

MEDIA RELEASE

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NSW Minister for Primary Industries to launch significant new community sustainable agriculture initiative.



At the Henty Machinery Field Day on Tuesday 23rd September, the Hon. Ian Macdonald, NSW Minister for Primary Industries will be on hand to launch a significant new community initiative. Murrumbidgee Landcare Inc, the community, non-profit, umbrella organisation representing landcare in the Murrumbidgee catchment, has recently been successful in attracting \$150,000 in sponsorship from the Woolworths *Sustainable Farming Drought Program*. Through two projects, one in the mid and one in the lower catchment, Murrumbidgee Landcare Inc aims to support farmers embracing change to better manage their farming systems and the natural environment through periods of drought

"What is different about these projects", explained Peter Holding, Vice Chair of Murrumbidgee Landcare and a project team leader, "is that they are community-initiated and community-driven. It is farmers and land managers on the ground, who know best how to talk to other farmers, to share information and new skills. The drought has devastated many of us and those of us still standing know that for our economic future as well as the future of the environment and our communities, we need to embrace change and that means sustainable farming systems."

The Hon. Ian Macdonald will present Murrumbidgee Landcare with a cheque from Woolworths; funding made possible through the supermarket chain's Drought Action days held in stores across Australia. It is a commendable corporate program which, through a collaboration with Landcare Australia Ltd, recognises that drought action requires long term strategies in our agricultural industries, including partnerships involving the community, private industry and government.

A mid-catchment project involving farmers and Landcare Networks at Henty, Junee, Mirrool Creek and Harden will focus directly on managing drought through sustainable farming systems. Working with experts from the NSW Department of Primary Industries and the EH Graham Centre (NSW DPI & Charles Sturt University), Murrumbidgee Landcare will work with the farmer groups to investigate local systems for managing stubble for cereal crops. Retention of stubble increases soil moisture content and along with integrated weed management can place farmers on a much more sustainable footing.

In the Western Riverina, the Hay/Balranald Landcare Network will be assisted by rangeland scientists to undertake an assessment of the current health of grazed native vegetation in the western ends of the Lachlan, Murrumbidgee and Murray catchments.

In an area once regarded as prime Merino grazing country, this project offers an opportunity to gauge the impact of livestock and recent years of below-average rainfall on the native vegetation. Resources to be used will include data collected through the Department of Environment and Climate Change Rangeland Assessment Program, and vegetation reference areas protected from grazing. The project will document the careful management of Travelling Stock Routes by local boards, and provide guidance for future sustainable grazing practices by land managers.

Minister Macdonald will meet farmers and Murrumbidgee Landcare members at the Landcare Shed at the Henty Machinery Field Day at 10.00 am.

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