

Regional Cleantech Solutions

Submission to the Agriculture Competitiveness Green Paper

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The food industry is different. Food security is critical to the strategic national interest. The food industry is a significant generator of wealth, particularly to regional Australians; it is an industry through which Australia engages with the world; and it is an industry with a proud tradition and bright future.

Governments role is to support the sector to deliver on these opportunities. Policies will therefore need to be focussed on :

- removing unnecessary barriers,
- ensuring the right mix of infrastructure to allow the safe and efficient delivery to market,
- regulating those parts of industry which threaten the viability and sustainability of family and other farms,
- facilitating maximum access to international markets through free trade agreements, and
- supporting the continued upskilling and professionalism of the industry

Must Haves

Regulation in the food industry is overly controversial with scant regard given to the ultimate objective which is to provide safe quality food to domestic and international customers at fair return to the producer and the food value chain. To do this Governments must:

- Tighten ACCC investigative powers and the Competition and Consumer Act - promoting fair average returns
- Improve labelling conditions - providing confidence in claims of Australian made, fresh, natural, sustainable, fair trade, organic
- Ensure that State and Federal regulations are complementary, consistent, clear, effective and efficient - future consumer choices will be made on the basis of product integrity
- Closely monitor international trade - to protect against infestation by pest or disease or the dumping of products and provide maximum access for Australian products
- Accelerate R&D tax deductibility in relation to investments which mitigate climate change risk.
- Attract investment from both domestic and foreign sources but ensure that investor disclosure thresholds meet community standards (e.g. \$10 million)

Immediate Action

Despite the importance of agriculture to the nation and particularly to the regions there is a diminishing investment by Government in research and industry development.

Many competitor companies subsidise their Agriculture industry. Australian agriculture has a long established tradition of having to compete on an unequal playing field. Innovation in varietal selection, production, processing, transporting and selling is critical and is worthy of substantially increased R&D support.

In many competing nations large corporate agribusiness is the norm and this is often underwritten by genetic modification and poor labour conditions.

Australia needs to find a new way of competing- selling high value products to wealthy customers. The Agriculture industry plays a critical role in balancing social, economic and environmental concerns.

Governments must recognise this unique role and ensure food security by supporting the transformation of the industry into a profitable, sustainable , job creating, industry of opportunity.

Regards

Peter Hansford