

Media Release

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



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UNLOCKING OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE ALMOND INDUSTRY

The Andrews Labor Government is supporting Victorian farmers to use new technologies to improve productivity while reducing their environmental footprint.

Minister for Agriculture Mary-Anne Thomas was in Sunraysia today to officially open Agriculture Victoria's Mildura SmartFarm, which will play a key role in helping Victorian temperate nut producers adapt to climate change and market demands.

The project is backed by the Labor Government through the \$5 million *Smarter, Safer Farms Initiative* – part of the \$115 million *Agriculture Strategy*.

Scientists at the Mildura SmartFarm are examining how sensors and automated irrigation systems, together with orchard design, could reduce water and fertiliser usage while increasing the intensity and efficiency of production.

The Mildura SmartFarm, which is linked to the Tatura SmartFarm, is on 20 hectares near Irymple. Almonds are the major focus, but hazelnut, walnut, macadamia, pistachio, pecan and chestnut are also grown there.

The SmartFarm is fitted with soil moisture sensors, a targeted irrigation system as well as light sensors. Drones are also being used by scientists to measure tree growth and the health of tree canopies, while ground-based laser technology is being used to investigate tree architecture.

Data captured by these technologies is helping accelerate research while demonstrating new opportunities for Victoria's almond industry. It will identify how producers can make more informed and timely decisions to reduce crop inputs, such as fertiliser and water.

Almonds are Victoria's largest nut export commodity, with a value of \$454 million in 2019/20. Exports from Victoria represent 60 per cent of total almond exports across the country.

The findings from research and innovation at the SmartFarm will help to deliver opportunities to protect and grow both export and domestic markets.

The Government is committed to increasing the adoption of new, effective and fit-for-purpose technologies to grow and protect our agriculture industries as a key commitment of the *Agriculture Strategy*.

Quote attributable to Minister for Agriculture Mary-Anne Thomas

"The Mildura SmartFarm is providing a blueprint for our temperate nut growers to become more efficient, ensuring they can adapt to climate change and respond to changing markets."

Quote attributable to Member for Northern Victoria Mark Gepp

"Ground-breaking research at Mildura SmartFarm is providing practical solutions to some of the industry's biggest challenges, paving a way to grow our export markets."