



Mary-Anne Thomas MP

Minister for Regional Development
Minister for Agriculture

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SUPPORTING RURAL AND REGIONAL VICTORIA'S RECOVERY

The Andrews Labor Government is backing rural and regional Victorians with investments in schools, hospitals, roads and rail – helping keep communities strong and growing local jobs.

The *Victorian Budget 2021/22* provides almost \$3.7 billion for regional initiatives, taking the Labor Government's total investment in regional Victoria to \$26 billion since 2015.

Some \$129 million in regional development and agriculture investments will deliver local solutions to local problems, and advance a 10-year plan to strengthen agriculture in Victoria and the 77,000 jobs that it supports.

The Budget will grow local economies and jobs across the state, with dedicated support for projects and programs that make our regional communities even better places to live, work and invest.

We're backing the Latrobe Valley, where a \$10 million investment in the Morwell Food Manufacturing Precinct will provide crucial services and better access to fast-track development of the site, which is forecast to support up to 1,700 ongoing manufacturing jobs when up and running.

In Victoria's south west, the Budget invests \$17.4 million towards job creation and economic diversification in Portland and communities across the Glenelg Shire – including funding for local freight road upgrades, Stage 2 of the Henty Employment Precinct Infrastructure Upgrades, a new Portland Diversification Fund and a new Victorian Government office in Portland.

In Northern Victoria, the Government is investing \$1.6 million in the design and construction of preliminary infrastructure at the Hilldene Employment Precinct in Seymour to address the shortage of industrial land in the town and pave the way for more jobs.

We're also investing in strong local communities. The Budget supports programs like Go Goldfield's Every Child, Every Chance program with a \$1 million investment to bring together community, business, government and not-for-profit partners to support children in Maryborough – so they can grow up safe, healthy and confident.

We're helping create jobs for people who experience barriers to employment while investing in local leadership to support recovery with \$2 million for the successful Community Leadership program and \$3 million in the Growing Regional Opportunities for Work (GROW) program.

Operating in five locations across the state, GROW has created more than 480 employment opportunities, with 370 businesses signed up.

Regional Partnerships continue to play a critical role in helping develop opportunities and overcome challenges in our local communities. An investment of \$5.1 million will further strengthen Regional Partnerships so they can continue to elevate regional voices, insights and issues.

The Budget delivers on the Labor Government's transformative 10-year agriculture strategy with \$46.4 million to strengthen, grow and protect the sector so it continues to be a cornerstone of our economy.

Victoria has built a reputation across the globe for high-quality produce – the Budget will further boost our standing by investing \$11.7 million to strengthen agriculture traceability systems and protect Victorian jobs.

This includes the establishment of a traceability information hub, the development of new systems to prove the origin and quality of Victorian produce, and campaigns to promote Victoria’s paddock to plate journey.

Improved Australian and Victorian traceability standards will ensure Victoria is in a leading position with overseas markets, furthering the demand for our produce.

A total of \$1.1 million has been made available to animal welfare organisations including Winged Horse Equine Welfare, Horse Shepherd Equine Sanctuary and Surf Coast Wildlife Rescue to provide equipment, infrastructure and care to animals in need.

The Budget also invests \$6.4 million for the Victorian *Fruit Fly Strategy*, which will be released next month. Fruit fly poses a significant threat to the horticulture industry and the new strategy will help industry and the community to take the lead on control programs.

Since its establishment in 1986, the Victorian Rural Women’s Network has supported women who are finding new and innovative ways to grow and improve their communities. This year, we are providing \$1.4 million to continue the network’s important work.

Rural communities will be further supported with a \$5.8 million investment in the Rural Financial Counselling Service. The Government recognises the key role the service has played in assisting farmers to recover from the impacts of drought, bushfires and the coronavirus pandemic.

The Budget provides \$19.9 million to fast-track the agriculture sector’s response to climate change – so farms can be productive, profitable and sustainable. This funding will support measures to accelerate research, innovation and deployment of methane-inhibiting feed additives and promote on-farm emissions reduction and adaptation.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Regional Development and Agriculture Mary-Anne Thomas

“Regional Victoria is an amazing place to live, work and invest – and we’re helping local communities make it even better by delivering the projects, jobs and programs they need.”

“This Budget backs farmers and rural communities by supporting initiatives that will help them respond to challenges like climate change and the threat of pest and disease.”

“Our agriculture strategy will be a boon for the entire supply chain, from farm businesses to the people who buy Victoria’s outstanding produce. Even better, it’ll support the creation of new Victorian jobs.”