projects. All things I know VFF members are acutely aware of and understand that every hectare lost to these projects is a hectare that can no longer produce food and fibre. We also have water buybacks making residual consumptive water more expensive for agricultural production. We continue to make this case in Canberra, that Government needs to balance National interests with the livelihoods of farmers and rural communities.

Any push to develop critical minerals or renewables must come with genuine consultation and ensure farmers and their land are not written off. Consultation must be a partnership, not a box ticking exercise.

When it comes to emissions reduction, we believe other sectors need to shoulder responsibility for their own emissions. It's a discussion I'm looking forward to further progressing at Parliament House.

This includes working closely on the environmental law reforms, which have passed the House of Representatives. We agree the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act needs updating, the laws are complex and there's duplication across federal and State levels. We need clear, consistent rules and approvals that support productivity, streamline consent processes across governments, and ensure existing continuing-use provisions are maintained and protected.

I've been in and out of the Canberra sphere before, as Chair of Cotton Australia, Director of Australian Wagyu Association, and during my time on the NFF Board.

I'm fairly used to splitting my time between the Nation's capital and my farms in southern Queensland. I know all too well that decisions made in Canberra can impact farmers' bottom lines and viability. That's why a united front from agriculture is so important. With the VFF and our other members, the NFF can turn farmers' experiences into National influence.

Farmers need resilient and efficient supply chains, and that's why I am especially looking forward to the NFF contributing to the National Food Security Strategy. This work will identify the cracks in our systems that make farm businesses vulnerable and find ways to address these issues.

Painful energy and agronomic product bills, plus being one of many farmers unable to access urea at a critical time for the crops spurred me to start an on-farm, manure based fertiliser program, but it's important to see where our vulnerabilities are and what we can do to mitigate them.



We have enjoyed growing our family farming business and ensuring that it is resilient to the continually changing climate and economic challenges. We have spent a lot of time in the paddock and behind the desk with our team of experienced managers running our operations. We have a family commitment to agriculture with our three sons pursuing study and careers in agricultural business and science.

I understand firsthand the risks, challenges and hard work experienced by farmers as they strive to produce world class food and fibre as well as the contribution they make to create vibrant rural communities.

I am very honoured to represent our farming sector at a National level. Whether it's trade, energy, water, labour or environment, I am determined to work hard to ensure National policy works for the VFF and all our members. I'm a big believer in the adage, the harder you work, the luckier you get.



Commodity wrap

A quick look at what's happening around the grounds.

WORDS

Ryan Moloney

Chicken Meat

Work continues in ensuring Australia's biosecurity safety net is strong and robust and equipped to respond to any incidents, including the H5N1 strain of avian influenza. At the time of publication, Australia remains the only continent free of this strain of the virus and we want to keep it that way.

United Dairyfarmers of Victoria (UDV)

Virtual fencing technology will soon be available in Victoria. UDV was central to the green-lighting of this vital technology and is now working to help ensure farmers can readily access it to use on their farms and boost its adoption.

Eggs

Despite the National deadline to phase-out caged eggs by 2036, we're continuing to flag the need for all systems to ensure an affordable and readily accessible supply of eggs is available for consumers. We believe this can be achieved by keeping all forms of egg production and ensuring animal welfare needs are prioritised.

Horticulture

We're pushing back against planned water buybacks in the Murray-Darling Basin, that threaten a huge number of producers in northern Victoria. We're asking the Federal Government to invest in alternative environmental measures, such as constraints management, infrastructure efficiency, and river restoration projects that improve river health without removing more productive water.

Livestock

The VFF has helped secure more than \$146.5m in drought support. We know this drought isn't over, and work continues to ensure more support goes to those who need it. Financial support is a key focus as we head into 2026, and work will continue to ensure farmers have the resources they need to get back on their feet.

Pigs

Work continues around protecting the biosecurity needs of the pig industry. We've been relaying to the decision makers, that it is essential to protect animal health, farm productivity and market access. It also safeguards livelihoods, reduces costs, and supports a resilient, sustainable pork industry.

Grain

The State of our local roads is a key focus, especially in the lead-up to next year's Victorian Budget. We're working on outlining the level of disrepair in the network and the huge flow-on impacts that has, when transporting from the paddock to the port.





Land Use



An aerial photograph of a vast agricultural landscape. The land is divided into numerous rectangular plots of varying colors: vibrant green, deep brown, and light tan. A network of dirt roads and paths crisscrosses the fields. In the lower-left corner, there are several large, light-colored industrial or farm buildings. The overall scene depicts a typical farmland environment.

Lines of power: farmland is not 'common land'

Dating back to Aristotle, the idea of the 'tragedy of the commons' describes the damage done to shared resources when self-interest prevails without oversight or management.

WORDS

Tobias Campbell

In today's world, this concept underpins many conflicts, most notably around pollution and climate change, the largest global manifestation of this problem.

Most people accept that government regulation is essential to manage these impacts and protect both the environment and communities. Sadly, in parts of Australia, particularly Victoria, the opposite seems to be happening. Farmland in many instances is being treated as 'common land,' as if it were empty or awaiting development. This view is deeply flawed and carries serious long-term consequences for farmers.

The rapid rollout of renewable energy facilities, transmission lines, mineral sands/rare earth mining and housing developments is disproportionately shifting the burden of climate change and growth onto small rural and regional communities, often onto individual families and farmers. The VFF understands that these outcomes are not necessarily inherent to the projects themselves but stem from how the projects are being implemented, and that responsibility lies squarely with the State Government.

