



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

GROW FARMING FESTIVAL

Friday 20 February 2026

Acknowledgments

Councillor Kate Kendall, Mayor, Macedon Ranges Shire Council

Donna Coutts, Director, **Committee Members and Volunteers**, GROW Farming Festival

Distinguished guests

I begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the lands on which this building stands – the Taungurung people – and pay my respects to their Elders, past and present.

It's a pleasure to be back here in Kyneton.

I first heard of this Festival during my visit to this region last year, during which Donna Coutts graciously welcomed me to her Walden Park Farm.

There, Donna and her family told me about the effect of the recent drought and the impact they observed on their pastures and livestock.

They told me of the ways they were trialing innovative techniques to adapt to those pressures.

And they told me how they – through this new Festival – are sharing knowledge and ideas with those facing the same challenges in other parts of the State.

It's fantastic to be here today to witness that collaboration.

I must admit I am an inexpert observer when it comes to the complexities of farming.

However, as someone who has spent a significant amount of time in higher education, I am deeply familiar with the role of research in driving innovation.

Then, as Governor, I have the privilege of seeing the real-world outcomes of its applications.

The benefits are evident both in the scale of the farming operations here in Victoria, as well as in the consistent quality of the produce we consume here and export overseas.

Governors of Victoria have had a longstanding engagement with Victoria's agricultural and horticultural communities, for the very reason that these sectors have been integral to our State's economy and identity for such a long time.

That was true all the way back to 1873, when Governor Sir George Bowen visited the Kyneton Agricultural Show.

Though it was over 150 years ago, the core aims of the Show were remarkably similar to what we see here today.

Sir George Bowen also addressed an audience that day, telling them:

"The benefits derived from agricultural societies are undoubtedly most important to the country at large...

...[they] have enabled farmers to compare the respective qualities of their stock and produce, and to acquire trustworthy information respecting the proper rotation of crops and new methods of cultivation."

We were learning back then, and we are still learning today.

Yet contemporary Victorians have access to a much deeper well of information.

We have at our disposal today significantly advanced processes and applications of technology.

And we have a much greater appreciation of the importance of land stewardship – both its long history led by Traditional Owners, as well as our responsibility to preserve the environment for the generations to come.

There are advancements which have no doubt made some aspects of farming more manageable.

And yet there are other factors that are making it increasingly difficult.

Changing trends in global markets and local industries are creating uncertainty – particularly for smaller operations.

Weather patterns are becoming less predictable and reliable, owing to the real perils of climate change.

And those living in regional and rural areas are facing larger and more persistent threats of natural disaster – as we have seen this year.

Often, the consequences of these difficulties are less understood by communities that are lucky enough not to face them directly.

Fora such as this festival provide the opportunity for those who are affected to share their insights with one another.

It is true that there are many people who may be unfamiliar with the work you do.

Yet you can be assured the population relies on the critical importance of farmers and their adjacent industries.

It is more than an economic question.

Well-supported farmers create stronger communities, more resilient landscapes and healthier populations.

In this context, to 'GROW' means so much more than what comes from this ground.

It speaks to a much broader, interconnected network of relationships that, when nurtured, enrich us all.

Thank you to everyone who is involved in making this Festival happen.

And best wishes to all those participating – I hope you find it to be constructive and insightful.

Thank you.