

RE: Agricultural Competiveness White Paper

Introduction

The Agricultural Competiveness White Paper acknowledges that action must be taken to allow Australian's food production to be more resilient and competitive than ever. This challenge is met by increased weather and climate pressure and a decrease in younger generations interest in the farming profession. To maintain and improve Australia's agricultural industry, acknowledgement and incentives must be placed in sustainable forms of agriculture, for the health of the population, for environmental concerns, and to increase yield and create a more resilient market.

Actions

1. Pay Carbon Credits/ Carbon Offset to Primary Producers for increases to soil humus.

Since 2007, the Australian government pay people to plant trees as carbon credits for the increase of carbon dioxide absorption. Every year, nearly 10 billion tonnes of carbon is being released into the atmosphere, yet an imbalance has been created because only 4-5 billion of this is being reabsorbed back into the ecosystem and is now present in the atmosphere (Berry, p.50). It is estimated that 476 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide has been released from the soil, due to inefficient and destructive conventional farming practices (Berry, p.51).

However, soil also has the largest capacity to store carbon dioxide, more than trees and plants. The ability to do this is through a soil storage system called humus. Humus is organic matter that has

broken down to the point of stability. Humus is a vital element for soil health, as discussed below. Humus has the incredible capacity to store carbon dioxide from the atmosphere into the soil. Therefore, as carbon credits are paid for tree planting, they should also be paid to farmers who are increasing soil humus and removing carbon from the atmosphere, through sustainable methods of farming.

2. Introduce Organic Waste bins and start large scale composting systems for farmers to buy at a subsidized rate to increase their soil humus.

Landfills are the second largest source of methane gas, contributing the climate change issue. 60% of domestic waste is organic matter, which has the potential to be converted into compost material. Organic or green waste bins should be introduced throughout Australia, especially in cities, and then added to large-scale compost systems. This compost, containing high levels of humus, should be available for farmers to buy at a subsidized rate. This will reduce landfill, reduce methane gas and carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, and improve the soil through humus. Humus is an incredible resource for soil health. It improves soil structure and has the ability to store more minerals and nutrients in the soil, therefore producing healthier, more nutritious food. It's capacity to hold minerals allows for less fertiliser application, which reduces cost. Humus is an excellent water management tool. A 1% increase in humus per hectare means that soil can hold 170,000 litres of water per hectare, which it could not previously hold. The higher the humus levels in the soil, the less need for chemical intervention. This makes the conversion to organic practice practical and also extremely cost effective. Humus determines profitability – it means an increase in yield. By converting under-utilised waste into

compost, it will help farmers, improve soils, increase yield, be beneficial to the environment, and improve the quality of produce.

Conclusion

Converting to sustainable farming practices can reclaim carbon from the atmosphere, improve crop yield and quality of food and improve the vitality and resilience of people. With promotion of these benefits, sustainable farming can attract more young people into the farming profession. This requires promotion of the environmental, health and income opportunities. By delivering a financial incentive with a carbon credit scheme, and assisting farmers with compost production through Green Waste bins, the government has the ability to make a significant positive impact on the environment, while supporting Australian farmers.

Considering of the issues and actions raised above, as well as the benefits many Australian organic farmers are already experiencing, the conversion to sustainable farming practice is of absolute necessity for future environmental health and health of the people.