

Tuesday, 30 June 2020

AUSTRALIAN PRODUCERS SHARE IN NEARLY \$3M TO GROW SALES AND IMPROVE SUSTAINABILITY

New plastic recycling solution among 12 projects funded by Coles

A unique plan to manufacture fence posts from recycled household and agricultural plastic will be one of 12 innovative projects to share in almost \$3 million from the Coles Nurture Fund.

Coles announced today it would provide grants to 12 small and medium sized businesses which are instigating plans to improve sustainability, rebuild after bushfires and produce more Australian food and beverages.

Recycling manufacturer Plastic Forests at Albury NSW will receive a \$300,000 grant to manufacture fence posts from recycled plastic, providing an end-to-end solution for agricultural plastic such as silage wrap and another recycling option for soft plastics collected at Coles.

Two farming families in NSW – the McKay family and the Clarke family – who were both significantly impacted by bushfires earlier this year near Tumbaramba will also receive grants to re-build fencing using the recycled plastic posts made by Plastic Forests.

Coles Group CEO Steven Cain said the commitment of nearly \$3 million in grants from Round 8 brings the total amount provided by the Coles Nurture Fund to more than \$24 million since it was established.

“The Coles Nurture Fund was set up to support new, innovative practices, processes and technologies and we’ve been delighted with the calibre of the applications this year. At a time when food and grocery manufacturing across Australia is so important due to the flow-on effect of COVID-19, it’s terrific to see the innovative, forward thinking of small to medium sized businesses,” he said.

“At Coles, we also want to win together with Australian producers to be the most sustainable supermarket in Australia. By helping to fund initiatives which increase recycling, reduce water use, increase local production and enhance the environment, we aim to drive generational sustainability in Australia.”

Other producers to receive grants in Round 8 include:

- The Mount Warning Beverage Company, better known as Yaru Water from the Tweed Valley in NSW, will install new equipment to produce a range of native botanical tonic waters which are Australian owned, sourced and made using Indigenous flavours.
- Black River Produce will plant more asparagus and install equipment to process the produce on their farm west of Townsville in Queensland. This will enable them to produce asparagus out of season and replace imported asparagus with Aussie-grown produce.
- Braebrook Pastoral will produce renewable energy from organic waste matter by constructing an on-farm biogas system on its pig farm at Willaura in Victoria.

- Beechworth Honey will increase productivity and cost efficiencies in their honey packing facility in Corowa NSW by installing robotic technology to streamline its operations.
- The Olsen family from Hallora in Victoria's Gippsland – who won The Weekly Times Coles Innovative Farmer of the Year in February - will expand its facilities to treble the manufacture of its Soilkee Renovator Units. The Soilkee Renovator, invented by Niels Olsen, is a revolutionary pasture cropping system that plants seeds in a unique way which improves soil structure and builds soil carbon through carbon sequestration.
- Harvey Citrus from Harvey in Western Australia will extend the supply of WA-grown citrus over the summer by at least three weeks and increase local employment by extending its cool room facility and acquiring solar panels for its packing shed.
- Sutton Farms from Gatton in Queensland will increase water and fertiliser efficiency by introducing grow bag technology and a new irrigation system for its cherry tomatoes grown in the field.
- Hall Stanley Premium Chestnuts from Stanley in Victoria will save water and increase production by introducing new high-efficiency irrigation and fertigation, which reduces evaporation and increases nutrients.
- Darren and Mark Todaro from Todaro Farms at Cora Lynn, Victoria will increase yields and quality by installing frost protection fleece and relocatable hail netting over their vegetables.

For Plastic Forests, the \$300,000 grant will allow the business to purchase equipment to upscale and accelerate the manufacturing of an innovative steel-reinforced plastic post to provide a sustainable fencing solution for farmers, including those affected by the bushfires.

"The support from the Coles Nurture Fund allows us to assist farmers to re-build following the devastating bushfires and will incorporate difficult to recycle post-consumer soft plastics collected from Coles supermarkets by REDcycle," Plastic Forests Managing Director David Hodge said.

"The new equipment will enable us to expand our manufacturing capacity for recycled fence posts and at a much faster pace than would otherwise be possible."

Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation (APCO) CEO Brooke Donnelly said: "We are delighted the Coles Nurture Fund is helping to fund important sustainability initiatives such as a new manufacturing solution for plastic packaging, which will support a circular economy and align with our national packaging targets to recycle packaging."

National Farmers Federation CEO Tony Mahar welcomed Coles' support for innovative farmers.

"It's inspiring to see that from the challenges of drought and bushfires has come such ingenuity – like the development of fence posts from silage waste; the installation of cutting-edge robotic technology and new high-efficiency irrigation systems," he said.

"The focus on sustainability and increased efficiencies amongst this Round's Nurture Fund recipients is in direct alignment with the NFF's vision to grow Australia's overall farm gate output to \$100 billion by 2030, up from \$60 billion today."

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