This farmland, largely privately owned freehold land, was never 'the commons.' It is prime agricultural land,

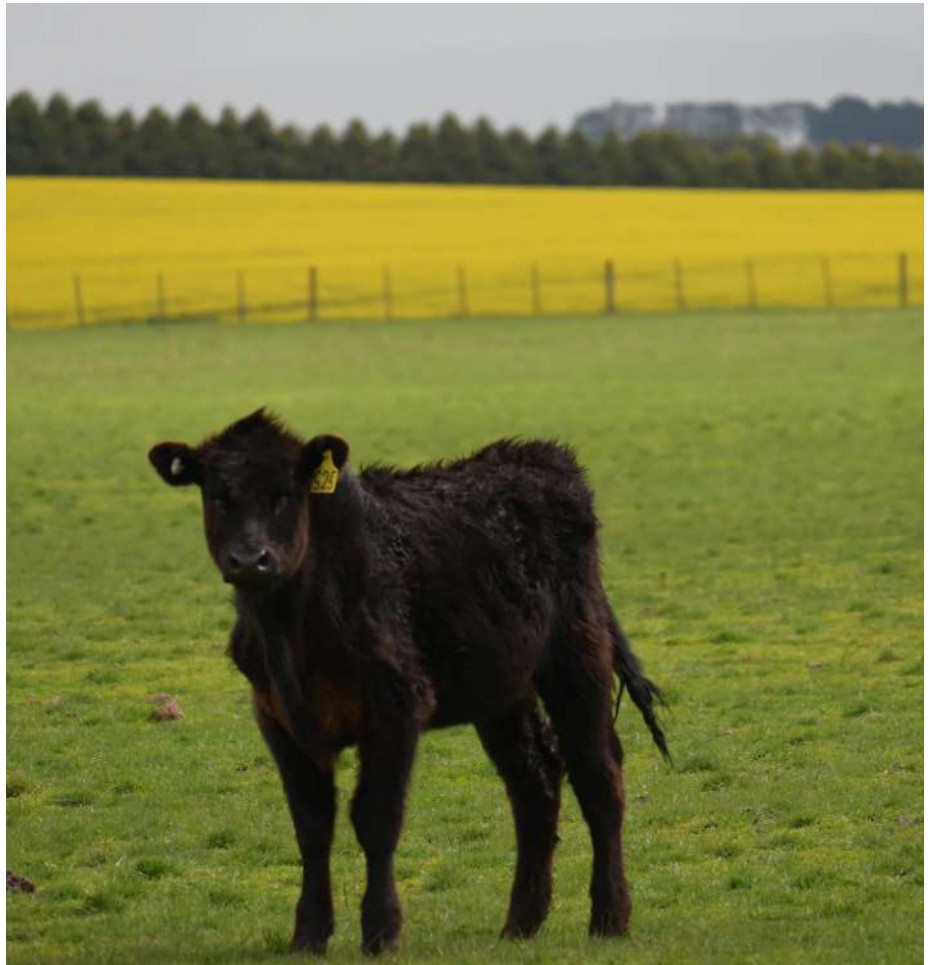
managed productively for generations, with deep cultural connections and often unique flora and fauna as well as many other aspects that are frequently undervalued or overlooked. What should have been a process built on seeking permission, seeking advice, building trust, and developing a proper equitable model of fair compensation, alongside community benefits and careful planning, has instead become autocratic and is now verging on farcical. Oversight is missing, and at a broader level, farmland is splintering without a cohesive plan or regard for impacts on farming systems, families, and communities.

When we have daily scenes of VicGrid employees having confrontations and stand-offs at farm gates, it is clear that something has gone seriously awry. The prevailing approach seems to be 'the end justifies the means.' It would be interesting to hear the justification for actions like this when on 1 December there were new Victorian OH&S laws around psychosocial hazards in the workplace; this may present some problems in the coming years, although none of us really needs new laws to know that

the current approach is ethically questionable.

In some senses, the damage has been done long ago, and it is entirely understandable that many landowners and communities are now deeply suspicious and cynical of what is occurring. There has been a litany of past transgressions and a long list of potential and current poor outcomes for farming businesses. Add to this a plethora of different government agencies and the absence of a trusted and empowered arbitrator other than the courts and here we are.

While some will always say 'no' to projects, and that is their right, others who support them often fear social exclusion or intimidation in local communities, leaving them effectively silenced. Planning processes that fail to prevent this division are deeply problematic. Alienating segments of society pushes people toward conspiracy theories and extremism, offering no solutions, only more problems. We unfortunately already have a society that is plagued with this problem and increasingly people can be put in the same box if there is



any alignment whatsoever. Everyone must be part of these changes, and everyone must be genuinely heard. The VFF understands the complexity and the enormous stress these conflicts place on farming families and continues to advocate for fair treatment, proper compensation, and legislative changes that value farmland.

What is the way forward for this genuinely intractable problem? Sending government employees to confront farmers at their gates daily does not foster goodwill, it creates flashpoints. Is that the goal? It may force court-driven outcomes, but inflaming tensions is not good policy in the short or long term. Real progress starts with genuine community consultation, an ongoing two-way process and an acceptance that if a large proportion of a community objects on reasonable grounds, the project should not proceed in that form or that location. 'Consultation' is not a fait accompli, yet it has often been treated as such. As VFF has repeatedly emphasised, genuine consultation, foresight and robust planning are critical, not just for project success, but for protecting the long-term viability of farming businesses.

The way forward means using the newest and best technology to minimise impacts, and providing proper, long-term fair compensation for utility and amenity, yes, it will cost more. If this does not happen, who bears the 'tragedy of the commons'? We know who - Farmers.

Foresight and planning are critical. Mining companies should not assess agronomic impacts of 'rehabilitated' land post factum. Liability insurance should not be an afterthought when neighbouring landowners assess the risk of having a \$150 million renewable installation appear next door. Research and risk assessment must happen before projects proceed. Without this, consultation and compensation are not linked to any well understood potential future reality. This should be part of a cohesive plan, not an ad hoc 'buy-off' of protesting landholders, which only deepens division, distrust and disdain.

Farmers are in the business of farming and much of this unwanted conflict is an enormously stressful and time-consuming burden, regardless of the potential financial benefits touted. This must be recognised. While some can see the environmental and financial benefits of the various industries and many see a 'greater good'; government

must change its attitude as to how farmland and people are treated; this must at some point extend to changes in legislation that actively values and protects farmland and farmers.

Farmland is not 'common land.' It is owned by families and individuals who form communities. It is sustainably productive, culturally significant, and environmentally important. When treated as 'common land,' as is happening today in Victoria, it 'receives the least care', something Aristotle understood 2,500 years ago.

To quote another philosopher:


“

Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”





VFF Ag Day Shop



Drought-hit farmers supported

The country comes to the city in Melbourne to celebrate National Ag Day at VFF's Ag Day Farm Shop.

WORDS
Anita Donnelly





Victorian farmers from across the State including VFF members Galloway Beef, Macedon Ranges Lamb and Schulz Organic Farms, showcased their produce as part of National Agriculture Day at the Victorian Farmers Federation's Farm Shop in Collins Street, Melbourne.

