



Submission to the Australian Government

Agricultural Competitiveness Issues Paper

“Rural Australia is more than agriculture. Whilst it is our economic underpinning, each region has a range of comparative advantages that need to be talked up and opportunities created. We need innovation, incubation, inspiration and networks”.

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Contents

Topic	Page
Who is National Rural Women's Coalition?	3
About this Response to Agricultural Competitiveness Issues Paper	4
Ensuring Food Security In Australia and Globally	5
Farm Decisions for Improving Farm Gate Returns	7
Enhancing Access to Finance	10
Increasing the Competitiveness of the Agricultural Sector and its Value Chains	10
Enhancing Agriculture's Contribution to Regional Communities	12
Improving the Competitiveness of Inputs to the Supply Chain	15
Reducing Ineffective Regulations	16
Enhancing Agricultural Exports	18
Assessing the effectiveness of incentives for investment and job creation	18
Summary	19
Contact Details	19

Who is the National Rural Women's Coalition?

What We Do - The National Rural Women's Coalition works to support and grow vibrant rural, remote and regional Communities throughout Australia. The National Rural Women's Coalition (NRWC) provides a collaborative national voice for women living in rural, regional and remote Australia and does this by:

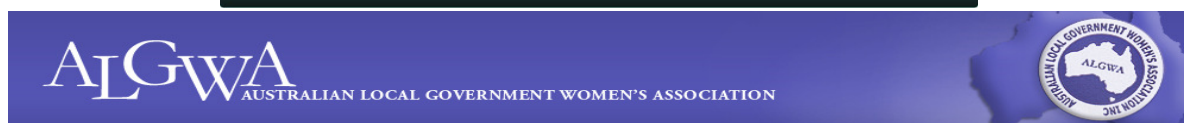
- Representing the diverse views of women in rural, regional and remote Australia.
- Providing advice to the Australian Government on policy issues relevant to the views and circumstances of rural women.
- Contributing to building a positive profile of rural women, their achievements and issues.

The core activities of the NRWC revolve around:

- Advocacy for women
- Influencing policy and decision-making
- Building capacity within women's organizations and for rural, remote and regional women
- Reflecting the diversity of the women's sector

Membership - Current members of the NRWC are the Australian Local Government Women's Association; Australian Women in Agriculture; Country Women's Association of Australia; National Rural Health Alliance; Women's Industry Network Seafood Community; two rural Aboriginal Women and one Independent Director. The content of this paper represents the collective views of rural, remote and regional women with whom we have consulted and does not necessarily represent the thoughts of Directors or member organisations. However, each member organisation reserves the right to independent policy on issues that directly relate to their areas of operation, or expertise, or any other issues that they might deem relevant.

The National Rural Women's Coalition has over 2700 social media supporters and is funded by the Australian Government - Office for Women.



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About this Response to Agricultural Competitiveness Issues Paper

This submission has been formulated from information gained from rural, remote and regional women during formal input (both face-to-face and survey) opportunities throughout 2013. The National Rural Women's Coalition believes it is important that the views of rural women who reside in the numerous rural, remote and regional communities throughout Australia have input into a consultation about their communities, industries, needs and issues. **Women in rural communities (especially women as farmers) pay a crucial role in Australian food production and must be part of any solution to future food security challenges and pressures.**

The thoughts and opinions which have informed this submission were gathered in the following manner.

2013 National Rural Women's Summit – The NRWC hosted a summit for rural, regional and remote women on 20th February 2013. Fifty-two women from rural, remote and regional areas, including Aboriginal women, those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, young women and women with disabilities came together to discuss current issues relevant to them which require attention at a national level. The fifty-two women came from all states and territories and there was an even distribution of age ranges. The results of the rich discussions from a wide range of backgrounds were captured in a document produced by the NRWC titled *"One Size Does Not Fit All"*. Whilst not all women at this event were primary producers, all were directly involved in the well-being of people who live in rural areas and support primary production.

2013 National Rural Women's Conference – Over 380 delegates attended the two day 2013 National Rural Women's Conference in Canberra in February 2013. Delegates were invited to define the issues and share ideas for action at the final session of conference. Ideas and thoughts gathered at the "Your Voice Counts" session have been harvested and included in this submission. The conference proceedings have been documented in the conference proceedings *"Setting the Agenda for Rural, Remote and Regional Women"*.

