

Submission by the West Family for the Productivity Commission Enquiry into the Pig Industry

The West family trading as M H West & Sons run a mixed farming partnership operation at Bribbaree, approximately 50 km west of Young.

Our family started producing bacon pigs in 1935 and have been constantly producing pigs to this day.

We also grow grain on a rotational basis, run a self replacing merino flock and produce prime lambs. We have also indulged in contract farming, harvesting and sharefarming. We have a partnership made up of Maurice and Rhona West, Tony and Jeannette West and their son Trent is also involved.

We ran an open range system up until the late 70's when we built and moved our stock into a fully shedded intensive system. The original shed system was a 100 sow unit with a 10% tolerance. In the first few years of the intensive operation we were selling on average 45 baconers per week.

We were slaughtering them at Moongamba Abattoirs, Cootamundra and selling to Prestos' up until the mid 90's we slowly expanded our operation to 330 sows and had 5 people working in our operation in the piggery and on the farming program. Up until the mid 90's if we had a drought our other tough time on the land the piggery would not only pay for itself but also carry the farm when it was managed well. In the early 90's we started slaughtering our pigs at Burrangong Abattoirs at Young and selling them to P & M Primo. We also had started a stud of the four main breeds (Landrace, Yorkshire, Hampshire and Duroc) and developed good lines and a strong client base.

We had been performance testing since the mid 80's with support from the NSW Department of Agriculture, Pig Staff.

In the mid 90's with the Canadian pigmeat coming in and the cost of production increasing the break even point increased making it harder to make a living with a seven day a week job.

The total lack of understanding by the Federal Government of that time did not help. It has been a down hill run ever since. The Danish pigmeat allowance of import in recent years was the last nail.

We run a very efficient operation by any standard but it has been down hill ever since. We could not afford the staff we had employed and over a period four have left. We have reduced our sow numbers to 100 at present. The accounts we have not be able to pay are a major concern. We lost land we had leased, also one header, one tractor and some credibility in our own community.

It is obvious that governments and bureaucrats have no idea the time and effort producers put into the long hours of producing pigs.

We have carted over 5.1 million gallons of water since August 2002 to keep the pigs going without any support. Exceptional circumstances does not exist if you have housed pigs even though you are eligible in every other way.

The Federal Government has been blaming the drought, high grain prices and various other problems for the loss of producers. There is one main cause and that is the heavily subsidised pigmeat coming into this country.

Now we are talking about restructure to become more efficient. How do we do that when we are running at 5% subsidy and we compete against Canada at over 15% and Denmark at over 40%.

At present rate the pig industry does not have a future in Australian production. We believe that our present Federal Government has a lot to answer for over the stress and financial ruin they have put many small businesses through in the pig industry.

We believe the Federal Government has failed in its duty of care to make a level playing field on which producers can compete and sustain a fair life style.