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17th April 2014

Mr Barnaby Joyce
Minister for Agriculture

Dear Mr Joyce

Agricultural Competitiveness Issues Paper

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our input into the Agricultural Competitiveness Issues Paper. Agriculture is critical to East Gippsland being our largest industry and predicted to shape our regional competitiveness.

The East Gippsland Food Cluster Inc (EGFCI) is an industry member-based not-for-profit organisation, which has been created for the following purposes:-

- 1 Sustainably growing the East Gippsland Food Sector;
- 2 Looking for opportunities to improve productivity through innovation and supply chain synergies;
- 3 Developing workforce capability to support the sector and promote industry excellence.

EGFCI members include the region's major food manufacturers and horticulturalists along with an increasing number of smaller niche artisan food and beverage businesses. Full details of the cluster's 16 members are available @ (www.eastgippslandfoodcluster.com.au).

EGFCI member's fresh produce and manufactured products make significant contributions to Australia's wholesale, retail and food service markets, with some exports. We are very optimistic about the future for our businesses and our sector. Accessing new markets and workforce solutions for now and into the future are key priority focus areas.

In principle EGFCI supports the general themes, outcomes and objectives outlined in the issues paper to guide the Australian Government's development of a White Paper on Agricultural Competitiveness.

In particular we are pleased to note the recognition of the importance of agriculture to regional communities. This will require strategies that recognize the diversity of regional communities, and balance local, regional, state, national and global interests. There will be no 'one size fits all' solutions and we welcome the opportunity to engage in strategic thinking that is aligned with the recently released Gippsland Food Plan, the East Gippsland Shire Council's strategic work in this area, and our own strategic and project plans.

Whilst we note and welcome the inclusion of many elements associated with the 'food system', we advocate a 'whole systems' approach.

We consider that the Australian Food System includes all processes and infrastructure involved in feeding populations: growing, harvesting, processing, packaging, transporting, marketing, consumption, and disposal of food and food-related items. It also includes the inputs needed and outputs generated at each of these steps. The food system also operates within and is influenced by social, political, economic and environmental contexts and requires human resources that provide labor, research and education.

We consider that a whole systems approach provides for both opportunities and problems to be viewed as parts of an overall system, rather than reacting to specific parts, outcomes or events, and potentially contributing to further development of unintended consequences. This approach is viewed as conducive to supporting transformational change requirements to support a resilient food system into the future.

EGFCI would therefore like to see a White Paper that is focused on working towards achieving a world's best-practice balanced set of economic, social, and environmental outcomes.

Accordingly we consider the following themes should be fully reflected in the White Paper:-

- Sustainable food production needs to protect the natural resources on which food production depends – soil, water and bio-diversity, and needs to sustain a focus on reducing greenhouse gas emissions
- Food production must consider nutrition and human health:-
 - 'Food security' is considered to be 'when all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life' (WHO);
 - Many domestic and global market and consumer trends demonstrate a demand for food that support nutritional and health and well-being outcomes.
 - The market opportunities to be realised if, for example, the average Australian consumed the daily recommended portions of fruit and vegetables.

We also consider that The White Paper would need to acknowledge the leadership requirements of supporting the outcomes sought. Consideration would therefore need to be given to be given to specific kinds of leadership qualities that will encourage this. Skills that support systems thinking, drive alignment, foster collaboration, support transformational change, and facilitate genuine and meaningful engagement are considered critical.

The East Gippsland Food Cluster looks forward to receiving the Green Paper and the opportunity to respond to the findings in the paper.

If you should have any questions related to this submission please contact me.

Yours sincerely



Dr Nicola Watts
Executive Officer