



MEDIA RELEASE

RFCS GIPPSLAND HELPING FARMERS WITH THE RED CROSS AND LIONS CLUB DROUGHT APPEALS

East Gippsland farmers have expressed gratitude as more than half a million dollars has been successfully distributed to drought-affected families across Eastern Victoria during the Christmas period.

Rural Financial Counselling Service (RFCS) Gippsland teamed up with the Red Cross who donated \$500,000 from their Aussie Farmer Appeal, and Lions Club of Heyfield contributed a further \$43,000 helping with the cost of living for 180 households.

The Red Cross allocated up to \$3,000 towards household and medical bills, while the Lions Club allowed \$500 cash cheques to be distributed to farming families most in need, with the aim to have the money spent within their communities to also help local businesses.

As farmers across Victoria continue to face hot and dry conditions, countless messages from families affected by the drought confirm that financial grants have been gratefully received, many from proud farmers who don't usually ask for help, proving just how much we need to continue to support our farmers.

"I'd just like to thank you so so much for helping. With Xmas coming I've been under so much stress I've got two young kids and with so many bills and failed crops Xmas wasn't looking good. To be able to pay my bills is an enormous relief. You truly do an amazing job. I just want let everyone involved know how grateful I am. I actually got tears in my eyes, so overwhelming. Thank you so much."

"You don't realise how grateful and appreciative I am of this amazingly generous gift. I am so humble to you all. I wish a wonderful Christmas to you all because you have made mine. Thank you again from a very humble farmer."

"You all are truly angels. I've never asked for help before. You all made it easy and not at all intimidating and made us feel like it is ok to ask for help and I will forever be thankful."

"It is with mixed emotions that we accept this money... Gratitude that we have such wonderful groups here in Australia...and sadness that we have to ask for your help at this time... But overall, we are just so relieved to have this money to help with our bills."

Every farmer has a story on the toll the drought is taking, and a letter received by RFCS Gippsland summarises what most farmers are experiencing:

"The drought has cost me approximately \$200,000 so far with increased costs of feed, water and electricity use forcing me to sell over 20% of my stock, as I cannot afford to feed them. These cost increases meant some of my employees also lost their jobs. I now have to work 17 hours a day and still don't get everything completed. My loan repayments would make most people have sleepless nights and I have no money for maintenance or to even install solar panels to reduce electricity costs. This comes on the back of the Dairy Industry Crisis in 2016 causing me to owe an additional \$200,000. Not only is the drought severely taking its toll on my farm, its taking a mental toll aswell."

Kylie Holmes, Executive Officer of RFCS Gippsland stated, "It's been a significant effort to distribute this money in such a short period of time, but it has been very worthwhile for our clients and our farming communities. We are very thankful to the Red Cross and the Heyfield Lions Club to be able to offer this relief during a very difficult time.

We encourage all farmers finding it tough to reach out for support, both financially and emotionally. Don't think there is someone else doing it tougher than you and just put up with it ... you are that 'someone'.

We can help with a range of assistance and support available to you. If you speak up, it will encourage other farmers to feel comfortable to make the call. Please don't suffer in silence. We are a free service here for farmers and small rural businesses. Call us today on 1300 045 747."

Media Enquiries: Kylies Holmes, Executive Officer: 0409 163 189

