

Australia Without Family Farmers Is Not ‘Viable’

The Citizens Electoral Council of Australia issued the following media release to summarize the scope of the agriculture crisis in the nation—a threat to the domestic and world food supply. The CEC is mobilizing for emergency action (www.cecaust.com.au).

May 10—Right now, as a consequence of political decisions, many thousands of family farmers across Australia face immediate ruin:

- 600-1,200 family farmers in Western Australia’s (WA) eastern wheat belt are under siege by the banks and both the state and federal governments, which are conspiring to starve the farmers of credit, to force them off the land and/or privatize and sell their cooperatives to foreign grain cartels.

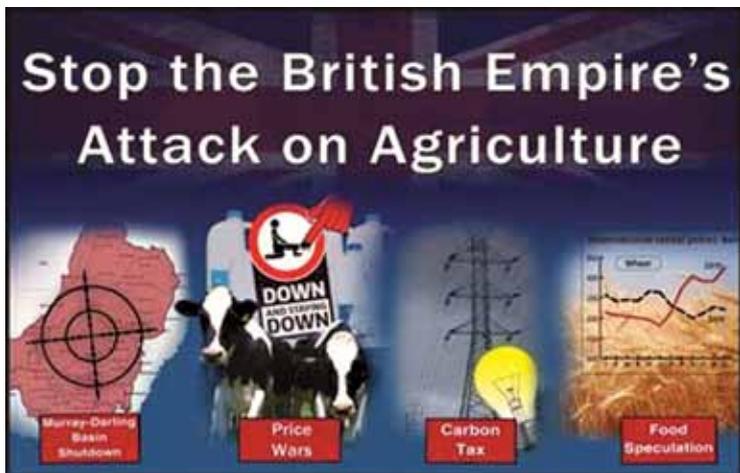
- Many hundreds of beef producers in northern Australia have been blindsided by the government’s outright sabotage of their export markets, which has caused a glut of beef on the domestic market that has driven down the price of cattle from A\$500-1,000 per head, to as low as A\$20, leaving hundreds of producers bankrupt and suicidal.

- Hundreds of fruit growers and dairy farmers in northern Victoria are getting smashed by the government’s policy of free trade, which is forcing the SPC Ardmona cannery in Shepparton to drastically reduce production, and has driven the price of milk way below the cost of production.

However, the government, which has caused these crises, is hammering the farmers with the message that they aren’t “viable.”

The CEC exposed, in its June/July 2012 *New Citizen* newspaper, the fact that the number of genuine family farms in Australia as of 2010 hit the dangerously low figure of 40,000, down sharply from 120,000 two decades earlier in 1991, and from 204,000 in 1953.

If the people of Australia tolerate their governments, of both major parties, continuing to aggressively drive family farmers out of agriculture—whether for reasons of free trade, banker-rationed finance, or green fascism



A Citizens Electoral Council organizing poster.

(including that of the vegetarian militants who purport to speak for animals)—they face the very real prospect that *their nation* will not be viable.

The present crisis is a mortal threat to Australia's food security. Corporate agribusinesses would be lying in wait to acquire some of these farming operations, but they do not guarantee a nation's food security. Agribusinesses only produce when it suits their bottom line, and often on contract to global supply chains, regardless of domestic food needs. Only strong family farms that produce reliably, prioritize the domestic market, export surpluses, and nurture the land to pass on to future generations, guarantee a nation's food security.

The present crisis is also a threat to the global food supply. An estimated 1 billion people worldwide go hungry every day, while the two sectors where Australian family farmers are being smashed, wheat and beef, are the country's two biggest agricultural exports.

Australia is the second-largest wheat exporter, after the United States, and WA's wheat growers produce the majority of the Australian crop. The government is letting the banks destroy WA's growers, at a time when drought and freezing temperatures in the United States are expected to reduce that nation's 2013 Winter crop by 25%, and dry conditions are reducing wheat production in Russia, the world's third-largest wheat exporter.

Australia's live beef exports to Indonesia significantly increased the protein consumption of millions of low-income people in that nation. Australia's meat export markets in the Middle East include some of the nations where food shortages triggered the overthrow of national governments in 2011. Australia's self-in-

flicted crisis exacerbates a global shortage: U.S. beef production, which represents one-fifth of global output, is expected to fall sharply this year.

There is no reason for any presently struggling wheat grower, beef producer, fruit grower, or dairy farmer to lose their farms. It is entirely within the government's power to immediately:

- declare a moratorium on farm foreclosures;
- order the banks to re-negotiate farm debt at lower interest rates;
- establish a government agency for farmers to borrow at low interest to finance their crops and capital upgrades;

• impose tariffs on canned fruit imports, and announce penalties on Coles and Woolworths for further abusing their market dominance by sourcing fruit and vegetables from overseas that are produced domestically;

- establish government-to-government contracts with nations such as Indonesia, to resume the supply of beef, with our government guaranteeing both the supply to Indonesia, and the price to Australia's producers; such contracts should also be sought in the Middle East and Africa.

The only long-term solution, however, is that the government must enact a Glass-Steagall separation of essential banking services from speculative investment banking, so as to protect and prioritize credit for agricultural production. The government must then establish a national bank, owned and managed by the government, which will direct long-term credit into strengthening and expanding the nation's food production. This would include, for instance, investing in more domestic meat-processing capacity, of which the present crisis has shown Australia to be woefully short.

Citizens Electoral Council leader Craig Isherwood declared today, "The decision before the government is not a business decision, it is a national interest decision. Any family farmers that are forced off the land by this crisis will be the clear victims of the government's deliberate intention, for which the government must be held to account.

"That is up to the Australian people," he continued. "If you understand the importance of family farmers to Australia's viability as a nation, and are willing to take responsibility to fight for the nation's future, join the CEC."