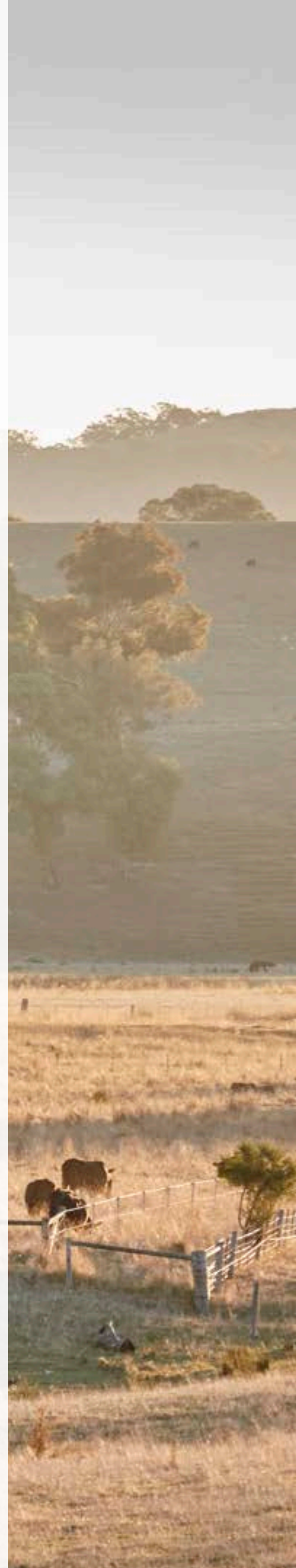




Sustainable Agriculture, Aquaculture & Horticulture

**Primary Industry
Entrepreneurial
Discovery Process**





Summary

A full day workshop in Sustainable Agriculture was held on Tuesday 27 February 2024 at the Taggerty Hall. The workshop supported using the Quad-Helix model, with participants ranging in experience and expertise across industry, government, research, and community. The aim of this workshop was to define the asset further, and link potential opportunities that will create social and economic benefit within the community. A range of opportunities were discussed, with the group unanimously agreeing Sustainable Agriculture, Aquaculture and Horticulture should progress to Stage 3 – Innovation Working Groups.

Sustainable agriculture, aquaculture and horticulture have significant potential for growth and innovation. Initiatives focusing on farm-to-plate and buy-local, local product utilisation, and environmental sustainability are gaining traction.

Sustainable Agriculture, Aquaculture and Horticulture
Primary Industry Entrepreneurial Discovery Process



Key Assets

Economic data as well as stakeholder input demonstrates the significance of agriculture in the corridor with many farmers identifying new products and exploring potential markets.

Education providers have recognised the importance of agriculture in the region and now offer VET certified courses through Yea High School. The demand by the local community to purchase local produce supports the Shire's large agriculture industry in fresh meats, fruit and other produce. Produce grown in the area is highly sought after in both national and international markets.

A key asset to the corridor is the abundance of farming land available, linked with rainfall patterns, climate and soil types.



Strategic Competitive Advantage

There is a strong network of researchers and scientists in this field, with farm forestry groups focused on addressing the current hardwood timber shortages while planning for future sustainability.

Work is already being done by Murrindindi Climate Network who have hosted multiple educative farm forestry field days with good attendance. Access to small scale harvesting equipment and machinery across the state to selectively fell trees on small plantations is limited and there is potential to sell / hire and share this equipment locally.

There is a strong future competitive market for high quality hardwood timber and firewood and a large hardwood manufacturing business (Ryan and McNulty) within 120km of Alexandra.



Key Challenges

Climate change and the impacts this will have on water supply and potential future water usage will be a key challenge.

The costs of logistics and transport will also need consideration. What are the opportunities around circular economy and utilisation of waste products? What will the final product look like and is there a market for it? Businesses will need to consider energy efficiency and how best to manage the future expansion and electricity needs. Finding and retaining skilled staff will be an ongoing and important issue.



