

# Herald Sun

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HD Farmers' message is that **China** is good for all of us  
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WE all hate being told what is good for us — stop smoking, stop speeding, stop voting for Clive Palmer.

Yet, rarely do we have to be convinced to get behind something that is going to put dollars in our pockets and create jobs for our children.

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But that is the case now, with Australia's farmers launching a social media campaign next Monday to build support for Australia to sign a free trade agreement with **China**.

We are in intense negotiations with **China** at the moment, with an end-of-year deadline set by Prime Minister Tony Abbott only days after he took office.

The benefits of a deal with **China** are enormous. And not just for farmers. We only have to look at New Zealand to see the impact of a trade deal with **China**. The Kiwis struck a deal in 2008. At the time it was exporting less than \$500 **million** worth of **dairy** products to **China** each year.

Now, with import barriers slashed, New Zealand exports \$4.5 **billion** of **dairy** annually to **China**.

And that is before the real growth in the **Chinese** middle class, which is yet to come, that will really drive exports of products such as **dairy**.

The Victorian Farmers Federations says the **China** trade deal is worth an extra \$400,000 for each New Zealand farm.

No wonder New Zealand is called the Saudi Arabia of **milk**.

Meanwhile, Australia's **milk** production has declined over the past decade. That is a disaster for Victoria, the biggest **dairy** state in the country.

Currently, more than 60 per cent of our **dairy** products are exported, generating \$13 **billion** and creating 43,000 jobs, according to the industry.

Imagine if our exports took off like the Kiwis' have. The explosion in transport, processing, services, manufacturing and administration would be spread from Cohuna to Collins St.

And it is not just **dairy**. Sheep, wool, grains and horticulture would all benefit if barriers to trading with **China** are cut.

So, if it is obvious we stand to benefit from a **China** deal, why do farmers have to convince the rest of us that this is the case?

The answer is in the trade deal signed with Japan earlier this year. **Dairy** was very disappointed with that outcome, with only a slight tariff cut for our exports.

The Government, in turn, blamed **dairy** for not getting its act together and sending mixed messages during those negotiations.

The **dairy** industry now realises it must get the public on **board**, to make sure the message gets to the politicians that they can't afford to stuff up the **China** deal.

So on Monday they are launching the #FTA4dairy and #FTA4farmers campaign in an attempt to swamp social media with the message a **China** trade deal is good for all Australians.

It is ironic that although the campaign has been planned for some time — hindered by the usual inability to co-ordinate all arms of agriculture — it comes at a critical time in the **Chinese** trade negotiations.

First, there was the disgraceful rant of self-centred Palmer United Party leader Clive Palmer against **China**, aided by his uninspiring Tasmanian colleague, Jacqui Lambie.

Palmer has **sold** himself as the friend of rural Australia, but the words of those two plodders could cause untold damage to the future incomes of Australian farmers.

His grovelling apology on Tuesday looked like too little too late. Second, there are rumblings from Canberra that negotiators may have to give more ground on agriculture to **China** than farmers will accept.

It is clear Australia must secure a deal with **China** to benefit all of us. We shouldn't need a hashtag to convince anyone of that. ED GANNON IS EDITOR OF THE WEEKLY TIMES

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