

Title	Farm Management
Policy type	Element of the Agriculture and Primary Industry Policy
Policy Working Group	Agriculture and Primary Industry
Policy history	New policy
Status	Final Draft – to be circulated for comment
Date	20/1/2010
Feedback	Formal submissions and comment should be emailed to rodney.gauld@democrats.org.au

Overview

To protect our farming future we must support farmers to effectively manage their farms. This includes encouraging the development of comprehensive farm management plans and providing appropriate training and support to encourage best practice farm management, managed through a centralised program.

The Issue

Currently farmers have to deal with a myriad of government departments, agencies and other organisations as well as different licensing for things like using chemicals, numerous quality assurance programs and numerous awareness campaigns and initiatives. This disjointed regulatory system creates an incredibly complex and sometimes contradictory matrix of red tape.

The Australian Democrats propose to introduce a holistic farm management program that enables farmers to develop individual management plans specifically for their farm. These plans would comply with all requirements to simplify the farmer's interactions with authorities and improve the productivity and health of our farms. The program would seek to enhance the planning for those farmers who already have good farm management plans through additional freedoms and support, as well as lifting the standards of those farms that are not currently at best practice management standards.

The Proposal

The Australian Democrats will push to have a comprehensive best practice farm management training and support program developed that would allow farmers to develop personalised farm management plans that take in to account all the requirements of the different agencies they deal with, all quality assurance requirements, environmental requirements and licensing relevant to their property.

The program would comprise two main components:

1. Support in developing individualised holistic farm management plans. These would be designed with the ongoing assistance of extension officers who are able to work with the farmer on their property to develop a best practice farm management plan. The individualised farm management plans would help clarify and streamline regulatory requirements. They would also allow for better management of the specific conditions of each property (as opposed to adherence with blanket State or Federal standards or restrictions that may be unsuitable for some properties), and would assist farmers in the environmental management on their

properties. In doing so, these farm management plans would act as an environmental management system, demonstrating a level of quality which would be then be marketable to consumers.

2. Increased support for training and information on farm management plants and best practice farming. The Democrats recognise that successive Governments, particularly at the State level, have moved away from extension services that deliver one-on-one support for farmers, and that farmers are now increasingly being forced to source their information from the private sector. As part of this program, extension services would be better funded to assist farmers in meeting their regulatory requirements, accessing information on the latest technological improvements for increasing productivity and accessing grants for conservation work.

The program would need to be developed and managed by a specific agency or department within the Federal Department of Agriculture in partnership with other relevant Federal departments, State and Territory Governments and all industry bodies in an inclusive and collaborative way.

The Goal

By providing a single best practice farm management model the Australian Democrats believe the following can be achieved:

- Better performance and health of farms
- More support for farmers through ongoing education and additional support
- Less confusion for farmers who will only have to liaise with one program instead of many
- Elimination of conflicting requests from different agencies or bodies as a result of the centralised management program being able to identify and resolve such conflicts
- Better penetration of disease prevention and other biosecurity or best practice farming messages through delivery in a common format
- Increased flexibility and freedoms for farmers through individual farm management planning rather than being confined by multiple blanket restrictions and guidelines
- Increased confidence in food production and quality assurance systems from better clarity and awareness of the requirements
- A mechanism to empower farmers to manage emissions and transition in to an emissions trading scheme with confidence (NB: Dependent on farmers being able to take credits for inputs so they can offset emissions within their properties if they so choose)
- Better surety for farmers through a more stable operating environment
- Easier implementation of new initiatives and requirements through the established program

Timeline

Initial development and implementation will take approximately 3 years, allowing an additional 5 years for all farmers to transition in to the program.