

Regional Workshop: Wodonga

Workshop Output Report



Background

The Wodonga regional workshop is one of 23 regional workshops designed to contribute to the development of the Australian Dairy Plan – a nationwide plan for a profitable, confident and united dairy industry. This report captures the discussions held at that workshop. It is intended to provide a record for workshop attendees and a basis for those who could not attend the workshop to contribute to the conversation. This report will be combined with the reports of the other 22 regional workshops in the development of the Australian Dairy Plan.

Workshop sessions

1. **The Set-Up: Why will this Plan be different?**
2. **How big is the appetite for change?**
3. **What needs to change?**
4. **What needs to be done?**
5. **What is success for the Australian dairy industry?**

Workshop details

Date: 6 June 2019

Location: DELWP Office, 1 McKoy St, West Wodonga

Facilitator: Stephen Petris – Nous Group

Coordinator: Murray Dairy, UDV

Attendees: 27 participants, including 14 dairy farmers, as well as service providers and representatives from UDV, ADF and Dairy Australia

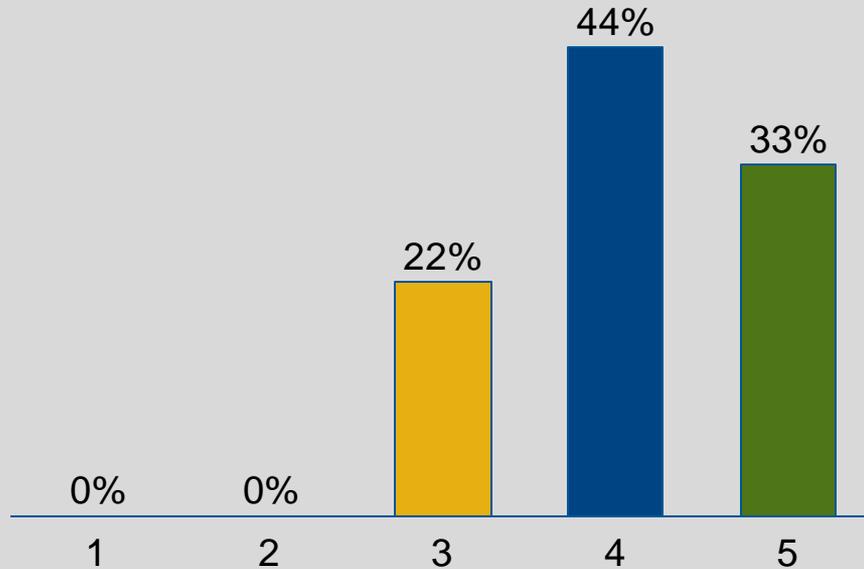
1. The Set-Up: Why will this Plan be different?

The facilitator set out the purpose of the Australian Dairy Plan and the workshop

- This is a great opportunity to shape the future of dairy by contributing to the development of the ADP
- But you've heard this before - what's different about this Plan? Why get involved?
 - The key players are working towards one national dairy plan, one set of national priorities, one voice in championing these priorities – that gives us more ability to drive change
 - This time the plan is being built from the 'bottom-up' i.e. by the people with 'skin in the game' – you!
 - The partners are committed to turning the plan into action through their individual strategic plans

2. How big is the appetite for change?

Participants voted on “how much change is required to get the industry to a better place”



N=18

1 = minor change, 5 = major change

In discussing the results, we agreed...

Why we need to change:

