

Victorian Budget 2022/23



The Hon Mary-Anne Thomas MP

Minister for Agriculture and Regional Development

Tuesday, 3 May 2022

BACKING OUR FARMERS AND REGIONAL COMMUNITIES

The Andrews Labor Government is supporting our farmers, boosting local jobs and strengthening regional economies with new investments in agriculture and regional development as part of the *Victorian Budget 2022/23*.

Some \$193.4 million will be invested in regional development and agriculture, advancing the 10-year agriculture strategy and helping the sector remain strong, innovative and sustainable.

The Labor Government has invested more than \$700 million in its flagship *Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund* since 2015 – supporting around 13,000 jobs and delivering 1,000 projects.

This year, the Fund will receive another \$30 million to help businesses create more jobs in regional Victoria, support more community projects and help councils build the infrastructure locals need.

The Government is investing \$5 million through the new *Living Local – Regional Fund*, designed to support growing towns with local projects to connect communities and make our regions even more appealing places to live, work and invest.

In the Latrobe Valley, the Government continues to support new jobs growth, with another \$7.5 million for the Latrobe Valley Authority (LVA) to continue its important work with the local community, including the development of a new transition plan to support the region through the power station's planned closures.

This plan will continue to put workers at the heart of the Government's long-term work for the Valley, as we keep providing dedicated support in consultation with workers, unions and the local community.

The new funding will also continue support for the successful Ladder Step Up program, which helps young people unlock opportunities across education, jobs and training – strengthening their health and wellbeing. This is on top of our \$1.9 million investment in the program since 2017.

The Labor Government is backing regional leaders, with \$3.9 million over four years to help key groups continue their work – including the Country Women's Association (CWA) and the Cross Border Commissioner.

The CWA is a much-loved organisation and plays an important advocacy and support role to help women living in rural and regional areas stay connected. Established in 1928, the Victorian CWA has around 5,000 members across 300 local branches across the state.

Agriculture is worth \$17.8 billion to the Victorian economy and almost one third of Australia's total agricultural value. The more we produce and sell, the more jobs are created in local communities.

The Government is investing \$2.9 million to support agribusinesses across Victoria reach new markets and grow their sales globally – which ultimately means more jobs for Victorians.

This includes funding to continue the successful *Drink Victorian* campaign, and for Vic House in Shanghai, which gives Victorian agriculture producers and exporters dedicated in-market space to showcase their products.

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Farmers and producers will also benefit from the new *Victorian Grown* initiative, which will get more locally produced food and drinks into Victorian businesses and on Victorian tables.

The Government will continue to fund drought preparedness and business planning programs for farmers and communities with \$1.4 million available over two years.

A strong biosecurity system protects Victoria's economy, environment, cultural heritage and way of life. This Budget will deliver \$1.8 million over the next four years to ensure farmers and industry are better prepared to respond to biosecurity threats.

A further \$12 million is being invested in innovative projects in Horsham, including glasshouses and an incubation hub – putting Victoria on the map as a driver of alternative proteins, fast-tracked research and programs to target new markets and consumers.

Animal welfare will receive a boost, with \$18.6 million going to initiatives that support their care and protection. This includes preparatory work for a new *Animal Care and Protection Act* and establishing a regulatory framework for the pet rehoming sector.

These changes will update Victoria's animal protection laws, support our reputation for the highest standards of animal welfare and ensure food and fibre producers can continue to access important markets.

As part of this, \$11.5 million will fund the development of a purpose-built regional animal facility to service the needs of the growing community in and around Ballarat. The new Ballarat Animal Shelter will ease pressure on the existing facility, improving the standard of animal care in the area.

Almost \$2 million over two years will support companion animal care – including Victoria's first-ever Pet Census, which will gather vital information to better understand trends and issues in pet ownership, helping work towards better targeted programs.

The Government will deliver Victoria's first comprehensive cat management strategy, a long-term plan to consider overpopulation, encourage responsible ownership and support better welfare for both cats and native wildlife.

Animal welfare support has also been made available to multiple animal welfare organisations for resources and tools to care for animals in need.

The Budget invests an additional \$10.5 million to support the ongoing roll-out of the *Victorian Forestry Plan*. This is in addition to \$89.7 million announced in December 2021 to support workers, communities and businesses to transition away from native timber harvesting.

Our regional unemployment rate is the lowest in the nation at 3.2 per cent. Since November 2014, regional unemployment has fallen by more than half and jobs have grown by more than 12 per cent in regional and rural Victoria – resulting in more than 80,000 more people employed compared to when we came to office.

This year's Budget provides \$5.7 billion for regional initiatives, taking the Labor Government's total investment in regional Victoria to more than \$36 billion since 2015.

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

"Our regional communities are powering the Victorian economy and boosting our recovery – and the industries that drive these communities are advancing, innovating and growing."

“We’re backing Victoria’s world-class agriculture industry with our 10-year strategy, helping farmers access new markets at home and overseas and future-proofing the sector against climate change, pests and diseases.”