



NEWS RELEASE
August 27, 2010

Climate vs food = our biggest challenge: ag group

Upping food production while curbing greenhouse gas emissions will be the biggest challenge facing Gippsland farming in the next decade, according to a regional agribusiness leader.

Alex Arbuthnot AM, chair of Agribusiness Gippsland Inc said a target of cutting emissions by 20% of 2000 levels by 2020 was a tough call. Adding a growing population and market demands for more food production could stretch systems too far, he warned.

“Futurists are warning that our farmers need to double food production by 2050. There’s scarcely the land, water, human capability and technology to achieve that, even without the extra task of arresting greenhouse gas emissions,” he said.

He warned: “Imposing too-strict limits could have dire consequences for Victoria’s economy: farmers curbing their outputs, industry moving to other states or even other countries and rolling power blackouts.”

He was responding to the State Government’s White Paper on Climate Change entitled ‘Taking Action for Victoria’s Future’.

Only two of the report’s 30 pages dealt with agriculture, he noted. Yet the sector held some of the greatest promise in greenhouse gas reduction.

“We recognise our farms need to undergo significant transformation, more than the changes currently underway,” said Mr Arbuthnot, who runs a dairy farm at Nambrok. “But we need recognition of the sustainable farming initiatives already in place.”

Victorian farmers are curbing greenhouse gas emissions through innovations such as no-till agriculture, ‘green’ cleaning of dairy milking systems, solar power use and more targeted application of nitrogen-based fertilisers, he said.

“We need is all the technology and government back-up possible to put a lid on emissions,” he said.

“Farmers are used to thinking in terms inputs and outputs when it comes to production. It’s vital the policymakers recognise the same formula and help us all achieve the desired result.”

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