What Do Rural Women Want to Know? – At the end of 2013, the NRWC decided to seek feedback from rural, remote and regional women to ascertain what information topics are of interest to them with a view to using this information to inform planning for NRWC programs in 2014 and beyond. The findings of this survey research have been recorded in this discussion paper titled *What Do Rural Women Want To Know?*

This submission has been written in a manner which responds to the Agricultural Competitiveness Issues Paper, however direct quotes from rural women have been captured in this report. The italicised quotes add an authentic richness to the report as they vividly reflect and highlight key thoughts and opinions from the rural, remote and regional women.

1. Ensuring Food Security In Australia and Globally

“We need to change the dialogue around rurality and the NBN. If we say we don’t want it – we just want something, we are setting up future generations of farmers to be behind the 8 ball. Think about it. If you were a butter producer and the government was rolling out great technologies to make the process infinitely more productive, you wouldn’t accept nor want the government to roll out a whole lot of hand butter churners in rural areas would you? Whilst it can be frustrating in reference to service at the moment, is it smart or sustainable to merely put this frustration off to future generations? We have the opportunity to make better decisions re technology for the future”.

Food security is about distribution and availability of food for all. The NRWC welcomes programs and investments which target food security and the capacity building for producers of safe and nutritious food by ensuring Australian farming, fisheries and aquaculture industries are environmentally responsible, profitable and competitive.

The NRWC believe that there must to be shared understandings of food as a foundation for healthy lives, community economies and eco-systems.

Key Points

Competent use of Computer and Digital Communication Technologies

Research on the Impacts of Mining

Rural women figure prominently in the management of a primary production business, both sea and land based. They believe it is vital to have access to technology that is affordable and reliable and which will allow rural Australia to receive timely information which will inform operational aspects and marketing decisions of food and fibre production. *“Good internet access and mobile phone coverage is essential to allow rural women to work from home, develop their home based business and to allow the farm to market produce locally, nationally and internationally”.*

Using Computer and Digital Communication Technologies – It can be difficult to keep up with emerging communication technologies and ensuring that the communication is effective and best practice. Women engaged in food and fibre production would like to have access to training to enhance their digital communication skills in order to ensure their business operates at a best practise level. Rural women would like have more knowledge about using various computer programs e.g. Excel, Microsoft Word, Picture Manager etc to their full advantage. The ability to use emerging digital technologies such as tablets/iPad/iPhone/Kindle and to be able to link these devices was knowledge that is

required. Social media use can be effective and the need to be able to use applications like Twitter and Facebook for business was considered desirable. Women would like to develop confidence when using web conferencing as well as understanding what makes a powerful message when composing emails or blogging. Learning about cloud computing and knowing how to share and use files and applications over the internet was also considered worthwhile if we are to operate businesses which will ensure food security. It should be noted that this access is subject to women from rural and remote areas having affordable high speed internet access. Currently, many costly plans and existing speeds do not allow all rural women to utilise these technologies.

Impacts of Mining - Rural women consider mining (and in particular, CSG production) as being a threat to the production of food and fibre. Women believe mining is not only detrimental to prime agricultural land and marine environments, but also impacts negatively on local community employment (e.g. mining wages are more appealing; FIFO decreases the ability of smaller communities to function efficiently and places a greater burden on the permanent residents); the environmental issues of dust and noise are often not considered. Additionally, mining increases the 'wear and tear' on local roads, which subsequently impacts on primary producers as they go about their business. Rural women would like to see careful research done on the impacts of mining in our water and food bowls and would like mining production ceased until this research has been completed.

"The biggest issue facing rural Australia is mining / CSG especially in the food bowls. The health, environmental, social and economic impacts are huge".

Recommendations

Provide women engaged in food and fibre production with access to training to enhance their digital communication skills in order to ensure their business operates at a best practise level.

Undertake research on the impacts of mining in our water and food bowls.

2. Farm Decisions for Improving Farm Gate Returns

“Protect our water. Value our food. Value and invest in our land. Grow our people – education, training and health”.

Rural and remote women believe that a new type of cooperation is necessary amongst producers and consumers if we are to sustainably produce food and fibre and undertake business planning that will improve farm gate returns. A key challenge is the fact that farm viability is threatened by fluctuating and low prices for primary produce. *“Rural women want payment for their produce e.g. milk, beef, spuds etc at a rate which is sustainable. Not the price received ten years ago”.* Prices paid to farmers are impacted by the lack of competition in the supermarket sector, as well as inefficient farmer to market supply and distribution systems where the prices paid by the consumer bear little resemblance to the price paid to farmers.

