



Victorian Farmers Federation  
24 Collins Street  
Melbourne VIC 3000

Dear Candidate,

On Saturday 24 November Victorians will go to the polls to elect the 59<sup>th</sup> State Government. The election is only 14 weeks away and I am writing to you as you are running as a candidate running in rural or regional Victoria.

Victorian agricultural production contributes over \$13 billion to the State's economy every year, most of which is produced in Victoria's rural and regional 48 electorates and regions. Victoria produces high quality food and fibre. Our food is produced with high standards of safety and with the lowest taxpayer support in the world – meaning Australian consumers pay no hidden costs for their food, unlike consumers in most developed countries.

Australia has an advanced traceability system in place for the identification of livestock and, according to the Australian Government, agriculture has reduced greenhouse gas emissions over the last two decades. In addition, Victorian farmers value and care for their workers and operate under some of the strictest environmental and highest animal welfare controls in the world. Victorian agriculture supports rural and regional economies, and as it is overwhelmingly made up of family businesses, it supports farming families.

The Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) launched its election campaign at our Conference in Ballarat on 19 July. The theme for our campaign is "Delivering for Agriculture – growing communities". This theme has been chosen to reinforce who we represent (farmers) but importantly to recognise that these farmers, our members, are vital components of rural and regional Victorian communities. We want to reinforce that beyond the boundaries of Melbourne, the strength of communities is strongly linked to the success of our farmers.

Our campaign has four platforms:

- Modern infrastructure
- Healthy and safe workplaces
- Science-based practical regulation
- A confident future

Like all businesses, farmers need certainty to underpin long-term investment and business confidence. I wanted to take this opportunity to highlight a few of our election asks, many of which are common across all our members and a number of Victorian stakeholders.

#### **Energy - \$155 million to develop a long-term energy plan to underpin business certainty**

Victoria needs a long-term energy plan for the State with buy-in from all sectors. This plan needs to recognise the vital role that agriculture plays in our State and it must deliver better management of supply and demand.

Victorian farmers need energy. The reliability, availability and cost of energy have a significant impact on agriculture and our farm businesses. For a dairy farmer, when the power goes out, not only do the lights go out but the milk goes down the drain, costing thousands of dollars. In several animal industries blackouts can also result in negative animal welfare outcomes which is something farmers want to avoid at all costs.

We need a secure energy future which includes affordable pricing and reliable service for the State of Victoria. Our dairy operations are also currently constrained by Single Wire Earth Return (SWER) power infrastructure. We need more skilled electrical contractors who can work with dairy farmers to provide advice and service farms to deliver cost-effective solutions to power quality and voltage distribution during milking (to support heating, milking and refrigeration). Working together and implementing innovative solutions should help to reduce electricity demand during peak times, delivering significant savings for dairy farmers.

We need a long-term plan and action to ensure reliable energy transmission capacity in our rural and regional communities.

**Roads - \$6.2 billion for fit-for-purpose roads to ensure safe travel for all Victorians and the timely transport of produce**

Local roads are a vital part of rural communities for interconnectivity. Improving local roads is not only critical for farmers but it also contributes to greater traffic safety, including improving access for emergency services.

Roads are critical for farmers not only to get produce out, but to get inputs in - supplies such as feed for stock, seed and fertiliser. Victorian roads have been neglected for far too long. We need investment to map the main road network for 'goods to market', a strategic plan to modernise the road network to meet the projected tonnage growth, and most importantly, urgent action to ensure our roads meet a minimum fit-for-purpose standard.

**Telecommunications: \$600 million to rid regional Victoria of blackspots and ensure farmers and their communities have high speed internet and reliable telephone access**

Regional Victorians remain disadvantaged due to low connectivity and reliable telephone access. Farmers, like all consumers, need reliable, quality mobile phone coverage. Increasingly, farmers are doing more and more of their business via their smart phone – checking weather reports, collecting and storing agronomic data, accessing online banking and ordering farm supplies. We need investment to remove blackspots and support business continuity.

**Animal welfare: \$20 million to support the development of a science-based, sustainable and responsible animal welfare plan**

Regulation is important to protect the safety of our communities and citizens. That said, good regulation should be easily understood and accessible, risk-based and proportionate, avoid unnecessary prescriptive requirements, be transparent and consistent, and be fair by not imposing regulatory burden on business that is not justified. Farm production animals do not fit into a 'one size fits all' approach. We need a responsible and sustainable animal welfare plan that is supported by ongoing investment in research, development and extension.

**Rates – a commitment to implement a fair and equitable rates system which allows regional communities to prosper**

Some farmers in regional Victoria have seen their rates increase by over 20 per cent. No business can operate in such an unpredictable cost environment. Farmers are being rated out of existence. We need a commitment by candidates to implement a fair and equitable rates system which allows regional communities to prosper. Such a system is likely to also require adequate funding to local governments to provide the necessary funds to undertake the tasks and services they need to deliver, rather than them attempting to raise these funds from farmers.

You can download a copy of our [election brochure here](#). You may also wish to view our election website: [www.deliveringforagriculture.org](http://www.deliveringforagriculture.org).

Over the coming 15 weeks, I look forward to engaging with all of the parties running in the Victorian election. In partnership with my councillors and members, we aim to engage with every candidate in each rural and regional seat in Victoria.

We are putting all candidates on notice. Agriculture, including farmers, is critical to the health and prosperity of our State. At our Conference in July, farmers unanimously moved a resolution that if no action is taken to address the rates issue, they will have no choice but to rally in Melbourne. We hope that candidates will realise the seriousness of the rates issues, along with the basic services we need to operate - energy, roads, telecommunications and a science-based approach to animal welfare.

We are looking for a genuine commitment from candidates to deliver for agriculture and grow communities.

I look forward to speaking with you.

Yours sincerely,

David Jochinke  
President  
Victorian Farmers Federation