



Cleaner and greener

Global markets can't be ignored: Bray

By **BRIAN CLANCY**

BEEF producers can't afford to ignore the environmental and animal welfare demands of their customers, according to Cattle Council of Australia president Bill Bray.

"We are already seeing it in Europe and Asia, where markets are demanding traceability and consumers want evidence that producers

are caring for their animal and the environment," Mr Bray said.

Mr Bray, who runs a breeding and finishing operation at Walkerville in South Gippsland, is already committed to the cause.

His farm has an Environmental Management Systems certification under a pilot program sponsored by Meat and Livestock Australia.

He is also a foundation member of the Gippsland Enviromeat group, promoting and marketing environmentally certified MSA graded beef.

As chairman of the VFF Environmental Management Systems project, Mr Bray said the Federal Government-sponsored project was a great opportunity.

Mr Bray said that, speaking from his own experience, those who undertook an EMS

program would find it would make them better farmers while providing proof that they cared for the environment.

"There was also a strong possibility that eligibility for Landcare grants and local government rebates for environmental work would become increasingly dependent on evidence of an EMS," Mr Bray said.

As for providing a marketing edge, Mr Bray said the trend

was already having an impact on Australian farmers, who were exporting horticultural produce into Europe where EurepGAP protocols included environmental issues.

"We would silly to ignore the fact that beef could come under similar protocols," he said.

Mr Bray said although his beef might be no better than that from a non-EMS farm, he wanted to be ready when such demands arrive.



Bill Bray

Careful choice: Victorian farmers now have the option of linking in with a major new environmental program.

Farm health check

By **BRIAN CLANCY**

THE most ambitious project ever conducted in Victoria in on-farm environmental management begins this month with the launch of the VFF Environmental Management Systems program

"We've set a goal to involve 4000 farmers in the first stage of the program," said VFF EMS co-ordinator Greg Smith. The VFF program, funded with a federal grant of \$950,000 from the Natural Heritage Trust, will be working with the

Department of Primary Industries and the catchment management authorities.

Under an EMS, farmers can work through four stages.

The first stage involves an on-farm self-assessment.

Using a workbook, farmers will be invited to assess a checklist on a whole range of environmental issues affecting their properties.

These issues could include water quality, soil nutrients, chemical usage, plant biodiversity, shelter, pest animals and weeds.

The second stage calls on farmers to adopt an action or management plan.

The third stage involves documentation detailing the conduct of environmental works, while the fourth and final stage involves the adoption of the ISO (International Standards Organisation) 14001 accreditation.

Mr Smith said the current program would concentrate on the first two stages, including a goal to have 2000 farmers commit to an action plan.

He said the latest program would blend with existing EMS programs being conducted in Victoria, including the current Glenelg-Hopkins Environmental Best Management Practice program.

Mr Smith said the VFF program would be open to all farming pursuits.

He said the only cost to producers involved in the first two stages of EMS would be their time.

He envisaged two three-hour training sessions for the first stage and three to four three-

hour sessions for those committing to an action plan under the second stage.

Experience has shown that completion of a workbook assessment takes three hours.

Participants would be provided literature explaining details of an EMS and an extensive workbook and farm plan.

Mr Smith said there was already wide interest from people involved in the state's 150 Landcare groups.

He said he was hoping that the VFF's 250 branches might also adopt EMS as a group activity.

Mr Smith said farmers wanting to extend their EMS into a third and fourth stage would be provided with training assistance.

He said the third and fourth, or ISO accreditation, stages of an EMS would be applicable to those farmers meeting environmental demands in the marketing of produce.

Mr Smith said the VFF EMS program had funding to the end of June next year.

One of its aims was to build a "critical mass" of farmers who understood EMS, he said.