Key Points

Food Education

Business Training - Business Budgeting and Financial Management

Business Training - Business Planning

Business Training - Navigating Government Regulations and Laws

Business Training - Marketing

Food Education - An education campaign is needed to educate Australian food and fibre consumers about farmers and the cost of produce. A “Food Price Watch” scheme could be set up in a similar manner to the fuel price watch. A shopping basket of ten items (e.g. milk, beef, lamb, lettuce, apples, bananas, celery etc) would be monitored with the daily prices paid at market; the price paid to farmers and the price paid at the supermarket being displayed. *“The consumer is our most important ally as there are millions of consumers in Australia, but only tens of thousands of farms”.* This style of campaign would also encourage consumers to purchase Australian manufactured products and fresh produce. Improved prices will lead to more viable production enterprises. Increased promotion should surround the purity of Australian grown produce and the fact that jobs are created as a result of buying local. Supermarkets should be encouraged to label and promote Australian grown goods and clearly state the percentage of imported contents in products.

Additionally, improved labelling of food origins would also assist to educate consumers. These measure would assist in improving farm gate returns.

<i>Item</i>	<i>Daily Market Price</i>	<i>Price to Farmers</i>	<i>Prices at supermarket</i>
Milk	28 cents litre	28c litre	\$1.00 litre plus

Bananas	\$15 / 10 kg	\$1.50 kg	\$4.99 / kg
Apples Pink Lady	\$20 for 10 kg crate	\$2 kg	\$6.99 kg
Lambs	\$70 head	\$3.50 / kg dressed	Chops \$28.99 kg Mince \$10.00 kg Shanks \$13.99 kg
Wheat	\$364 tonne FIS	36.4 cents / kg	Weeties \$4.70 / 450 grams
Beef	\$1.45 kg / live	\$3.00 kg dressed	Mince \$10 kg
Celery		69 cents / stick	\$2.98 / stick
Cos lettuce	38 cents / pack of 2	19c each	\$2.98 pack of two

Business Training - The NRWC recently (October 2013) surveyed rural women and asked them *what do you want to know about?* Sixty-three percent of women respondents indicated that they would like information / training which would assist them with running their business.

The top four topics (listed in priority order) which women wanted to know about were:

1. Business Budgeting and Financial Management
2. Business Planning
3. Navigating Government Regulations and Laws
4. Marketing

Business Budgeting and Financial Management – Overwhelmingly, rural women want to know more about the accounting, budgeting and streamlined financial management of running a small business, and in particular, agribusiness financial management. Keeping accurate records for good business management (e.g. with employees, invoicing, managing the books) was considered important as was the ability to read financial statements.

Business Planning – The establishment of and fine-tuning of business plans was considered an important skill by women. Rural women want to know how to plan, expand and grow successful businesses, establish a vision, determine their role within a business, cut down costs and prudently plan for a financially stable business.

Navigating Government Regulations and Laws – Knowledge of the relevant government regulations that provide an obligation on business operators is considered important by rural women. In particular, the laws relating to the Australian Tax Office and managing taxation matters; Workcover, workplace health and safety / occupational health and safety; superannuation, contracts and human resource regulations were considered important. Assistance with navigating the relevant government websites which contain this information was also valued. An understanding of navigating local government licensing and regulations was also needed. Finally, there was a clear demand for information relating to the preparation of a Business Activity Statement and lodging this online.

Marketing – The third most requested skill for running a small business related to marketing and advertising, and in particular, online marketing and direct marketing from the farm to the

consumer e.g. *selling steak, not cows* or marketing grain. Developing skills in using social media for public relations, to market and to engage and enhance rural activism was also seen as important.

If farm gate returns are to improve, good decisions needs to be made. As rural women are key partners in a primary production business, we need to ensure that women have the knowledge to grow their business in an innovative and profitable manner.

NRWC Recommendations

Establish a “Food Price Watch”

Offer agribusiness financial management training which includes business planning.
Ensure there is a currency of understanding with government regulations which impact
on rural businesses.

Support skill development in small business online and direct marketing

3. Enhancing Access to Finance

Rural women need to be viewed and treated as an equal partner in a farming business partnership and financial institutions should accept that they are a representative of a business enterprise.

4. Increasing the Competitiveness of the Agricultural Sector and its Value Chains

“We need to build a future for farming. More investment is needed in training for agriculture and horticulture”.