Held at Farrer House, the Shop traded on Thursday 20 and Friday 21 November, showcasing the very best of Victoria's local producers. Among the 1000 shoppers visiting we had tourists, local residents, city workers, and we also had Victoria's Minister for Agriculture Ros Spence MP drop in, along with many other Ministers and our much-valued VFF partners including WFI and Bunnings.

Stallholders were a selection of Victorian Farmers Market Association (VFMA) Accredited Producers, among them, some proud Victorian representatives from the FAO Global Exhibition recently held in Rome.



Visitors were able to taste, shop and support regional Victorian farm produce, with stalls offering award-winning cheeses, honey, artisanal wines and craft spirits, beef, vegetables, lamb and more, all grown and made and crafted by producers recognised at the Australian Fine Food Awards, Royal Shows, Olive Awards, and Melbourne Food & Wine Awards 2025.

Attendees also helped support farmers doing it tough. All donations made to the VFF Disaster Relief Fund in the Shop went directly towards assisting farming communities impacted by drought and natural disasters and almost \$2000 was raised.

Melburnians visited in droves and sampled produce from Victorian farmers and supported them through trying times. VFF President Brett Hosking said "We're still in the grips of one of the worst droughts in living memory and so many farmers are doing it tough. This was a fantastic chance to support farmers when we needed it most and they were able to snap up some of our world-leading food and fibre made right here in Victoria."

VFMA Executive Officer Sarah Parker said "this is a celebration of Victoria's exceptional producers, the farmers, makers, and growers whose dedication to quality has earned State, National and international acclaim. From medal-winning cheeses and golden olive oils to honey voted best in Victoria, handcrafted gin, pasture-raised meats, and vibrant seasonal produce, it's the best of our farms brought together for Melbourne to see, taste, and take home. Every item tells a story of local pride, sustainability, and excellence. There's something for everyone, and every purchase supports the farmers who nourish our communities."

As highlighted by both the VFF and VFMA, the Farm Shop was a powerful reminder of the skill, resilience, and excellence of Victoria's growers and makers, proving that every purchase and donation can help sustain our communities.

VFF Ag Day Farm Shop



The one rule at Judy Croagh's Christmas table: you must love pork!

WORDS
Phoebe Doyle

“

My advice is for people
to ask...where the pork is
sourced from.”

- Judy Crough
Mount Mercer



Celebrating Australian produce



Celebrating Australian produce

As the CEO and Director of Western Plains Pork, Ms Croagh said that her home-grown meat is at the centre of her Christmas dinner, with her family and friends often gathering annually for a slow-cooked shoulder, ham off the bone or suckling pig.

"After people get there and I've had a glass of wine, it doesn't matter too much because I can't stuff (the pork) up, and it's always so delicious," she said.

Western Plains Pork has been operating in the western district of Victoria for 29 years, employing over 50 people and running 4500 sows and their piglets in an outdoor bred environment.

The sows live outside in small paddocks with shelter, water and wallows, and give birth in insulated huts. Their piglets are then weaned into either straw-based huts called eco shelters or into free-range paddocks.

While there are now local shareholders involved in the business, Western Plains Pork began as the brainchild of Ms Croagh and her husband Tim, making the switch from sheep and cattle to pork in 1996.

Western Plains Pork is owned by a small number of shareholders who live locally. Ms Croagh and her husband, Tim, have been involved with the business since its inception, with Tim putting in a lot of work to establish and set it up.

"The business just keeps evolving and developing, and it's pretty cool really," Ms Croagh said.

Ms Croagh's passion for pigs is evident, describing herself as a "nerd" as she talked excitedly about how sustainability is an intrinsic part of the business.

"I love seeing what the pigs put back into the soil, the fertility that they put into the soil, and the crops that follow behind," she said.

"We work on a nine-year rotation, so we will be in an area for two to three years, then we will move off that (leased) site, and then the farmer comes behind and crops.

"We don't come back to that location then, for another six years.

"In a lot of ways that's how Western Plains was originally born, because the chairman of the business is a beef and grain grower, and he loved what the pigs could do for the ground."

This Christmas, Ms Croagh is encouraging everyone to look out for the little kangaroo label

on their pork products to make sure they are buying Australian produce.

"My advice is for people to ask the question where the pork is sourced from," she said.

"In Australia we have really high standards that we have got to meet, and we have got to tick off.

"Every year we are audited, so our standards we have to keep are quite high, and we try to do better than that all the time.

"There's a whole lot of different standards throughout the world, they don't always align, and I think here if you are buying Australian pork, you know that you can find out the standards that we have to meet."

But the most important part of buying Australian pork?

"It's just so delicious," Ms Croagh said.





Photos: supplied by Judy Crough



AUSTRALIAN PORK KNOWS HOW TO DO CHRISTMAS!

RECIPE



Prep Time: 30 mins

Cook Time: 1 hr 10 mins

Serves: 18 people

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 x 7-8 kg ham leg, skin removed
- 1 small pineapple, peeled and cut lengthways into thick wedges

Pineapple & Honey Glaze

- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup crushed unsweetened pineapple
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup honey
- 1 cup dark brown sugar
- 2 cinnamon sticks
- 2 tablespoons Dijon mustard

METHOD:

1. Preheat oven to 180°C/160°C fan-forced.
2. Using a sharp knife, score the ham fat (not the flesh) lengthways in 1cm wide intervals. Place ham on a greased rack in a large baking dish lined with foil.
3. For ease use a large disposable foil roasting dish.
4. To make the glaze, place crushed pineapple into a medium saucepan and using a hand-held blender, puree until quite smooth. Add remaining glaze ingredients to pan. Bring to the boil, stirring, over medium-high heat. Reduce heat and simmer, stirring occasionally, for 5-8 minutes or until slightly thickened.
5. Brush ham fat two to three times with the glaze to coat. Arrange pineapple wedges around the ham. Brush lightly with the glaze. Roast for 50 minutes, brushing with the remaining glaze once or twice or until golden. Stand to cool for 30 minutes.
6. Slice and serve with the pineapple.

