

NATIONAL AGRICULTURE DAY

Statement

HON COLIN de GRUSSA (Agricultural) [6.25 pm]: I rise to make a brief statement on National Agriculture Day, which is today. It is the day on which we have the opportunity to celebrate everything the agricultural industry around the nation, and particularly in this state, does for all of us and to #thankafarmer. What I will not do this evening is rattle off a bunch of statistics about agriculture. I do not think that is the essence of National Agriculture Day. Today is about remembering what we can do to help our farmers and what our farmers do.

Hon Darren West: Preselect one then.

Hon COLIN de GRUSSA: They did preselect a farmer, Hon Darren West.

Hon Darren West: You are not a farmer.

Hon COLIN de GRUSSA: I was indeed a farmer when I was preselected. Hon Darren West can have that argument. The honourable member keeps pointing out, or trying to point out, that he is the only farmer in the Parliament. If that were the case, then according to —

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! It is difficult to hear the member when other people are talking over him.

Hon COLIN de GRUSSA: I presume the honourable member is earning 75 per cent of his income from agriculture as required under Australian Taxation Office rules. But I digress.

Today is a day we celebrate agriculture. I have banged on about this in this place a number of times. One thing I have talked about before is that the consumer needs to have confidence in the food system—in the production of food right around Australia. People need to be confident that the products that they get are of high quality, which they are, and that they are produced in the best possible way, which they are. However, there have been some examples this year of terrible acts perpetrated against the agricultural industry, one of which in particular attracted a lot of media attention—that, of course, was the incident of needles in strawberries. That heinous crime did a huge amount of damage to the industry right across the nation, and although it was largely perpetrated in Queensland, the effect was felt in Western Australia and farmers were forced to dump their strawberries.

The egg industry is also struggling at the moment. Imported eggs are coming into Western Australian supermarkets because egg farmers in this state cannot agree to drop prices for Coles and Woolworths because grain prices have gone up due to the drought. We are now forced to endure imported eggs, although enough eggs are produced in this state to meet all of WA's requirements.

What can we do? We can make sure that next time we go shopping, we grab a piece of local pork from our local butcher and put that on our forks, and do not forget to buy locally grown Western Australian vegetables and dairy, including cream to go with those lovely strawberries that we can eat after. The awful reality of the drought in the east has indeed brought agriculture to the fore, but it is unfortunate that this industry is still portrayed only in times of crisis and that we do not see the good things that agriculture does.

I have talked about confidence in the system, but I want to talk more about the importance of agriculture itself working hard to unite and change its image. Years ago I was fortunate to win a Nuffield scholarship, which gave me an opportunity to go around the world to look at what was happening in agriculture in other parts of the world. I was particularly interested in how the industry can connect with the consumer, because we all know that there are interest groups out there endlessly bombarding the population with information or fake news, as some people would call it, about agriculture and what it does. We need to ensure that consumers get the right information, and this requires the industry uniting and finding a way to work together like it has never done before. It is not a new problem, but one that is increasingly more challenging for the industry to deal with. This year, of course, we have seen examples of issues that have really brought that to the fore, and I am sure the industry knows that it needs to work very hard to inform consumers a bit more.

Last week, I was very excited when a good friend and another Nuffield Australia Farming scholar, Ben Forsyth of Three Rivers Station, posted a news article, which was written by Andrew Norris on 15 November in *The Land*, on one of those wonderful social media sites. The New South Wales government has just adopted a mandatory agriculture component in its school curriculum as of next year. Depending on the resources of individual schools, primary and high schools will teach more about agriculture and food technology, which are incredibly important things for all students to learn to understand where their food comes from and how it is produced. It is only through education that we can teach our young people and future employees of agriculture and the city dwellers of the future about this industry, and other industries, too, I might add. It is only through education that we can combat the scourge of fake news, if you like. People will understand better when what they are reading is right. There is a huge amount of wrong information about agriculture and it is important that we do all we can to make those

changes to educate our young people. I implore all members to think about how we can work to find a way to improve student engagement with agriculture.

