

MPs won't commit to buying local produce

By Geoff Adams

We're looking into it . . .

Beleaguered fruit processor SPC Ardmona is getting moral support from Victorian political leaders for its push to get preference from government departments buying fruit, but not much more.

At a pre-election debate on agriculture, both the Food Security Minister Peter Walsh and Shadow Agriculture Minister Jacinta Allan promised to look into the idea of preference for Australian food

producers in departmental buying practices.

Both the Coalition and the Opposition have acknowledged meeting with the company to discuss the issue, months ago, but there has been no commitment to change.

SPC Ardmona managing director Peter Kelly has been arguing the case for 12 months.

Imported fruit products are being sold in Australia below what SPC Ardmona can match.

Mr Kelly believes that if a range of factors including food miles, environmental impact and quality were taken into account as well as price, the Australian product could still be a value buy for departments like hospitals and prisons.

"This is not just about SPC Ardmona, but other Australian foods as well, including dairy products," he said.

"Our customers say, if quality is so important why is it that you

can't convince your own government to buy it?"

Mr Walsh repeated comments made a month ago at a public Shepparton forum that the government had already met with company representatives and was considering the issue.

When pressed on the issue last week, Ms Allan said she was unable to give a commitment on the issue without access to information held by government departments.

She said if the cost of purchasing was higher in hospitals, for example, the government would have to ensure hospitals were well funded to cover the expense.

"There have already been significant cuts to the hospital system.

"We will be examining the issues around the purchase of SPC or Victorian fruit in the hospital system.

"These are things we are very keen to look at."

Pactum keeps on expanding

By Geoff Adams

New Goulburn Valley milk processor, the Pactum Dairy Group, is buying a \$4 million neighbouring property to more than double its land size.

The corner property will be used for a warehousing and distribution centre, and to replace currently leased facilities.

The company, which processes milk for the Chinese market, has been operating for less than 12 months and only officially opened in May.

Employment numbers have grown since the opening to 45 and more permanent staff are being sought.

Freedom Foods managing director Rory Macleod announced to the stock market that it was buying the 77 000 square metres with frontage to Old Dookie Rd and the transport artery, Doyles Rd.

Mr Macleod said the land provided much needed capacity and flexibility for

longer term warehousing and distribution capability for the Pactum operation.

"The existing warehousing capability on site and adjacent to the site is insufficient for long-term requirements, including operating a low-cost automated logistics function, with facilities for export containerisation.

"Additional warehouse capacity will provide space for future expansion of processing and packaging operations at the site and expansion of other dairy processing capabilities in the future."

Detailed planning for, and construction of, an integrated warehouse and distribution facility is expected to start next year.

Bega Cheese recently announced it had signed a deal to provide UHT milk to a south China retail group, which will be manufactured for Bega by the Pactum Dairy Group at Shepparton

and could eventually require up to 20 million litres annually.

Pactum operations manager Mark McWhirter said it was an exciting step for the company, which was in a growth phase, and for the industry.

The acquisition of land, associated building and capital requirements is expected to be funded from existing finance facilities and other assets.

Pactum is a joint venture between regional milk supply company ACM and Freedom Foods.

ACM chairman Michael Auld said the land acquisition was part of the company's growth strategy.

"Our goal is to be a world class manufacturer of UHT milk and we need the right facilities to support that strategy," Mr Auld said.

"We will be located on the bypass, 180 km from the Port of Melbourne with only one set of (traffic) lights."



Growing concern . . . Pactum Dairy Group operations manager Mark McWhirter at the milk receival station of the Shepparton factory.



Holiday fun . . . Jack Scott, 8, from Kialla and his mate Mitch Rummery, 10, from North Shepparton kept themselves amused while the adults concentrated on the auction. Pictures: Julie Mercer

Everything goes at sale

The contents of the yard of failed Shepparton tractor and equipment dealership Bee-Jay Machinery and Tractors R Us went under the hammer on Thursday and Friday.

After the bigger equipment such as tractors, balers, rakes and ride-ons was knocked over on the first day, auctioneer Michael Bent had a herculean session on the rostrum to disperse workshop parts and office equipment with the sale beginning at 10 am and running until 3 pm.

No stone was left unturned in the receivers' quest to return money to creditors, beginning in the service and repair area with a bench vice and ending out on the front verandah with the final lots including potplants and a garden hose.



Going, going . . . Auctioneer Michael Bent in action at the first day of the two-day liquidators' auction of Bee-Jay Machinery and Tractors R Us in Shepparton last week.

Environmental water will flow

The first of two spring environmental flow releases from Goulburn Weir near Nagambie is due to begin on Friday, October 10.

Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority environmental water coordinator Meegan Judd said the aim of the flow was to help re-establish vegetation on the lower river banks and improve the waterbug populations native fish feed on. This flow is timed earlier than previous years to improve the chances of seed germination and plant establishment before the hot summer weather.

"The flow will peak about 8500 ML/day at Murchison by Monday, October 20 and then reduce back to minimum flows of about 1000 ML/day by Wednesday, November 5," Ms Judd said.

The flow will occur at McCoys Bridge about four days after being released from Goulburn Weir. The flow will see river heights in the Goulburn River rise to a maximum of 4 m at Murchison, 5.5 m at Shepparton and 5 m at McCoys Bridge as measured at each local gauge.

The second flow is planned to start at Goulburn Weir on Saturday, November 15, rise to 8500 ML/day by Wednesday, November 19 at Murchison, and return to minimum flows by Tuesday, November 25.

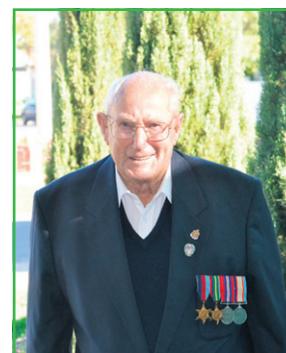
"This second flow is aimed at stimulating golden perch (yellow belly) spawning," Ms Judd said.

"It builds on the success of last year's environmental flow that triggered golden perch spawning."

The flows along the Goulburn will be finished before the Murray cod season opens. Flow levels and timing may vary depending on weather conditions and other system demands.

The flows will use a combination of Commonwealth and Living Murray environmental water.

The environmental flows are planned by Goulburn Broken CMA, managed by Goulburn-Murray Water in line with the Victorian Environmental Water Holders Seasonal Watering Plan 2014-15, and take into consideration delivery orders by irrigators and other water users.



Invitation

My Life – From Farmer To POW and Back
The story of Dick Campbell – Farmer, POW and Cobram district identity

Dick Campbell, local farmer and World War II veteran has written his memoirs.

You are cordially invited to the book launch on Sunday October 12, from 11am at Barooga Sports Club.

Finger food provided. Alcoholic drinks at bar prices.

Book price: \$25.00 Dick will be available to sign your copy.

Come along and hear about Dick's life as a POW on the Burma-Thailand Railway and in a Japanese coal mine.

To reserve your seat, phone the staff at D'Vine Ideas in Cobram on (03) 5872 1400

Numurkah A. & P. Society Inc.

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