

## **Ensuring a profitable and sustainable agriculture and food sector in Australia**

On behalf of Diploma of Organic Agriculture students based in Drouin, Victoria, we would like to submit some issues for consideration.

Australia's agriculture and food sector is indeed complex and faces many challenges. The integrity of our system will ultimately drive its long term profitability and sustainability. Herewith we outline some suggestions for maintaining, enhancing and restoring our farm/food industries.

Water and soil resources in Australia are not abundant and obviously need to be carefully managed to maximise their potential for use. Good soil is the basis of civilisation; water conservation is becoming part of wider understanding, soil need to be similarly valued. With continued clearing and mismanagement we lose much of these resources, there are deserts now where there was abundant soil and water.

Farmers are more aware of the complexity of these issues than most but need considerable support to be able to manage landscapes beyond the profit motive. Perhaps industry should direct sponsor the landscape to offset its commercial imperative. The idea of pollution tax is another alternative that may prompt corporate players to clean up their act. Waste cannot be a part of a flourishing (limited) system, we need to promote initiatives that minimise waste or turn it into part of the production cycle.

Farming and environmental consciousness need not be mutually exclusive. If we are to have a future we need to see these pursuits not as polarised but as sides of the same coin; we need farming and we need a preserved natural environment.

Protecting our own production from cheap imports appears a pressing issue. If quality were emphasised, many would choose Australian product, a lot of it is in education. We will have little left if we remain dollar driven. Fortunately the new Agriculture minister seems committed to this and we hope to see swift and sustained action to save our farming sector.

Organic agriculture is more than an emerging niche, it is the viable solution to a lot of the issues we face including food safety and salinity. Demeter Biodynamics has illustrated reversal of salt scalding in the WA wheat belt. Have a serious look at this. <sup>1</sup>

Farmers and consumers have made it perfectly clear they do not want GMO foods, labelled or otherwise and we should, if for market reasons alone, err on the side of caution. "The potential benefits claimed for this kind of technology

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<sup>1</sup> BDRI

are every bit as speculative as the hypothesized dangers”<sup>2</sup>. We think Australia will be at a distinct advantage if it can maintain its clean and green image; those that pay most want the highest of quality. Australia needs more independent R&D; much scientific research has been compromised by corporate funding delivering biased outcomes.

There is the repeated question, “what is the government’s role in this (issue)?” Well the government need to take the initiative in each issue to determine best practice and facilitate provision of resources and services to ensure long term prosperity of public assets such as water, communication and transport infrastructure, heritage. Narrow, myopic focus is not conducive to the goal. We should be ensuring a *sustainable* and profitable agriculture as our resources base, nature, is far more critical to our existence than \$.

By whatever method, remediation needs to occur immediately. We need to shift our paradigms rapidly and radically to focus on revitalising our environment to reinvigorate our farm industries. We should use our land more intensively, especially land capable of supporting more than grazing, and we should recover the landscape in trees and shrubs to give the myriad benefits higher plants offer.

Interdisciplinary teams are proving effective at finding innovative solutions to problems and we need to see our current problems are integrated, so too will be the solutions. For example, university scientific experiments that produce waste now work from this waste back to pure elements and this has given these students great problem solving and practical experience. “Problems are not solved with the same thinking that created them.”

Youth need to believe in a bright future that will and they need to be embraced and encouraged to make a contribution. A thriving ag sector could absorb many workers and solve our current rural labour shortage/youth unemployment crisis if we had a flourishing, promising self sufficient industry. Looking overseas for labour denies our children of future opportunity. We need to create the answers here.

We would be happy to be involved in further consultation with the government on these or any related issues and can be contacted by email: **marlid-hrt@nmit.vic.gov.au**. Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the process.

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<sup>2</sup> David Suzuki “Ignorance is not Bliss: The perils of genetic engineering” in Nature’s Operating Instructions ed Ausubel, K. 2004 Collective Heritage Institute