Key Points

Increased Investment in Research, Development, Training In The Rural Sector

Increased Connection Between Innovation and Research

Rural women are proud of the fact that the food produced in Australia is plentiful, healthy and nutritious. However, if primary production is to be viable and competitive, innovation on land and in the sea needs to be supported by research and development funding. Rural women would like to request that consideration be given to:

Increased Investment in Research, Development, Training in the Rural Sector – Investment in training, skill development and extension activities by government, private enterprise and industry groups needs to be more supportive of the rural sector in order to increase productivity and improve global competitiveness. Rural women consider that it is not enough to invest in research and development. Innovation needs to be supported at primary producer level with training, skill development and extension activities. *“To complete this cycle, extension activities should be followed up with testing and data capture by farmers to build the knowledge bank and demonstrated increased productivity”. “I’d like to see any new initiatives include a component for reporting back from farmers and formally sharing their experience when new methods or strains are introduced”.*

Increased Connection between Innovation and Research – Innovation and research is closely connected to economic and social benefits at local, national and international levels, and this connection needs to be understood, communicated and strengthened. Investment is

required if primary producers are to be more sustainable and productive. Rural women want more support for initiatives that increase productivity, in the form of investment in research and development and extension activities.

Rural women believe that farm would be more financially viable as a result of this development and training. *“The NFF estimates that 90 000 new people need to be employed to return to agriculture to pre-drought capacity and a further 15 000 a year to replace those leaving. This won’t happen unless more funding is available for traineeships and cadetships. Give proper support to agriculture so that farmers can afford trainees. This is our future. Let’s invest in it”.* Strong views are also expressed about the need to ensure younger workers are attracted and retained in agricultural production. *“Keep the kids on the farms. Offer then traineeships and cadetships. Have a farmer’s apprentice”.* If rural Australia is to retain your younger generations, priority should be given to high levels of communication (mobile phone / internet); health services; transport; access to ongoing education; sporting facilities and access to government services.

NRWC Recommendations

Support innovation needs at primary producer level with training, skill development and extension activities.

Create an environment to support for initiatives that increase productivity, in the form of investment in research, development and extension activities.

5. Enhancing Agriculture's Contribution to Regional Communities

"Rural Australia is more than agriculture. Whilst it is our economic underpinning, each region has a range of comparative advantages that need to be talked up and opportunities created. We need innovation, incubation, inspiration and networks".

Rural women believe that agriculture is one dynamic that contributes to regional communities. However, communities are much more than the agricultural input, and this needs to be considered. Rural women in all spheres of their personal and professional lives are vital to the social, economic and environmental sustainability and development of regional communities. In 2014, many rural communities are under strain as they face an ageing population, climatic variability, a loss of young people and the withdrawal of services.

Rural Australia is home to approximately 30% of our population – babies are born in isolated communities, children grow up in the wide open spaces, families work and play in their rural surrounds and residents grow old feeling a sense of connection to their small communities. However, this idyllic scenario is tempered by many challenges that are often only found in rural Australia. There is a need to connect and link people more actively into the lives of their communities – communities of people who are aligned to a geographical space e.g. Gippsland, Gascoyne etc; communities of people who have common interests e.g. Hazelnut growers, parents of isolated children; and communities of identity e.g. Aboriginal women, refugee women.

Key Points

A Desire to Build Community and Adaptive Capacity to Support Rural, Remote and Regional Communities

Equity of Access to and Cost of Services

Increased Economic Diversification

Need for Tax Incentives

Coordinated Living Community Plans

Families face many challenges, and rural women would like to see regional communities that embrace a wider vision which includes:

A Desire to Build Community and Adaptive Capacity to Support Rural, Remote and Regional Communities - Residents of rural, remote and regional Australia need funding assistance to proactively undertake community capacity building projects that will help support rural

communities and build adaptive capacity. These activities need to be based on developing skills and educating human capital, and in particular, rural women. *“Help action, not talk fests. We need to delete resilience from our vocabulary and talk action and transformation. This is what we need to do”.*

Equity of Access to and Cost of Services – Rural women want equity in the provision of services and they want to access services in a similar manner to that which their metropolitan counterparts enjoy. *“Childcare in rural areas is difficult. In x, there is little or no flexibility, making the viability of childcare centres very tenuous. This can be improved by providing flexible options and making it easier to deliver long day care, family day care. Childcare is fundamental in allowing rural women to work, boost the economy and stay in rural areas”.*

“The cost of services is higher in rural areas. I pay more for petrol, water and electricity”.