PINEAPPLE & HONEY GLAZED HAM



Prep time: 30 minutes

Cooking time: 1 hour 30 minutes

Serves: 8

INGREDIENTS:

Ingredients for pork rack:

- 1 x 2.5kg (8-bone) pork loin rack, scored (see tip)
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 tablespoon sea salt flakes
- 8 baby red apples, scored apple skin horizontally around the middle

Tray-roasted bacon, pistachio & raisin stuffing:

- 150g rindless Australian streaky bacon, thinly sliced crossways
- 3 cups white sourdough bread, torn into 1-2cm pieces (made from day old bread)
- 12 sage leaves, chopped
- 1/2 cup pistachios, roughly chopped
- 1/2 cup raisins

CRACKLED PORK RACK WITH TRAY-ROASTED BACON, PISTACHIO & CRAISIN STUFFING

RECIPE



METHOD:

1. Preheat oven to 240°C/220°C fan-forced. Rub pork rind with oil then rub with salt. Place pork on a rack in a large baking tray lined with baking paper. Roast pork for 35-45 minutes until skin is golden and crackled.
2. Meanwhile, to make the tray stuffing, combine torn bread, sage, pistachios and raisins in a large bowl. Set aside. Heat oil in a large non-stick frying pan over medium-high heat. Add onion, garlic and bacon and cook, stirring often, for 5 minutes until onion is tender and bacon is golden on the edges. Add bacon mixture to bread mixture and stir until bread is well coated with oil. Spoon stuffing mixture onto a large baking tray lined with baking paper. Set aside.
3. Reduce heat to 170°C/150°C fan-forced. Roast pork for a further 45-50 minutes or until just cooked through.
4. In the last 30 minutes of cooking the pork, place tray with the stuffing on the top shelf of the oven and cook for 25-30 minutes until golden.
5. In the last 20 minutes of cooking the pork, place apples around the pork and cook for 20 minutes.
6. Remove pork from oven. Cover loosely with foil and rest for 10 minutes. Serve pork with the stuffing and apples. Team with gravy and steamed beans if liked.

Tip

For best results, dry the pork belly with paper towel. Place, uncovered, in the fridge overnight to air dry. Let pork stand at room temperature for 1 hour before roasting.

Roads



Why abandoning rural speed limit cuts is the right decision - and why investment must now follow

After successfully opposing a proposal to slash rural speed limits Nationwide, the VFF outlines why blanket reductions would have harmed farm productivity, freight efficiency and regional economies - and makes the case for proper investment to rebuild, maintain and modernise Victoria's rural road network.

WORDS

Glen Hepburn

Photo: AgriShots

Victoria's farmers rely on safe, reliable road networks every day of the year.

Whether transporting livestock, delivering grain to receival sites, moving machinery between properties, or accessing essential services, regional roads are critical to farmers. When these roads deteriorate, the consequences are immediate and widespread: higher fuel consumption, more machinery damage, slower freight movements, and increased safety risks for farmers and local communities. In this context, road standards are not simply a matter of convenience, they drive productivity, competitiveness, and the wellbeing of regional Victorians.

This is why the Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) strongly opposed the proposal to significantly reduce default speed limits on thousands of rural roads across Australia.¹ The plan, advanced through a Consultation Regulatory Impact Analysis earlier this year, suggested lowering the longstanding 100 km/h default limit on non-built-up roads to as low as 70 km/h. The change would have applied to vast stretches of regional and remote road network, irrespective of local conditions, usage patterns, or economic consequences.

This was unacceptable.

Following outrage from farming groups and regional communities, the federal government has now abandoned the proposal. The withdrawal is both welcome and necessary. It reflects a clear acknowledgment that the approach was flawed, both in its evidence base and in its understanding of rural realities, and that a different path is



needed to genuinely improve safety on regional roads.

A proposal that missed the real issue

From the outset, the proposal was simply a regulatory shortcut to safety. It targeted the behaviour of motorists rather than the condition of the roads; road users had to change their behaviour because the road was not up to scratch! The change would have imposed significant costs on farmers, freight operators and regional communities, while leaving the root cause of many road safety problems unaddressed: ageing, poorly maintained rural infrastructure.

Farmers drive responsibly; they modify their driving behaviour in response to road conditions. On poor quality roads, speeds drop naturally, because conditions demand it. The law already requires drivers to travel at a speed appropriate to the road environment. Creating a new National regulatory layer would have duplicated existing expectations while adding significant burdens without delivering meaningful improvement.

The cost of slower roads

The VFF believes that the withdrawn proposal underestimated the economic impact that blanket lower limits would have imposed on

speeds can compound into substantial delays when applied across large distances. For producers and freight operators, longer journeys translate directly into higher fuel use, longer labour hours, and increased wear on machinery.

Perishable, time-sensitive and high-value commodities would have been particularly affected. Victoria's dairy and horticulture industries, for example, depend on timely delivery to processors and markets. Any extension to transport timeframes disrupts scheduling, erodes competitiveness and increases the risk of spoilage or quality loss. In many cases, farm businesses cannot pass these costs on; they absorb them, weakening already tight margins.

The flow-on effects extend beyond the farm gate. Local contractors, processors, service providers and regional businesses depend on reliable and timely freight movement. Slower roads would have undermined regional economic performance, productivity and, ultimately, employment.

Accountability cannot be shifted to road users

Perhaps the most concerning aspect of the proposal was the shift in responsibility it signalled. Regional motorists expect governments to maintain safe, fit-for-purpose roads.

Lowering speed limits instead of fixing the infrastructure transfers accountability from the provider to the user. Rather than bringing roads up to a standard suitable for the long-standing 100 km/h limit, governments would simply redefine the standard downward.

This risked setting a precedent that would be deeply damaging for regional communities. Once a road is reclassified as suitable only for lower speeds, the incentive to invest in its repair diminishes. A cycle begins in which poor condition becomes the justification for lower expectations and reduced investment. This is how incremental policy changes can entrench long-term infrastructure decline. Regional Victorians deserve better than a system that normalises underfunding by reducing service levels.

An incomplete evidence base

The VFF also raised concerns about the lack of robust data underpinning the proposal. The regulatory analysis explicitly acknowledged that reliable National data on vehicle kilometres travelled and crash rates on default rural roads is incomplete or unavailable. Without these foundational metrics, modelling the benefits of reduced limits becomes speculative. Sound policy requires strong evidence that reflects real-world conditions in regional Australia, not assumptions drawn from incomplete data sets.

The government's decision to withdraw the proposal implicitly recognises that the evidence base was not sufficient to justify such a sweeping change. Effective road safety policy must be built on accurate, transparent data, especially when the impacts fall so heavily on regional communities.

The real safety risks: fatigue and road conditions

Longer travel times can also create new safety risks, particularly fatigue. Driver fatigue is already one of the leading contributors to serious injuries and fatalities on rural roads. Extending journey times across the State, especially on long-haul agricultural routes, could have unintentionally increased the risk of fatigue-related incidents. The proposal therefore carried the potential to undermine the very safety outcomes it sought to improve.

