

Media Release

Ms Mary-Anne Thomas MP
Minister for Regional Development
Minister for Agriculture



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ORCHARD FUTURES BRIGHT WITH SMARTFARM SOLAR SHADE

Scientists at the Tatura SmartFarm are thinking outside the box by examining how solar panels could be used to protect produce from extreme heat events, widening their on-farm uses.

Minister for Agriculture Mary-Anne Thomas was in the Goulburn Valley today to officially open the SmartFarm and announce the Horticulture Solar Energy program which will examine the impacts of solar energy generation infrastructure and the sun protection it provides fruit trees.

Solar panels are being installed above the pear orchard as part of the Program, which has been funded through the Andrews Labor Government's \$30 million Agriculture Energy Investment Plan.

The SmartFarm is backed by the Labor Government's \$5 million Smarter, Safer Farms initiative, and is Australia's leading horticulture SmartFarm, undertaking research and innovative ideas to deliver high-quality fruit from orchard to export market.

At the SmartFarm, Agriculture Victoria scientists and technicians develop and demonstrate new applications of agricultural technology to achieve increases in marketable yield, product value and production efficiency in pears, apples, stonefruit and almonds.

The SmartFarm is also home to the world's first sundial orchard – a multi-directional experimental orchard covered in sensors and includes orchard design and training systems for stonefruit and pomefruit. The Sundial orchard is helping researchers to understand how orchard design impacts production efficiencies, labour efficiencies, resilience to extreme climatic events, and the yield and quality of fruit.

The Labor Government is backing the adoption of new, effective and fit-for-purpose technology to grow and protect our agriculture industries as a key commitment of the \$115 million Agriculture Strategy which includes the Agriculture Energy Investment Plan and \$15 million for the AgTech Regional Innovation Network.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Agriculture Mary-Anne Thomas

"The Tatura SmartFarm is an important way for Victorian scientists to develop practical solutions to some of agriculture's biggest problems, and to grow our export markets."

"Farmers and producers experience the impacts of climate change firsthand – it's vital that we help them adapt so they can continue to get our world-class produce to markets across Australia and the world."

Quote attributable to Member for Northern Victoria Mark Gepp

"The Tatura SmartFarm is doing ground-breaking research that'll help farmers across Australia – I'm really proud that this exciting work has started right here in Northern Victoria."