

Submission to the Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper

- ***Farmers are getting older and there's no one left to take over the family farm***

My husband has been a sugar cane farmer for the past 45 years. We have four adult sons of whom two may be interested in carrying on the family farm, but the prospects of them running the farm as a viable business does not look good. While every other farmer's children are walking off the family farm to live and work in the city, why should we encourage our children to live a life of hardship on the land? Even though farming is in our blood, there is just no incentive to continue working very long hours with little return.

- ***Input costs going up and up. The price of sugar has to be above the total cost of production for farmers who supply the world market.***

The money we are getting for our sugar cane has been much the same for the past 20 years. We get the odd year when the price spikes, but then we are hit with a big tax bill. The price just does not deliver a fair return and we cannot afford to update our ageing machinery. Instead we continue to repair and maintain to survive.

Input costs continue to rise every year but we cannot raise our selling price because we are 'price-takers'. Electricity, fuel, rates, steel, fertilizer, services, living costs, etc. are on the rise all the time and we are forever looking for ways to be more efficient, but if we don't get a fair price, we can't be sustainable. The current price of sugar also discourages farmers from re-investment.

- ***Support and recognition from the Government and the public is needed***

As farmers, we are concerned about the lack of support in general that we get from all levels of government. Why are farmers in other countries held in high esteem and even subsidized by their governments for growing crops? Why aren't we afforded the same respect? Why are we made to feel like environmental vandals? Without Government support we cannot survive.

Let's educate our children from an early age about where our food comes from and that we cannot have food without farmers.

I despise what Coles and Woolworths have done to the dairy farmers. Without farmers there would be no supermarkets. Not one single item of food can be produced without some form of farming. Government needs to dictate to the multi-nationals – don't allow them to dictate to you. A little less profit for them could mean the difference between survival and death for our farmers.

- ***Food Security – stop the construction of houses on farming land***

Stop allowing the construction of homes on good, arable farm land. Once you build on this land, you will never get it back. Houses should only be built on land that is not suitable for growing crops. Once we run out of farming land, we can't grow anything.

Stop selling our farming land and water to overseas companies who are only looking after their own country's food security. What about Australia's food security? Do you think these countries will supply us with food if there is a shortage? No, they will feed their own people first. If we don't change our attitude, Australians will one day starve. The only people who will survive will be the few people remaining who know how to grow crops...and believe me they are disappearing fast.

- ***Manufacturing***

Bit by bit we are losing all the manufacturing industries in Australia. If we don't produce anything, be it manufactured or farmed, what are we going to have to export? Where is everyone going to work? We can't all sit in front of a computer in an office. We're losing valuable people skills too.

- ***Conclusion***

In conclusion it all boils down to money. We must get a fair wage for our hard work and a fair return for our investments in agriculture. Food security should be at the top of any Government's agenda and the only way to have food security is to support the people who produce the food. Give us a fair go please.