



Newsletter

July 2006

President: Bev Jordan (bevjordan@msn.com.au)

Secretary: Susan Madden (smadden@hassall.com.au)

Newsletter: Camilla Hunter (camilla.hunter@solutionsgroup.com.au)

Farm Writers' Association of NSW Inc. GPO Box 1108 Sydney NSW 2001
Internet: www.nswfarmwriters.org

Tackling farming's emotional toll

In Australia, approximately one male farmer dies from suicide every four days. Depression is a high risk factor for suicide," says the Hon Jeff Kennett AC, Chair of *beyondblue*: the national depression initiative, and the speaker at Farm Writers' next event on Wednesday, 2 August.

The message that Mr Kennett will be stressing needs to get out to the country is "that it [depression] is an illness, not a weakness and men shouldn't be ashamed to ask for help".

Research indicates depression rates are the same in both rural and metropolitan communities, but suicide rates are much higher in rural areas – particularly among men. *beyondblue*-funded research shows farmers often have a poor understanding of mental health and are reluctant to access formal health care. No surprise then that, in tight-knit rural communities, where everyone knows each other and where local health services are scarce and hard to access, country people are less likely to seek help for depression than people who live in

metropolitan areas – with tragic results.

As founding Chair of *beyondblue*, Mr Kennett is well placed to shine a spotlight on these issues. Since 2001 he has led *beyondblue*'s efforts to raise awareness of depression and reduce the stigma associated with the disease. At a Drought Summit in NSW in 2005, he helped draw out the lasting emotional impacts of the severe, lingering drought of recent years by encouraging farmers to speak openly about the associated stresses. Yet whilst the drought may have highlighted the difficulties with current mental health conditions and services in rural NSW, when its effects dissipate there is a range of other stresses that threaten farm families' mental health.

Join our corporate members of the month, Jocellin Jansson & Associates and McGrath Nicol & Partners, to hear the former Victorian Premier (1992-1999) outline the problem and the contributions that *beyondblue* is making to address these issues.



Hon Jeff Kennett AC, Chair of beyondblue: the national depression initiative.

Mr Kennett will also give an early indication of the response to the campaign, launched this month, to raise awareness in rural areas of the *beyondblue* information line.

To book go to our website: www.nswfarmwriters.org/BOOKINGS.htm

Farm Writers 40th Anniversary Celebrations

Join the NSW Farm Writers' Association to celebrate our 40th Anniversary on Friday 29 September with Rural Press Chairman Mr JB Fairfax AM who will aptly address "The future of rural and regional media".

Register early and on-line for Wednesday, 2 August luncheon with the Hon Jeff Kennett AC

Corporate Members of the Month: Jocellin Jansson & Associates and McGrath Nicol & Partners

Venue: The MENZIES HOTEL, 14 Carrington Street, Sydney. **When:** Wednesday 2 August at 12pm for 12:30pm

Cost: \$60 per head, or voucher, for members. \$70 per head for all non-members.

Register: **BEFORE 5:00pm on Monday 31 July**, on-line at <http://www.nswfarmwriters.org> or by emailing bookings@nswfarmwriters.org or by phone to Sarah Robson, (02) 8204 3730.

Reminder: **If bookings are not cancelled by the deadline the Association incurs a charge, for which the person making the booking will be invoiced. We will do our best to accommodate late bookings and cancellations – please phone Sarah Robson on (02) 8204 3730.**

Website sponsored by Telstra Country Wide NSW

Sparking the biofuels debate

Contributed by Sally Edgar, OneProfile Communications

Despite recent hype about a biofuels and energy crop boom in Australia, market and production barriers need to be overcome before ethanol and biodiesel become mainstream fuel options.

This was the message biofuels expert Dr John Keniry, member of the Federal Government's 2005 Biofuels Taskforce and chairman of Ridley Corporation, delivered to a packed house at the June Farm Writers' lunch in Sydney.

Dr Keniry said while Government mandates and financial incentives had driven and sustained biofuel growth since the 1970s in the US and the 1990s in Europe, Australia's free market policies were stifling growth here.

"Volumes are not mandated in Australia and this is a key barrier to biofuel growth here, where the big oil companies are not interested in renewable fuels," Dr Keniry said.

And from 2011 domestically produced ethanol will have to compete on equal terms with imports from countries such as Brazil, which makes 20-25 per cent of its own ethanol from its sugar crops.

"The reduction of subsidies and excise concessions for ethanol and biodiesel will be positive disincentives for further investment in domestic production of these renewable fuels," Dr Keniry said.

Australia has been a slow starter on the global biofuel stage. Dr Keniry said current use was 0.1 per cent of the nation's fuel needs, with present sales representing about 30 per cent of total installed capacity of 200 megalitres of ethanol and 100ML of biodiesel.

Whereas the US was on a mission to "replace 75 per cent of its oil imports from the Middle East by 2025" and its Renewable Fuels Standard (2005) requires 7.8 billion gallons or 29.5 billion litres of renewable fuels produced per annum by 2012.

In Europe, the target for biofuels, mainly biodiesel, is to be 5.75 per cent of the energy content of all transport petrol and diesel by 2010.

On the upside, growth in the Australian biofuels industry could produce an 'energy crop' boom for Australia's sugar, cereal grain and oilseeds growers.



Dr John Keniry, Chairman Ridley Corporation with Tony Eyres, CEO Grain Growers Association

But there's argument that this would pressure the intensive livestock industry's feed needs, to which Dr Keniry said the two industries would need to find some common ground.

It was no surprise Dr Keniry's 'Biofuels – the Great Debate' speech (view at www.nswfarmwriters.org) drew a big Farm Writers' crowd.

Industry and media interest in biofuels has been growing due to escalating petrol prices, and the Federal Government last year encouraged the major oil companies to help meet a national 350ML/year biofuel target by 2010. More recently, the excise benefit of 38.4c/l for off-road and heavy transport use of biodiesel was controversially removed from 1 July 2006 by the Federal Fuel Tax Bill that was passed last month.

Dr Keniry said despite environmental and self-sufficiency benefits associated with biofuels, the production expenses, myriad of cost-benefit assumptions and the Government's soft-handed approach have dampened local expectations.

*Thankyou to Corporate Members of the Month:
Grain Growers Association and Shute Bell Badgery Lumby.*

Note: Sally Edgar has recently joined the NSW Farm Writers' Association Committee and will help publish the monthly newsletter.