

Co-ops are still producing good results for farmers

CO-OPERATIVES work, are not outdated and can help farmers make more profit.

Those were the findings of research presented at the launch of the A\$14.9 million Farm Co-operatives and Collaboration Pilot Programme in Australia. Business Council of Co-

operatives and Mutuals chief executive Melina Morrison said consumers did not have to wait for the recommendations of the recent Senate inquiry into co-operatives to be enacted to start thinking co-operatively.

"As consumers we can disrupt the economy today to make sure that more of the benefits of economic activity flow back to the local community," she said. "You need to shop co-op, you need to bank with a co-op bank, you should join a health mutual, you can put your money into a

mutually owned superannuation fund.

"You can be a rebel capitalist by shopping co-op."

Morrison took her vision of a purse-strings protest to Australia's first forum on agricultural collectives.

The programme was an Australian government investment providing farmers with knowledge and materials on co-operatives, collective bargaining and other forms of collaboration.



Lorraine Gordon

Southern Cross University was administering the programme nationally.

Keynote speaker, Co-operatives and Mutuals Canada director Jack Wilkinson, said co-ops had a resilience that outlasted

economic downturns because they had principles around investment strategies.

"After the 2008 economic collapse, co-ops did survive well and we are now

regrouping," the Ontario grain grower said.

"We are seeing the co-op model getting traction and flourishing once again.

"It is not a tired business model of the past, rather an exciting way to come together to meet future needs."

Wilkinson said business courses around the world did not give enough airtime to the co-operative model.

"The paucity of co-op know-how means a shortage of chief executives capable of

understanding the model and its funding structures," he said.

"We have to infiltrate the education system so that this is seen as a viable model. I think that is really critical."

Programme director, beef producer and former New South Wales Rural Woman of the Year Lorraine Gordon said collaborative business arrangements could improve

farmers' position in the market.

"Others may wish to consider moving up or down the supply chain by establishing buying or selling co-operatives," Gordon said.

"Collaboration with businesses beyond the farmgate can also create great value for farmers."

Deputy Prime Minister and Agriculture Minister Barnaby Joyce said the national pilot programme would allow farmers

to work together to improve farmgate returns.

"Agricultural co-operatives allow farmers to own and control more of the food supply chain, which gives them more bargaining power when it comes to negotiating with buyers of their produce," Joyce said.

"This pilot programme has been developed to give farmers access to information and resources in a flexible, responsive and customised way and will focus on supporting farmers at a grassroots level.

"By allowing farmers to reach further down the supply chain, it gives them the ability to get better returns at the farmgate — it's that simple. It's better for the farmer and it's better for local communities and the people who live and work there."

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