

Media Release

The Hon Jaclyn Symes MLC

Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Minister for Regional Development

Minister for Agriculture

Minister for Resources



Monday, 28 September 2020

PRIMARY PRODUCER FIRE RECOVERY SUPPORT EXPANDED

The Victorian Government is backing grape growers facing ongoing impacts from last summer's devastating bushfires as part of joint recovery efforts with the Commonwealth Government.

Minister for Agriculture Jaclyn Symes today announced new funding through Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements to help grape growers in local government areas outside bushfire zones who have nonetheless had their crops affected by smoke taint.

A new program provides up to \$10,000 for farmers from outside defined bushfire areas who have suffered a decline in revenue or harvest of 40 per cent or more compared to the previous year because of smoke taint.

Applicants are required to provide a dollar-for-dollar co-contribution and can use the support for business recovery, growth and diversification, and improvements to make the business more resilient to future disasters. The grant is available through Rural Finance and is open until 31 December.

For primary producers operating within areas directly affected by bushfire, the Victorian and Commonwealth governments have also expanded the *Emergency Bushfire Response in Primary Industries Grant Program*, meaning more primary producers will become eligible for payments of up to \$75,000 helping clean-up and recovery.

This grant is for primary producers who usually earn at least 50 per cent of their income from farm production and is now open until the end of the year, giving farmers more time to apply for help in the recovery process. The grant money can be used to cover the cost of clean-up and repairs for buildings, fencing and salvaging damaged crops.

Eligibility changes now allow those farmers whose income from farm production is less than 50 per cent due to drought, or who are still in the early phases of building up their businesses, to apply for the grant. For these farmers, the \$100,000 off-farm income threshold has been removed, and off-farm income is no longer taken into consideration.

Farmers have also been given more time to reach the point where at least 50 per cent of their income is generated from on-farm activities in recognition of long lead times required by some sectors to reach full production. This helps farm businesses in the early years of development in industries like forestry, orchards, vineyards and nuts.

The Victorian Government is working with Wine Victoria to encourage locals to buy Victorian wine either direct from the winery or through local businesses to help boost sales and put winemakers back on the path to recovery.

Producers who have inquired or applied in the past but did not meet criteria may now be eligible and are encouraged to contact Rural Finance on 1800 260 425.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Agriculture Jaclyn Symes

"Our wine industry is vibrant, diverse and a vital part of our economy – that's why we're ensuring the industry has access to the support and advice it needs to be best placed for future vintages."

"Now many cellardoor are reopening to regional visitors, I'd encourage those who can travel to take a trip to their local winery, enjoy a day out and support our winemakers through what's been an incredibly challenging year."

Quote attributable to Minister for Police and Emergency Services Lisa Neville

"Recovery is a long-term process – that's why we're giving Victorian primary producers directly and indirectly affected by bushfires the time they need to apply for support to rebuild their businesses."

Media contact: Casey Lodge 0410 964 928 | casey.lodge@minstaff.vic.gov.au