

Newsletter

February 2005

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Fletcher's vision for the bush

DUBBO businessman, Roger Fletcher, will kick start this year's Farm Writers' Association seminars with his challenge to politicians to reverse the decline in rural and regional Australia.

Mr Fletcher says the time has come for a united approach from farm and industry leaders across the bush to solve some of the real issues - such as our crumbling rail and road network - which were eroding the future of rural communities.

Mr Fletcher is an ex-drover who has built Fletcher International Exports over the past 30 years into Australia's largest sheep meat processor with plants in Dubbo, and Albany, in Western Australia.

He has created a meat empire which exports to more than 70 countries and he employs almost 700 people at the company's base in Dubbo.

Mr Fletcher chairs a number of industry boards and committees, but says he isn't into political games or bunfights, and has now become committed to driving some grass-roots solutions to some of the big issues which he believes are holding back progress west of the Great Divide.

"Our infrastructure is not keeping up with modern technology and our expectations of being a world player in agriculture," he said.

"The appalling condition of infrastructure and the high level of taxes paid in NSW are two of the biggest inhibitors to progress west of the Great Divide.

"If I don't tell people what's happening to them and we business leaders don't tell the government to make some changes, we are letting down the people of rural Australia."

In November last year Mr Fletcher co-ordinated a rural forum



in Dubbo to discuss some of these issues with the wider community and set up some working groups to tackle the problems.

He expected only a handful would attend, but the forum attracted more than 300 people from across NSW.

The common concerns were health and education services, road and rail infrastructure, taxes, agricultural research and natural resource legislation. Nearly all present registered for a range of special committees established that night, with the first committees meeting earlier this month.

Mr Fletcher is determined to keep the momentum moving on that first Dubbo meeting, and is keen to engage more community leaders to help force this change.

■ **To book your place at the first seminar for 2005 go to our website: www.nswfarmwriters.org/BOOKINGS.htm.**

Register early and on-line for our Friday, February 18, for the first luncheon for 2005 with Dubbo businessman, Roger Fletcher.

Corporate 'Members of the Month': Landmark - an AWB Company, and Meat and Livestock Australia.

Venue: THE MENZIES HOTEL, 14 Carrington Street, Sydney.

When: 12 noon for 12.30pm, Friday, February 18.

Cost: \$55 a head, or voucher for members. \$65 a head for all non-members.

Register: On-line BEFORE 5pm, WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 16, at www.nswfarmwriters.org or through Australian Honey Bee Industry Council's Laurel Pickering, ahbic@honeybee.org.au, phone (02) 9221 0911 or fax (02) 9221 0922.

Late cancellations: Phone Fiona Dewar, (02) 8204 3856, or Jamie Graham, 0418 479 434.



■ Trudy Glasgow and Brett Fifield (NSW Department of Primary Industries Public Affairs).



■ Dougal Hunter (ASX), Carmen Scolari (*The Weekly Times*) and Rob Kelly (Coopers Animal Health).



■ Sally Bull and Jonathon Hewitt (Rabobank).

Farm Writers' festivities



■ NSW Minister for Primary Industries, Ian Macdonald.



■ Rosemary Walcott (MLA), Charles Saldanha (*The Weekly Times*) and Carolyn Martin (MLA).



■ Torie Hall and Matt De La Hunty (*Rural Press*) and Merrill Atlas (*Friday magazine*).

The NSW FarmWriters Association celebrated a successful 2004 with its annual Christmas party at Parliament House.

The party was hosted by Farm Writers patron, Minister for Primary Industries, Ian Macdonald, who was also the final guest speaker for 2004.

The huge Christmas party crowd were given an overview of some of the challenges and issues faced by farmers and agricultural communities during the past 12 months, and how the DPI was involved in assisting farmers.

The battle to fight locusts was top of the Minister's address, in which he praised farmers for their vigilance in helping control the biggest locust plague seen in NSW for 30 years.

He said Authorities have controlled about 1 million hectares of locust bands and swarms so far, and Mr Macdonald said the department estimates that for

every one dollar spent, the benefit to agricultural production was about \$30.

Mr Macdonald said locusts could still be a major threat until Easter this year, and control efforts would continue for "as long as necessary" until the threat to crops and pasture was removed.

The annual Farm Writers' Association Christmas party has always attracted a large number of guests, and this year was no exception.

Corporate members were overwhelmingly generous with gifts and lucky door prizes, which helped add to the festive spirit at Parliament House.

The NSW Farmwriters' Association would like to thank Mr Macdonald for hosting another enjoyable end of year function.

■ Thanks to our corporate sponsors for the month of December, Dupont Australia, Horticulture Australia and Renard.