



Feasibility: Water Security pipe

Tim Leeming currently owns and manages a 1510 hectare property at Pigeon Ponds. This local farmer who also specialises in farm extension is hoping that many local landholders will join him in attending the GWMWater information session on Tuesday 7 February (see ad) to learn about the potential benefits to their properties of a connection to the proposed West Wimmera Rural Pipeline. There is no obligation to sign up after attending, but Tim believes not attending may prove to be an opportunity lost for the next generation of farmers attempting to secure their farming future. His opinion piece is below.

History

2014 and 2015 have been recorded as the two lowest successive rainfall years in living history to central and south western Victoria. 2002 to 2007 were also very recent years to challenge agricultural regions of which our area was affected greatly.

What did we learn? Dry times not only put strain on farmers but also the greater rural community, being small towns, areas and bigger regional centres.

What was once reliable agricultural regions from rainfall are now unreliable and suffer from an air of anxiety, risk and hope.

We must learn from these times to better prepare ourselves to make a more vibrant and resilient community.

Being a livestock producer I need to know and ask a series of questions to best handle what may face me, my family, my district and the greater community of regional Victoria.

My questions start:

How much water do I have and how much do I need to sustain my production system, activities and lifestyle where I live?

What have I learnt over the past 15 years?

Did I run out of water, to what extent and did I, as a consequence, change my production output, enterprise, direction, goals and lifestyle?

I could say that 2016 was like "Ground Hog Day". Like 2010/11, the rains came again after the long dry spell of 2013 to 2015. Yes markets responded on the back of re-stocker pressure, solid markets and a bountiful Winter and Spring.

Were you in a situation to cash in really well on this great year of 2016?

We all know that carting water is a thankless task and often is highly costly and completely inefficient. I sympathise with many farmers forced to undertake this and I'm not trying to labour my point, but we may have a way to help ease the pain in these ordinary and unfortunate situations.

To get back to full production in these good

seasons it can cost dearly to re-coup stock numbers during high demand and grass fevered markets. Often the horse has bolted. Given 80% of our profits lie within 20% of our years, - during my farming life this has been found so true.

I'm lucky to know some fantastic farmers of all generations, but I probably gain my most enthusiasm from the ones that are keen to be better. Despite getting older, I mostly think our region is welcoming many more younger farmers into the field, and I worry about where their future lies and what can be done to assist those having a real 'crack'.

What about our local town centres and the opportunities for their prosperity?

At tennis, just over twelve months ago, I happened to have a water tester in the ute whilst playing in Edenhope. A conversation started about the dry season, lack of water and poor water quality in town. I actually was "gob smacked" when I tested the town water at over 1000EC.

My stagnant dam water for my sheep tested better in many paddocks than what was supposed to be supplying people in my local regional town. There was also a question of water quantity and pressure at times during the Summer in town.

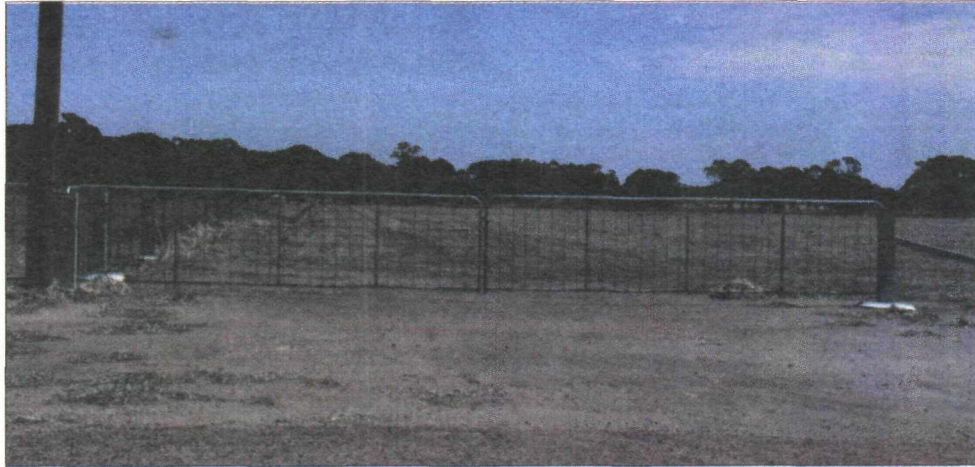
Regional Development

So more questions started to raise their head.

Not only were many farmers struggling with their water on farm but also the town supplies were also suffering. Regional development is vital for rural areas in a highly mechanised world with large shifts of people moving to urbanised centres.

What hope have we got to encourage industry and employment when water quality and quantity is in question?

Security, stability, vibrancy and opportunity will come with hard work, planning and some cost but I will argue that it will be well worth it for the future of our greater community.



There are always changes in farming practices. For instance gateways are growing, from singles to doubles, near Goroke.