

Submission to Agriculture and Food Policy Reference Group from Hart Bros Seeds.

We note in the approach section of the Reference group paper that it would like its report to be a “constructive agent for change”. These words are a great lead in for growers to produce crops to suit newer or changing markets, yet history shows the time frame is so long that most growers pick up the changes after they have missed a period when volume production was required.

Over a long time we have conducted trials and demonstrations on improved production technology and quality, yet post farm gate costs nearly beat the chance of improved returns. Example it took 5 years to move Rapeseed to Canola yet all the quality attributes were there from day one.

Markets: Their needs to be improved market signals and description of organic products and a case for semi organic products where soil health is the main criteria of production.

A code of practice is often the best method for addressing consumer requirements; a low-key role of facilitation is also required.

Competitiveness: Post farm gate costs are increasing at a fast rate as a % of farm gate returns; bulk commodities need to find a cheaper pathway to markets.

Growers are curtailing costs by size and field efficiencies at a cost to communities at large. Up country processing for export could be a way of holding communities together.

Education: Governments should support a strong apprenticeship scheme for nearly all grains, meat and fibre production focusing on the long term benefits of remaining in rural Australia. Part of the apprenticeship scheme should include opportunities of working in post farm gate sections of the supply chain.

Research: The current R, D& C's in general are giving a good return to both levy payers. The sectional interests are well served by the current focus of salinity, water quality etc; these problem areas will always occur in the big picture.

Perhaps the levy system could be improved by equalising the levy rate as a % of gross returns.

Currently a grain grower pays 1% of the sale price, if he feeds the same grain to livestock he pays less than half of the 1% .

The research evaluation system is very poor, with far too much focus on science only and too little on the opportunities to work with others.

Innovation in on farm practices are often over researched to find out why the system is an improvement, followed by some organization trying to commercialise the results.

It is far better to make the in principle results freely available and let industry do the adoption work.

Biotechnology: Australia has waited long enough, researched most angles relating to the objections to GM trials in crops, that it is now time to go forward otherwise many

of the beneficial health traits to consumers and healthy soils will be lost to overseas interests, plus the loss of highly skilled staff.

Whilst it will cost more, a GM supply chain and isolation is the best compromise.

Infrastructure: Zones of supply rings and developing the infrastructure identifying in the region of this zone is the best way rather than focus on a major town or city in the zone. Some start up funds will be required to encourage private investment to remain in there while productions changes occur.

Communities: Just give rural areas the same access as their city counterparts. The failing landline system, unreliable satellite pickup even for on farm use is frustrating. Market access is limited by excess numbers of seaboard traders due to regional differences as is the limited access to groups like Austrade.

Biosecurity /quarantine: This is perhaps the key element to controlling and securing export markets.

Full traceable QA systems are a “must” for the agricultural food chain. More responsibility could be given to AQIS for imports.

Improvements are coming through via Livestock Identification yet the real concerns are state governments creating massive National Parks where animal control will be very difficult.

Natural Resources: Far more recognition of the landholder role in caring for this asset needs to come from government; no farming business is intent on destroying this asset.

Land managers are carrying out far more improvement than required by law yet they are still required to meet adhoc piecemeal legislation on land care issues. Some returns to land managers will be required in future to maintain improved Catchment Management Authorities guidelines.

Governments should sort out the Greenhouse Gas/Carbon Credit mess as soon as possible.

The current drought policy favours the retention of farmers as the status quid quo, but it fails to acknowledge innovation in farm businesses. How to improve it is difficult without changing the whole system; using an insurance base and a federal pool arrangement could be very successful.

Rural and Regional communities: Trying to implement changes to the mentality that Australia is a bulk producer of a raw commodity is the highest priority to support up country processing; change land use, develop better market niches, all this will assist communities and use regional infrastructure.

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