7 billion mouths to feed: Australian farmers play leading role

With the world population expected to reach seven billion people on Monday, the National Farmers’ Federation (NFF) has backed calls for Australian agricultural know-how to play a leading role in curbing the world food crisis.

Speaking following an address by the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry today on the National Food Plan and ahead of tomorrow’s CHOGM where food security is expected to be a major topic, NFF President Jock Laurie said the experience of Australian agriculture in dealing with challenges such as drought and water scarcity could form a vital part of the combined Government response.

“Australian farmers are world leaders when it comes to productivity, production and efficiency and this means Australian knowledge and expertise is in demand in other countries, particularly developing nations,” Mr Laurie said.

“A World Vision report released earlier this week shows that Australia could play a vital role in helping to curb the global food crisis by sharing our expertise in arid farming techniques.

“But at the same time, there are also many challenges for our farmers to face closer to home. We know that global demand for food is expected to rise by 70 percent in just 40 years, yet domestic production is not keeping pace.

“We welcome the announcement today by Minister Ludwig that the National Food Plan will be developed as a green/white paper that looks at the short, medium and long-term requirements, as there are many issues that need to be tackled.

“Of particular concern for us is the lack of a long-term perspective on competing land uses, like mining and coal seam gas developments, that may reduce the amount of arable land available for agriculture. There is also an urgent need for increased investment in agricultural research and development to help our farmers increase production.

“The Food Plan also needs to provide assurances that any potential impact on food production is explicitly taken into account in the development of policies across all Government portfolios.

“Of course, while food production is of paramount importance, these issues do not just affect our food farmers, but also the fibre sectors, like our cotton and wool producers. This is one of the reasons why the agricultural industry is developing the Blueprint for Australian Agriculture, which will take a more holistic approach to the major issues affecting all Australian farmers,” Mr Laurie said.

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