

Stories

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Better Farms leads Bega to circular economy



“We can measure nearly everything that comes in and out of the Bega Valley and its impact on natural resources. Our industries have proven they work well together, so a circular economy is a natural progression.”

Andrew Taylor, South East Local Land Services

A project that succeeded in encouraging dairy farmers to be better environmental managers has laid a robust foundation for a new phase — an ambitious 10-year plan to build and test a circular economy in the picturesque Bega Valley of southeast NSW.

It's a proposal for a \$100 million partnership between private enterprise, community and government that could prove to be a pilot for regional areas throughout Australia.

“Up until now we've focussed on Bega Cheese and tourism, but we want to develop up other industries to make the economy more resilient. A circular economy is the way of the future because it minimises the impact on natural resources,” explains Melissa Balas.

Melissa is the Farm Sustainability and Technical Services manager for the powerhouse Bega Cheese company, which teamed up with South East Local Land Services to implement the highly successful Bega Environmental Management Systems (BEMS) for the local dairy industry, expanded across two states as the Better Farms program.

‘NATURAL PROGRESSION’ FROM ROBUST DAIRY INDUSTRY

Both Melissa and Andrew Taylor from South East LLS see the Bega Circular Valley project as a natural progression from the previous programs that built trust between project partners, farmers and local communities; secured multiple forms of funding; and applied technical expertise to on-ground

works so that farmers benefited from improved land management and protection of waterways.

Bega Cheese executive chairman Barry Irvin AM has already approached the Federal Government for \$7.5m in funding to launch the program and support key priority projects, including the establishment of a Bega Valley circular co-operative; a Bega biodiversity and carbon trading desk; an on-farm smart water storage network; the Bega smart food and logistics program; and a regional circularity baseline assessment of material flows.

The co-operative would use skills from different sectors of industry in the Valley and improve resource utilisation, Melissa says. Fresh partnerships with Rabobank and KPMG will provide farmers with new options to develop an alternative income stream through carbon credits, and investment in smart on-farm water storages would secure water supplies for agriculture and support carbon and biodiversity measurement.

“We are aiming to build 9000 megalitres of on-farm water storage through expressions of interest from dairy, beef and poultry farms, with sensors that indicate to the Rural Fire Service the precise location, amount and quality of water available for use in bushfires,” says Melissa.

Enhancing irrigation efficiency and capacity will drive agriculture production improvements, accelerate biodiversity and regional regeneration, and create a community safety asset to achieve risk-adjusted insurance premiums for the region.

A smart food and logistics program would build on the experience of local oyster farmers in processing and transporting fresh product and maximise the impact of Bega's clean, green image across multiple sectors of the Valley.

South East LLS is proud to have built a trusted partnership with Bega Cheese which has already boosted sustainability and is encouraging innovation in the local community.

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