Meanwhile, the core safety issues facing rural motorists remain largely unchanged: poor surfaces, inadequate shoulders, limited line marking, weak pavement structure, and insufficient

drainage. These engineering failures are the true contributors to many crashes in regional areas. Lower speed limits do not repair the road surface or improve visibility. Investment does.

Moving forward: more investment is the answer

With the proposal now withdrawn, it is critical that governments do not interpret the backdown as the end of the matter. The VFF has not argued that rural roads are safe enough. We have argued that the solution lies in investment, not downgrades.

The VFF maintains that the most effective path forward is a coordinated rural road renewal strategy focused on engineering, maintenance and long-term planning.

Farmers want safer roads just as much as policymakers do. However, safety must be delivered through infrastructure that meets the needs of modern agriculture and regional freight, not through regulatory shortcuts that shift costs onto rural communities while leaving the underlying issues untouched.

A welcome decision, but work remains

The government's decision to abandon the proposed reduction in default rural speed limits is a positive outcome for regional Victoria. The VFF and others pushed hard, and we had a win!

The decision is a recognition that rural communities spoke with clarity and conviction, and that their concerns were valid. But this outcome must now serve as a turning point. Regional Australia needs a renewed commitment to rebuilding, maintaining and upgrading the roads that underpin its economic and social fabric.

The VFF will continue to advocate strongly for investment-led solutions that enhance safety, productivity and fairness for Victorian farmers. Abandoning the speed limit proposal was the right decision. Ensuring that rural road networks are restored to the standard regional communities deserve is the essential next step.



Getting employment basics right: A simple guide from the VFF Workplace Relations team

Our team provides Platinum and Gold members with practical advice on everything from casual employment to time off in lieu, pay rates, disciplinary matters and more.

WORDS
Tim Green



Finding and keeping good staff has never been more important or more challenging for Victorian farmers. With labour shortages persisting across the State, many employers are offering above-award wages to attract reliable workers. But even when you have found the right person, navigating the rules around employment contracts, award classifications and probation can feel daunting.

That is where the Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) Workplace Relations Service comes in. Our team provides Platinum and Gold members with practical advice on everything from casual employment to time off in lieu, pay rates, disciplinary matters and more.

Recently, Workplace Relations Adviser Tim took a call from a member seeking help with a new full-time hire. Their conversation is a useful reminder of the key steps every employer should follow when bringing someone on board.

Starting out right: the need for a proper employment contract

The member's first question was simple:

"I have found a great worker and want to offer them the role. I need an employment contract and the award rate of pay. Can you help?"

Tim began with the most important clarification:

Is the role full-time, part-time, or casual?

In this case, the employee would be full-time, and the employer intended to pay above the award. As many farmers know, offering competitive rates has become essential in today's tight labour market.

Tim assured the member that he could provide a permanent full-time employment contract, along with the Fair Work Information Statement (FWIS), which must be given to all new employees before or as soon as they start. The FWIS outlines the minimum National Employment Standards that apply to all Australian workers.



Understanding Award classifications

Next came a crucial question:

“Do you know what classification the employee falls under in the Pastoral Award?”

Many employers are not always certain, and that is perfectly normal. Award classifications depend on several factors. Tim asked about:

- the employee's age
- their experience
- the type of work they will perform
- whether they can work independently or need supervision

Using this information, Tim identified the correct classification and helped the member determine an above-award wage that felt fair and competitive.

Why probation matters

Before wrapping up, Tim recommended placing the new employee on a minimum three-month probation period.

He advised the member to hold regular meetings during that time:

- to check in on performance
- to provide feedback
- to ensure the employee is settling into the role

This process helps both parties confirm the role is a good fit. As Tim reminded the member, once probation ends, managing performance or ending employment becomes more complex.

A smooth start for everyone

By the end of the discussion, the member felt confident:

“Thanks Tim, that is really helpful. I will give the employee the contract and the Fair Work Information Statement, and I will monitor their progress during probation.”

Tim's response was simple:

“That is great to hear.”

For Victorian farmers hiring new staff, whether full-time hands, harvest casuals or skilled operators, getting the basics right from the beginning can prevent major headaches down the track. And you do not have to navigate it alone.

Need help with employment matters?

The VFF Workplace Relations Service is here to support your farm business with award advice, templates and practical guidance. If you are a Platinum or Gold member, do not hesitate to get in touch for tailored support.

Good people are hard to find. Make sure you set them up for success from day one.





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Virtual Fencing





Legalising virtual fencing in Victoria: An examination of the VFF's policy advocacy and approach

The legalisation of virtual fencing in Victoria exemplifies this dynamic. This reform taking effect from now enables producers to access modern, welfare-aligned livestock management tools. It was the culmination of sustained and strategic advocacy undertaken by the VFF.

WORDS

Nicholas Ayres-Wearne

Virtual Fencing

Public policy achievements in agriculture rarely emerge fully formed or in plain sight.

Much of the advocacy, negotiation, and technical policy development that ultimately shapes regulatory reform occurs behind closed doors and is therefore often misunderstood or underestimated by those observing from outside the process. The legalisation of virtual fencing in Victoria exemplifies this dynamic.

Responding to member demand: identifying the regulatory gap

Virtual fencing technologies which use audio cues and controlled stimuli to guide livestock movement have been unavailable for Victorian farmers while farmers in other countries and States have now had access to the technology for a number of years.

Farmers have consistently reported economic, environmental, and welfare benefits. Despite this, the absence of a legal framework in Victoria created uncertainty for both manufacturers and farmers, effectively limiting commercial adoption in Victoria. As other jurisdictions modernised their regulations, Victoria risked falling further behind both technologically and competitively.

VFF's commodity structures, particularly through the Livestock Council and United Dairyfarmers of Victoria (UDV), captured growing member concern. Farmers articulated a clear need for regulatory clarity to support innovation, improve environmental outcomes, and enhance labour efficiency. Their practical insights formed the foundation of the VFF's objective: securing a legal framework enabling responsible, welfare-aligned adoption of virtual fencing systems.

