**FIA2 Speech**

Did you know that the people who put food on **your** plate are 94% more likely to commit suicide than the rest of the Australian population? Australian farmers are vastly undervalued by society and are being cruelly exploited at the mercy of large supermarket conglomerates. Due to current market conditions and non-existent protection laws, many farmers are feeling the so-called ‘pinch’ as a ‘slap to the face’, as all of their costs have exploded substantially within the last decade and furthermore, the last 3 years, while getting paid **even less** for a crop that is expected to be unrealistically perfect. Good morning, I’m **(PERSONAL INFORMATION)** and today I will inform you of the current predicament faced by our irreplaceable Australian farmers.

Just like every other industry in Australia, there have been soaring costs of **certain** supplies and resources, but Australian farmers have it even harder, not only have **all** their base costs (Fuel, fertiliser, wages, transport, etc) significantly increased, many farms are severely suffering from a lack of seasonal workers to be able to actually pick and package their produce. While the prices for fresh goods are constantly increasing for consumers, farmers are being paid the same as they were **15 years ago**, while the large greedy supermarket conglomerates (Coles & Woolworths) are recording record profits. An article published by the ABC states that Coles and Woollies made 643 and 907 million dollars in profits alone last year during a time of record inflation and cost of living crisis (RBA, 2023). This in turn leaves many farmers being barely profitable or most incurring themselves a debt just to package a crop for market. *No seriously.* It is common practice in many industries to dump perfectly fine produce; the simple fact being it costs them less to ‘drop it on the ground’ than to send it to market where they get nothing for it. *How is this acceptable?* Coles and Woolworths hold a duopoly over the fresh food sector, being able to pay farmers quite literally ‘Whatever they want’. I know personally, that you and I wouldn’t work if our boss could pay us as little as they wished to. There currently exist no actual laws to protect farmers from these greedy capitalist pigs whose only goal is billions in profit. We get minimum wages, so why don’t the people who feed us have one too?

Meanwhile, a vast majority of Australians are struggling to make ends meet, and buying fresh, healthy produce is often a tedious task as it is often out of stock or disproportionately price gouged so that only the greedy pigs at the top are really eating. *So, what if I told you that Australia is one of the most wasteful countries in the world*. Take for example the banana industry, farmers throw away as much as 40%, yes **40%,** that’s **almost half** of their entire crop before it even makes it out of the farm (War on Waste, 2017).Considering Australians eat 5 million bananas **every day**, that’s equivalent to over **half a billion** perfectlyedible bananas wasted every year! This mind-boggling amount of perfectly edible fresh produce is simply wasted because it doesn’t meet retailer’s perfectionist standards. This issue came as a major shock to many Aussies as it was at the forefront of Craig Reucassel’s award-winning documentary *War on Waste*, in which the first episode highlighted how tons of bananas were being thrown away each week for being, ‘too long, or to bent’. This occurrence isn’t limited to just banana farmers, other farming industries such as the Avocado industry threw away 200 tons of perfectly edible avocados last May alone due to having slight marks on the skin (News.com, 2022). *How is this acceptable?* We are being played to the mercy of greedy supermarkets while the rest of us stand idle, getting our empty pockets bled dry.

These ruthless conditions for our farmers have led to a mass exodus of the industry entirely with the farmers left facing the worst mental health pandemic in the country’s history. An ABC report from 2019 states that we have lost over 16,000 dairy farms in the last 40 years. **This is utterly atrocious**. That’s more than 1 farm farming closing **every single day** for the last **40 years straight**. That is thousands of livelihoods and jobs unnecessarily destroyed. Despite Australian farmers being among the most resilient group of people in the world, the Government Health website reports that the farmer suicide highest rate is one of the **highest** in the country, with farmers being **94% more likely** to take their own life than the average Australian. The aforementioned problems are a serious issue, they are taking the lives of the men and women who put food on our plates. Remember that you need a lawyer, builder, or policeman once in your life, but **at least** three times a day you need a farmer.

So, how can we fix this? The best solution to this catastrophic issue will be to push your elected officials into supporting laws that give farmers a ‘minimum wage’ for their produce. *But why do farmers need special treatment in order to make a profit?* With 99% of farms being family owned in Australia, you are supporting small and rural communities grow, not the pockets of some multi-millionaire CEO (Farmers.org, 2018). While pushing for protection laws will be a gigantic task, it is up to **you** as a consumer to support our farmers where possible. You can start by avoiding imported produce and supporting roadside stalls where the funds go straight to the farmer, and not to a billion-dollar conglomerate. It has been a pleasure to speak with you all today, and please remember that you need a lawyer, builder, and policeman once in your life, but at least three times a day you need a farmer.

Thank you.

WORDS: 975

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