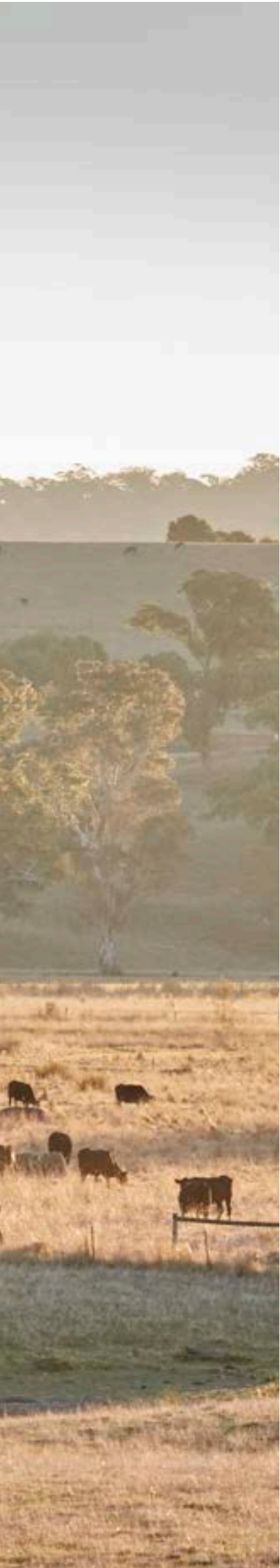
Workshop Discussion

Manufacturing and Processing

There is interest and opportunity to bring local processing and manufacturing back into the Shire rather than sending products to and from Melbourne facilities. Difficulty with logistics and transport to outside facilities for processing and packaging are forcing higher prices to both the producer and consumer. This includes the processing of local meat (lamb, beef, deer, goat), fruit processing and grading, and packaging of meat, fruits and fruit bi-products for local and export markets.

Peak Body/ Co operative

Similar to other Innovation workshops, the group saw benefit to a peak body or co-op model that incorporates the producer not just the retailer and supply chain. This could be linked in with the already existing Murrindindi Food and Wine Inc to showcase local products using a unique Murrindindi brand, with targeted marketing campaigns to grow and expand the local sales of produce. This group will have capacity to attract more funding This peak body could also assist businesses finding and retaining skilled staff on a job share arrangement, offering staff fulltime work over a variety of businesses.



Opportunities for Students

Yea High School is undergoing further redevelopment which will support and grow the Agriculture Education Program offering Cert II and giving students exposure to on farm experience. There is opportunity for Murrindindi to become an Agriculture destination facility – with an onsite learning centre for students and adults offering a range of short courses while exposing students to the types of employment opportunities in the industry. This facility will be open for students from all surrounding towns and will aid in bringing new families to the area, expanding the schools and student numbers, and helping students stay and find employment locally after school.

Development of Hobby Farms

Further subdivision of larger parcels of land into more manageable hobby farms particularly around Eildon, may support opportunity to expand small scale Agriculture activities by better utilising good quality farming land that may be vacant or not used on a fulltime basis.



Circular Economy

Biochar is a porous structured charcoal that sequesters carbon, and improves soil structure, with high moisture retention and nutrient availability. A major source of feedstock comes from municipal waste. There is opportunity to repurpose Agriculture waste into other valuable soil products.

Logistics

A centralised manufacturing and processing site would need to manage contamination and biosecurity risks, support a range of producers from small to larger scale, and understand the needs and demands of both local producers and the scale of market. Would the products then be sold through the facility locally, if so how would they be branded/ marketed. Research into the size/scale of production facility needed to best service the local producers. Acknowledging the different towns, the variety of Agricultural activities, and the associated challenges. Rising prices, high insurance and investment costs of new business start ups may impact the economic viability of this opportunity.



Logistics

Having a strong Agricultural Educational Program in Murrindindi Shire will assist in encouraging new families to the region, helping students stay and find work locally as well as increase student enrolment numbers in the local schools. Building relationships with a variety of Agricultural farmers and businesses will ensure the program can continue to grow and expand, offer a variety of opportunities for students that feed into the workforce, and ensure its longevity and success. This needs to be well supported through affordable and available housing, access to childcare, and improved public transport.

How can innovation in Agriculture continue to be bring resilience to climate change and extreme climate events. What sustainable farming practises can be developed on an individual basis and is their adequate experience to support this.



Infrastructure

Industrial land for development of an all purpose manufacturing, processing, and packaging facility. A central Local Learning Facility to advance development of the Agricultural Education Program at Yea High School. Development of a range of housing, to attract new families and students wanting to participate in the Agricultural Program.

Policy and Regulation

Primesafe is the Statutory Authority responsible for regulating the processing of meat, poultry, seafood and pet food in Victoria. These regulations determine controls for biosecurity, cross contamination and food safety. Available and suitable industrial land for development of a processing/ packaging facility. Further subdivision or development of farming land into hobby farms pending Zoning and Planning Scheme regulations. Relevant Water Authority bodies and access to usage may impact new start up agricultural businesses.

Conclusion

This is a viable opportunity that could be realised in the short and longer term.