Evidence-based policy development: building a robust foundation

Central to the VFF's approach was constructing an evidence-based approach grounded in scientific literature, welfare research, and international case studies. Early in the advocacy process, ethical

considerations emerged as a major barrier across government. A prevailing interpretation of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act placed technologies involving conditioned stimuli regardless of their mildness or behavioural validation, under a regulatory cloud. This ethical barrier reflected a longstanding policy stance favouring precaution over innovation, particularly for emerging technologies involving animal conditioning, with a perception that these 'cues' lead to worse welfare outcomes.

To address this challenge, the VFF drew on peer-reviewed studies on behavioural conditioning and welfare outcomes in cattle and sheep. These studies demonstrated that, when used correctly, virtual fencing systems could reduce stress, support adaptive grazing, and decrease reliance on higher-stress physical handling.

This evidence reframed the ethical discussion: rather than posing new welfare risks, virtual fencing could enhance welfare outcomes and align with modern, low-stress livestock management principles.

However, evidence alone was not sufficient. Regulators required practical, observable demonstrations of how the technology operated under Victorian conditions. Through coordinated advocacy involving departmental staff, producers, and manufacturers, a commercial manufacturer was granted approval to undertake a supervised trial at Agriculture Victoria's Ellinbank SmartFarm. Securing this trial required navigating ethical concerns, clarifying regulatory uncertainties, and demonstrating appropriate safeguards.

The Ellinbank trial was important in progressing the ultimate goal of legalisation. It provided independently verified welfare observations, controlled comparisons with conventional methods, technical performance data, and a transparent demonstration platform for government officials. It reassured policymakers that commercial



systems incorporated robust safeguards, data-logging, and clear training requirements. Ellinbank thus served as the bridge between theoretical welfare assurance and practical regulatory confidence.

Industry collaboration: working with developers and manufacturers

A defining element of the VFF's advocacy was sustained engagement with technology developers. These interactions clarified system behaviour, automated learning mechanisms, welfare safeguards, data capture capabilities, and technical limitations requiring regulatory attention. This partnership ensured the VFF's advocacy remained scientifically valid, practically grounded, and responsive to ongoing technological evolution. It also demonstrated to government, that the livestock industry was ready to adopt virtual fencing responsibly and transparently.

Strategic government engagement: multi-level pressure and political proximity

Successful agricultural advocacy requires the ability to apply sustained pressure across multiple decision-making layers. The VFF employed a multi-tiered engagement model that strategically combined:

1. Staff-level bureaucratic engagement, focusing on identifying technical and regulatory blockages within existing legislative frameworks.



2. Executive public service engagement, ensuring senior departmental figures understood the economic, welfare, and innovation-based rationale for reform.
3. Member of Parliament engagement, particularly with representatives of agricultural regions who could reinforce local support and articulate political necessity.
4. Ministerial engagement, where ultimate decision-making authority resides. The VFF provided evidence-based briefings, coordinated site visits, and aligned reform arguments with government priorities such as modernisation, productivity, and animal welfare.

Political pressure through multiple channels

The VFF's approach reflects a core principle from political science: policy reform is most effective when pressure is applied strategically across multiple institutional touchpoints. The VFF coordinated technical, political, bureaucratic, and constituency pressure, ensuring the case for reform permeated all layers of the decision-making structure. This simultaneous pressure helped reduce political risk, increase bureaucratic confidence, and build a cohesive narrative supporting regulatory change.

Advocacy as coalition-building: identifying and dismantling regulatory roadblocks

The VFF's approach emphasised identifying the clear regulatory

roadblock, the absence of lawful approval mechanisms under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act and assembling a coalition capable of dismantling it. Producers, manufacturers, researchers, bureaucrats, MPs, and ministers all played distinct, coordinated roles. This diversity of expertise created a unified reform narrative that made regulatory change both logical and politically feasible.

Legislative detail, innovation, and the importance of future-proof regulation

Securing legalisation was only the first stage. The regulatory drafting process that follows policy approval is often where the most consequential decisions are made. Poorly drafted regulations risk being overly prescriptive, inflexible, or misaligned with evolving technology. The VFF therefore devoted significant attention to ensuring that the regulatory framework was future-proof, risk-based, and supportive of ongoing innovation.

Virtual fencing systems continue to evolve rapidly, and improvements in software responsiveness, battery design, welfare safeguards, and GPS accuracy are ongoing. Regulations that are too rigid could stifle innovation, discourage investment, or inadvertently lock producers into outdated technologies.

During the review of draft regulatory materials, the VFF identified a critical issue: uncertainty around the delineation of virtual boundaries and the speed at which these boundaries could be modified. Without provisions

for rapid boundary adjustment, emergency responses to fires, floods, or infrastructure failure could be dangerously compromised. The VFF argued that delays in adjusting virtual boundaries could pose greater welfare risks than the technology itself was designed to prevent.

Through targeted engagement with departmental officers the VFF ensured that the final regulatory framework recognised the necessity of immediate boundary adjustment under emergency conditions, supported real-time system responsiveness, and was sufficiently flexible to accommodate ongoing technological evolution.

Conclusion: a model for strategic agricultural advocacy

The legalisation of virtual fencing in Victoria demonstrates how targeted, evidence-based, and politically astute advocacy can deliver major regulatory outcomes. Through a combination of scientific evidence, industry collaboration, political engagement, and careful legislative analysis, the VFF delivered a reform that is both technically robust and future-oriented. This case exemplifies that effective policy reform emerges not from a single argument or meeting, but from sustained, coordinated, coherent advocacy supported by evidence and collaboration.

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A man in a black polo shirt and blue jeans stands in a vineyard, holding a large, round loaf of bread. In the foreground, a metal pot sits on a tree stump, and a metal grill with meat is visible. The background shows rows of grapevines and distant hills.

Bringing Victoria's heartland to the city: Farmer's Daughters and the spirit of Gippsland

WORDS
Anita Donnelly

Photos: supplied by Farmer's Daughters





In an era when the distance between producer and plate can feel greater than ever, Farmer's Daughters has made it its mission to bring the character, stories and seasonality of Victoria's regions, especially Gippsland, into the centre of Melbourne.

At its core is a simple idea: honour the people who grow our food, respect the land that sustains it, and ensure those stories continue long after a meal is finished.

Founded on a deep connection to one of Australia's most diverse and productive food regions, Farmer's Daughters serves as a bridge between rural and urban Victoria. Every dish, every glass poured and every story told in the venue carries the unmistakable imprint of the countryside and the people who shape it.