The British National Farmers Union has a mantra in its communications department that is used in everything it does when it talks about agriculture, and it is certainly something that I would like to use as much as I can. That mantra is about being relentlessly positive. It is incredibly important that we talk about this industry in a positive light. Instead of images of dead and dying animals, we need to talk about the exciting things that are happening in agriculture, how much opportunity there is for young people to engage in this wonderful industry and what a bright future it has. On agriculture day, I thank our farmers and all those working in agriculture-related industries for what they do and I look forward to continuing to champion agriculture in this place. I will leave with a quote from Norman Borlaug, the father of modern agriculture and the green revolution, who said —

When the Nobel Peace Prize Committee designated me the recipient of the 1970 award for my contribution to the ‘green revolution,’ they were in effect, I believe, selecting an individual to symbolize the vital role of agriculture and food production in a world that is hungry, for both bread and for peace.

Statement

HON RICK MAZZA (Agricultural) [6.32 pm]: I rise this evening to also acknowledge National Agriculture Day, the second year of such a day, with the theme #GrowForFood. According to the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences, the agriculture industry accounts for about 58 per cent of Australia’s land use, with gross farm production being more than \$63 billion in the 2016–17 year. From a WA perspective, a *Countryman* article from 15 November entitled “Agriculture in national day spotlight” details how more than 40 per cent of the state’s land area is used for agriculture. The gross value of WA production in 2016–17 was \$9 billion or around 15 per cent of the national total value. Our highest sector is the grains industry, with wheat production worth \$2.4 billion, canola production worth \$1.2 billion and barley production worth \$860 million. These combined commodities contribute to about 50 per cent of the total worth of agriculture in the Western Australian economy. Nationally, Australia grows 93 per cent of its food and exports two-thirds of our produce.

Farmers are resilient people. They get up early in the morning, tend to their livestock and earn their living off the land, as many of them have done for many generations. As a member of the Agricultural Region, they have my full support. However, the industry in which they earn a living is unfortunately beset with a multitude of challenges. Increasingly, Australian farmers are battling not only things such as the impacts of drought or commodity prices, but also hostile political conditions that surround the industry itself. Activism from special interest groups that are determined to either shut down or impair the agriculture industry cannot help but hurt farmer morale and make them concerned about the future. Certain talking points can create a false perception of the work our tireless farmers and their employees do within the agriculture industry and it is often emboldened by governments that do not always focus on the many positive aspects of the industry as a whole. We certainly need to be aware of that.

Today there was an online article in *The Land*, the title of which reads “National Ag Day—Why agriculture must get on top of animal welfare”. It is pretty interesting to note that the article states —

FARMERS must get on top of managing perceptions about animal welfare or face the real danger of losing key markets and destroying economic viability of livestock businesses.

Charles Olsson ... made the ... observation at the Rural Press Club in Brisbane on Wednesday, saying that animal cruelty—real or perceived—was a death sentence for any brand or organisation in the world of social consumerism.

“Animal rights organisations have huge marketing budgets and they’re not afraid to use them,” Mr Olsson told the National Ag Day gathering.

“The fund raising revenue is vast at \$650 million alone in US ...

“Unless our ag sector matches their public marketing budgets to defend our farming practices, then we are in real danger of losing key markets and losing actual farming viability.”

...

Mr Olsson warned animal rights was much more than a movement, and had become widely accepted thinking in an increasingly urbanised world.

That proves that sometimes there is a bit of a disconnect.

Universally, our farmers treat animals with care and respect. The agriculture industry has some good stories to tell and they need to be told. The statistics really do speak for themselves. Australian farmers will do what they always

do—get on with the job and provide for the nation. But while they are out in the field, they deserve peace of mind knowing that their industry is not just safe for another year, but safe for many years to come. The government needs to listen and engage with farmers. It must look at production systems holistically and not pursue predetermined outcomes. We need the government to step up and fight for the industry, which is the largest employer in many remote and rural communities.

In closing, I once again thank our farmers for their massive contribution to the Australian way of life.