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How much food can we really produce?

How accurate are claims that Australian farmers can produce enough food for 75 million people?

It is a statement that has been made consistently by politicians and others in recent times, but according to the Speak Up Campaign it needs to come under serious scrutiny.

Deputy Chair Lachlan Marshall said while the figure of 75 million may have been the case in the past, huge quantities of water have been removed from food production so it is probably no longer the case.

“In our regions across the Murrumbidgee and NSW Murray, as well as northern Victoria, the quantity of staple food being produced has diminished considerably. This is the region that has long been regarded as ‘Australia’s food bowl’.

“So if you significantly reduce production in the food bowl, it naturally follows that it will have an impact on national capacity and food security. We do not think this reduction in food production has been taken into account, especially by the National Farmers Federation and the Agriculture Minister David Littleproud, who keep telling Australians we produce enough food for 75 million people. We believe this is a falsehood based on past production.”

Mr Marshall said Speak Up had written to the NFF asking if it has figures on production of specific foods over the past two, 10 and 30 years.

He said while current food shortage issues were exacerbated by unnecessary panic buying, they have also been impacted by the inability of farmers to grow the volumes they have grown in the past.

“Rice, wheat and dairy are prime examples. These are staple foods that we all need in our fridge or pantry.

“Our rice processing company, SunRice, is forced to import rice because for the past two years little or no water has been allocated to farmers in the rice growing region of southern NSW.

Media Release

For immediate release

“We are importing dairy products because many dairies have closed and others which are still operating have downsized because they cannot afford the water needed to grow feed for the cows.

“Australia is also being forced to import wheat. Have you tried getting pasta from the supermarket lately?

“We have an emerging food supply and security issue and unless governments wake up to the situation we will not solve the problem,” Mr Marshall said. He said while Australian farmers are capable of producing enough food to feed 75 million people, this cannot be achieved without a productive irrigated agriculture sector, and it has been decimated by the Murray-Darling Basin Plan and poor water policy decisions.

“Those at the coalface of producing staple foods have major concerns about the accuracy of this ‘75 million people’ claim. We think the number has been handpicked by those in our city concrete jungles who are sheltered from the real world of farming and do not have a true appreciation of current conditions.

“We eagerly await a response from the NFF, which we hope will calculate food production trends – especially recent years - so we have a realistic assessment of the decline in food production from impacts of water policy and the Basin Plan,” Mr Marshall said.

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