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Western Australian Country Hour » Agriculture in crisis meeting unanimously approved 12 resolutions to solve rural debt problems

Agriculture in crisis meeting unanimously approved 12 resolutions to solve rural debt problems

By Kate Wood Tuesday, 16 April 2013



A thousand farmers turned out to yesterday's Agriculture in Crisis meeting in the wheat belt town of Merredin.

At the conclusion of the meeting 12 resolutions were put forward and accepted unanimously.

Some of the main resolutions to come from yesterday's meeting, include a State and Federal Government assistance scheme for agricultural business, which would include drought assistance; first start loans to help pass on the farm from one generation to the next; exceptional circumstances provisions and low interest rate loans.

Muntadgin farmer and one of the event organisers Jeff Hooper said some of the resolutions need to happen fast to get farmers through this coming season.

"We had to try and get resolutions across for the short term at a state level, and to try and get help for those who want to put a crop in this season, that's our short term objective. Then obviously at a federal level try and get some policy change so we can help all farmers."

"Now whether that's going to come just from us, we're not anywhere near arrogant enough to think we're going to make all those changes, but if we can work in with other groups and get those changes, well then that would be fantastic."

One of the major talking points from the meeting, is the resolution that the Federal Government instate a \$300 per tonne floor price for wheat this season or some other means to ensure the profitability of the industry.

Jerome Critch from Ten Tigers Grain Marketing was at yesterday's meeting at Merredin. He said the \$300 a tonne floor price is not economically viable, however he'd hate people to focus on this particular resolution at the expense of the other, more practical resolutions.

"For \$300 a tonne to be realised, if you look at a year like 2011 where Western Australia produced 15 million tonne of grain was grown, if the price became \$50 beneath the set floor price then you'd need to come up with, or the government or someone would need to pay \$50 a tonne across 15 million tonnes. So the government's probably unlikely to write a blank cheque at the start of the season."

Mr Critch says the main thing he took from yesterday's meeting was that solutions needed to be found not just for this year's crop but for the future, so that industry isn't in the same position 20 years from now.

"One thing I think we really need is a capital injection, whether it comes from government, that capital injection in the form of a low interest rate loan to try and get farmers to improve technology or improve their soil nutrition so maybe a discount for liming or to try and improve the soil health."

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"We need a capital injection and at the moment it looks like the only capital is coming from offshore investors and that's not a huge concern to me personally, I think we need investment irrespective of where it comes from but it would be disappointing to think that the only people prepared to invest in Australian agriculture are 10,000 kilometres away."

Another resolution passed yesterday was that the recent WA Drought Pilot Program is a failure and the approach is rejected outright.

John Noonan from Curtin University was involved in the development and roll out of the program.

He says all the evidence is that the program was an outstanding success.

"There were an enormous number of measures taken to see how ... the farmers were going and how the delivery was going."

"The farmers were asked a raft of questions, and except in instances where people were in very difficult circumstances or felt that what was being offered to them wasn't for them and there were a number of those participants, the reality is that 97 per cent of the participants said they'd had a worthwhile experience and they'd come back and do that type of thing again.

The Western Australian Minister for Agriculture Ken Baston was contacted for his response, it's expected he will comment once he officially receives the list of resolutions from the Muntadgin Farm Alliance.



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