



VFF ELECTION BREAKFAST

Hotel Windsor

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I am a farmer who grew up on the Wimmera plains.

When I attended the Dooen Primary School, with around thirty-five other farming kids, a viable farm was around 650 acres. Today that school doesn't exist and a viable farm would be approaching 2400 hectares (almost ten times the size). From the perspective of local government services this is a massive change. This expansion in farm size, driven by financial pressure to constantly improve efficiency, is not abating.

In the majority of cases it is **not** large corporates that are managing these farms. There are few new names to the district on the council rate notices. It is the remaining families now footing the rate bill that was once spread over many. It would be unusual for a whole viable farm to be sold, in most cases the transaction is between a retiring farmer and a nearby farmer looking to make an existing farm more efficient.

The rate burden on the farming community has not previously been well understood by our city cousins however this is changing as our townfolk see their own rates decline while farmer's rates increase by over 30 percent. It is also hitting regional retailers and farm service industries as the financial viability of local farms also impacts their bottom line.

A local council executive can look over the property valuations and see farms valued at many millions of dollars and compare that with the average two-four hundred thousand dollar regional house. It is **only on the basis of this level of observation** that the current basis of rating burden distribution could be seen as equitable. This system is broken – as the farm property value does not reflect the farmer's disposable income or the extreme variability of that income from season to season. Imagine those experiencing drought,



coming in from feeding stock, to find a rate bill which has increased over 20 per cent. This is not uncommon.

Farmers, being a conservative and community minded group, have quietly complained but continued to be the group least likely to be late or default on their rate bill. This level of complacency, or obedience, is changing. Farmers are speaking up!

And while I stand here and tell my story, I am not alone. This is a state-wide issue. In regions of the State farmers have gathered in numbers to protest to their council. To date, this appears to have fallen on deaf ears, but here are some of their stories:

- James is a livestock farmer who farms at Hexham in Polwarth. His rates have increased by 20 per cent.
- Peter farms livestock in Bass Coast Shire, in the electorate of Bass. He receives no services, yet his rate bill has increased by 16 per cent.
- Ed in the Pyrenees Shire has watched his rates go up 21 per cent.
- Lyn farms at Ballarat and her rates have increased by 25 per cent.
- John is a member of our livestock group and farms near Bendigo. His average rate increase across his farms is 31 per cent.
- In Shepparton, Lionel who is a grain farmer has watched the rates bill on his son's farm increase by a whopping 50 per cent.
- Mark, who runs a mixed grains and sheep business in the Northern Grampians, has seen his rates go up by 20 per cent.
- And lastly Diane, who produces citrus in Mildura, has seen a huge 44 per cent rate increase.

All well run businesses budget for good and bad times but what business, small or large, can factor in the arrival of an annual bill which has suddenly increased by over 20 per cent?



Victoria's rate system is broken. The current system must be scrapped and we need to start again. We need a state-wide solution.

Our farmers – your food producers – need business certainty and in an election on year, I'm calling on you to step up.