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Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Resources
Canberra ACT 2600

Re: Adapting Farm Enterprises to Climate Change

Dear Committee Members

The biggest challenge facing Australian farmers today is change whether it be volatile commodity prices, climate variability/change or the credit crises. Government can play an important roll in assisting primary producers in managing the change process. The severity and the duration of the current drought has provided an insight, on how to assist farmers through the change process. Over the last seven years we have worked extensively with primary producers who have struggled financially due to the severity of the drought. The vast majority of these producers have been in a state of grief and despair and this has had a significant negative impact on their state of mind in making sound business decisions about their farm enterprises. Primary producers who are struggling to adjust to the extremes of weather conditions need professional assistance on farm. The vast majority of producers don't have time to leave their farms and attend elaborate training courses, they need assistance on farm, as every farm is different with the financial position, condition of natural resources such as soil, water, pests etc.

The Exceptional Circumstances program which is funded by the Federal Government is available to primary producers in drought declared districts. The one initiative from the EC program which has made an actual difference in bringing about change is the Professional Advice and Planning Grant, this Grant provides primary producers in drought declared districts with a voucher to receive professional advice. The criteria for accessing this Grant is quite strict, in that producers must engage professional advice to have an objective drought management plan completed for their farm enterprise. These drought management plans involve working through a step by step process with the farmer and involving the farming family as much as possible. There is a level of empathy conveyed to the farming family in the early stages to build a sound working rapport with the farming family. However, the goal is to produce an objective business plan which will set the future direction for the farming family and the enterprise. The Professional Advice and Planning Grant has only been available for eighteen months and the vast majority of producers are not aware of this program, this program is due to close on the 15th June 2009.

Primary producers need professional advice on farm which brings about change in a cooperative manner for the future well being of the farming family, the enterprise and the natural resources.

Yours Faithfully



Rural Management Consultants