Increased Economic Diversification – In some regions, there is a contraction of employment, businesses and primary production. Climate change and market shifts also create challenges for primary producers. Once this contraction commences, the loss of a critical population mass and services often follows. Rural women believe that to be sustainable, economic diversification opportunities should be enabled. This could include the setting up of a funding pool to identify, establish and develop new regional food systems and economic value chains. This funding could be used to support training, research and facilitation and would encourage innovation. Industry bodies could be funded to investigate consumer needs. Research could be undertaken to offer food and fibre producers more profitable options that meet market demand and suit regional growing conditions. *“There is a sense of urgency – we need action items to get some deliverance on them”.*

Need for Tax Incentives - Zonal tax incentives were seen as a desirable enabler of both local and regional commercial and community growth, as it would attract much needed workers to rural areas, and would advantage business operators and primary producers. The economic benefits of zonal tax would ensure prosperous and growing regions. *“We need tax incentives for rural communities”.*

Coordinated Living Community Plans – Coordinated plans where people, communities and governments work together were seen as essential to achieving sustainable food and fibre production. People/communities/government would work together to develop realistic long term visions for the water and soil resources in an area e.g. local creek catchment or multi-state river basin. *“The environment is linked to producing good food”.* Whilst some of this work has already commenced in the Murray Darling Basin, it was considered appropriate to replicate this in other major river systems in Australia.

These plans would be expanded to include a national soil productivity map were the map would outline high priority soil assets for food production. Plans would also inform local government planning to protect productive land areas and water resources from urban development and mining. Community plans are to be built on the premise of joint management of country between government and landholders. *“We need a whole of community response that is consistent and coordinated across all areas”.* Rural women want these living community plans to be checked, reviewed and evaluated regularly once they are adopted.

Recommendations

Residents of rural, remote and regional Australia are funded to proactively undertake community capacity building projects.

Ensure equity in the provision of services and access to services.

Enable sustainable, economic diversification opportunities such as the setting up of a funding pool to identify, establish and develop new regional food systems and economic value chains.

Implement zonal tax incentives as a desirable enabler of both local and regional commercial and community growth.

Bring together people and communities to work with government to develop realistic long term visions for the water and soil resources in an area.

6. Improving the Competitiveness of Inputs to the Supply Chain

“The biggest threat facing rural Australia is mining / CSG in the food bowls”.

Rural women are passionate about the inputs of our natural resources i.e. the soil and water. They see these as the key inputs which need to be nurtured and taken care of if primary production is to be competitive in both the short term and long term. These are the foundation blocks and inputs of the supply chain.

Key Points

Sustainability of environmental resources e.g. soil and water

Sustainability of environmental resources e.g. soil and water - Rural women expressed strong views that sectors of the community *“undermine industry in the sustainability debate”*. More support should be shown to those who are producing food and fibre for Australians and the wider export market. The challenge centered around the tension between the right of landholders to use soil and water (including marine) resources to operate a sustainable and productive enterprise whilst working within the expectations of community and legislative requirements of governments who act on behalf of the interests of society.

Particular concern was expressed with mining activity happening in traditional food production areas. *“Rural communities are under threat from mining and CSG extraction”*. Other themes which relate to the sustainability of the natural resources include the social licence of producers to operate; climate change; food security and the ownership of natural resources by foreign owned investment interests. *“What is Australia going to do when we are no longer producing our own food? We produce the freshest, tastiest, healthiest food in the world. We need restrictions on import trade to protect our production and manufacturing industries. Then we will be in a healthy economy again; our health and educational and transport industries (road, rail, air) will be the best supported in the world and we’ll be the lucky country again”*.

Recommendations

Landholders are enabled to use soil and water (including marine) resources to operate a sustainable and productive enterprise whilst working within the expectations of community.

7. Reducing Ineffective Regulations

“Our voices seem to be not heard”.

Rural women would like to have the skills that would assist them to be able to support and advocate for causes that are important to them. Rural women want to know how to ‘talk the talk’ that will enable them to advocate for reducing ineffective regulations. They see this as being the key to having a voice and influencing the reduction of ineffective regulations. These skills are needed as the influence of advocacy groups who operate outside the realm of agriculture and food production increasingly impacts upon the operations of primary producers. These groups often have views that conflict with sustainable and profitable food and fibre production. The resulting regulations that are put in place are often detrimental to production and grower income.