VFF Members Cafresco Organics and Jones Potatoes feature on the menus at Farmer's Daughters (Melbourne), Victoria by Farmer's Daughters at Fed Square and Farmer's Daughters Wine House on Little Collins Street in the CBD.

A celebration of provenance and people

About 15% of all VFF Members are based in Gippsland, a region defined by contrast and abundance, from rolling hills and fertile plains to rugged coastlines and dense forests. It is home to dairy farmers producing world-class butter and cheese, small-scale growers working tirelessly to preserve heirloom varieties, and producers leading the way in regenerative farming.



For Farmer's Daughters, these producers are not just suppliers. They are collaborators and partners. The team regularly travels through Gippsland, walking paddocks, visiting sheds and discussing the seasonal shifts that determine what ends up on the plate. That paddock-side dialogue forms the backbone of the menu and keeps the restaurant firmly tethered to the rhythms of Victorian agriculture.

It is more than a supply chain. It is a community, and one the Farmer's Daughters team is committed to championing.

Farm to table as a living philosophy

While many venues use the term "farm to table," at Farmer's Daughters it is a working practice rather than a marketing phrase. Menus are built on what is abundant, not what is fashionable; on what is ready, not what is shipped in; on what farmers tell them is at its peak, not what trends dictate.

The result is a menu that breathes with the seasons:

- earthy root vegetables grounding the cooler months,
- vibrant greens and shoots signalling spring,
- lamb raised on open Gippsland pastures,
- seafood pulled from nearby coasts by those who understand its cycles.



Each ingredient carries its own story. Together, they reflect the ingenuity, resilience and stewardship of the farmers who make Victoria one of Australia's richest food landscapes.

Closing the city and country gap

The divide between metropolitan and regional Victoria is not just physical. It is cultural. Many city diners have become disconnected from the people and processes that put food on their tables. Farmer's Daughters aims to close that gap and offer an experience that reconnects urban visitors with rural reality.

Through producer dinners, seasonal storytelling and immersive dining experiences, guests are transported from the laneways of Melbourne to the misty hills of South Gippsland, where generations have cared for the land. They taste produce that has travelled hours, not days. They learn the value of supporting local supply chains. They understand the craftsmanship that underpins Victorian agriculture.

In doing so, Farmer's Daughters helps build a future where city and country remain intertwined, economically and culturally.

Commitment to sustainability

Good hospitality does not end at the plate. The Farmer's Daughters team works with growers committed to ethical production and environmental responsibility. Within the venues, composting initiatives, waste-reduction strategies and resource-efficient processes reflect a commitment to leaving a lighter footprint. Beyond the kitchen, partnerships with regenerative farmers highlight practices that protect the soil and secure the future of Victorian agriculture.

It is sustainability with purpose and with flavour.

A taste of home in the heart of Melbourne

Whether guests visit for a relaxed lunch, a special-occasion dinner or a chef's table experience, Farmer's Daughters aims to offer something that resonates deeply with regional Victorians: hospitality grounded in season, place and story.

Every dish is a tribute to the farmers who feed the State. Every menu is a celebration of Gippsland's natural abundance. Every experience is a reminder that Victoria's regional food culture deserves to be tasted, honoured and preserved.



Photos: supplied by Farmer's Daughters

A full-page photograph showing two workers in a grassy field under a clear blue sky. The worker on the left is wearing a high-visibility yellow and grey jumpsuit and a white hard hat. They are using a long, yellow telescopic pole to reach up and adjust a white hard hat that is hanging from a black structure. The worker on the right is wearing a dark blue long-sleeved shirt, khaki pants, and a brown cap, and is standing with their back to the camera, observing the process. In the background, there is a line of trees and a small building with a sign that partially reads 'POWER R'. A red banner with white text is visible in the top right corner of the image.



Powercor

2026 goals for VFF project, Making Our Farms Safer

The MOFS team look forward to getting out in 2026 to support farmers all over Victoria in many different formats, in ways that will best support you, getting you home safe, every day.

WORDS
Bianna Kelly





Key focus areas for Making Our Farms Safer (MOFS) in 2026

Agriculture represents 2 percent of Victoria's workforce but accounts for 10 percent of work-related deaths.

Over the past five years, an average of eight farm workers have died each year. WorkSafe Victoria identified tractors and attachments, side by side vehicles, quad bikes, and cattle handling as particularly high-risk areas that cause the most injuries and fatalities.

These statistics show that the implementation of safe and effective OHS systems remain inconsistent across Victorian farms. Poor safety culture and high-risk tolerance, along with working alone, physically demanding seasonal work, and repetitive tasks, can increase risks, especially on smaller commercial and family-run farms.

MOFS Project Manager Bianna Kelly said this data has helped shape the key focus areas for MOFS in 2026 - education and prevention on cattle handling, quad bikes, side-by-sides, and tractors and attachments.

"We know that MOFS have an important responsibility to help make sure that Victorian farmers go home to their families every night," she said.

"That's why we wanted to focus specifically on what was causing the most harm on farms."

So what does this look like in terms of the MOFS program?

One way is through the new and improved on-farm safety visits, which now look slightly different compared to previous years.

"In the past, these visits have been an all-in-one visit where a whole farm safety review and 'dinner table discussion' is undertaken, normally taking around four to six hours," Ms Kelly said.

"In the new MOFS project, these visits will be reduced to a shorter visit of approximately one hour, with more than one visit available to each farmer, bringing safety discussions to you, in smaller bite-size chunks."

MOFS participant Robyn Williams, who underwent a farm safety visit from the team earlier this year, spoke highly of the project.

"The MOFS program gives you a framework to set up your safety culture," she said.

"The team helped me feel motivated to create safety change in my workplace."

MOFS will also be delivering two types of events throughout the year to support farmers – dynamic engagement days and focussed targeted learning sessions.

Ms Kelly said the dynamic engagement events will bring a wide range of services, educators and industry specialists together under one roof.

"Designed as one-stop support days, they will offer convenient access to demonstrations, presentations, expert advice, and practical resources," she said.

"The goal is to create an efficient and collaborative space where farmers can easily tap into the help and information they need."

Meanwhile, targeted learning events zero-in on specific priority topics.

These smaller, specialist sessions provide hands-on instruction, structured demonstrations, and personalised guidance from experts local to the area of attendance.

"With the concentrated format, these events will give participants the chance to deepen their knowledge and walk away with clear, actionable insights into safety improvements on their own property," Ms Kelly said.