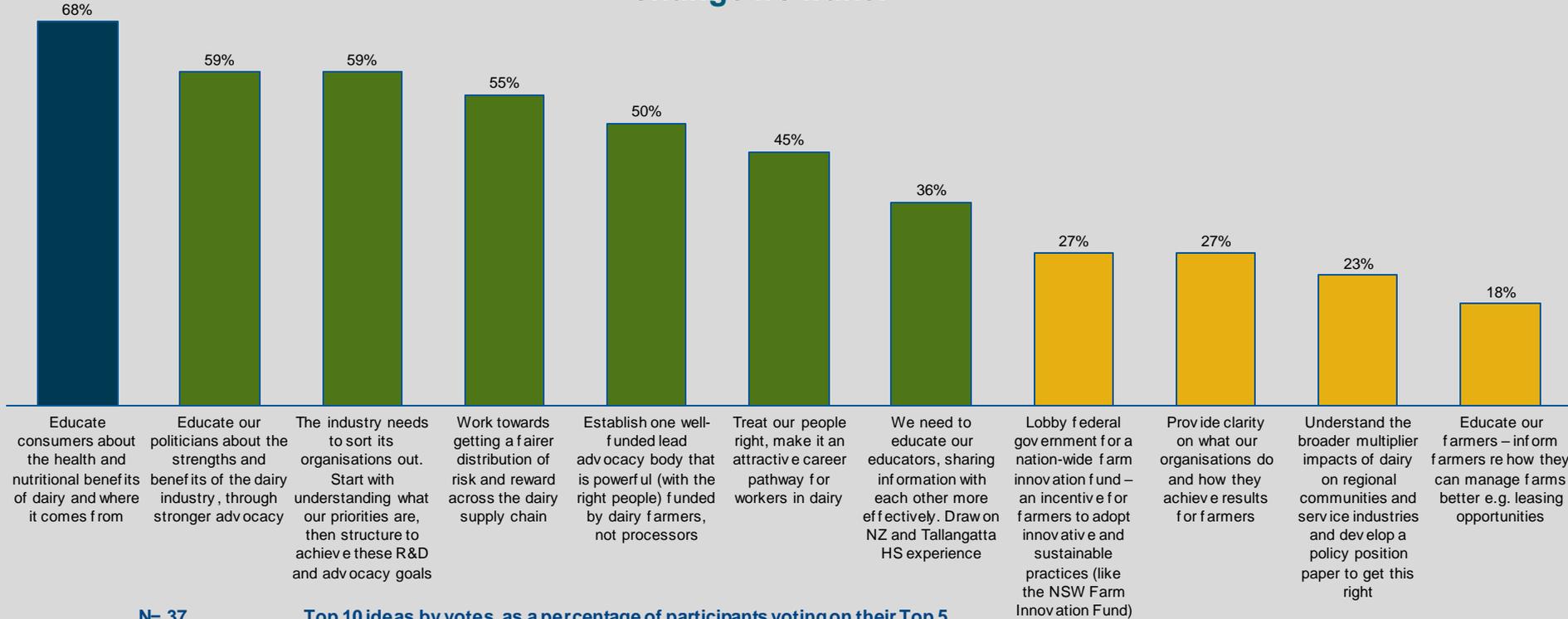
- There is a serious disconnect between the farmgate and decision makers. Our leadership isn't good enough. We need to advocate better to get things to happen. We need to get the PM to talk about the dairy industry like he talks about the mining industry. We're too fragmented, politicians ask “why don't we hear from the whole industry?”
- There is low trust between processors and farmers. There is a big job to be done to build trust here. The processors are not taking leadership – they need to be part of the discussion too. We need to know what they are thinking about for the future of the industry.
- Consumer mistrust has also grown. There is no clear message on how the industry works or operates so consumers get mixed messages. Dairy is too insular – we talk amongst ourselves, but we don't talk to our communities. We need to be more proactive and positive – there is a growing disconnect between urban and rural populations – people don't understand where their food comes from or the nutritional benefits of dairy.
- Young generations are not coming back to the farm, and old people are not encouraging them to come in either.
- We focus too much on the negative – we don't focus enough on the good farmers. This creates a lack of confidence, which means people are not prepared to go into debt. Farmers are not willing to take on more debt, not just the older farmers, but younger ones too.

On the other hand:

- We have a long history of collaboration, sharing and working together. For example, beef and cropping farmers would never share financials to benchmark their operations, but we do.
- There are good pathways in dairy for young people to get in and build equity a lot quicker than other agricultural industries.
- Dairy Australia's training programs are great – no other industry has this. It's free (or at least part of the levy)
- We do amazingly, WITHOUT subsidy. Other countries don't. We have a great, nutritious product that is in demand. We are good adopters of innovation.