Rural women have concerns that agriculture is an over-regulated industry and there is a perception that this regulation is bought about by the activity of urban based minority pressure groups who appear to make it more difficult for farmers to survive or indeed, prosper. The Australian farmer is the most efficient in the world and needs protection from inappropriate policy decisions if we are to remain competitive in the global market.

Key Points

Lobbying and Advocacy Skills
Using Social and Traditional Media
Working with Government
Engaging Others in The Cause
Funding Advocacy and Campaign Work

Lobbying and Advocacy Skills – Rural women want to know the basic and advanced skills of effective lobbying. This includes how to start an advocacy process; how to persuade, empower and enlist other people in the cause so they can be advocates; how to form an advocacy group; how to effectively understand an issue; the process to set up and present arguments in the public arena using effective public speaking skills; planning who to lobby; the need for different advocacy skills for positive engagement with different groups e.g. other groups, men’s groups, health departments, governments etc, how to be hard without harming the cause; how to deal with hostile activism and any legal ramifications of being involved in advocacy.

Using Social and Traditional Media – Rural women have a strong interest in knowing more about how to get messages across using both social and traditional media. Overwhelmingly, women wanted more information on how to effectively use social media to support advocacy work at both basic and advanced levels and how to plan effective messages for different audiences e.g. urban and get them heard by that audience.

Working with Government - Governments represent all people and lobbying is a legitimate part of the democratic process. Rural women would like to know more about effective political lobbying and advocacy and how to identify and work the correct communication pathways with all levels of government that will lead to effective change; how to develop connections and networks with government and politicians; understanding the political process; how to partner, affiliate and collaborate with other organizations when lobbying governments and how to get the message across without sounding extremist. Rural women would also like to hear from successful women lobbyists as to how they go about planning and executing advocacy work.

Engaging Others in The Cause – All effective advocacy campaigns have a range of supporters working with and for their cause. Rural women would like to know more about getting other members of their community and from outside their community on board with campaigning and in particular, convincing people that there is a need to work together to overcome a problem or challenge. In particular, rural women believe there are a unique set of circumstances present when lobbying for causes based in rural areas and the subsequent engagement of people who are isolated due to the tyranny of distance. The NRWC believe that there must be shared understandings of food as a foundation for healthy lives, community economies and eco-systems.

Funding Advocacy and Campaign Work – Any change campaign needs funding and rural women would like assistance in gathering ideas as to how to fund advocacy work, especially when it may potentially involve legal costs. This includes locating sources of funding, preparing submissions to access funding for advocacy and writing reports that will assist in gaining funding.

Recommendations

Support training to rural women in lobbying and using social/traditional media for messaging so their advocacy for reduced regulations can be best practice and effective.

8. Enhancing Agricultural Exports

A competitive food industry is an imperative for driving innovation and maintaining fair costs and prices.

It is vital that Australia is competitive in the global market against highly subsidised overseas primary food producers. In recent times, there have been many examples of local food and fibre processors who have missed out on contracts / have had to close due to the costs of production being too high to be competitive in a global economy. The rise and fall of the Australian dollar has also had a huge impact on returns to the producer.

A resilient food industry is one which remains competitive, vibrant and profitable over the long term, able to identify, respond and adapt to challenges strategically, including by responding to consumer concerns, by increasing production and embracing innovation.

9. Assessing the effectiveness of incentives for investment and job creation

The sale of land and the associated primary production enterprise to overseas interests often results in a loss of jobs to local communities as a result of economy-of-scale operations and foreign interests importing their own labour force. For example, in Western Australia, the purchase of land by overseas investors has seen the loss of 20 farming families in a small community. The impact of foreign ownership needs to be carefully assessed and restrictions put in place if there are indications that the Australian worker will face job losses.

Summary

In reinforcing the issues raised and the accompanying recommendations in this Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper, the National Rural Women's Coalition believes:

- Agriculture on land and in the sea underpins productivity growth by supporting innovations through education, technology, science and infrastructure research and development funding to support global competitiveness and productivity growth of the food supply chain.
- Meeting the challenges of the future, such as gearing up for climate change, reducing water use and waste streams and re-engineering food products to better meet population health needs, will require improved profitability within the industry.
- The NRWC supports increased funding of rural research and development to improve productivity through innovation in using our natural resources.
- **Women in rural communities (especially women as farmers) pay a crucial role in current global food production and must be part of any solution to future food security challenges and pressures.**

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