



Newsletter

June 2004

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More than a grain of truth ...

No major grain crop depends more on water than rice. Heck, you even need litres of water to cook the stuff!

So, when water runs short, rice growers and their industry really feel the pressure (or lack thereof).

There are also many trenchant critics of rice farming who, even in good times, argue Australia is no place for what they describe as profligate water consumption by a crop which is inherently alien to our dry climate.

So, just how have rice farmers coped ... and how are they continuing to cope ... with the stresses of reduced water allocations as the drought bites ever harder in major rice growing districts in south eastern Australia?

And how do rice farmers argue their case for continued access to large quantities of Australia's most precious commodity?

At our upcoming luncheon seminar on Friday 25 June, the Chairman of SunRice, Gerry Lawson, will explain the key strategies which the industry and its participants have been adopting to make do with limited resources. He will also, no doubt, put his industry's case for equitable water rights into the future.

On top of that, Gerry Lawson will show how rice is going into overdrive to promote itself as a premium food commodity in this, the 'Year of Rice'.

And, even better, we will all get to sample rice, as the industry believes it should be prepared and presented, during the meal as we listen to what Gerry has to tell us.

SunRice, wholly owned by more than 2000 farmers, is one of Australia's most successful vertically integrated



Hear SunRice Chairman, Gerry Lawson, mix rice and water on Friday 25 June

agribusinesses, producing and marketing an extensive range of table rice and value-added rice food products.

Over recent years, SunRice has transformed from a commercial grain handler into Australia's largest exporter of branded food products.

Gerry Lawson is a Mayrung rice grower who has chaired SunRice since 2001. He has been a member of the Board since 1985. Over this period, SunRice has grown from a \$240 million in business in 1985 to an \$800 million business today.

Gerry is also Chairman of Riviana, a subsidiary company of SunRice. Since SunRice's acquisition eleven years ago Riviana has grown from a \$20 million business to a \$90 million business.

Register early and on-line for Friday 25 June's luncheon seminar with Gerry Lawson

Corporate 'Members of the Month': Rabobank and Anvil Media Pty Ltd

Venue: The **ALL SEASONS PREMIER MENZIES HOTEL** 14 Carrington Street, Sydney.

When: 12:00 noon for 12:30pm: Friday, 25 June

Cost: \$55 per head, or voucher

Register: On-line before 5:00pm, Tuesday 22 June 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 (phone: 02 8204 3856) or Jamie Graham (0418 479 434)

Economy in bed with environment

Sustaining the economy and the environment are not mutually exclusive. That was one of the main messages from our guest speaker at the April 30 luncheon meeting, NSW Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources Minister, Craig Knowles.

Mr Knowles spoke to an audience of more than 80, including some irrigators from north-western NSW keen to get information on the state of play in water policy straight from the horse's mouth.

Since that meeting an amended water bill has gone before NSW Parliament to bring about some of the sweeping reforms Mr Knowles has initiated in water management.

Among other things the Bill provides for water licences in perpetuity for NSW irrigators instead of the current 15 years.

Mr Knowles said a sustainable economy and a sustainable environment were "joined at the hip" and could not be

logically or obviously separated.

He dismissed as "nonsense" claims by some environmental groups that giving irrigators licences in perpetuity was in some way handling a public asset to private owners.

He said water would be allocated according to the water sharing rules applying to each river valley.

One new measure was that water sharing plans could roll over after their 10 year life span there were no environmental problems. The



Craig Knowles: sustainable economy and environment "joined at the hip"

old legislation required mandatory review every 10 years.

In addition, assessment of plans would have to take account of the social and economic as well as the environmental impacts of the plans — something that had not been in previous legislation, Mr Knowles pointed out.

The Minister sought to downplay a proposal he floated in March that the government could take up to 10pc of irrigators' water entitlements without compensation in the 10 year life of a water sharing plan if there was evidence the environment needed more water.

He said he had floated it as a "discussion point" to tease out reactions to the complex issue of who bore the risk when there was a perceived need to provide more water for environmental uses.

Budget Breakfast

This year's Federal budget was designed to support rural and regional communities in developing self-reliance, meeting challenges confidently, securing opportunities, and continuing the develop and prosper sustainably.

This was how Federal Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Minister, Warren Truss, described it at our budget breakfast on May 12.

Mr Truss offered figures to show an improving situation for agriculture. He said forecasters estimated the gross value of farm production in 2003-04 at \$36.1 billion compared with \$31.8b in 2002-03, but put the net value of farm production at \$6.3b, more than double the 2002-03 figure.



Funding for agriculture in the budget included more than \$280 million on the Agriculture Advancing Australia program that helps producers improve their business and risk management skills, to take Coalition spending on Triple-A programs to more than \$1 billion.

There was \$134.9m for the Farm Help - Supporting Families Through Change program and a further \$66.7m for FarmBis, through which about 150,000 primary producers have participated in subsidised training and education.

Mr Truss said the budget also included \$4.7m for a new pilot Industry Partnerships program where the Government would team up with targeted industries to develop trading products and support trade missions and industry workshops. He said the government, which had already spent more than \$432m on drought assistance expected to spend more than \$1 billion by the time the drought was over.

Continued support for Landcare to the tune of \$159.5m to cover it till 2007-08 was another feature, and represented a two year extension on previous commitments.

Also in the natural resource area, the budget had committed \$42.7m over five years to extend the Great Artesian Basin sustainability initiative and \$86.5m over four years to the Murray Darling Basin Commission to fund capital works, administration and education.

Mr Truss said it had been a "mammoth" year for agriculture, with the government pushing hard in multinational trade negotiations for freer international trade.

It expected its bilateral free trade arrangements with Thailand and the United States to provide new trade opportunities for a wide range of agricultural industries.

Grilling for new NSW Farmers CEO

Don't miss the special NSW Farm Writers' luncheon seminar on Friday 30 July when the recently appointed CEO of NSW Farmers' Association, Dr Ray Johnson, outlines what he sees as the future for the organisation and is then interviewed about some of the more contentious issues facing him and the farmers of NSW.