



Blowing our trumpet or letting off steam

We don't think there is anything to celebrate about this unresolved dairy crisis. However we do think that the criticism handed out by the VFF that Farmer Power has done nothing about it is a bit rich.

Farmer Power is a voluntary group of dairy farmers and we receive no external funding for our lobbying activities. Despite our lack of resources we have:

Maintained a facebook page to keep dairy farmers informed about our activities as well as the unfolding response of others to the dairy crisis, and to facilitate exchange of views

Organised public meetings of dairy farmers to gain support for collective action

Organised a huge rally in Melbourne to present the concerns of dairy farmers to politicians, and encouraged farmers in other States to hold similar events

Written and spoken to many of the candidates in the Federal election to inform them about the dairy crisis and lobby for support

Written to the Federal and Victorian Governments to put forward specific proposals that would assist dairy farmers survive the crisis and rebuild the industry

When denied a place in the official meetings convened by the Victorian Government on the dairy crisis, we secured a separate meeting with the Victorian Minister for Agriculture to press our case

When denied a place at the recent national dairy symposium, we sent a delegation to Canberra (at their own expense) to meet with Minister Barnaby Joyce, as well as cross-bench Senators who have offered support for dairy farmers

Issued more than 60 media releases since May to keep the concerns of dairy farmers in the public eye, hopefully putting pressure on the politicians to act

Taken part in TV and radio interviews, often involving traveling into Melbourne (at our own expense) and facilitated media interviews with other farmers

Sought legal opinions on aspects of the dairy industry (provided pro bono)

Made a detailed submission to the Government White Paper on Agricultural Competitiveness

Made two detailed submissions to the Productivity Commission and reinforced our proposals at a formal hearing

Raised the necessary sponsorship (thanks to local businesses and others) and held a magnificent free entertainment night to cheer up dairy farmers in south-west Victoria.

Doing nothing indeed!

The proposals we have consistently put forward for dealing with the crisis are:

Reverse the claw back – there is some progress on this and more yet to come;

Implement a 50c/litre levy of the retail price of milk to be redistributed to all farmers as a temporary 11c/litre top up on the farm gate milk price – this got some political support but has not yet been implemented, and who would have thought that after opposing this the VFF would have stepped in and grabbed a levy for itself? However we have succeeded in getting the message across that cheap home brand milk is bad for the industry.

Conduct an inquiry into the dairy industry with a view to getting fair contracts, fair milk prices and fair governance – the Government responded with an ACCC inquiry, the Senate upped the ante with a Senate Inquiry, and a full Commission of Inquiry is still a possibility.

Over the course of pressing our demands we have pointed out why the Government's rescue package was not going to resolve the crisis, which has resulted in some improved access to concessional loans but we remain skeptical about the end results. We have become critical of the existing peak bodies who are paid to help dairy farmers, because while we bust our voluntary guts they appear to be paralysed. We still don't know why, but the question has to be asked whether this is the result of the power and influence of the major processors and supermarkets.

So, no, it is not fair to criticise us for doing nothing. We can be criticised for not yet meeting our objectives of securing solutions to the crisis, and we are saddened every time we hear of another dairy farmer going broke or giving up.

Because we are a voluntary group, wanting to get back to milking our cows, it seems that the powers that be are hoping we will get tired and stop causing trouble. But rest assured we are not done yet!

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