The MOFS team look forward to getting out to support farmers all over Victoria in many different formats, in ways that will best support you, getting you home safe, every day.

For more information and guidance on managing psychosocial hazards, booking a farm visit or any other safety enquiries, contact the MOFS team via email mofo@vff.org.au.

New psychosocial health regulations

Farm health and safety extends well beyond the physical, and new regulations that have recently come into effect now reflect exactly that.

Photo: AgriShots

As of 1 December 2025, new Occupational Health and Safety (Psychosocial Health) Regulations came into effect in Victoria. These laws expand employers' duties to manage risks that could harm an employee's psychological wellbeing and mental health.

These new regulations require farmers to identify and control psychosocial hazards present within their workplaces. On farms, these hazards might include:

- Long working hours, especially during harvest;
- Working alone or in isolation from others;
- Work-related stress or high workloads;
- Bullying, harassment, sexual harassment, and discrimination;
- Exposure to traumatic events, such as animal injuries or accidents; and
- Poor communication or lack of support.

Managing these risks doesn't have to be complicated. Start by having regular conversations with staff about how they're coping, especially during busy seasons. Make sure everyone gets enough rest breaks and encourage people to speak up early, if they are feeling stressed or overwhelmed.

Employers must consult with staff when identifying hazards and deciding how to control them. On farms, this might mean having informal chats at the end of the day, toolbox talks, or team meetings during busy times. Looking after your team's mental health is a legal duty but also an important part of keeping your farm safe, productive, and sustainable.



Book a FREE Farm
Safety visit with MOFS





Stock Sense year in review

Stock Sense travelled far and wide
across Victoria in 2025.

WORDS

Phoebe Doyle



FROM South Gippsland to Numurkah to Hamilton and everywhere in between, Stock Sense travelled far and wide across Victoria in 2025.

Eighteen workshops, 11 webinars and over 550 participants later, the team is looking back on the incredible year that was.

Funded by the Cattle Compensation Fund and the Sheep and Goat Compensation Fund, Stock Sense's mission is to improve animal health, welfare and biosecurity across Victoria, focusing particularly on peri-urban farmers and small landholders.

Stock Sense Project Manager Dominic Enter said it's been great to see the progression of the project over the past year.

"It's been exciting to step into the role in the last few months and get to continue to spread biosecurity awareness across Victoria," he said.

"Our team and the presenters we get to our events are all passionate about Australian agriculture and making sure animal welfare is a top priority, whether you are a commercial farmer or just have a couple of sheep in the back paddock.

"Our workshops and webinars have been really well received, and we've met some incredible people along the way."

Stock Sense's face-to-face workshops in 2025 centred around either stock handling, fencing or animal husbandry, while also having that overarching theme of welfare and biosecurity.

The project's most popular workshop this year was an animal husbandry workshop held at the Yarra Valley in May with 34 attendees. It was followed closely by a stock handling day in Numurkah in November, which 32 people attended.

Stock Sense's webinars focused more on specific animals in 2025, covering goats, sheep and cattle across six webinar series.

Registrations averaged 150 per webinar, with an average 53 people tuning in live and 138 watching it later, on the project's YouTube channel.

"Our webinars have really grown in popularity this year, as people can dial in from anywhere in the State, and also have the chance to rewatch it, if they need to," Mr Enter said.

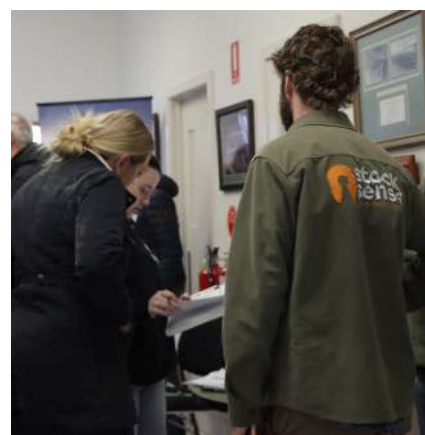
"We like being able to give people the option of being a bit more hands-on at our face-to-face workshops or still get the same quality of information they need but from the comfort of home."

Stock Sense also reached a special milestone in 2025 – the team's first work baby, Benjamin Divitcos! Congratulations to Project Manager Tegan.

Mr Enter said he is feeling really positive about the direction Stock Sense is taking in 2026.

"We are already in the midst of planning events, and while it can be challenging, we know it's really rewarding to see what people get out of it, at the other end," he said.

Want to see Stock Sense in your area next year? Contact the team via email at stocksense@vff.org.au to let us know.





Testimonials from participants

“The webinar was great, really knowledgeable and practical vet - great to hear her presentation.” – *Sheep Essentials Webinar Series*

“It’s very informative and to the point, Q and A at the end is good. Can’t think how to improve it.” – *Goat Essentials Webinar Series*

“It reinforced how important it (foot paring) is and I will up our hoof trimming game. Yesterday gave me confidence that we are actually doing quite well.” – *Wattle Flat Goat Workshop*

“I was definitely doing a lot of it already in my day to day. The workshop put actions into words very well and helped me understand why we do these things.” – *Shepparton Stock Handling Workshop*

“Great workshop, hands on and really well organised, will definitely use the learning.” – *Yarra Valley Fencing Workshop*

“The facilitators were down to earth and also encouraged some fun banter between themselves which was enjoyable and helped to relax people. There was good communication in the lead-up to the event, as well as clear direction and instructions.” – *Blampied Fencing Workshop*

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Out and About

Here we showcase some of the best shots from our members all over the State.

If you have a great photo of your farm that you would like published, send it to magazine@vff.org.au and follow us on Facebook, Instagram, X, TikTok and LinkedIn.



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1. Hon. Governor of Victoria, Margaret Gardener AC, hosted a Christmas BBQ for drought stricken farmers recently at Government House. @vicfarmers
2. @gallebroad celebrating National Agriculture Day with VFF at our Ag Day Farm Shop recently.
3. Meet the farmers behind your milk. @schulzorganicdairy
4. The boys loving a bit of attention... @bindiw_photos
5. Spinning circles, round and round. Like the grooves of a record. Like the windmills of your mind. @e.m.images_
6. We love this time of year - the sun is shining and our vines are full of promise. @1890onthevine
7. Catch me if you can! @highlandsonthehill
8. Warwick Long (ABC Country Hour Host) and Peter Tuohy (former VFF President) at the 2025 Mallee Machinery Field Days. @vicfarmers



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