3. What needs to change?

Participants voted on “where should we be focusing our efforts and energy to get the change we want?”



4. What needs to be done?

We further developed our top 4 prioritised ideas by thinking about what success would look like, how we might get there and what might hold us back.

Educate consumers about the health benefits of dairy

- Launch a marketing campaign via social media and TV that is targeted to urban areas to counter anti-animal product lobbies. Highlight alternative uses for milk – medicines, probiotics etc.
- Establish a specific position at Dairy Australia with responsibility to fund and promote dairy.
- Introduce curriculum in schools to help educate the educators.
- Promote grass fed as the preferred option.
- Promote Australian production, new milk processing technologies and the full product range – dairy needs to be seen as “the right option”, i.e. no additives.

Educate politicians about the strengths and benefits of dairy

- Develop industry specific policies that will support, innovate and grow the dairy industry.
- Present a clear and unified vision so government backs us and knows the whole industry is behind it.
- Educate government to understand and appreciate what the dairy industry contributes socially and economically to regional communities and Australia.
- Change the dialogue so that it is government coming to the dairy industry to ask us what we need and how can they help.

4. What needs to be done?

Customers need to value dairy more – we need to better educate the consumer

Sort out dairy organisational structures

- Undertake a review of existing structures and remove the barriers between research, development and advocacy – this need not just be a Dairy Australia plan. Change legislation if needed to allow this.
- There should be clear and transparent responsibilities and accountabilities with the new structure.
- Advocacy needs to be professional and well resourced, with a peak national body to break down state barriers. It should include an independently funded Chief Advocacy Group.
- The new structures should place a greater focus on engagement with processors.

Fairer distribution of risk and reward

- Encourage a more collaborative and transparent supply chain, with well informed businesses to drive decisions that benefit both the industry as a whole and individual farms.
- We need to build greater trust and grow the understanding of the interdependencies.
- Introduce new payment structures with a focus on longer term contracts to take the volatility out of returns. Processors should be making decisions based on what suits farmers.

5. What is success for the dairy industry?

Imagining the future of the industry, we articulated our vision by developing the front page of the industry newspaper.

THE DAIRY TIMES

June 2025

In this issue, we look at dairy's journey to 2025 & celebrate the people and successes that have got the industry to where it is today.

A lot has changes since 2019. In 2025 the cream has risen to the top! We have seen consistent growth, improved market share and ROI at the farm gate.

“ We have turned a corner, and the industry feels positive – I have a positive work/life balance and a positive bank balance!

”

- Dairy farmer

“ Sales are skyrocketing and we are investing in further manufacturing capacity and research to add/ provide greater value to our farmers.

”

- Processor

“ Dairy is my favourite industry to deal with. It is so well organised and they know where they are headed.

”

- Minister for Agriculture & Water Resources

Appendix. What needs to change? (full list of results)

Participants completed a survey on the workshop

- Educate consumers about the health and nutritional benefits of dairy and where it comes from
- Educate our politicians about the strengths and benefits of the dairy industry, through stronger advocacy
- The industry needs to sort its organisations out. Start with understanding what our priorities are, then structure to achieve these R&D and advocacy goals
- Work towards getting a fairer distribution of risk and reward across the dairy supply chain
- Establish one well-funded lead advocacy body that is powerful (with the right people) funded by dairy farmers, not processors
- Treat our people right, make it an attractive career pathway for workers in dairy
- We need to educate our educators, sharing information with each other more effectively. Draw on NZ and Tallangatta HS experience, for example
- Lobby federal government for a nation-wide farm innovation fund – an incentive for farmers to adopt innovative and sustainable practices (like the NSW Farm Innovation Fund)
- Provide clarity on what our organisations do and how they achieve results for farmers
- Understand the broader multiplier impacts of dairy on regional communities and service industries and develop a policy position paper to get this right
- Educate our farmers – inform farmers re how they can manage farms better e.g. leasing opportunities
- Get a better image for the dairy industry
- Bring our agenda as farmers back to local government, demonstrate our value to local shires, they do not support us enough
- Strengthen the Department of Agriculture support of dairy
- Remove the blockers to employing people, i.e. immigration policy settings